

A Text Book of Irish Literature

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THIS text-book of Irish Literature, which has been prepared at short notice to meet the requirements of the students under the Intermediate Board, takes in, generally, the period up to the early years of the sixteenth century. There are, however, some portions of the Literature which would fall chronologically under that period that it has been found impossible to deal with here. For a great part of the early literature no chronological order can, for the present, at all events, be followed. The earlier existing secular material comes to us for the most part gathered into great vellum compilations made by the assiduity of the scribes of the twelfth and following centuries ; but the contents of these volumes are of various ages ; and the actual date of the composition of any particular piece can only be approximately calculated either by casual allusions contained in it to persons or events whose dates can be verified from other sources, or by the language of the piece itself. Often such calculations can only be fixed within the wide limits of three or more centuries.

It has on this account been thought more satisfactory to group the material under general heads even when this does not indicate the precise chronological order of composition. By this means the student can more readily find any particular piece he may be in search of under its own subject ; and a chronological table has been added to help him as to dates, so far as these are known. The chronology applies chiefly to the poets and poetry and to the religious and historical materials whose dates are to a large extent fixed ; the names and dates of the story-tellers who helped to create and shape the great mass of the romance literature must remain for ever unknown.

The method that has been adopted has necessitated the exclusion from this volume of some material which actually comes to us from before the sixteenth century, and which ought therefore, on chronological grounds, to be found here. The Annals, the Ossianic Literature, and the Classical tales, for example, many of which might appropriately take their place in this volume, have had to be postponed for a second part.

I have thought it inadvisable, in a text-book of small size, to give a large number of foot-notes and references ; but I hope to compensate for this by adding a bibliography to the second volume, covering the material dealt with in both Parts, so far as this material has been already published.

I have to thank my friends, Mr. Alfred Nutt for kindly reading through the proofs of the Prose Section, and Dr. Douglas Hyde for looking over the chapters on the Poetry ; also my cousin, Mr. J. D. Hendley, for help in proof-reading.

CHRONOLOGY.

(The dates given are those of the deaths of the poets named.)

GROUP I. Group of semi-mythical poets connected with the traditions of the Milesian settlers in Ireland. These are AMERGIN GLUNGEL, " White Knee," author of three poems or incantations preserved in the *Leabhar Gabhála*, or Book of Invasions. He is said to have been son of Golamh or Milesius and brother to the three Milesian princes, Heber, Heremon, and Ir.

LUGAIDH, son of Ith and nephew of Milesius. Lament on the death of his wife.

OLLAMH FODHLA, law-giver and monarch of Ireland, and reputed founder of a College for Law and Poetry.

ROIGNE, or Royne the Poetic. Poem on the partition of Ireland among the sons of Milesius.

GROUP II. Poets chiefly connected with Ulster during the time of its power in the first century.

ADHNA, chief poet, father of Neidhe.

ATHAIRNE. He belonged to Benn Edair, or Howth, but fled into Ulster when the poets were proscribed. Of his cruelty and avarice many stories are told, and his tragic death forms the subject of a separate tale.

FORCHERN. His work is unknown.

FERCEIRTNE. To him are ascribed the composition of the *Uraicept* or primer of the learned, a teaching book for the schools of the poets ; and a poem on Ollamh Fodhla. It was between Ferceirtne and the young poet NEIDHE that the famous contest called the “ Dialogue of the Two Sages ” took place for the appointment to the office of Chief Poet on the death of Adhna.

MORANN. A law-giver and judge.

GROUP III. About the year 266 died King Cormac mac Airt of Tara, about the time of whose reign flourished Fionn mac Cumhaill, Oisín, Oscur, Caoilte, and Fergus *finbel*, warriors and poets under whose names a large quantity of prose and verse continued to be composed for several centuries. Fionn was son-in-law to Cormac by his marriage with Grainne ; and Oisín and Fergus *finbel* were sons of Fionn ; Oscur was his grandson.

TORNA, called, like many other poets, by the official title of *Eigeas* or the “ Learned,” was poet and fosterer to Niall of the Nine Hostages (d. 423). To him are ascribed three poems written to mediate between Niall himself and Corc, Prince of Cashel, in Munster. The ascription is doubtful. These poems are prefixed to those written by the bards of the seventeenth century in the poetic contest known as the “ Contention of the Bards.”

GROUP IV. Writers of the Early Christian Period. In the reign of Laeghaire, or Laery (c. 450) three princes, three poets, and three law-givers or Brehons were appointed to revise and compile the Laws of Ireland. The bishops engaged in the task were St. Patrick, St. Benen, and St. Cairnech ; the poets, Dubhtach, Rossa, and Fergus ; and the princes, Laery himself, Corc, King of Munster, and Daire, King of Ulster.

d. 461. ST. PATRICK. He wrote the Confession, the Epistle to Coroticus, and the Hymn called the Lorica or Breastplate of St. Patrick.

ST. SECUNDINUS, or Sechnall, nephew to St. Patrick, wrote a Hymn to St. Patrick and (?) a Communion Hymn.

467-8. ST. BENEN, Bishop of Armagh. To him are ascribed parts of the Book of Rights, but the ascription is doubtful.

499. ST. CAILIN, Bishop of Down. A book bearing his name contains prophecies and poems addressed to the heads of several tribes regarding their race and the tributes due to himself from them. Doubtful.

500. ST. FIACC, Bishop of Sletty. Poem on St. Patrick ascribed to him.

525. ST. BRIGIT, Abbess of Kildare. A hymn is ascribed to her.

570. ST. ITA. Poem on the Infant Jesus.

597. ST. COLUMCILLE, Abbot of Hi or Iona. A large number of hymns and poems in Latin and Irish are ascribed to him.

596. DALLAN FORGAILL, or Eochadh Dalian. Wrote the *Amra* in praise of St. Columcille and odes to Aodh mac Duach on his shield and weapons.

b. 543. ST. COLUMBANUS. (Date of death uncertain.) Latin poems on various subjects.

647. SENCHAN TORPEIST of Connaught. Lament over the dead body of Dallan, his predecessor ; poem on the battles of Fergus. To him is ascribed the recovery of the tale called the *Táin bó Cuailnge*. Contemporary with Guaire of Connaught and Senchan Torpeist was MARBHAN the poet, half brother of Guaire, a recluse, who wrote a poem in praise of woodland scenery.

656. ST. ULTAN. Irish hymn to St. Brigit attributed to him.

661. ST. CUMMINE *fada*, “ the Tall ” Bishop of Clonfert. Religious poem.

678. CINNFAELADH the Learned, son of Olioll, or Ailell. Poems on the *Miodhchuarta*, or Banqueting Hall (“ mead-hall ”) of Tara, and on the travels of Milesius. He revised the *Uraicept*, or teaching-book of the Learned.

704. ST. ADAMNAN, Ninth Abbot of Hi or Iona. Works (a) Life of Columcille, (b) Book of the Holy Places, (c) The Vision of Adamnan bears his name, but is probably later.

707. RUMAN MAC COLMAIN, the “ Homer and Virgil of Ireland. ” Song of the Sea.

705. FLANN FIONN, or King Alfrid of Northumbria. Recalled to his Kingdom 685. Poem on the beauty and attractions of Ireland.

746. ST. CUCHUIMNE. Hymn in praise of the Virgin.

800. ST. ANGUS the Culdee “ *Céile Dé*. ” Compiled a Calendar of Saints, or *Féilire*. To him is ascribed also the poem called *Saltair na Rann*, or Psalter of the Verses.

807. The writing of the Book of Armagh was completed in this year by Ferdornach the Scribe (d. 845).

860. SEDULIUS *Scotus*, or “ the Irishman ” Abbot of Kildare, 820, Principal of the Royal School of Liége. He wrote Latin poems to the Emperor Lothaire ; also a Dialogue between the roses and lilies, and other occasional poems.

GROUP V. NORSE PERIOD.

876. FOTHADH “ of the Canon ” or “ Law. ” Odes to Aedh Finnliath, monarch of Ireland ; he is called “ Fothadh of the Law ” because he secured the passing of an ecclesiastical canon exempting the clergy from warfare.

884. MAOLMURA OF FATHAN. Historical and genealogical poems on (1) the Origin of the Gael, (2) on the Acts of King Tuathal, or Toole the Legitimate (reigned 130-160), (3) on the Kings of Ireland up to Flann Sionna, his contemporary monarch (reigned 879-914). He is called by the Four Masters “ a well-taught, skilful poet and intelligent historian.”

908. CORMAC MAC CUILEANAN, King and Abbot of Cashel. He was killed in the battle of Bealach Mughna (Ballymoon, Co. Kildare), fought against Flann Sionna, monarch of Ireland. To him are ascribed (a) A Glossary of old and rare words, known as Cormac’s Glossary (*Sanas Cormaic*) ; (b) The Compilation of the *Saltair Chaisil*, or Psalter of Cashel ; (c) Poems. The Annals called *Chronicum Scotorum* describe Cormac as “ a most excellent bishop, scribe and anchorite, and the wisest of the Gael.”

919. QUEEN GORMFLAITH, or Gormliath, d. of Flann Sionna and wife of Cormac mac Cuileanan. She was afterwards married to his enemy, King Cearbhal, or Karval, of Leinster, and to Niall Glundubh, who became monarch of Ireland in 914. In her old age she fell from her high estate, and was forced to “ beg her bread from door to door.” She wrote many “ learned and pitiful ditties” on the death of her son, which seem to be lost, but a poem on her second husband, Cearbhal, and a touching appeal after his death to Niall Glendubh, are extant.

918. FLANN MAC LONAIN, poet to the O’Brien family, and predecessor of Mac Liag as chief poet of Munster. He was a native of South Connaught and lived during the lifetime of Lorcan, the grandfather, and Cenneide, or Kennedy, the father of Brian Boru, at their palace of Kincora, near Killaloe, on the Shannon. He is called by the Four Masters the “ Virgil of the race of Scotia.” He was killed by the Decies of Munster. His death is twice recorded by them under the years 891 and 918. The latter date (or a still later one) is probably correct, as one of his poems is an Elegy on the death of a Prince of Tirconnell who died in 902. He was still living when Mac Liag was poet to the O’Kellys as a young man. Among Mac Lonain’s remaining poems are (1) Two in praise of Lorcan, his patron, King of W. Munster ; (2) a poem on Kincora (*Ceann-Coradh*, or the “ head of the weir”) ; (3) a poem on the topography of the Clare Hills addressed to Mac Liag. He wrote in a romantic and allegorical style.

946. CORMACAN, or Cormac, son of Maelbrigid, chief poet to Muirchertach, or Murtough, son of Niall *Glundubh* (“ Black-knee”) of Ulster. Poem describing the “ Circuit of Ireland” made by that monarch, from which he gained the title of “ Murtough of the Leather Cloaks.”

975. GINAEDH, or KENNETH O’HARTIGAN. (a) Topographical poems preserved in the *Dindsenchus* on “ Rath Essa” in Meath ; on “ the Hill of Acaill,” or the Hill of Screen in Meath ; on “ Brugh mac-an-Oig” on the Boyne ; on the “ Origin of Tara,” on places called after celebrated women, etc. (b) Historical poems on the deaths of Irish kings and warriors ; on the origin of the stone called the “ Pillow of St. Buite” at Monasterboice in Meath ; on the death of Niall of the Nine Hostages.

984. EOCHAI DH FLOINN, or O’FLYNN. Chiefly chronological poems on the legendary colonizations of Ireland, most of them of great length and tediousness. (1) Poem on the Invasion of Partholan ; (2) on the coming of Cessair and Partholan ; (3) on the division of Ireland between the four sons of Partholan ; (4) on Partholan’s druids and artizans ; (5) on the destruction of Conaing’s Tower (Tory Island, Co. Donegal) ; (6) on the time which elapsed between the creation of Adam and the coming of Cessair, Partholan and Nemedh. This poem has a gloss between the lines. (7) On the Invasion of the Tuatha Dé Danann ; (8) on the sons of Milesius ; (9) on the partition of the Island between the two princes ; (10) on the Invasion of the Milesians ; (11) on the building of the Palace of Emain Macha ; (12) on the Kings of Ulster ; (13) on Ugaine Mór, monarch of Ireland ; (14) on the Creation, the Deluge, and the

settlement in Egypt of Niul, son of Fenius Farsaidh. Many of Eochaidh's poems are incorporated into the *Leabhar Gabhála*, or "Book of Invasions."

1015. MAC LIAG, Chief Poet and Secretary to Brian Boru. His real name seems to have been Muirchertach, or Murtough mac Chonchertaigh, and he belonged to the Corann country of Mayo and Sligo. He was first attached to the family of the O'Kellys of Hy Maine, on the Shannon, and several of his poems are addressed to them, but he eventually succeeded Flann mac Lonain as poet to the O'Brians at Kincora. Both historical pieces and poems are ascribed to Mac Liag, but several of the ascriptions are doubtful. Of the historical works (a) it is likely that a good part of the "Wars of the Gall and Gael," or "Wars of the Foreigners and Irish," may be by his hand. O'Reilly also thinks that he wrote the *Leabhar Oiris*, or Annals of the Wars and Battles of Ireland, but this seems to be rather later. A life of King Brian is said to have been written by him, but if this was the case it is now unknown. Of his poems (b) several are extant. (1) On the Sons of Cas, from whom are descended the Dal Cais of Thomond ; (2) on Brian and his brothers, sons of Kennedy ; (3) on the Fall of Brian at Clontarf and the desolation of Kincora, beginning "O Kincora, where is Brian ?" (4) poem on the Battle of Clontarf, the account of which was brought to him by Mac Coise. It is in the form of a dialogue between the two poets, beginning "From the East has come the news of Brian's fall." (5) Accounts of the Tributes (*Boromha*) received by Brian at Kincora and from which he took his title ; (6) Lament on the fall of Kincora, written from *Innse Gaill Duibh*, the Island of the Black Foreigners, in the Shannon, after his retirement to that place. Other poems are (7) on the history of Carn Conaill ; (8) two poems in praise of Tadhg O'Kelly ; (9) on the death of Tadhg O'Kelly at Clontarf. Some of these poems to the O'Kellys must have been written in Mac Liag's early days. They are preserved in the *Leabhar Ui Maine*, or Book of the O'Kellys.

1023. URARD, or ERARD MAC COISE, Chief Poet to Maelseachlann II. (called Malachy II.), the monarch of Ireland who was deposed by Brian. He was present among Maelseachlann's hosts at Clontarf and brought the account of the battle to Mac Liag at Kincora. He wrote several good poems (1) in praise of the monarch who was his patron and some of his contemporaries ; (2) dialogue with Mac Liag about Clontarf and the fallen princes ; (3) in praise of a son of Tadhg of the Tower, King of Connaught ; (4) on the death of Fergal O'Ruire, or O'Rorke, who was killed in East Meath in 964 ; a curious prose piece, in which he describes under the form of an allegory the destruction of his castle at Clartha (Co. Westmeath) by the O'Neills of Ulster, and demands redress. This piece he recited before Donnell O'Neill at Aileach in Donegal and gained his purpose in obtaining restitution for his losses. Mac Coise died at Clonmacnois.

1016. (?) MAC GIOLLA CAOIMH, or Keeffe, a Munster poet who wrote poems in lamentation after the death of Brian and on the deserted condition of the palaces of the South of Ireland. Date of death uncertain.

1024. CUAN O'LOCHAIN, appointed joint Regent of Ireland with Corcran Cleireach, or the "Cleric" of Lismore, after the death of Maelseachlann in 1022. He did not long survive to enjoy this dignity, for he was slain by the men of Teabhtha, or Teffia, two years afterwards (1024), an act which brought that tribe into great disrepute. The interregnum lasted eighteen years after his death, during part of which time Corcran continued to act as Regent.

In the Annals of Clonmacnois Cuan is said to have been a great chronicler, and one to whom, on account of his capabilities, the causes of Ireland were committed to be examined and ordered. The O'Lochains, or O'Lothchains, were a distinguished family of Meath with whom also the O'Garas and O'Haras of Sligo are connected. His extant poems are (1) Poem on Tara in the reign of Cormac mac Airt (d. 266) ; (2) on the Prerogatives and Prohibitions of the monarchs of Erin ; (3) Topographical Poem on the Shannon ; (4) on the history of the hill

of Druim Criaich (Drumcree, in Co. Westmeath) ; (5) in praise of Tara under Niall of the Nine Hostages ; (6) on the Hill of Taillte (Teltown, in Meath), and the assemblies and sports celebrated there.

1038. MAEL-ISU, grandson of Brolcan of Derry. The real name of the author of the short and sweet religious poems ascribed to “ Mael-Isu” is unknown ; his adopted name means “ Servant of Jesus,” or literally, “ Tonsured of Jesus.”

1056. FLANN MAINISTREACH, or Flann of the Monastery. Fear-léighinn, or Principal of the School of Monasterboice (Mainister-Buite, or Monastery of St. Buite), in Co. Louth. Compiler of synchronisms and historical poems (1) on the burial-places of the Tuatha Dé Danann ; (2) on the deaths of the Pagan Kings of Tara ; (3) the same, on the Christian Kings ; (4) on the names of the persons who composed the “ Great Bardic Company” in the seventh century ; (5) on the Christian Kings of Munster ; (6) on the Kings of Erin descended from Niall of the Nine Hostages ; (7) two poems on the origin and history of Aileach, which form part of the *Dindsenchus* ; (8) on the household of St. Patrick ; (9) an abstract of universal history. These are only some of the compositions of this laborious and voluminous writer.

1072. GIOLLA CAOIMHGHIN (Keevin). His poems are of a similar character to those of Flann Mainistreach and are also of great length. They deal with the Christian and Pagan Kings of Ireland, whose names are given in chronological order ; the ancestors of the Gaels, etc. These verses are merely aids to memory composed for the use of the schools.

1088. TIGHERNACH, the Annalist, Abbot of Clonmacnois and Roscommon. A learned and widely-read man, as is shown by the numerous and careful citations from foreign authors found in his works. His Annals are the earliest historical compilations that have come down to us in Ireland. They are in mixed Latin and Irish, like many of the compilations and notes of Irish ecclesiastics, and include the period from the earliest times to his own date. They were continued by Augustin M’Grath to the year 1405.

1100. In this year the compilation called the *Leabhar na h-Uidhre*, or Book of the Dun, was completed at Clonmacnois.

1136. TANAIÐHE O’MULCONAIRE, or O’Mulconry. Poems on the Firbolg and the Tuatha Dé Danann.

1143. GIOLLA MODHUDA O’CASSIDY, called Dall Clairineach, Abbot of Ardraccan, in Meath. Poem giving a catalogue of the Christian Kings of Ireland, beginning “ Sacred Erin, Isle of Saints,” 368 verses ; and two other poems on similar subjects.

1160. GIOLLA-NA-NAOMH O’DUNN, chief bard of Leinster. Poems (1) on the tribes sprung from Milesius, 392 verses ; (2) on the tombs of the Kings of Leinster ; (3) a catalogue of the Kings of Connaught, and other effusions on similar subjects.

1160. In this year the compilation of the Book of Leinster was completed.

1100-1200. The Vision of Mac Conglinne, in the form in which we have it, appears to date from the twelfth century or earlier.

GROUP VI. ANGLO-NORMAN PERIOD. MAURICE O’REGAN, a native of Leinster, was employed by Dermot mac Morrough, King of Leinster, as his ambassador to Strongbow and the Norman nobles of S. Wales to solicit their aid in the recovery of his kingdom. O’Regan wrote in Irish a history of the Anglo-Norman Invasion as he himself witnessed it, from the year 1168 to the Siege of Limerick in 1171.

circa 1224. MUIREADACH O'DALY, called Muireadach Albanach, or "Murray the Scotchman," poet to Mac William de Bergho of Connaught. In 1213 he killed O'Donnell's steward and fled to Scotland, where he became chief poet to the Mac Donalds of Clanranald. He returned to Ireland in his old age and died a monk in the Monastery of Knockmoy. POEMS : (1) two to Cathal O'Connor of the Red Hand, Prince of Connaught (1156-1224), one of them written in the Levant ; (2) poems to Murrough O'Brien and Donough Cairbreach O'Brien, one of them disclosing his name and saying that he was just home from the Mediterranean ; (3) religious poems ; (4) poetic dialogue with Cathal the Redhanded of Connaught while they are shaving their heads before retiring to the Monastery of Cnoc Muaidhe (" Knockmoy") built by Cathal. His original home seems to have been on the shores of Lake Derryvarra, Co. Westmeath, and he calls himself O'Daly of Meath to distinguish himself from O'Daly of Finnyvarra, Co. Clare ; but he was living at Lisadill, Co. Sligo, when O'Donnell's steward came to collect his cess or tribute. In his old age he wrote some very tender religious poems, several of which are preserved in the Scottish Book of the Dean of Lismore. He is styled " Chief Poet of Erin and Alba."

1244. DONOGH MOR O'DALY. The Four Masters speak of this writer as " an expert that in the exercise of the poetic art never has been, nor ever will be, surpassed." He is undoubtedly the greatest member of the ua Dálaigh or O'Daly family, the most important of all the families of hereditary poets in Ireland. He lived at Finnyvarra, in Co. Clare, and from him the O'Dalys of that county are descended. He died at Boyle, Co. Roscommon, and was buried in the Norman Abbey there. From this fact, and also from the devotional character of his extant poems, a tradition grew up that he was Abbot of Boyle, but this does not seem supported by evidence. O'Reilly gives the names of more than thirty extant poems of his containing over 4,200 lines, and there are others in the British Museum not known to him. Many of Donogh's poems are still familiarly repeated in Ireland.

circa 1200-1260. GIOLLA BRIGHDE MAC CONMIDHE, or Gilbride mac Namee, an Ulster poet and retainer of the O'Donnells. O'Curry shows that several poems addressed to the O'Donnells and O'Neills supposed by O'Reilly to be the work of Flann Mainistrech are really written by Mac Namee. (1) Poem on the Battle of Downpatrick, 1260 ; (2) to Hugh O'Connor, of Rathcroghan ; (3) to a helmsman in the Levant ; (4) to Rolfe mac Mahon of Oriel, a vision. Mac Conmidhe is sometimes styled Giolla Brighde Albanach from his frequent visits to Scotland. The date given in O'Reilly (1350) to this poet is erroneous.

1310. TORNA O'MULCONAIRE, or Mulconry. Some of the poems ascribed to Torna Eigeas were possibly written by this poet. There is also a poem extant by him on the inauguration of Felim O'Connor on the hill of Carn Fraoch, in Co. Roscommon.

1315. TADHG MOR O'HIGGIN. Poem addressed to the young Manus O'Connor of Connaught.

1350. ANGUS ROE O'DALY of Meath. (1) Two poems on the erection of a castle on the hill of Carn Fraoch (1309) are ascribed to him by O'Reilly (" Irish Writers") ; (2) a spirited address to Hugh mac Owen O'Connor ; (3) address to Art Mór O'Melaghlin inciting him to drive the English out of Ulster ; (4) poem to Mulloy, whom he had insulted when in a state of intoxication. He beseeches him to forgive him, and instead of revenging himself on his own bard to turn his attention to destroying the English.

1372. JOHN O'DUBHAGAIN, or O'Dugan, Chief Poet of the O'Kellys. Genealogical and Topographical Poems (1) on the Kings of Leinster ; (2) on the Kings of Erin ; (3) on the battles of Cormac mac Airt, etc. His great topographical poem includes all the septs and families of Meath, Ulster, and Connaught. It was completed for Munster by O'Huidhrin in 1420.

1387. GEOFFREY FIONN O'DALY, a Munster Poet. (a) Poem addressed to the Mac Carthys inciting them to vigour, especially against the English ; (b) Religious Poems (1) on the limitations of earthly happiness. He contends that to be satisfied with this world is to be like a woman born and bred in a dungeon who has never seen the beauties of the world outside. (2) A poem written after a heavy sickness in gratitude to the Heavenly Physician for recovery.

1390. MAGNUS O'DUIGENAN, one of the great family of scribes of that name. He wrote out a great part of the Book of Ballymote.

1418. GIOLLA ISA MAC FIRBIS, the famous antiquary or scribe of Lecan in Sligo. He arranged and wrote out most, if not all, of the great book of Lecan, and also of the companion compilation known as the Yellow Book of Lecan. A poem on the synchronisms of the Irish Kings with the Roman Emperors is ascribed to him.

1420. GIOLLA-NA-NAOMH O'HUIDHRIN. He completed the topographical poem of John O'Dugan, adding the families belonging to the districts of Munster and Leinster. The poem consists of 780 verses or 3,120 lines, and when joined to O'Dugan's reaches 1,660 verses.

1448. TADHG OG O'HIGGIN, Poet of the O'Neills. He died at Kilconla and was buried in the Monastery of Athlahen, Co. Galway. He wrote (a) poems to the O'Neills and (b) devotional poems. Of the first are (1) on the inauguration of Niall Oge in 1397 ; (2) address to the same ; (3) on the death of Teigue mac Cathal O'Conor-Sligo. This is an affectionate effusion, but does not forget to mention, by way of business, that the slain man was accustomed to bestow on him twenty cows for a composition. (3) On the death of Teigue O'Kelly, a prince who, according to this poem, had incurred the hatred of his tribe for the oppressions necessary to keep up his personal munificence and splendour. (4) On the death of Ulick mac William-Burke ; (5) on the death of his elder brother and preceptor, Fergal Rua, full of gratitude and affection for his instructions ; begins " To-night the schools of poetry are dissolved" ; (6) on the struggle of the flesh against the spirit. These poems are in the British Museum. (See O'Grady's Catalogue of Irish MSS. at Egerton in. Arts. 37-43-)

1498. ANNALS OF ULSTER, otherwise called the Senatensian Annals. These important Annals were compiled from older material by CATHAL MAC MAGNUS, or Charles Maguire, at Seanaidh mac Magnus, now Belle Isle, in Lough Erne, Co. Fermanagh. They begin at the mission of Palladius and close at the year of the author's death. Some copies have additions up to the year 1588.

1459. THE WARS OF TURLOUGH O'BRIEN. This account of the wars against the Anglo-Normans in Munster from 1194-1355 was compiled by JOHN MAC CRAITH, or John Rory Magrath, Chief Historian of the Dalcais of North Munster in this year.

The close of this century and the beginning of the next yield few names of first-rate importance either in poetry or prose, though the family bards continued to produce verse all over the country.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE ancient literature of the Celt leads us into a world of pure romance. To study it, we must be content for a while to loosen our hold upon external fact ; legends of ancient gods, romantic adventures that seem to belong to fairyland, strange over-sea voyages and descents into the mysterious unseen world believed to exist beneath the hills or across the lakes and seas will meet us everywhere. We shall find the tenderest love-tales and songs of love ; we shall find poems on natural scenery, in which there is revealed what Matthew Arnold calls " a

magic intimacy with nature” ; we shall hear alike the ring of battle, the bugle-call of the chase, the eulogy of the chieftain, and the passionate lament of the down-trodden and lonely peasant.

In Cuchulain and Conall the Victorious, in Fionn mac Cumhaill and Oisín and Oscar, in King Cormac mac Airt and Niall of the Hostages we shall see set before us the heroic ideals of our forefathers. It is not merely as pretty tales, smoothly or pleasantly told, elopements or fairy tales or descriptions of raids as such, that we prize the old romance as our best heritage from the Gael of an older age ; it is because these stories open up to us not only a picture of his life and social habits, but of his thoughts and ideals, his notions of right and wrong, his conception of chivalry, his dreams of perfection and his pursuit of happiness. They show us what the old Gael was, as no other kind of history can show us, in his home, in his daily life, in his aspirations and the inner dwellings of the soul.

The world conceived of in his literature is far removed from ordinary life, though it touches it at many points and throws over it a brilliant fantastic glamour ; it is, to a large extent, a realm of the imagination, illumined by the fancies of fairy-land and the traditions derived from the belief of his forefathers. Everywhere in the literature he has produced we find the same mingling of the actual and the purely imaginative ; in his serious annals and historical tracts he surprises us by the perpetual intrusion of fairy-lore, or by the gravely historic importance which he attaches to the genealogies and wars and settlements of the gods ; his legal decisions and ancient laws have “ a thread of poetry” thrown round them, and his official verse contains the geography, the genealogies and the historical traditions of Ireland. One of the difficulties with which the Irish historian will always have to deal is to discriminate where the imaginary ends and the actual begins. It, in fact, ends and begins nowhere ; the two move on through all the centuries in a friendly union which can only partially and uncertainly be disentangled. The accounts of Brian Boru early in the eleventh century are tinged with fairy-belief just as are the tales of Conaire Mór at the beginning of the Christian Era ; nor, when Dr. Geoffrey Keating comes to compile a connected history of Ireland in the seventeenth century, does he show much desire to sift the real from the unreal.

But what is undoubtedly a loss to the historian may be a gain to the lover of literature, and from this point of view the quite extraordinary proportion of pure romance coming down from the earliest times to the present day, as compared with the entire literary out-put of the country, cannot be regarded as a misfortune. We are presented with an almost bewildering mass of story and legend and vision and bombastic narrative, which has never entirely ceased to be invented down to close upon our own times ; while if we could reckon up the official poems of the filí, and the more spontaneous productions of the bards and later Jacobite and popular poets, the output of verse would be hardly less surprising.

The untiring and splendid efforts of such scholars as Dr. Kuno Meyer, Dr. Stokes, and Dr. Windisch in the early romance literature, the poetry and the literature of vision ; of Mr. Standish Hayes O’Grady in the historical tales and legends, and the Ossianic and later mediæval literature ; of O’Donovan, Petrie, Todd, O’Curry, and others in the publication of the official and topographical poetry and of works of historical importance, have contributed to open out before us a very considerable portion of the literature in its various aspects. The vast amount of work that has been done is but imperfectly realised by the ordinary student, and much of the lamentation that we hear over the masses of unedited manuscripts might well be spared when we consider that, although there is still material to engage the attention of all the publishing agencies for many years to come, a great part of the remaining manuscripts are duplicates of those already published, and a good number are worthless either from the condition of the manuscripts or from the character of their contents. It is quite as necessary to realise what has been done as to deplore what remains to be done ; and we hope that this little book, which deals chiefly, though not quite exclusively, with material that has, in one form or

another, been made accessible to the public, may do something to remove the impression that seems to be abroad that very little has as yet been accomplished. It is a thankless task to underrate the results of those noble and fruitful efforts, which from the time of O'Curry, the Inspirer and Father of a race of laborious sons, until to-day, have done so much to open out before us the literary remains of our ancestors.

Though gaps remain to be filled in every department, we can yet get a fair bird's-eye view of the whole literature in its various aspects.

Old Romance.— A very large body of the Old Romance has been published, and the tales that remain to be edited are many of them duplicates with variations in their details, or short incidents or fragments which would certainly serve to fill up gaps in our knowledge, but which would not greatly extend our grasp of the cycles as a whole. There are still, however, unpublished, several tales belonging to the oldest mythology which would be valuable in extending our very scant knowledge of the oldest folk-lore of Ireland.

Annals.— A most important series of the Annals of Ireland has been issued from time to time under the auspices of the Master of the Rolls, and these are supplemented by the shorter historical tracts brought out among the publications of the Irish Archæological and Celtic Societies, in the *Revue Celtique*, and elsewhere. The general Historical literature is represented by the Annals of Tighernach, of the Four Masters, of Loch Ce, of Ulster, of Clonmacnois, and the *Chronicum Scotorum* ; the history of special periods by the Wars of the Gael and Gall, the Wars of Callachan of Cashel, and a number of other pieces, usually more or less fragmentary, both in Irish, Latin, and English, which throw light upon contemporary and local events in different periods. The labours of William Hennessy, Drs. John O'Donovan, James Henthorn Todd, Rev. Denis Murphy, Dr. Whitley Stokes, and others, have rendered many of these national annals accessible to the public. Yet several historical tracts and annals of importance still remain to be published. Such are the Annals of Innisfallen, the Annals of Boyle, and of Connaught, and portions of the Munster Annals, which might add considerably to our local provincial information. There also remains to be published the piece known as the "Triumphs of Turlough O'Brien," which gives an interesting account of events in Munster during the Norman period (1194-1355 A.D.[1]) ; the *Leabhar Gabhála*, or "Book of Invasions" (a), and its accompanying piece, the *Reim Rioghraidhe*, or "Succession of Kings" ; Keating's History of Ireland, known as the *Foras Feasa ar Eirinn* (b), and some personal and special historical pieces, such as the interesting tract known as the "Flight of the Earls" (c), which gives an account of the departure of O'Neill and O'Donnell from Ireland in 1607, and their journey through France and the Low Countries on their way to Rome.[2]

Several of the more important of these historical tracts are, however, in the hands of Editors, and we may look for considerable additions to the historical Literature during the next few years. Some very important genealogies, such as Mac Firbis' great compilation, are still only accessible in manuscript.

Law Tracts.— Large portions of the ancient Law Tracts of Ireland, commonly called the "Brehon Laws," have been issued by the Commissioners specially appointed for this purpose, and these volumes throw a flood of light upon the early life and institutions of the country.

Ecclesiastical Material.— A great deal of the ecclesiastical material, both in Irish and Latin, including saints' lives and legends, martyrologies and calendars of saints, homilies and passions, sacred poetry, hymns and service books, have been carefully edited for various publications from the time of Colgan to our own day. Among many laborious workers in this field we can only here mention Bishop Reeves, Rev. Dr. MacCarthy, Dr. Whitley Stokes, Rev. Dr. Edmund Hogan, Dr. Robert Atkinson, Rev. Professor Bernard, Rev. F. Warren. Irish and Latin

scholars of many different schools of religious thought have nobly united in the effort to lay these documents open to the study and criticism of those interested in Church history.

The Great Collections.— From about the eleventh or early twelfth century, scribes, both secular and ecclesiastical, fearing perhaps the destructive effects of the Norman wars, or actuated by a just pride in the traditions and literary remains of their race, began to collect in large vellum books the old stories, genealogies, historic tales, and poems that had been repeated among the people, and which were probably dying out amid the inrush of new ideas and customs. Some of these, like the Book of Leinster, which was compiled in the reign and probably for the benefit of Dermot Mac Morrough, the infamous prince in whose time the Normans came over to Ireland, are largely concerned with the traditions and events belonging to their own province, but all contain a part of the general stock of the national records and romance, and they preserve for us these stories and poems in the earliest form in which they have come down to us. Among the most important of these collections are the Book of the Dun Cow (*Leabhar na h-Uidhre*, L.U.) the earliest existing of these large compilations of material, which was compiled at the monastery of Clonmacnois about 1100 A.D. ; the Book of Leinster (*Leabhar Laighneach*, L.L.), the Great Book of Lecan (*Leabhar Mór Lecain*), (Mór) the Yellow or Golden Book of Lecan (*Leabhar Buidhe Lecain*, Y.B.L.), and the Book of Fermoy (*Leabhar Fearamaighe*), all of which contain for the larger part early romances, genealogical and annalistic and topographical tracts and poems, and old historical legends, traditions and bardic plays. Besides these we have the Book of Armagh, the Book of Ballymote (*Leabhar Baile an Mhota*, B.B.), the Speckled Book (*Leabhar Breac*, L.B.), the Book of Lismore, which preserve for the most part religious and ecclesiastical documents, although they contain a certain proportion of other matter. In the Book of Ballymote, especially, there are several Irish versions of classical tales, and text books of the instructions given by the poets to their schools of students ; but on the whole these four volumes may be said to be chiefly occupied with the lives and legends of the saints, sermons, passions, and homilies, religious poems, martyrologies, and the “ rules ” of various monastic bodies, with much Biblical history. The Book of Armagh contains the earliest and most authentic documents regarding St. Patrick and the tracts believed to have been written by him.

Scribes.— Though one or two of these collections were written at monasteries or by ecclesiastics, the larger number were the work of successive generations of official scribes who, in different parts of the country, preserved these great vellum manuscript volumes, adding to them from time to time any material which seemed to them of sufficient importance, gathered either from without or contributed by the bards belonging to the different families and septs. The Mac Firbises, the Mac Egans, the O’Duigenans, the O’Mulconroys, the Mac Brodys, and many other noted families of scribes and genealogists have helped to preserve to posterity the traditions of the race. The office of scribe and genealogist was a high one, held in honour in the tribe, and in the ecclesiastical world even bishops were proud to add this title to their names and roll of dignities. Hence the clergy and laity alike contributed to the preservation of the records and to their worthy keeping in large, and, in the case of portions of the Scriptures, often highly ornamented vellum volumes. Some families of chieftains, the O’Donnells, for example, seem to have taken a special pride in the collection and preservation of manuscripts.

Modern Manuscripts. But besides these well-known books, which bear distinctive names, there are also a number of hardly less important and lengthy compilations in Trinity College, Dublin, and at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, at Brussels, and elsewhere, formed on the same plan ; and there are, outside of these large vellums, a mass of Irish manuscripts existing on parchment and paper dating chiefly from the seventeenth century and onwards, and becoming very numerous during the eighteenth century, from which time, no doubt, owing to the general loss of the language, the interest in copying and preserving manuscripts gradually dwindled away. The ignorant and wasteful destruction of manuscripts during times quite near

our own has perhaps not been equalled in the whole course of Irish history ; by persons no longer able to read them they were looked upon as so much waste paper, and ruthlessly flung away. Nevertheless, our readers would probably be surprised at the enormous number of Irish manuscripts still existing, and collected under the hospitable roofs of the Libraries of the Royal Irish Academy, and of Trinity College, Dublin ; of the British Museum, Maynooth, and other home and Continental Libraries. The indices to the manuscript catalogues in the Royal Irish Academy Library alone occupy thirteen large volumes, and these do not contain the more recent additions to the collection. In the British Museum there are one hundred and ninety-eight volumes of Irish manuscripts, each containing a large number of separate pieces. The fact that a copy is comparatively modern in date does not necessarily detract from its value, for the age of the contents of these manuscripts varies greatly, and in some cases a very old story or poem may have survived, as though by the merest chance, in some quite recent manuscript.

There is necessarily a vast amount of repetition, some popular tale or song being contained in as many as twenty or more different manuscripts, but we frequently gain by this means different versions of the same tale, with considerable varieties of style and detail in the method of narration. The different copies, also, frequently help to the elucidation of linguistic difficulties or obscure passages.

[1] In course of being edited for the Cambridge University Press by Mr. Standish Hayes O'Grady.

[2] These tracts are in course of being edited for the Irish Texts Society by Mr. R. A. S. Macalister (a) ; Mr. David Comyn (b), and Miss Agnes O'Farrelly (c). The first portion of Keating's History has already been issued.

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