

Travelers of Early Tradition.

The Irish in America

One thousand years before Columbus

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The Ireland of the early ages was not only the land of saints and scholars, but also the country of travelers. Energetic and restless ; proud of their independence, both religious and political, the Irish appear to have inherited the qualities of their legendary ancestors, the Phoenicians. They loved change and activity, and like them, they hesitated not to carry into other climes their genius and enterprise. The sea which surrounded them on all sides assisted them considerably in those projects. They spoke from their imaginations with its changing colors, its various horizons and the marvellous phenomena of which it is the theatre. They dreaded not to face its tempests in their barques covered with skins heavily laid on, and coarsely stitched, which recall the “ baidares ” of the modern Esquimaux, and which had struck the mariners of antiquity with astonishment. This “ curach ” of the ancient Celt is described by Cæsar, by Lucien, by Pliny and by Solin ; and the description given by any of those, two thousand years ago, will find its exact counterpart to-day on the shores of Connemara or Galway Bay.

Avienus says of them : “ A numerous people live there having a proud spirit and great activity, free to the exclusive cares of commerce, and they traverse the seas in their canoes, which are constructed either of pine or fir, and wrapped in furs and hides.” The framework of the modern curach is just as he described it, but a plain cheap tarred canvas does duty for the furs and hides which go to grace the trappings of the foreign master, while the cheaper material is always characteristic of the slave.

Long before either the Italian or the Englishman had any notion of venturing from their native shores, and ages before the modern idea of English or Italian existed, the Irish Celts felt it a national anxiety to explore and introduce into strange lands their science and their experience, which even in those remote ages caused the country to be surnamed the “ Island of scholars,” from the great number of its monasteries, the learning of its druids, and above all the captivating ardor of its missionaries, who could be found on all seas and in all the countries of Western Europe, professing the then unknown laws of “ justice ” and “ humanity,” and teaching the scientific works so little known outside of Alexandria, such as those of Priscian, Solin, Pliny, Ptolemy and Pythagoras.

While circumstantial evidence points to a very early civilization, unfortunately the direct or documentary evidence that should be in Ireland has been destroyed, some say as part of a preconceived scheme always followed by the victorious party, as well now as in those early days, for no sooner does the Italian get a landing on the Irish shore than we hear of his destroying the books and manuscripts of the Irish Druids as if they were of no value, and nothing fit to be preserved by mankind, but the peculiar ideas of which he pretended to have a monopoly. Ages later we find the Danes resorting to the same custom of destroying manuscripts and relics for some mysterious purpose, and sparing nothing that was sacred in the eyes of the people, while at a still later date we find the English nation in the same roll and proclaiming aloud to the world as a divine mission from the Almighty God, that they must destroy everything, belonging to the Celtic race, that they cannot steal for themselves, on the

plea that to them as his chosen people belong the entire earth, but to the Irish Celt not one foot of ground ; and strange to say apologists who pretended to be Celts, endorsed this wonderful dogma, and taught that the Celtic mission was to spread civilization and humanity wherever man could be found.

It was thus from the earliest period of which we have any knowledge until we come to the period of Columbcille, who has been styled by some the “ Dove”, and by others the “ Prop” or “ Corner Stone” of the Church. We are inclined to agree with the latter idea for the reason that in his day and for ages afterwards, the laws and regulations laid down by him were strictly adhered to, both in Ireland and the various places over which this particular order claimed any jurisdiction. Happily, we do not need to depend upon Irish authority alone for this, as we have ample proof of it in Scotland and the continent of Europe, over which he and his immediate disciples traveled, with cross in hand, converting the barbarous inhabitants, while their co-patriots ventured on the ocean, and have the glory of discovering ignorant peoples, and the consolation of reducing them to their own faith or civilization.

About the year 565 A. D., (Aois An Tigearna), finding themselves at the court of Brudeus, king of the Picts, in presence of the Chief of the Orcades or Western Isles, Columbcille took occasion to recommend to the latter, some of his monks who were exploring upon the ocean. “ Some of us”, said he to Brudeus, “ have lately emigrated with the hopes of finding desert countries in the impenetrable seas ; perhaps after a long voyage they arrived at the Orcadian Isles. Make now some pressing recommendations to this chief, whom thou hast as a hostage in thy power, to the end that he may not do us any injury within the limits of his territories.”

Concla The Beautiful

Their immediate successor followed their example, and continued their voyages until the following centuries, when the movement of emigration became more marked. Bernard in his “ Life of Malachy,” writes : “ These swarms of holy Irish monks have placed themselves among all strange nations, one might say an inundation ;” and Strabo, writing in the ninth century, as quoted by Montelambert, says : “ The custom of exploring on the sea has become a second nature with the Irish. They despise the dangers of the deep, emigrate almost entire with their troops of philosophers and descend upon our shores.” Their object was education and equality, the two cardinal pillars of Celtic civilization, and here we cannot help contrasting these with the selfishness, which induces the civilized plunderers of the modern day to follow in the wake of the lackadaisical missionary.

These troops of philosophers who are here mentioned, not without a shade of irony, were organized into confraternities of twelve from the earliest period of which we have any record, and was the general arrangement in the time of Columbcille, whose successors carried out the general designs that he had marked for them to follow. They called those groups, Culdees, which means, according to some writers, Cultores Dei ; that is workers in divine things, or pious learning, but we are inclined to think the word comes from the Celtic word “ Coll” a wood, a grove, and very aptly had reference to the custom of those men, both officiating and teaching in the sacred groves, the arrangement of whose trees had been so complete and beautiful that it was copied ages afterwards into stone and marble, and is presented to us today in what is known as the Gothic style of architecture, but which is in reality a reproduction of the grove where the Celtic druid preached and taught ages before the Goths had assembled into human societies. In several places they were called Papae, which comes from an Irish word “ Puppa” a teacher or one who had a knowledge of books.

Either Columbcille or some earlier chief had prescribed a white tunic and this they most scrupulously adhered to wherever they went for ages afterwards. Their tonsure or manner in which the hair was shaved was different also from what they were pleased to call the Italian,

Jewish or Eastern tonsure, and their mode and time of celebrating Easter, was entirely at variance with that then in vogue, only in a few places on the European continent.

We shall not trace, here, the wanderings of the Irish Papae or teachers across barbarous Europe, to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, and will follow them, only, in the direction of the Atlantic, and the Western regions, where they made important discoveries, and founded several colonies.

These voyages belong to two different epochs. The first, all of tradition, but of a persistent tradition, is marked by legends of either Pagan or Christian origin, while the second rests upon witnesses more authentic and is marked by the voyages of these Culdees or Papae in the Atlantic Ocean, and by the colonization of Irland It Mikla or Greater Ireland.

The first of these daring Irish of whom either legend or history has preserved a name, was called "Condla the Beautiful." The story is preserved in a manuscript of the year 1,000 A. D. (Aois An Tigearna), called "Leabhar na Huidre" and has been translated for several societies. The last edition for the "Review of the History of Religions" in 1883, under the title of "The Transatlantic Elysium and Western Eden," being the most exhaustive and closely connected with our present subject.

This Condla was the son of Conn, who was king of Ireland from 123 to 157, A. D., and relates that one day being alone with his father on the summit of Uisneac, a woman appeared to them who said she had come from the "Land of Youth," where no one knew death or evil, and where all are continually in luxury and happiness. She invited him to visit her there, where he could enjoy communion with those freckled-skinned beauties, whose beautiful eyes and vermilion cheeks were a delight, and where he would lose none of his youth or beauty until the "Day of Judgment."

The old king called a council of his druids, and demanded an explanation of the witcheries of this fair unknown, whose voice he heard, but whose form was invisible to him, and all the knowledge he could glean was that she had presented his favorite son with a beautiful apple, a sample product of the Western Eden, and we are told that Condla fell as Adam did, for this Celtic fairy was more captivating than Eve was, and used all the arts of coquetry to entice him to visit that land beyond the seas where such pleasures and luxuries awaited him.

The interview affected him sorely, for upon her departure, after giving him the magic apple which was always intact, he grew melancholy and acted a good deal like one of our modern heroes who, failing to navigate the seas of love resolve to commit suicide. This condition so alarmed his royal father, that he demanded an explanation, and was told by the youth that the cause of his grief was this beautiful damsel from the Western Eden; that he loved his country and its people, but that his heart had gone over the seas with this strange fairy, and that he could find no peace without following also, in the path she had marked out.

During this interview, he could hear someone whisper into his ear, "Thou beautiful, silly, Celtic youth, I know you are sad, but I know also the cause of your sadness. To be relieved you must be united with me in my Crystal Curragh, and before yonder sun goes down we will be resting in the land of Boadog, the Eden of the West." Scarcely had she finished her magic whisper when Condla threw himself into her canoe and was lost to his father and his country forever.

Some no doubt will deny that such an event could occur, that it was only in the East that wonders, miracles and ghosts appeared, but let us say to those, if the Irishman is called upon to believe without question stories of strange things happening in the East is it not natural and logical that he should ask that similar and parallel stories of ghosts, miracles and wonders be

believed by others as happening on the sacred soil of Ireland ? If we admit the truth of one how can we deny the logic of the other, and as to its legendary feature, do we not find the exact counterpart happening to-day, when princes and youths of so called noble blood, desert the faded traditions of Europe and the East, for some fair American, if not for perpetual youth, at least to bolster up a falling dynasty or preserve a patent of nobility, and an ancestral home by hard American dollars, wheat, oil, sweet apples or fat pork ? This legend was well known in Ireland, and is to-day to all readers of Irish literature, though modified by the different civilizations from then till now. The foundation, however, remains the same ; always pointing to a voyage by sea westward, in search of a marvellous land, to which the Irish were always attracted with singular facility, regardless of the distance or the difficulty of the enterprises.

Cuchullin.

Champion of the Red Branch Knights OF Ulster.

The next legend bearing upon our subject is that of Cuchullin the famous royal-athlete and champion of the Red Branch Knights of Ulster. Here the legend relates to a country situated to the west of the great ocean, and called the “ Valley of Delicacies.” Here in this “ Fairy Plain” could be found trees always laden with fruit and some of this fruit of enormous size, while some were covered with silver, that glittered like the rays of the sun. Scattered through the vale were fountains which recalled the cornucopia of classical antiquity, or, if shaded over, would suggest the idea that Gambrinus was anticipated, and that some genial spirit had built a primeval brewery to which the gods and spirits had descended to quench their thirst with the delicious nectar of the plain. But its greatest attraction was its beautiful women, the most resplendent of whom was Fand, the daughter of Ald Arbhal, who, being forsaken by her spouse, MacNanain, set out to find him, and on her journey had heard of the achievements of Cuchullin, of whom she became enamored, and immediately offered him the place left vacant by the absent MacNanain. Celtic chivalry in those days demanded that a gentleman must not refuse a lady’s request, be the consequences what they may, so regardless of the fact that he had a wife and mistress of his own, he decides to cross the sea, live in the Vale of Delicacies, wed the beautiful Fand, and then return to his own country and his first wife, the beautiful and jealous Emer, but in company with the beautiful flower which he had taken with him from the West. The two rivals meet, perhaps the two most attractive women of an age, fertile in beautiful women, but sensible, as they were, instead of coming to blows, as their civilized sisters would do to-day, they embrace one another, and are both lavish in generosity. All is well until the unfaithful MacNanain returns from a trip further West, where he had been detained, to seek his bride, the beautiful Fand, and Cuchullin, who cannot console himself at her departure, drinks a magic beverage which lulls him into forgetfulness.

Other voyages and adventures of Cuchullin in this direction are recorded in *Leabhar Na h-Uidhre*, in Windisch’ Irish Texts, in the *Atlantis* of July, ’58 to January, ’59, and in Beauvais’ *Transatlantic Elysium*.

Another hero of Irish legend appears to have more voluntarily accommodated his life to the new situation. He was Laogaire, the son of Crimthan Cas, king of Connaught. He embarked and crossed the seas to succor his friend Fiacha mac Retach, king of the Sidhs, from whom he obtained as a reward his beautiful daughter with whom he retired into Dun Magh Mealla or the Fortress in the Plains of Honey. After sojourning here for some time he returned to his native country, where he found that his father had decreed that he must never again leave his people to wander into the Western wilds. Laogaire remained deaf to all supplications and replied to his father when offering to abdicate in his favor, “ That just one night among the Sidhs was better than a lifetime in the paternal kingdom.” This whole story may be found in the *Book of Leinster*, edited some time ago by Dr. Atkinson, whose untiring

efforts have placed within the reach of Gaelic readers some of those treasures of their native tongue, which has lain dormant for centuries.

But the Magh Mealla is not the only land spoken of in Irish legends. O'Curry tells us of another land, just as marvellous visited by the Fianns, the heroes of Ossianic poetry, whose name is usurped by the modern Fenians through the agency of John O'Mahoney. The Fianns were the enemies of the Danaans, and have united to expel them from the country, and have compelled them to seek a refuge on the other side of the Atlantic. The Danaans although settled in their new home, have not forgotten the old soil, and revisit it occasionally to vindicate their expulsion upon the Fianns, but as they were magicians they have recourse to miserable artifice to satiate their vengeance. One of them, Avarta, metamorphised as a pirate, concealed himself under the name of Giolla Deacair, and entered the service of the chief of the Fianns, Fionn Mac'Cumhaill, whom Macpherson immortalized centuries later under the name of Fingal.

One day he enticed into his suite fifteen of the Fianns, compelled them to enter a magic curach that travelled fleetier than the wind, and crossed the seas. The waves fled before them, and soon they landed in the grand Western Country where the Danaans awaited them. Fionn, aided by two valiant champions, Feredith and Folt Leabhar, sped in their pursuit, and travelled through tempest and darkness upon the ocean until they reached a perpendicular rock, the summit of which was lost in the clouds. Fionn attempted to climb it and mounted upon a shady plateau, in the middle of which rolled a fountain guarded by a giant. After many extraordinary adventures, he was forced to take to the sea again, and wander from isle to isle, until they finish by finding Avarta and rescuing their compatriots. A fuller account may be found in O'Curry's Mss. Materials, or in the "Adventures of Giolla Decair" lately published, where we read that the rescued comrades were not inclined to return home without seeing more of the beauty and delight of the country which made such a vivid impression on the minds of all, that must be satisfied by other visits at a later period.

Early in the second century, of the present era, the fame of the Western Eden was so well known throughout Ireland, that the reigning prince himself, Ossian, the son of Fionn, concluded his life was not worth living unless he had seen with his own eyes this beautiful country, and tasted of its honeyed delicacies. His visit to the Western World and its marvels have charmed every generation down to the present, and while travelers may describe the real beauties of America of the eighteenth, nineteenth, or twentieth centuries, still the wanderings of Ossian in the Western Eden, his famous Tir Na-N-og will ever be considered by Irishmen as a classic, a foundation from which the real miracles have been wrought, that resulted in the discovery of the America of the fifteenth century.

Tir Na-N-og.

"Land of Perpetual Youth."

About the middle of the eighteenth century, a bard by the name of Michael Comyn, blended the old Pagan traditions and Christian legends of this famous man and produced a poem of which the principal episode is Tir Na-N-og, or the "Land of Perpetual Youth". Ossian, blind and old, but having still preserved the belief in the divinities of his youth, and the ideal Celtic worship of Equality, Virtue and Courage, is honored by Patrick the national saint of Ireland, who kindly condescends to converse with the ancient bard, because all the writers of this and earlier periods never fail to represent the foreigner in Ireland, as superior to the native Celt. Then the representative of Druidism or Celtic Civilization, and the champion of Italian-English Christianity engage in a terrible controversy. The aged Ossian cannot control his fury, but the cunning Anglo-Italian soothes him by asking him to narrate a part of his past history, and the Celtic hero could not resist the pleasure of imagining himself on the

scene in those happy days when he was young and full of ardor. Ossian says that one day when finding himself with his father Fionn, he saw approaching them a young woman of marvellous beauty. She called herself Niamh of the Golden Hair, and said she had come from the great land of the West, Tir Na-N-og. "It is the most delightful country that exists," said she, "and the most wonderful in the world ; there the trees are laden with fruits and flowers ; there honey and wine are in abundance. Once there thou shalt fear neither death nor infirmity ; thou shalt live in luxury, joy and happiness. Thou shalt listen continually to the most exquisite music of concordant harps, and shalt have silver, gold, jewels, and swords, with thousands of nameless pleasures for which the human heart has sighed."

Without more ado, Ossian accepted the invitation of Niamh, and after bidding his father, Fionn, and his son, Oscar, farewell, he set out for Tir Na-N-og. Niamh became his spouse and bore him three children, but after a joyous existence of three centuries, he grew tired of all, even of happiness, and wished to return once more to his own beloved Ireland. She consented to his departure, but on condition that he should not dismount from his horse, else he would become affected like all mortals and crumble into dust.

Ossian accepted these conditions and departed, but when he disembarked in Ireland his disappointment was great ; nobody knew him ; all the Fianns were dead, and briars and thistles grew upon the site of his ancient residence in Almuin. At this moment several men called him to their aid where they were crushed by a large flat stone which had fallen upon them. Ossian, without descending from his horse extended his hand to aid them, but the girth of his saddle breaking he was thrown to the earth, and became at once old, frail and blind. For a more comprehensive account of this beautiful legend the reader may consult any of the following works, "Ossian in the land of Perpetual Youth," edited by O'Looney in 1859, and lately reprinted for the Celtic Union, and translated into the French by Beauvais for his "Transatlantic Eden" while the Scotch have it under the titles of "Ossian and the Clyde." "Fingal in Ireland" and "Ossian Historical and Authentic" published in Glasgow in 1875.

Tir Na-N-og or as some prefer to call it the "Fountain of Perpetual Youth", has, since Ossian, been celebrated several times, and the different writers who have recounted this legend have always placed it in the West.

These stories, though marvellous to us to-day, so impassioned not only the early Irish, but even other Europeans, for we find as late as the sixteenth century, a learned Spaniard, John de Solis, who ought to have been well informed by the experience of his own countrymen and contemporaries, set out for the conquest of this region, this "Land of Perpetual Youth." Assuredly, all these early legends are strange and perhaps a little fabulous, but yet we must not treat them lightly. The characters may have been invented, but at an age when the marvellous was accepted by intelligence, while races now cultured were at that time only evolving into their infancy from barbarism, and had yet to evolve still further into the family of nations ; and while those adventures of this early period and the manner of their recital may seem incredible to us, looking back through the mists of centuries, still the effect, in all these past ages, was the persistent belief in a great Western land beyond the ocean, and the frequency of the relations which existed between the Irish and the inhabitants of this transatlantic world.

Adventures of the Middle Ages.

The Middle-Age legends which now remain to be examined, are equally full of extraordinary events, and the heroes who took part in those exploits are perhaps, imaginary also, but yet they confirm the reality of the voyages undertaken by the early Irish, in the direction of the West, and for this reason they merit from us a strict examination.

Brendan is the hero of those legends. The recital of his adventures was widely circulated in the Middle Ages, not only in Ireland, but throughout Europe ; and thus he contributed to turn public attention towards those Western seas, where already certain savants had placed the terrestrial Paradise. His adventures were recounted by the Gauls, the Normans, the English, the French, the Germans, and the Spaniards, and were carried still further East to the regions bordering on the Bosphorus and the Black Sea. Several of these legends can be found in the Bollandist Collection, Palme Edition ; some in the Latin Legend of Brendan, published by Jubinal at Paris, in 1836 ; a few in the Percy Society publications of London, 1834. Reeves quotes a number in his Lives of the Cambro-British saints of the fifth and sixth centuries. Schroeder and Suchier have collected them for the German people, while T. Moran has rendered them into Latin for the Irish people, so that they might the more easily understand them(?) ; but perhaps no one has presented the facts so clear and elaborate as Gaffarel in the “ Marvellous Voyages of Brendan and the Celtic Papae in the Atlantic during the Middle Ages.”

Raoul Glaber tells us that in the time of King Robert who died in 1030, A. D., the French placed the most absolute confidence in the history of the discoveries of Brendan in the Western World as taught in France and throughout Europe by the hordes of Irishmen who were then teaching in Europe and scattering the beauties of Celtic Civilization among its barbarous inhabitants. In France those voyages became the subjects of their national and popular poetry as we find in the Roman Du Renard.

“ Je fat savoir lon lai Breton
Et de Merlin, et de Faucon
Del Roi Artur, et de Tristan
Del chievrefol, de Saint Brendan.’

It is therefore indispensable to know the legend that exercised such an influence upon his contemporaries as would induce them to follow his example, and as it stood so many editions in those early times, it is well fit for another recital in this the twentieth century.

Biography of St. Brendan.

Brendan was an Irishman. The Bollandists fix the date of his birth at the year 460, A. D. In his early years he was placed in charge of a good woman, the chief of one of those institutions for which Ireland was remarkable from the earliest ages and which were very popular in Ireland at the dawn of the period known in Europe as the Christian Era. When a man, he entered ecclesiastical orders and established monasteries in his territory, the most important of which was Clonfert in Connaught, where he, being of noble family, assumed chief control. His community consisted of three thousand, all devoted to the arts of peace and production in the midst of a warlike community. Two of his disciples, Fursa and Machuta became afterwards bishops in Peronne and St. Malo, in France, where they were selected by the people among whom they preached the grand truths of Celtic civilization, and whom they brought from ignorance to an enlightened stage.

Thus we can see that the Ireland of those days was the centre from which emanated the learning and religion of Europe, for not only do we find our countrymen going West on the Atlantic, but also do we find them in every continental city of any consequence, teaching and lecturing, combating the heretical and erroneous opinions of the times, and laying the foundations of learning and advancement among those European communities which were then emerging from the Kimmerian darkness, where they revelled for centuries before.

Brendan’s reputation for sanctity and wisdom was so well known that European clerics came and submitted to him grave and disputed questions of conscientious guilt. In fact his

school was the Supreme Court of his day, from whose decisions there was no appeal, for the name Irish in those early days carried with it all the attributes that to-day constitute an educated man, and on the contrary to say that a man was educated, was tantamount to saying that he was either an Irishman or had been to the Irish schools for his learning and knowledge.

But there was a greater destiny before him, and like all lovers of the curious, he wondered what new ideas the Western world could unfold, and as in a later day Napoleon had wished to possess himself of the Kremlin, the palace of the Cæsars, so at this early stage Brendan had wished to follow the footsteps of his countrymen, Condla, Laogaire, Fionn and Ossian, and give their descendants the benefit of his counsel and advice, or implant among them, what was already being scattered broadcast through Europe, the seeds of Celtic Civilization.

Brendan had been preceded by a brother monk, named Mernoc, and by one of his former teachers Barinta. Mernoc had installed himself on an island in the distant ocean and had under his control a colony or community of monks. When he returned to Ireland, he related that on one occasion he was absent from his home, being detained in the woods for some days, and when he returned the air was impregnated with an odor that lasted for several days. Here we must remark, that when Lescarbot a thousand years afterwards, was describing the first voyage of Columbus, he either plagiarizes Mernoc, or else actually met those zephyrs, loaded with perfume, for he says, "We have come to a land where the odors excel in sweetness, and are borne on a Southern wind, so abundant that all the Orient could not produce a parallel. We stretched out our hands to take them as if they were tangible."

We must here remark about the persistence of this odor ; for all the ancient voyagers are unanimous in speaking of the perfumed air of tropical America. In the first voyage of Columbus, October 18, 1492, "The air was as sweet as in Andalusia." "It was a pleasure to respire this air, which was truly embalmed." Verrazona had remarked, "These perfumed breezes which announced the proximity of the American continent"; and Barlow, in his description of the Carolinas in 1584, says, "We smelled so sweet and strong a smell, as if we had been in the midst of some beautiful garden, abounding in all kinds of odoriferous flowers."

But Mernoc had not forgotten his native land which he occasionally revisited. In one of his voyages, he persuaded his master Barinta to accompany him, and placed him in a barque enveloped in mist so thick, that the voyagers could not distinguish the poop from the prow. Barinta describes this visit, and says that the sun dissipated the clouds, and soon after, they beheld towards the West a great island on which they entered. After fifteen days travelling across a beautiful country, amongst fragrant flowers and trees laden with fruit, it appeared they were still only in the middle of the island, and prepared to cross a large river which rolled from the West towards the East, when an angel appeared to them and bade them turn back, saying that Paradise began from this side of the stream.

They retraced their steps and soon Barinta returned to his home in Ireland, where the recital of his adventures and journey so inflamed the minds of those who heard him, that soon a company of one hundred monks, were resolved to tempt the dangers of the deep, and establish themselves in this Western Eden.

Brendan was the leader in this expedition, but owing to the inexperience of the crew, it proved a failure, and they returned without locating Mernoc and his community of monks. Undaunted by failure, Brendan resolved a second time, and took with him only fourteen of his former comrades, with provisions for forty days and a light boat, whose framework was covered with skins of animals sewed together. At the moment of their departure three brothers joined them, in spite of the remonstrances of Brendan and his sad presentiments.

For fifteen days the wind blew steadily from the East, when it suddenly fell, compelling the monks to resort to the oars to propel the vessel. In this extremity it took all the genius and patience of Brendan to encourage them, especially as their provisions were giving out fast. However, at the end of a month, they reached a large island where they went ashore and found a deserted mansion, which showed signs of Eastern civilization, for it contained a table and some furniture, if these be regarded as of Eastern origin. Lying around were several pieces of shining gold, and one of the monks, more selfish than his kind, took a lump of the tempting metal, and was punished by death. This so alarmed the others that they took to sea again, and soon reached another land where they saw a number of strange white animals grazing, about the size of an ox. The inhabitants of this island were very hospitable as one of them brought the wanderers some food and caused them to be sprinkled with water on their departure.

Legends of the First Voyage.

After a few days they find themselves in view of an isolated island which appeared to them a convenient place to take their repast and rest from sailing. Scarcely had they lighted a fire when the island began to move, and what they had taken for a solitary rock was in effect a fish, perhaps one of those monsters whose species has perished in the course of nature's evolutions. This fish story may appear strange to us to-day in this enlightened twentieth century, but Fournavat, writing from a manuscript of the tenth century, refers to this island fish, in his "Bestiare d'Amour"; so does La Croix in his "Science of the Middle Ages", and as late as the year 1530, Landrin in his "History of Marine Monsters" quotes no less a personage than the Bishop of Nidros, Eric Falkendorf, who, writing to Pope Leo X., described a similar occurrence. Whether he was quoting from Brendan or reciting his actual experience the reader must judge for himself. He says: "Wishing to celebrate Mass in some place besides on board, we disembarked upon an island which sunk as soon as the Sacrifice was finished." In passing, let us say that the story is no more improbable than the story of Jonah and his whale; if we believe one, how can we doubt the other; or if we doubt one who can ask us to swallow the other.

Some days after this, Brendan landed on a beautiful island, where they were astonished at the beauty and familiarity of the birds, and he says that some of them could talk. To the Irish monks it looked miraculous and they named it the "Paradise of Birds." No one would believe that St. Francis D'Assise would repeat an old story of the fifth century, or that he would misrepresent what he saw; yet, still his account of the famous swallows that perched upon his shoulders and head, so familiar to us in that beautiful painting, is only another link in the chain of evidence that Brendan and his companions visited those islands.

Let us here remark that the navigators who discovered the Azores, at a comparatively modern period, were astonished at the number and familiarity of the birds in this group of islands, and called them Azores from the Portugese word Acor, a bird. The chart of Gabriel de Valesque composed in 1439, and upon which this archipeligo appears calls it Ylha de Oesels. Fructuoso in his chronicle goes into ecstasy when relating of the delicious melody that he always heard in the woods of San Miguel. He recounts with a charming simplicity which recalls the Irish legend, that he assisted at a concert, the principal characters of which were larks, canaries, blackbirds and turtle doves. A great deal more on this subject can be seen in Avezac's account of the "Discoveries made in the Atlantic Ocean, during the Middle Ages."

The companions of Brendan withdrew themselves with difficulty from those delicacies, and returned to their vessels, from which they next landed on the Isle of Albaeus, where one of Ireland's famous apostles Ailbe of Emly had secluded himself with his companions. When they landed on this island they were met by an old man, one of their countrymen, who said nothing but made signs for them to follow him. They soon reached a monastery, where they

found twenty-four monks, two groups of twelve each, their own kindred, who for years had maintained a marvellous silence. They wanted for nothing, however, and Brendan says : “ Even the very lights sprang up spontaneously.” Can it be possible that these Celtic apostles had investigated electricity, and harnessed the magnetic fluid, centuries before Edison came on earth ? Quite possible, and very probable, for those stories were written and related as an everyday occurrence, when there could be no object in claiming a patent or deceiving anybody, and we have no doubt they only related what they saw. In revisiting the Paradise of Birds to celebrate their Celtic festival of Caisg, now Easter, they found in one place a dead calm sea, and in another, ice blocks which offered great resistance, but still for the five years that they wandered this beautiful country they were always in this Paradise, with the birds, at the period when it was the Equinox of Spring, and the day and night were equal all over the world.

In a later age we find references to the same and similar experiences in the chivalrous romances of the Frenchman, *Roman De la Charette*, *Chanson D’Antioch*, and one writer, Francisque Michel, who wrote between the years 896-9, A. D. The accounts they gave of the wild birds and other animals met with were exactly as the Spanish and Portugese explorers described them in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries almost a thousand years after those Irish monks had dared to lift the veil of ocean and bring back to the then barbarous Europe the knowledge of land still further west on the other shores of the broad Atlantic.

It was those Celts who first described the Griffon, that peculiar species of bird, so powerful that it lifted vessels in the air with the merciless grasp of its talons, and then let them fall upon the rocks to be shattered into pieces ; or dashed up against them in an attempt to seize them, when it is immediately killed by another bird, more powerful and of a fiercer nature. Another day an enormous fish would dash against them, and attempt to devour them, only to be killed himself by another marine beast more monstrous still. This fish was so large that it furnished food for the wanderers for three months.

After several days they reach an island where they are not allowed to land, although they understand the language of the people, who were chanting and singing the music of their own country. They were directed to an island further south where they land and in a country covered with forests, find vines loaded with grapes, from which is emitted a most delicious odor, as if from a room full of apples. This incident which we have already shown in the history of Mernoc appears to indicate that the pious explorers were now near the American Tropics. In this vicinity they passed through a sea whose waters were so transparent, that they could see plainly the huge fishes which sported at an enormous depth below.

Soon the tempest drifted them into a place which they considered the entrance to the infernal regions. The picture drawn by those early dreamers of what they actually saw was so vivid and awful that anyone who has compared it and Dante’s *Inferno* will have no hesitation in saying that the Italian only copied vaguely from the original drawn by the Irish monks centuries before, from the real panorama as they beheld it while riding upon the crest of the Atlantic wave. They imagined they saw Vulcan erect before them, perhaps Hecla or the Mt. Beerenberg of Jean Mayen, who made the sea boil at a distance and filled the atmosphere with a sulphurous vapour, while the neighboring islands resounded under the hammer of the gigantic Cyclops, the famous Goll MacMorna, of the early Celt. They met demons who submitted them to a thousand proofs, but they surmounted all and after passing through the most dense fogs, they finally arrived at an island which they called the “ Terrestrial Paradise.” But this was an immense continent where they met the most varied productions, under an atmosphere through which the sun never ceased to shine.

During forty days the monks endeavored to find the confines of this land which they took to be an island, until they arrived at the mouth of an immense river, which proved to them as

the Orinoco did to Columbus, that the island was an immense continent. It was here that an angel or spectre appeared to them and ordered them to return to Ireland, which they did, not however, without having carried with them fruit and stone souvenirs of this Paradise, the residence of the saints, the Elysium, when the entire world will be converted or dead.

Having celebrated their “Caisg” or Vernal equinox, for the last time in the Paradise of Birds, they return to their native country. Soon after their arrival Brendan died in his ninety-sixth year, in all the glory of sanctity and renown, after having spent the prime of his life in educating his countrymen, and the declining years in spreading a knowledge of their civilization among the Atlantic and Western islands.

His favorite disciple Machutu was not content to remain in Ireland, but made one other attempt to go West, with messages from his Irish Alma Mater to her apostles in the Western seas. His vessel was driven by a storm from her path, and stranded on the coast of Armorica Gaul, in France, where he resolved to end his career, by accepting of their hospitality, and giving them in return the benefit of his voyages and the learning for which Ireland was then so remarkable. They elected him bishop of the community, called their principal town by his name, and have jealously guarded his memory and traditions to this day in the town of St. Malo, while even at this distant date they preserved the language in which he addressed them, his own native, Celtic tongue.

Gleanings from the Early Ages.

Such is the legend. It is not always told after the same fashion, but the differences only record different adventures, and always point to one grand conclusion, the great discovery of a wonderful land beyond the Western horizon. But what surprises us most is the analogy that exists between this legend and Oriental traditions, and it would be very interesting to learn whether this legend passed from Ireland to the Orient or did the two peoples conceive it spontaneously. Renaud, in his “Introduction to the Geography of Abelfonda” mentions these discoveries. Edrisi in his translation of Joubert, as the anonymous author of the “Marvellous Voyages” names the “Isle of Flocks” and the “Paradise of Birds,” while in the “Thousand and One Nights” the famous Sinbad, in one of his numerous voyages lands on the isle El-Ghanamh, where are found enormous flocks of brebis. The bird called the Roc, which raises him into the air, strangely resembles the Gripha of Brendan, while the story of the island fish seems wonderfully like the Jewish myth of Jonah and the whale.

“But the name Gripha is mentioned very often in early Irish romances and literature, and as it plays a very important part in the sacred rites and initiations in Persian mysteries and mystic orders, I will quote from “Richardson’s Dissertations” on that subject :

“In Fox’s collection of Persic books, there is an illustrated copy of Ferdusi, containing a picture of the Gripha, which is there represented as an ugly dragon-looking sort of a bird. This omniscient griffin, called Simorgh, who had existed through all the revolutions of ages, revealed to a hero, called Cahermann, that the first inhabitants of this earth were the Peris or good beings, and the Dives or wicked ones, (very similar to the Irish good and bad Fairies, the one inhabiting the air and upper realms while the others take charge of the infernal regions), who wage eternal war with each other, and though the former were the most powerful, their contests for superiority were sometimes so violent as to throw nature into convulsions and cover the universe with dismay ; that she, herself, witnessed seven creations and destructions of this world.”

We must not be surprised when told that the legend of Brendan found its way into the East, and was read everywhere during the Middle Ages, for did not the adventures of Ulysses charm the Greeks, and why should not we glory in the adventures and patience of our own

countrymen ? They may not have been all true, but the greater part of them have been verified, some to-day, and some a thousand years after their first recital, and who would not wish to retain those legends which have been verified, even they were forced to reject the *Odyssee* and other epics, with all the marvels and fables which ornament them.

The learned savant who wrote the “ *History of Ancient Alban,*” says, “ It is a pious romance, but it rests upon a historic foundation, for why should these fabulous recitals be interspersed in the biography of Brendan, if there had not been in the events of his life, a great enterprise for the extension of his native Celtic civilization, into some far distant lands, and if he failed not to indicate that, by showing that he was there.” The true or false courses only prove that they did not hesitate to undertake them ; besides, the islands that they traveled on, the great continent upon which they disembarked ; the dangers, the adventures, all these episodes, we have no doubt, conceal under the veil of fiction, true discoveries. It is left for us however, to unravel the historic truth from the ornamentation surrounding it.

As we have already remarked, Brendan and his companions, always directed their course for the West, in the direction of America, passing by the Archipelagoes which we recognize as the Azores, the Canary and Madeira Islands, besides Iceland and other groups lying between the two continents. The Paradise of Birds corresponds to one of the Azores. Teneriffe in the Canaries is an ancient volcano, which, without doubt, was in activity when Brendan and his companions contemplated with awe the ebullitions of flame which crowned its summit, and the streams of lava which coursed along its sides. Besides the eruptions of Hecla, those of Beeremberg are still active, and it is not amiss to say that the Irishman Brendan has explored as far as these northern latitudes. As to the terrestrial Paradise, so far away from Ireland, and watered by such majestic rivers, the whole course of which the monks did not take time to trace or if they did have not recorded, would not this be the American continent?

While it is not necessary to indicate literally the exact geographical position of these marvellous voyages, it appears, nevertheless, well established that they sailed to the West ; that they discovered islands and landed on a continent ; that at several times in the course of their voyages they met their own co-religionists, kinsmen and countrymen, which would prove to them that there were explorers and adventurers from Ireland long anterior to themselves.

The Irish in America one thousand years before Columbus (1906)

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