

Evidence of Topography and Genealogy

Douglas Hyde

1901

And now we come to the birth of Christ, which is thus recorded by the “ Four Masters” :
“ The first year of the age of Christ and the eighth of the reign of Crimhthan Niadhnaír.” [1]
Crimhthan was no doubt one of the marauding Scots who plundered Britain, for it is recorded of him that “ it was this Crimhthan who went on the famous expedition beyond the sea from which he brought home several extraordinary and costly treasures, among which were a gilt chariot and a golden chessboard, inlaid with three hundred transparent gems, a tunic of various colours and embroidered with gold, a shield embossed with pure silver,” and many other valuables. Curiously enough O’Clery’s Book of Invasions contains a poem of seventy-two lines ascribed to this king himself, in which he describes these articles. He was fabled to have been accompanied on this expedition by his “ bain-leannán” or fairy sweetheart, one of an interesting race of beings of whom frequent mention is made in Irish legend and saga.

The next event of consequence after the birth of Christ is the celebrated revolt led by Cairbré Cinn-cait, of the Athach-Tuatha, [2] or unfree clans of Ireland, in other words the serfs or plebeians, against the free clans or nobility, whom they all but exterminated, three unborn children of noble line alone escaping. [3]

The people of Ireland were plagued—as though by heaven—with bad seasons and lack of fruit during the usurper Cairbré’s reign. As the “ Four Masters” graphically put it, “ evil was the state of Ireland during his reign, fruitless her corn, for there used to be but one grain on the stalk ; fishless her rivers ; milkless her cattle ; un plenty her fruit, for there used to be but one acorn on the oak.” The belief that bad seasons were sent as a punishment of bad rulers was a very ancient and universal one in Ireland, and continued until very lately. The ode which the ollav or head-bard is said to have chanted in the ears of each newly-inaugurated prince, took care to recall it to his mind, and may be thus translated :

“ Seven witnesses there be
Of the broken faith of kings.
First to trample on the free,
Next to sully sacred things,
Next to strain the law divine,
(This defeat in battle brings).
Famine, slaughter, milkless kine,
And disease on flying wings.
These the seven-fold vivid lights
That light the perjury of kings !” [4]

According to the Book of Conquests the people of Ireland, plagued by famine and bad seasons, brought in, on the death of Cairbré, the old reigning families again, making Fearadach king, and the “ Athach-Tuatha swore by the heaven and earth, sun, moon, and all the elements, that they would be obedient to them and their descendants, as long as the sea should surround Ireland.” The land recovered its tranquillity with the reign of Fearadach. “ Good was Ireland during his time. The seasons were right tranquil ; the earth brought forth its fruit. Fishful its river mouths ; milkful the kine ; heavy-headed the woods.”

THE ramifications of early Irish literary history and its claims to antiquity are so multiple, intricate, and inter-connected, that it is difficult for any one who has not made a close study of it to form a conception of the extent it covers and the various districts it embraces. The early literature of Ireland is so bound up with the early history, and the history so bound up and associated with tribal names, memorial sites, patronymics, and topographical nomenclature, that it presents a kind of heterogeneous whole, that which is recognised history running into and resting upon suspected or often even evident myth, while tribal patronymics and national genealogies abut upon both, and the whole is propped and supported by legions of placenames still there to testify, as it were, to the truth of all.

We have already glanced at some of the marks left by the mysterious De Danann race upon our nomenclature. Mounds, raths, and tumuli, called after them, dot all Ireland. It is the same with the early Milesians. It is the same with the men of the great pseudo-historic cycle of storytelling, that of Cuchulain and the Red Branch, not to speak of minor cycles. There is never a camping-ground of Mevè's army on their march a century B.C. from Rathcroghan in Roscommon to the plain of Mochruime in Louth, and never a skirmish fought by them that has not given its name to some plain or camping-ground or ford. Passing from the heroes of the Red Branch to the history of Finn mac Cool and the Fenians, we find the same thing. Finn's seat, the Hill of the Fenians, Diarmuid and Gráinne's bed, and many other names derived from them or incidents connected with them, are equally widely scattered.

The question now arises, does the undoubted existence of these place-names, many of them mentioned in the very oldest manuscripts we have—these manuscripts being only copies of still more ancient ones now lost mentioned, too, in connection with the celebrated events which are there said to have given them their names, do these and the universally received genealogies of historic tribes which trace themselves back to some ancestor who figured at the time when these place-names were imposed, form credible witnesses to their substantial truth? In other words, are such names as Creeveroe [5] (Red Branch) given to the spot where the Red Branch heroes have been always represented as residing; or Ardee [6] (Ferdia's Ford) where Cuchulain fought his great single fight with that champion—are these to be accepted as collateral evidence of the Red Branch heroes of Ferdia and of Cuchulain? Are See-finn (Finn's seat) or Rath Coole (Cool's rath) to be accepted as proving the existence of Finn and his father Cool?

In my opinion no stress, or very little, can be laid upon the argument from topography, which weighed so heavily with Keating, O'Donovan, and O'Curry, for if it is admitted at all it proves too much. If it proves the objective existence of Finn and of Cuchulain, so does it that of Dana, "the mother of the gods," and of divinities by the score. Besides the Gaels brought their topographical nomenclature with them to Alba, and places named from Finn and the Fenians, are nearly as plentiful there as in Ireland. Wherever the early Gaels went they took with them their heroic legends, and wherever they settled place-names relating to their legends which were so much a part of their intellectual life, grew up round them too. Something of the same kind may be seen in Greece—a land which presents so many and so striking analogies to that of the Gael; for wherever a Grecian colony settled, east or west, it was full of memorials of the legendary past, and Jasonia, or temples of Jason, and other memorials of the voyage of the Argonauts, are to be found from Abdera to Thrace, eastward along the coast of the Euxine and in the heart of Armenia and Media, just as memorials of the flight of Diarmuid and of Grainne from before Finn mac Cool may be found wherever the Gael are settled in Ireland, in Scotland, or the Isles.

Having come to the conclusion that Irish topography is useless for proving the genuineness of past history, let us look at Irish genealogy. When the Mac Carthys, descendants of Mac

Carthy Mor, trace themselves through Oilioll Olum, king of Ireland in the second century, to Eber Finn, son of Milesius ; when the O'Briens of Thomond trace themselves to the same through Oilioll Olum's second son ; when the O'Carrolls of Ely trace themselves to the same through Cian, the third son ; when the O'Neills trace themselves back through Niall of the Nine Hostages, and Conn of the Hundred Battles to Eremon, son of Milesius ; when the O'Driscolls trace themselves to Ith, who was uncle of Milesius ; when the Magennis trace themselves through Conall Cearnach, the Red Branch hero, back to Ir, the son of Milesius ; and when every sept and name and family and clan in Ireland fit in, and even in our oldest manuscripts have always fitted in, each in its own place, with universally mutual acknowledgment and unanimity, each man carefully counting his ancestors through their hundredfold ramifications, and tracing them back first to him from whom they get their surname, and next to him from whom they get their tribe name, and from thence to the founder of their house, who in his turn grafts on to one of the great stems (Eremonian, Eberian, Irian, or Ithian) [7] ; and when not only political friendships and alliances, but the very holding of tribal lands, depended upon the strict registration and observance of these things we ask again do such facts throw any light upon the credibility of early Irish history and early Irish records ?

The whole intricate system of Irish genealogy, jealously preserved from the very first, as all Irish literature goes to show, [8] played so important a part in Irish national history and in Irish social life, and is at the same time so intimately bound up with the people's traditions and literature, and throws so much light upon the past, that it will be well to try to get a grip of this curious and intricate subject, so important for all who would attempt to arrive at any knowledge of the life and feelings of the Irish and Scottish Gael, and upon which so much formerly depended in the history and alliances of both races.

All Milesian families trace themselves, as I have said, to one or other of the three sons of Milesius, who were Eremon, Eber, and Ir, or to his uncle Ith, who landed in Ireland at any time between 1700 and 800 years before Christ according to Irish computation. But while they all trace themselves back to this point, it is to be observed that long before they reach it, in each of the four branches, some place in the long row of ancestors is arrived at, some name occurs, in which all or most of the various genealogies meet, and upon which all the branch lines converge. Thus in the Eberian families it is found that they all spring from the three sons of Oilioll [Ul-yul] Olum, who according to all the annals lived in the second century in this Oilioll all the Eberian families converge.

Again all, or nearly all, the Irians trace themselves to either Conall Cearnach or Fergus Mac Roy, the great Red Branch champions who lived in the North shortly before the birth of Christ.

The tribes of the Ithians, the least numerous and least important of the four, seem to meet in Mac Con, king of Ireland, who lived in the second century, and who is the hero of the saga called the Battle of Moy Mochruime, where Art, son of Conn of the Hundred Battles, was slain.

In the line of Eremon only, the greatest of the four, do we find two pedigrees which meet at points *considerably antecedent* to the birth of Christ, for the Dál Riada of Scotland join the same stem as the O'Neills as much as 390 years before Christ, and the O'Cavanaghs at a still more remote period, in the reign of Ugony Mór. But setting aside these two families we find that all the other great reigning houses, as the Mac Donnells of Antrim, Maguires of Fermanagh, O'Kellys of Connacht, and others, either meet in the third century in Cairbré of the Liffey, son of King Cormac mac Art, and grandson of Conn of the Hundred Battles ; or else like the O'Neills of Tyrone, O'Donnells of Tirconnell, O'Dogherties of Inishowen,

O'Conors of Connacht, O'Flaherties of Galway, they meet in a still later progenitor—the father of Niall of the Nine Hostages.

It will be best to examine here some typical Irish pedigree that we may more readily understand the system in its simplest form, and see how families branch from clans, and clans from stems. Let us take, then, the first pedigree of those given at the end of the *Forus Feasa*, that of Mac Carthy Mór, and study it as a type.

This pedigree begins with Donal, who was the first of the Mac Carthys to be created Earl of Clancare, or Clancarthy, in 1565. Starting from him the names of all his ancestors are traced back to Eber, son of Milesius. Passing over his five immediate ancestors, we come to the sixth. It was he who built the monastery of Irriallach on the Lake of Killarney. The seventh ancestor was Donal, from whose brother Donagh come the families of Ard Canachta and Croc Ornachta. The tenth was Donal Roe, from whom come the Clan Donal Roe, and from whose brother, Dermot of Tralee, come the family of Mac Finneens. The eleventh was Cormac Finn, from whom come also the Mac Carthys of Duhallow and the kings of Desmond ; while from his brother Donal come the Mac Carthys Riabhach, or Grey Mac Carthys. The thirteenth was Dermot of Kill Baghani, from whom come the Clan Teig Roe na Sgarti. The fourteenth was Cormac of Moy Tamhnaigh, from whose brother Teig come the Mac Auliffes of Cork. The fifteenth was Muireadach, who was the first of the line to assume the surname of Mac Carthy, which he did from his father Carthach, from whom all the Síol Carthaigh [Sheeol Caurhy], or Seed of Carthach, including the Mac Fineens, Mac Auliffes, etc., are descended. The seventeenth was Saerbhrethach, from whose brother Murrough spring the sept of the O'Callaghans. The nineteenth was Callaghan of Cashel, king of Munster, celebrated in Irish romance for his warfare with the Danes. The twenty-third was Snedgus, who had a brother named Fogartach, from whose son Finguini sprang the Muinntir Finguini, or Finguini's People. The twenty-eighth was Falbi Flann, who was king of Munster from 622 to 633, from whose brother Finghin sprang the sept of the O'Sullivans. The thirty-second was Angus, from one son of whom Eochaidh [Yohy] Finn are descended the O'Keefes ; while from another son Enna, spring the O'Dalys of Munster—he was the first king of Munster who became a Christian, and he was slain in 484. The thirty-fourth was Arc, king of Munster, from whose son Cas, spring the following septs : The O'Donoghue Mór from whom, branched off the O'Donoghue of the Glen—O'Mahony Finn and O'Mahony Roe, *i.e.* the White and Red O'Mahonys, and O'Mahony of Ui Floinn Laei, and O'Mahony of Carbery, also O'Mullane [9] and O'Cronin ; while from his other son, “ Cairbré the Pict,” sprang the O'Moriarties, and from Cairbré's grand-son came the O'Garvans. The thirty-sixth ancestor was Olild Flann Beg, king of Munster, who had a son from whom are descended the sept of O'Donovan, and the O'Coiléains, or Collinses. And a grandson from whom spring the O'Meehans, O'Hehirs, and the Mac Davids of Thomond. The thirty-seventh, Fiachaidh, was well known in Irish romance ; the thirty-eighth was Eoghan, or Owen Mór, from whom all the septs of the Eoghanachts, or Eugenians of Munster come, who embrace every family and sept hitherto mentioned, and many more. They are carefully to be distinguished from the Dalcassians, who are descended from Owen's second son Cas. It was the Dalcassians who, with Brian Boru at their head, preserved Ireland from the Danes and won Clontarf. For many centuries the history of Munster is largely composed of the struggles between these two septs for the kingship. The thirty-ninth is the celebrated Oilioll [Ulyul] Olum, king of Muster, whose wail of grief over his son Owen is a stock piece in Irish MSS. He is a son of the great Owen, better known as Mogh Nuadhat, or Owen the Splendid, who wrested half the kingdom from Conn of the Hundred Battles, so that to this very day Connacht and Ulster together are called in Irish Conn's Half, and Munster and Leinster Owen's Half. The forty-third ancestor is Dergthini, who is known in Irish history as one of the three heirs of the royal houses in Ireland, whom I have mentioned before as having been saved from massacre when the Free Clans or Nobility were cut to pieces by the Unfree or Rent-paying tribes at Moy Cro—an

event which is nearly contemporaneous with the birth of Christ. Hitherto there have been nine kings of Munster in this line, but not a single king of Ireland, but the forty-ninth ancestor, Duach Dalta Degadh, also called Duach Donn, attains this high honour, and takes his place among the Reges Hiberniæ about 172 years before Christ, according to the “Four Masters.” After this a rather bald catalogue of thirty-six more ancestors are reckoned, no fewer than twenty-four being counted among the kings of Ireland, and at last, at the eighty-sixth ancestor from the Earl of Clancarthy, the genealogy finds its long-delayed goal in Eber, son of Milesius.

It will be seen from this typical pedigree of the Mac Carthys—any other great family would have answered our purpose just as well—how families spring from clans and clans from septs—to use an English word—and septs from a common stem ; and how the nearness or remoteness of some common ancestor bound a number of clans in nearer or remoter alliance to one another. Thus all septs of the great Eberian stem had some slight and faint tie of common ancestry connecting them, which comes out most strongly in their jealousy of the Eremonian or northern stem, but was not sufficient to produce a political alliance amongst themselves. Of a much stronger nature was the tie which bound those families descended from Eoghan Mór, the thirty-eighth ancestor from the first earl. These went under the name of the Eoghanachts, and held fairly together, always opposing the Dalcassians, descended from Cas. But when it came to the adoption of a surname, as it did in the eleventh century, those who descended from the ancestor who gave them their name, were bound to one another by the common ties or a nearer kinship and a common surname.

It will be seen at a glance from the above pedigree, how, taking the Mac Carthys as a stem, and starting from the first earl, the Mac Finneens join that stem at the eleventh ancestor from the earl, the Mac Auliffes at the fifteenth, the O’Callaghans at the eighteenth, the O’Sullivans at the twenty-ninth, the O’Keefes at the thirty-second, the O’Dalys [10] of Munster at the thirty-second, the O’Donoghues, O’Mahonys, O’Mullanes, O’Cronins, O’Garvans, and Moriartys at the thirty-fourth, the O’Donovans, Collinses, O’Meehans, O’Hehirs, and Mac Davids at the thirty-sixth.

Now each of these had his own genealogy equally carefully kept by his own ancestral bardic historian. If, for instance, the Mac Carthys could boast of nine kings of Munster amongst them, the O’Keefes could boast of ten ; and an O’Keefe reckoning from Donal Og, who was slain at the battle of Aughrim, would say that the Mac Carthys joined *his* line at the thirty-sixth ancestor from Donal.

All the Gaels of Ireland of the free tribes trace back their ancestry, as we have seen, to one or other of the four great stocks of Erimon, Eber, Ir, and Ith. Of these the EREMONIANS were by far the greatest, the EBERIANS coming next. The O’Neills, O’Donnells, O’Conors, O’Cavanaghs, and almost all the leading families of the north, the west, and the east were Erimonian ; the O’Briens, Mac Carthys, and most of the leading tribes of the south were Eberians. [11] It was nearly always a member of one or the other of these two stems who held the high-kingship of Ireland, but so much more powerful were the Eremonians within historical times, that the Southern Eberians, although well able to maintain themselves in the south, yet found themselves absolutely unable to place more than one or two [12] high-kings upon the throne of All-Ireland, from the coming of Patrick, until the great Brian Boru once more broke the spell and wrested the monarchy from the Erimonians. The Irians gave few kings to Ireland, and the Ithians still less—only three or four, and these in very early, perhaps mythic, times.

If now we trace the O’Neill pedigree back as we did that of the Mac Carthys, we find the great Shane O’Neill who fought Elizabeth, traced back step by step to the perfectly historical

character Niall of the Nine Hostages, son of Eochaidh Muigh-mheadhoin [Mwee-va-on], who was grandson of Fiachaidh Sreabhaine [Sravinna], son of Cairbré of the Liffey, son of the great Cormac Mac Art, and grandson of Conn of the Hundred Battles, all of whom are celebrated in history and endless romance ; and thence through a list containing in all forty-four High-kings of Ireland back to EREMON, son of Milesius, brother of that Eber from whom the Mac Carthys spring, and from whom he is the eighty-eighth in descent. The O'Donnells join his line at the thirty-sixth ancestor, the O'Gallaghers at the thirty-second, the O'Conor Don and O'Conor Roe and the O'Flaherty at the thirty-seventh. We find too, on examining these pedigrees, the most curious inter-mixtures and crossing of families. Thus, for instance, the two families of O'Crowley in Munster spring from the Mac Dermot Roe of Connacht, who, with the Mac Donogh, sprang from Mac Dermot of Moylurg in Roscommon, ancestor of the prince of Coolavin ; while the O'Gara, former lord of Coolavin in the same county, to whom the " Four Masters" dedicated their annals, was of southern Eberian stock.

The great warriors of the Red Branch, the men of the original kingdom of Uladh [Ulla, *i.e.*, Ulster], were of the third great stock, the IRIANS or race of Ir, [13] but they are perhaps better known as the Clanna Rudhraighe [Rury] or Rudricians, so named from Rudhraighe, a great monarch of Ireland who lived nearly three hundred years before Christ, or as Ulidians because they represented the ancient province of Uladh. But the Three Collas, grandsons of Cairbré of the Liffey, who was himself great-grandson of Conn of the Hundred Battles, and of course of the Eremonian stock, overthrew the Irians in the year 332, and burned their capital, Emania. The Irians were thus driven out by the Eremonians, and forced back into the present counties of Down and Antrim, where they continued to maintain their independence. So bitterly, however, did they resent the treatment they had received at the hands of the Eremonians, and so deeply did the burning of Emania continue to rankle in their hearts, that after a period of nearly 900 years they are said to have stood sullenly aloof from the other Irish, and to have refused to make common cause with them against the Normans at the battle of Downpatrick in 1260, where the prince of the O'Neills was slain. [14] So powerful, on the other hand, did the idea of race-connection remain, that we find one of the bards so late as the sixteenth century urging a political combination and alliance between the descendants of the Three Collas who had burned Emania over twelve hundred years before, and who were then represented by the Maguires of Fermanagh, the Mac Mahons of Oriel [15] and the far-off O'Kellys of Ui Maine [16] [Ee maana].

As for the fourth great stock, the ITHIANS, [17] they were gradually pushed aside by the Eberians of the south, as the Irians had been by the Eremonians of the north, and driven into the islands and coasts of West Munster. Yet curiously enough the northern Dukes of Argyle and the Campbells and MacAllans of Scotland spring from them. Their chief tribes in Ireland were known as the Corca Laidhi [Corka-lee] ; these were the pirate O'Driscolls and their correlatives, but they were pushed so hard by the Mac Carthys, O'Mahonys, and other Eberians, that in the year 1615 their territory was confined to a few parishes, and twenty years later even these are found paying tribute to the Mac Carthy Reagh. There is one very remarkable peculiarity about their genealogies, which is, that, though they trace themselves with great apparent, and no doubt real, accuracy back to Mac Con, monarch of Ireland and contemporary with Oilioll Olum in the end of the second century, yet from that point back to Milesius a great number of generations (some twenty or so) are missing, and no genealogist, so far as I know, in any of the books of pedigrees which I have consulted, has attempted to supply them by rilling them up with a barren list of names, as has been done in the other three stems. [18]

Let us now consider how far these genealogies tend to establish the authenticity of our early history, saga, and literature. The first plain and obvious objection to them is this that genealogies which trace themselves back to Adam must be untrue inventions.

We grant it.

But all Gaelic genealogies meet, as we have shown in Milesius or his uncle, Ith. Strike off all that long tale or pre-Milesian names connecting him with Adam, and count them as a late excrescence—a mixture of pagan myth and Christian invention added to the rest for show. This leaves us only the four stems to deal with.

The next objection is that pedigrees which trace themselves back to the landing of the Milesians—a date in the computation of which Irish annalists themselves differ by a few hundred years must also be untrue, especially as their own annalist, Tighearnach, has expressly said that all their history prior to about 300 B.C. is uncertain.

We grant this also.

What, then, remains ?

This remains—namely the points in each of the four great race stems, in which all or the most of the leading tribes and families belonging to that stem converge, and, as we have seen, all of these with a few exceptions take place within reach of the historical period. In the lines of EBER and of ITH, this point is at the close of the second century ; in the race of IR it is about the time of Christ's birth, [19] and in the fourth and perhaps most important stem, that of EREMON, the two main points of convergence are in the historical Niall of the Nine Hostages, who came to the throne in 356, and in Cairbr6 of the Liffey, who became High-king in 267. [20]

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

WE must now consider whether Irish genealogies were really traced or not to those points which I have mentioned. Is there any documentary evidence in support of such an assertion ?

There is certainly some such evidence, and we shall proceed to examine it.

In the *Leabhar na h-Uidhre* [*Lowar na Heera*], or *Book of the Dun Cow*, the existing manuscript of which was transcribed about the year 1100, in the *Book of Leinster*, transcribed about fifty years later, in the *Book of Ballymote* and in the *Book of Lecan*, frequent reference is made to an ancient book now lost called the *Cin* or *Codex of Drom-sneachta*. This book, or a copy of it, existed down to the beginning of the seventeenth century, for Keating quotes from it in his history, and remarks at the same time, “ and it was before the coming of Patrick to Ireland the author of that book existed.” [21] This evidence of Keating might be brushed aside as an exaggeration did it stand alone, but it does not, for in a partially effaced memorandum in the *Book of Leinster*, transcribed from older books about the year 1150, we read: “ [Ernin, son of] Duach, [22] son of the king of Connacht, an ollav and a prophet and a professor in history and a professor in wisdom ; it was he that collected the genealogies and histories of the men of Erin into one, and that is the *Cin Droma-sneachta*.” Now there were only two Duachs according to our annals, one of these was great-grandson of Niall of the Nine Hostages, and of course a pagan, who died in 379 ; the other, who was an ancestor of the O'Flaherties, died one hundred and twenty years later. It was Duach the pagan, whose second son was Ernin ; the other had only one son, whose name was Senach. If O'Curry has read the half-effaced word correctly, then the book may have been, as Keating says it was, written before St. Patrick's coming, and it contained, as the various references to it show, a repertoire of genealogies collected by the son of a man who died in 379 ; this man, too, being great-grandson of that Niall of the Nine Hostages in whose son so large a number of the Eremonian genealogies converge. [23]

There are many considerations which lead me to believe that Irish genealogical books were kept from the earliest introduction of the art of writing, and kept with greater accuracy, perhaps, than any other records of the past whatsoever. The chiefest of these is the well-known fact that, under the tribal system, no one possessed lawfully any portion of the soil inhabited by his tribe if he were not of the same race with his chief. Consequently even those of lowest rank in the tribe traced and recorded their pedigree with as much care as did the highest, for “ it was from his own genealogy each man of the tribe, poor as well as rich, held the charter of his civil state, his right of property in the cantred in which he was born.” [24] All these genealogies were entered in the local books of each tribe and were preserved in the verses of the hereditary poets. There was no incentive to action among the early Irish so stimulative as a remembrance of their pedigree. It was the same among the Welsh, and probably among all tribes of Celtic blood. We find the witty but unscrupulous Giraldus, in the twelfth century, saying of his Welsh countrymen that every one of them, even of the common people, observes the genealogy of his race, and not only knows by heart his grand-fathers and great-grandfathers, but knows all his ancestors up to the sixth or seventh generation, [25] or even still further, and promptly repeats his genealogy as Rhys, son of Griffith, son of Rhys, son of Teudor, etc. [26]

The poet, Cuan O’Lochain, who died in the year 1024, gives a long account of the Saltair of Tara now lost, the compilation of which he ascribes to Cormac mac Art, who came to the throne in 227, [27] and in which he says the synchronisms and chronology of all the kings were written. The Book of Ballymote too quotes from an ancient book, now lost, called the Book of the Uachongbhail, to the effect that “ the synchronisms and genealogies and succession of their kings and monarchs, their battles, their contests, and their antiquities from the world’s beginning down to that time were written in it, and this is the Saltair of Tara, which is the origin and fountain of the historians of Erin from that period down to this time.” This may not be convincing proof that Cormac mac Art wrote the Saltair, but it is convincing proof that what were counted as the very earliest books were filled with genealogies.

The subject of tribal genealogy upon which the whole social fabric depended was far too important to be left without a check in the hands of tribal historians, however well intentioned. And this check was afforded by the great convention or Féis, which took place triennially at Tara, [28] whither the historians had to bring their books that under the scrutiny of the jealous eyes of rivals they might be purged of whatever could not be substantiated, “ and neither law nor usage nor historic record was ever held as genuine until it had received such approval, and nothing that disagreed with the Roll of Tara could be respected as truth.” [29]

“ It was,” says Duaid Mac Firbis [30]—himself the author of probably the greatest book of genealogies ever written, speaking about the chief tribal historians of Ireland, “ obligatory on every one of them who followed it to purify the profession” ; and he adds very significantly, “ Along with these [historians] the judges of Banba [Ireland] used to be in like manner preserving the history, *for a man could not be a judge without being a historian*, and he is not a historian who is not a judge in the BRETHADH NIMHEDH, [31] that is the last book in the study of the Shanachies and of the judges themselves.”

The poets and historians “ were obliged to be free from theft, and killing, and satirising, and adultery, and everything that would be a reproach to their learning.” Mac Firbis, who was the last working historian of a great professional family, puts the matter nobly and well.

“ Any Shanachie,” he says, “ whether an ollav or the next in rank, or belonging to the order at all, who did not preserve these rules, lost half his income and his dignity according to law, and was subject to heavy penalties besides, so that it is not to be supposed that there is in the world a person who would not prefer to tell the truth, if he had no other reason than

the fear of God and the loss of his dignity and his income : and it is not becoming to charge partiality upon these elected historians [of the nation]. However, if unworthy people did write false-hood, and attributed it to a historian, it might become a reproach to the order of historians if they were not on their guard, and did not look to see whether it was out of their prime books of authority that those writers obtained their knowledge. And that is what should be done by every one, both by the lay scholar and the professional historian everything of which they have a suspicion, to look for it, and if they do not find it confirmed in good books, to note down its doubtfulness, [32] along with it, as I myself do to certain races hereafter in this book, and it is thus that the historians are freed from the errors of others, should these errors be attributed to *them*, which God forbid.”

I consider it next to impossible for any Gaelic pedigree to have been materially tampered with from the introduction of the art of writing, because tribal jealousies alone would have prevented it, and because each stem of the four races was connected at some point with every other stem, the whole clan system being inextricably intertwined, and it was necessary for all the various tribal genealogies to agree, in order that each branch, sub-branch, and family might fit, each in its own place.

I have little doubt that the genealogy of O’Neill, for instance, which traces him back to the father of Niall of the Nine Hostages who came to the throne in 356 is substantially correct. Niall, it must be remembered, was father of Laoghaire [Leary], who was king when St. Patrick arrived, by which time, if not before, the art of writing was known in Ireland. *A fortiori* then, we may trust the pedigrees of the O’Donnells and the rest who join that stem a little later on.

If this be acknowledged we may make a cautious step or two backwards. No one, so far as I know, has much hesitation in acknowledging the historic character of that King Laoghaire whom St. Patrick confronted, nor of his father Niall of the Nine Hostages. But if we go so far, it wants very little to bring us in among the Fenians themselves, and the scenes connected with them and with Conn of the Hundred Battles ; for Niall’s great-grandfather was that Fiachaidh who was slain by the Three Collas those who burnt Emania and destroyed the Red Branch and his father is Cairbré of the Liffey, who overthrew the Fenians, and his father again is the great Cormac son of Art, son of Conn of the Hundred Battles who divided the kingdom with Owen Mór. But it is from the three grandsons of this Owen Mór the Eberians come, and from their half-brother come the Ithians, so that up to this point I think Irish genealogies may be in the main accepted. Even the O’Kavanaghs and their other correlations, who do not join the stem of Eremon till between 500 or 600 years before Christ, yet pass through Enna Cennsalach, king of Leinster, a perfectly historical character mentioned several times in the Book of Armagh, [33] who slew the father of Niall of the Nine Hostages ; and I believe that, however we may account for the strange fact that these septs join the Eremonian stem so many hundreds of years before the O’Neills and the others, that up to this point their genealogy too may be trusted.

If this is the case, and if it is true that every Gael belonging to the Free Clans of Ireland could trace his pedigree with accuracy back to the fourth, third, or even second century, it affords a strong support to Irish history, and in my opinion considerably heightens the credibility of our early annals, and renders the probability that Finn mac Cool and the Red Branch heroes were real flesh and blood, enormously greater than before. It will also put us on our guard against quite accepting such sweeping generalisations as those of Skene, when he says that the entire legendary history of Ireland prior to the establishment of Christianity in the fifth century partakes largely of a purely artificial character. We must not forget that while no Irish genealogy is traced to the De Danann tribes, who were undoubtedly gods, yet the

ancestor of the Dalcassians Cormac Cas, Oilioll Olum's son is said to have married Ossian's daughter.

- [1] Pronounced " Crivhan" or " Criffan Neeanar." Keating assigns the birth of Christ to the twelfth year of his reign.
- [2] The Athach (otherwise Aitheach) Tuatha Dr. O'Conor translates " giant-race," but it has probably no connection with the word \fathach, " a giant." O'Curry and most authorities translate it " plebeian," or " rent-paying," and Keating expressly equates it with daorchlanna, or " unfree clans." These were probably largely if not entirely composed of Firbolgs and other pre-Milesians or pre-Celtic tribes. See p. 22, note i.
- [3] These were Fearadach, from whom sprang all the race of Conn of the Hundred Battles, i.e., most of the royal houses in Ulster and Connacht, Tibride Tireach, from whom the Dal Araide, the true Ulster princes, Magennises, etc., spring, and Corb Olum, from whom the kings of the Eoghanachts, that is, the royal families of Munster, come. O'Mahony, however, points out that this massacre could not have been anything like as universal as is here stated, for the ancestors of the Leinster royal families, of the Dal Fiatach of Ulster, the race of Conaire, that of the Ernaans of Munster, and several tribes throughout Ireland of the races of the Irians, Conall Cearnach, and Feargus Mac Roigh, were not involved in it.
- [4] " Mos erat ut omni, qui in dignitatem elevatus fuerit, philosopho-poeta Oden caneret," etc. (See p. 10 of the " Institutio Principis" in the Transactions of the Gaelic Society, 1808, for O'Flanagan's Latin.) He does not give the original, nor have I ever met it. Consonant with this is a verse from Tadhg Mac Daire's noble ode to Donogh O'Brien

" Teirce, daoirse, díth ana,
Plágha, cogtha, conghala,
Diombuaidh catha, gairbh-shíon, goid,
Tre ain-bhfir flatha fásoid."

i.e. , " Dearth, servitude, want of provisions, plagues, wars, conflicts, defeat in battle, rough weather, rapine, through the falsity of a prince they arise." I find a curious extension of this idea in a passage in the " Annals of Loch Ce" under the year 1568, which is recorded as " a cold stormy year of scarcity, and this is little wonder, for it was in it Mac Diarmada (Dermot) died" !

- [5] Craobh-ruadh.
- [6] *I.e.* , Ath-Fhirdia, Suidhe Fhinn, Rath Chúmhair. There are See-finns or See-inns, *i.e.* , Finn's seats in Cavan, Armagh, Down, King's County, Galway, Mayo, Sligo, Tyrone, and perhaps elsewhere, and there are many forts, flats, woods, rivers, bushes, and heaps, which derive their name from the Fenians.
- [7] As the various Teutonic races of Germany traced themselves up to one of the three main stems, Ingævones, Iscævones, and Herminones, who sprang from the sons of Mannus, whose father was the god Tuisco.
- [8] A large part of the Books of Leinster, Ballymote, and Lecan, is occupied with these genealogies, continued up to date in each book. The MSS. H. 3. 18 and H. 2. 4 in Trinity College, Dublin, are great genealogical compilations. Well-known works were the Book of the genealogies of the Eugenians, the Book of Meath, the Book of the Connellians (*i.e.* , of Tirconnell), the genealogy of Brian, son of Eochaidh's descendants , the Book of Oriel, the Genealogies of the descendants of the Three Collas in Erin and Scotland, the Book of the Maineach (men of O'Kelly's country), the Leinster Book of Genealogies, the Ulster Book, the Munster Book, and others.
- [9] The great Daniel O'Connell's mother belonged to this sept of the O'Mullanes, and the so-called typical Hibernian physiognomy of the Liberator was derived from her people, whomhe nearly resembled, and not from the O'Connells.

- [10] Not to be confounded with the Síol nDálaigh, who were the great northern family of the O'Donnells, who had also an ancestor called Dálach, from whom they derived, not their surname, but their race-patronymic.
- [11] Strange to say Daniel O'Connell was not an Eberian but an Erimonian. The history of his tribe is very curious. It was descended from the celebrated Ernaan, or Degadian tribe to which the hero Curigh Mac Daire slain by Cuchulain belonged, who trace their genealogy back to Aengus Tuirmeach, High-king of Ireland about 388 B.C. These tribes were of Erimonian descent, but settled in the south. They were quite conquered by the descendants of Oilioll Olum *i.e.*, the Eberians, who owned nearly all the south—yet they continued to exist in the extreme west of Munster. The O'Connells, from whom came Daniel O'Connell, the O'Falveys and the O'Sheas were their chief families, but none of them were powerful.
- [12] The Munster annals of Innisfallen themselves claim only five, but the claims of some of them are untenable. Moore will not admit that any Eberian was monarch of Ireland from the coming of St. Patrick to the “usurpation” of Brian Boru.
- [13] Their greatest families were in later times the Magennises, now Guinesses, O'Mores, O'Farrells, and O'Connor Kerrys, with their correlatives.
- [14] O'Donovan says that Brian O'Neill was not assisted by any of the Ulidians at this battle, but of course they had more recent wrongs than the burning of Emania to complain of, for battles between them and the invading Eremonian tribes continued for long to be recorded in the annals. See p. 180, “Miscellany of the Celtic Society.”
- [15] *I.e.* Monaghan.
- [16] Parts of the counties Galway and Roscommon.
- [17] In later times their chief families were the O'Driscolls, the Clancys [Mac Fhlanachdas] of the county Leitrim, the Mac Allans of Scotland, the Coffeys and the O'Learys of Roscarberry, etc. They were commonly called the Clanna Breogain, or Irish Brigantes, from Breogan, father of Ith.
- [18] From Mac Con, son of Maicniad, king of Ireland, to the end of the second century, Mac Firbis's great book of genealogies only reckons twelve generations of Breogan, but in the smaller handwriting at the foot of the page twenty-two generations are counted up. See under the heading, “Do genealach Dairfhine agus shíl Luighdheach mic Iotha Mac Breoghain,” at p. 670 of O'Curry's MS. transcript. Michael O'Clery's great book of genealogies counts twenty-three generations from Maic Niad to Ith, both included, see p. 223 of O'Clery's MS. Keating's pedigree, as given in the body of his history, gives twenty-three generations also, but only seventeen in the special genealogy attached to it. There are no such curious discrepancies in the other three stems. I can only account for it by the impoverished and oppressed condition of the Ithians, which in later times may have made them lose their records.
- [19] The chief exceptions being, as we have seen, the Scottish Dál Riada and the Leinster O'Cavanaghs, who do not join the Eremonian line, one till the fourth and the other till the seventh century before Christ.
- [20] Conall Cearnach, from whom, along with his friend Fergus mac Roigh or Roy, the Irians claim descent, was first cousin of Cuchulain, and Tighearnach records Cuchulain's death as occurring in the second year after the birth of Christ, the “Chronicon Scotorum” having this curious entry at the year 432, “a morte Concculaind herois usque ad hunc annum 431, a morte Concupair [Conor] mic Nessa 412 anni sunt.” It is worth noting that none of the Gaelic families trace their pedigree, so far as I know, to either Cuchulain himself, or to his over-lord, King Conor mac Nessa. Cuchulain was himself not of Ithian but of Eremonian blood, although so closely connected with Emania, the Red Branch, and the Clanna Rury. If Irish pedigrees had been like modern ones for sale, or could in any way have been tampered with, every one would have preferred Cuchulain for an ancestor. That no one has got him is a strong presumption in favour of the genuineness of Irish genealogies.

- [21] See Haliday's "Keating," p. 215.
- [22] See p. 15 of O'Curry's MS. Materials. There was some doubt in his mind about the words in brackets, but as the sheets of his book were passing through the press he took out the MS. for another look on a particularly bright day, the result of which left him no doubt that he had read the name correctly.
- [23] For a typical citation of this book see p. 28 of O'Donovan's "Genealogy of the Corca Laidh," in the "Miscellany of the Celtic Society."
- [24] See "Celtic Miscellany," p. 144, O'Donovan's tract on Corca Laidh.
- [25] "Generositatem vero et generis nobilitatem præ rebus omnibus magis appetunt. Unde et generosa conjugia plus longe capiunt quam sumptuosa vel opima. Genealogiam quoque generis sui etiam de populo quilibet observat, et non solum, avos, atavos, sed usque ad sextam vel septimam et ultra procul generationem, memoriter et prompte genus enarrat in hunc modum Resus filius Griffini filii Resi filii Theodori, filii Aeneæ, filii Hoeli filii Cadelli filii Roderici magni et sic deinceps.
 "Genus itaque super omnia diligunt, et damna sanguinis atque dedecoris ulciscuntur. Vindicis enim animi sunt et iræ cruentæ nec solum novas et recentes injurias verum etiam veteres et antiquas velut instanter vindicare parati" ("Cambriæ Descriptio," Cap. XVII.).
- [26] O'Donovan says—I forget where—that he had tested in every part of Ireland how far the popular memory could carry back its ancestors, and found that it did not reach beyond the seventh generation.
- [27] According to the "Four Masters" ; in 213, according to Keating.
- [28] But see O'Donovan's introduction to "The Book of Rights," where he adduces some reasons for believing that it may have been a septennial not a triennial convocation.
- [29] See Keating's History under the reign of Tuathal Teachtmhar.
- [30] In the seventeenth century. His book on genealogies would, O'Curry computed, fill 1,300 pages of the size of O'Donovan's "Four Masters."
- [31] This was a very ancient law book, which is quoted at least a dozen times in Cormac's Glossary, made in the ninth or tenth century.
- [32] Thus quaintly expressed in the original, for which see O'Curry's MS. Materials, p. 576 :
 "muna fflaghuid dearbhtha iar ndeghleabhraibh é, a chuntabhairt féin do chur re a chois."
- [33] See pp. 102, 113 of Father Hogan's "Documenta de S. Patricio ex Libro Armachano," where he is called Endæ. He persecuted Cuthbad's three sons, "fosocart endæ cennsalach fubîthin creitme riacâch," but Patrick is said to have baptized his son, "Luid iarsuidiu cucrimthan maccnêndi ceinnselich et ipse creditit."

A literary history of Ireland from the earliest times to the present day (1901)

Author : Hyde, Douglas, 1860-1949

Subject : Irish literature — History and criticism

Publisher : New York Scribner

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : MSN

Book contributor : Robarts - University of Toronto

Collection : toronto

Source : Internet Archive

<http://www.archive.org/details/literaryhistoryo00hydeuoft>

Edited and uploaded to www.aughty.org

August 23 2010