

The Vikings

in

Western Christendom

A.D. 789 to A.D. 888

by

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The Unknown World

The one thing of all others which it is hardest for us to realize is, that the life *was* so new, the world so unknown to the greatest number. We, in our mental pictures of the Europe of those days, cannot but see some parts of it as if visibly bathed in light ; those are the parts in which authentic history has begun. Other parts, of which we have no authentic records, are as visibly cast in shadow. But from the Northman's point of view we must reverse the picture. He had some knowledge (vague, no doubt) of the Baltic lands—first those of his own kinsfolk, next those of the Slavonic peoples, his Vendland—his Vanaland, perhaps—of Obotriti, of Wiltzi, who are no more than names to us, of others who are not even named in authentic history. Something of these and of their ways he knew ; not much, but more than we shall ever know.

Beyond this circle all was strange for the vast majority of the Viking wanderers, not less strange than in the old Northern mythology was all the land beyond the Midgard Sea. Some one or two wanderers had fared south, may even have abandoned their creed and become Christians, like the half-mythical Holger (Otkar [1]), the Dane who, about A.D. 760, came to Francia and settled there. But as these wanderers would not return, the stay-at-home Northmen were none the wiser.

We have a remarkable example to show how real was this feeling of strangeness ; how real, too, that giant world of the Teutonic mythology difficult though it is for us to realize this. One name for that giant-world, or Jötunheim, among the Northmen was Bjarmaland (Biarmia), a name which was no doubt appropriated from Perm, south of the White Sea, as mythical places, Olympuses, Tempes, Nysian Plains, generally do get identified with actual localities. There is, however, no doubt that Biarmia was, in many Northern myths, scarcely distinguishable from Hel, the home of the dead. It was like Helheim, both under the world and at its extreme limit. In Saxo Grammaticus' story of the Voyage of King Gorm the Old and his comrade Thorkill, we come to this Bjarmaland, and to a town in it which, says Saxo, ' looked like a vaporous cloud.' (This is the Grammarian's translation of Niflhel, a portion of Hel.) Two dogs exceeding fierce guarded the entrance of the king's palace. Within the gates were horrible black spectres ; and the travellers were well-nigh choked by the putrid stench which filled the air. Clearly no human dwelling-place. Thorkill made another journey or another descent to this out-world region ; and on this occasion he found the old Giant Loki, whom the gods had chained till Doomsday. As a remembrance of his journey Thorkill

plucked three hairs of the giant's beard, and brought them back to the upper earth. But they made so dreadful a smell that it caused a plague, and many died therefrom.

Now there is a legend of Viking days with almost the same 'plot.' In it the typical Viking hero, Ragnar Lodbrog, goes upon an expedition. He, too, assaults a strange town and carries thence a prize. But after the assault an uncanny mist surrounds the northern troops ; they are so enveloped that they can scarcely find their way back to their ships ; many are killed before they can do so. Nor does the vengeance of the infernal powers and of the lord of this vaporous city end here. Ragnar Lodbrog carries back his prize with him, and his troops their booty ; but they carry back also the infection of a plague, or of a sort of dysentery or cholera which kills many of them, which spreads among the Danes after they have returned to their native Denmark. What is this city which in Viking tradition corresponds to Niflheim, the lower world ?

By chance we have an account of the same expedition preserved by Christian chroniclers. They, too, record that the leader of the Vikings was called Ragnar. They, too, tell us of the mist which enveloped the plunderers (which had, no doubt, nothing of the supernatural about it), and of the sickness which they carried home with them ; this sickness, say the Christian writers, was only stayed after the release of all the Christian prisoners, and after the restoration by Ragnar of the plunder which he had taken from their churches. But the chroniclers add to all this the name of the spot where these wonders took place ; and the place is—Paris, no other ; Paris, the favourite city of Julian, Paris, where Pippin lay buried, which, though not precisely a royal city, was from its position even then one of the most important centres of trade and one of the richest towns in France. A volume could not better express than this one fact the feelings with which the wanderers set forth upon their new life. Such feelings are best rendered by the lines of the Eddaic poem describing how Skirnir, the messenger of Frey, set forth on a journey into Jötunheim. Words like those which Skirnir addressed to his horse, the Viking leader might have addressed to his ship : —

Dark it grows without,
Time it is to fare
Over the misty ways. [2]
We will both return
Or that all-powerful Jotun [3]
Shall seize us both. [4]

The Vikings in Ireland.

I.

Nothing of the character of those new-comers, as we have sketched it in the preceding chapter, nothing of their history or their birthplace was known to the Christian chroniclers of the time. How could it be ? By an exception which is extra-ordinary those ' first three Viking ships' which came to the shore of England are in our *Chronicle* reported to have come from Hærethaland. But where that Hærethaland lay, whether it was, as has generally been assumed, Hördaland, or the Hardanger region of Norway, whether finally the name Hærethaland may not have arisen from a copyist's mistake are matters for question.

After this date the chroniclers in the different Christian countries know little of the home of the pirates. The Vikings are to them heathens, Gentiles, foreigners (*Gaill*, Ir.), [5] lake-men (*Lochlainn*—an expression only used in Ireland), Northmen (*Normanni*) a word which we

must translate Scandinavians not Norsemen [6]) and Danes. This last word again, in the mouth of a Frisian or a Saxon chronicler, might very well be a general name for any Scandinavians.

From this necessary ignorance on the part of the contemporary chroniclers of all which could give distinctness and the element of personality to the history of the early raids, and from the fact that through all this period the native literature of Scandinavia is yet unborn, there results a sad uniformity and dullness in the earlier pages of Viking history. There is no help for this. We must, on the path of history as on all other paths, make up our minds to much monotonous travelling. We cannot be concerned with ideas and pictures only ; we must follow the course of events even when those events are recorded only in the driest outline. It is in view of much that must, I know, prove stony and dull in this history (the present chapter perhaps the stoniest and most dull of all), that I have placed after the title-page those lines of Michael Angelo, which I have myself often found a sort of talisman upon the drier roads of history and of life : —

The best of artists hath no thought to show
Which the rough stone in its superfluous shell
Doth not include : to break the marble spell
Is all the hand which serves the brain can do. [7]

Its application to the present case is that even the dreariest chronicles contain within them—they cover up and conceal, but still hold—the records of a mighty activity, a quenchless life, which the highest art of the historian could never revivify in half its natural fire and beauty. That incomparable power—whether you call it human or Divine—which moulds human history into shape, greater than any power of any artist, is not only always at work, but can be always seen at work, though dimly seen sometimes through the meagreness of our records.

It would be an impertinence to spend words in painting the immensity of the creation which is hidden behind the superfluous shell of our present history. For that is nothing less than the Europe of the Middle Ages ; the Europe which brought to birth the mediæval cathedral, and all that that implies ; that created the Latin hymn, the vast and tenebrous mythology and belief attaching to the future state, the Vision of Dante ; who can record how much else of good and of evil it has created? These are some of the things which lie beyond the end of our journey, and which though we shall never reach (in this present history), we can see them always before us and recognize the signs of our approach.

Another birth of Time lying in the same way beyond the compass of the present volume, but only just beyond it, is the Old Norse literature ; a creation far smaller, doubtless, than that of mediæval Europe or the Gothic Cathedral, but far greater than most readers are inclined to suppose. A thing unique, too, belonging to its own age, and to none other in the history of the world, which has had its birth and growth and decline, and has then died away, leaving, we might fairly say, no successor. This is an outcome of the contact between Christendom and the Vikings. We cannot, I think, refuse to accept the theory which assigns the birthplace of the Northern literature to some part of the extreme west of Europe, to one or other of the kingdoms which the Vikings conquered from the Celts in Scotland and Ireland—in the Orkneys or the Shetlands, in Caithness, in the Hebrides, in Man, or round the Irish coast. [8] These different kingdoms came in the course of time to be so closely allied, that it makes little difference which of them we choose for the cradle of the Edda and Saga literature. In these regions the contact between the Vikings and the Christians was wholly different from what it was in Central Europe ; the Christianity itself of these countries was of a peculiar character. But such as they were the effects of that contact were very marked. Should our in-

quiries ever advance into the ensuing century we should obtain a clearer idea of what were these effects. At present this, too, stands hidden in the future, as the image within the stone.

II.

Something has been said, and more might easily have been said, of the learned and spiritual life of Ireland in these and earlier days. But let not the reader inquire after the contemporary political life. Scarcely anything can be told of it except empty dynastic lists, or bald records of continual civil wars. Irish historians contend (some of them do at least) that about the time of St. Columba the country really was showing signs of coalescing into one kingdom, and of making a new beginning in policy. It is a pious opinion which one would not wish to disturb. All acknowledge that between that day and the days to which we have now come, when the invasions of the Northmen brought ‘ unnumbered woes’ upon the people of Erin, that progress had not been continuous. And now the power of the Ard-Ri, the so-called Over-King of Ireland, was little more than nominal over his brother kings of the larger districts. The number of persons who bore the name of king was almost uncountable. ‘ No dun (fort) without its king.’ It is a maxim of Irish law. Each of these kinglets, again, was no doubt bound, though by a loose tie of service, to some one or other of the kings of the greater divisions. Only one principle, the family or clan feeling, was kept alive in this embryo nationality. And where all else seems to fluctuate, we have the extraordinary phenomenon of one great clan, the Hy-Njall (O’Neil), having already remained the dominant race in Ireland for four hundred years, and furnishing from among the heads of one or another division of the clan all the chief kings of Ireland during this period. These O’Neils all claimed descent from a certain Njall of the nine hostages, whose date is given A.D. 396-406.

We may look upon Ireland as divided first of all into two great sections, a northern and a southern ; the dividing line running somewhere about the latitude of the Slieve-Bloom mountains. In the Northern half reigned the different kings of the O’Neil family. And their chief rivals at this period were the king or kings of Munster, the southern half of Ireland, which formed sometimes a single kingdom, sometimes was divided into two. The most southern of the two branches of the O’Neils reigned in Meath, a kingdom which in those days included a great part of Leinster. In Ulster, amid the oak forests of Derry, reigned the great family of the northern O’Neils, whose king, Njall-Caille, beside the kingdom of Ulster, enjoyed from A.D. 833-845 in addition the title of Over-King of Erin. Out of Ulster was cut the kingdom of Irish Dalriada ; and out of Meath was taken the small kingdom of Bregia (Bray). Bregia, situated as it was on the east coast, was an important district in the history of the Vikings in Ireland, a likely object for their attacks. It came in the end to receive more of their inroads than any other of the Irish kingdoms ; and probably contained, after their final settlement, a larger infusion of Norse blood than any other part of Ireland (though that was not great [9]).

The Over-King of Ireland was still called King of Tara ; though at this moment his throne was at Derry—not even in the kingdom of Meath, where Tara stood, and though Tara never more contained the palace of the Ard-Ri. ‘ Tara’s halls,’ it is to be feared, had long grown silent. And this was no small matter. Not because there was any particular magic about the name of one capital rather than that of another, but because in ancient days the greatest *market* in all Ireland had been held at this place, the one great national assembly which the people enjoyed. To have the command of the market was, as it were, to have the command of the purse-strings ; for the king who dominated Tara with his army might exact such tolls and dues as he pleased. In those days, too, the great annual or triennial fairs held at Tara, or wherever they might be, constituted the very life of the nation. At them took place not only a buying and selling, but assemblies of notabilities, passing of laws—or interpretations of laws

—and so forth. So that historians are right in dating, in a great degree, the decline of the power of the Irish over-kings from the decay of Tara and the silencing of its harps.

Up to the year 807 the Vikings had not touched upon the mainland of Ireland. Indeed, so far as the records tell us, each attempt of theirs to establish themselves upon the mainland of any country had, up till that year, proved unsuccessful. They had succeeded on the Island of Lindisfarne ; they had failed upon the Northumbrian coast at Wearmouth. They had been beaten in Glamorganshire, but they had succeeded in Rechain, in Man, in Iona, and in Innishmurray. Now, however, they broke the spell. Shortly after their attack on the last place, they landed in Sligo and harried the country far and wide. [10] And after that, fleet seemed to follow fleet in quick succession ; so that we soon hear of the Vikings plundering and exploring all down the western coast of Ireland ; now carrying on their depredations with little hindrance, now encountered and defeated by the inhabitants : slaughtered by Ulstermen in 811 ; marauding down the west coast in 812 ; in Mayo, in Connaught, and down as far as Cork harbour ; and once again in the more southern parts near Killarney. [11]

In 812 they met with rather a decisive defeat at the hands of the Eoghanachts of Loch Lein (Killarney), which was noised abroad in Northern Europe, and joyfully recorded by Einhard over at the Court of Charles the Great. [12] Howbeit next year the marauders were successful in another engagement with the men of Owless. [13]

Then came a pause of seven years ; and it may have been about this time that a change took place in the nationality of the Vikings who came to Ireland.

Before the Viking history has advanced far we begin to detect two series of northern piracies, taking two different routes. One route was a coast voyage : down the west coast of Denmark to Frisia ; from Frisia to Francia—Neustria, that is to say—or to the opposite side of the English Channel, to our own coasts, through the English Channel to the mouths of the great rivers of Francia, the Seine, the Loire, the Garonne ; later still, to the west coast of Spain, and through the Straits of Gibraltar to the Mediterranean. Or, supposing the pirates to have made their way to England, they might sail north to East Anglia or Northumbria, or south by west round the coast of Kent to Sussex, to Wessex, possibly up through St. George's Channel to Wales, to Ireland, to Man, to Iona. All these different expeditions might diverge from one original route.

But there was another route which went straight across the North Sea, from the Norway coast we may suppose, to the north of Scotland, to the Shetlands and Orkneys, down to the Scottish coast, then round by Western Scotland, by the Hebrides, by Iona, to Ireland, where it would meet with the other current, supposing any stream thereof to be flowing at the time. Or, again, this current of invasion might flow northward from the Shetlands to the Faroes, beyond the Faroes as far as Iceland. An Irish monk, writing in A.D. 825, [14] says that even at that day many colonies of Irish monks in the islands of the North Atlantic had been uprooted and destroyed by the pirates from the north ; so by A.D. 825 we may be sure that both routes were in full use.

But not, I suspect, much earlier. It is natural to suppose that the coasting voyage was the earliest made, and that it continued to the last to be the most frequented. I am myself disposed to attribute all the earliest Viking raids to adventurers who had come this way ; and I will guess that the first attacks upon Ireland, which came from the far north, are those which we are about to record. [15] These renewed attacks begin in A.D. 820, about the time, as we have just seen, that other Viking fleets were plundering and slaughtering in the Shetlands and

Faroes. The Vikings who came by the coasting route would naturally be chiefly Danes, and we may be almost sure that Danes were in the majority in the fleets which sailed to England and to Continental Europe. In Ireland, upon the contrary, the Norsemen had, for some time after A.D. 820, the field to themselves, and the traces of Norse language in Ireland and Scotland are much more numerous than the traces of Danish. [16]

The Irish at the beginning designated their new invaders by the name of foreigners (Gaill) simply. In time they began to distinguish the Gaill into two sections or two nationalities—the Finn-Gaill, or white strangers, and the Dubh-Gaill, or black strangers. What the foundation for this distinction was we cannot tell ; for there is really no racial difference of type between the Norsemen and the Danes. It is, however, certain that by the names Finn-Gaill and Dubh Gaill the Irish meant to separate these two Scandinavian peoples.

The attacks, then, began once more in 820. In this year and the next Viking fleets appeared upon all sides of Ireland. They plundered in Cork harbour and in Beggary Island, off the Wexford coast ; and thence they sailed to Howth, near Dublin : [17] a place we note which like Lambey, has got its name from the Northmen—hoveð, a head. They did not disdain to fall upon the barren Skellig Michil, which stood off the coast of Kerry, fronting the Atlantic waves, and to carry off its one inhabitant, a solitary hermit (Etgall), who died in their hands [18] ; no more than they shrank from attacking one of the most famous religious communities of North Ireland, Bangor (Bennchair), on the coast of Down. [19]

At first, of course, their attacks were chiefly upon places on or near the coast. But it was not long before they ventured far inland. We can see them landing in Wexford Bay, and marching thence west to Taghmon, which now lies on the high road from Wexford to New Ross ; from Taghmon (probably through Old Ross) to St. Mullin's, which lies upon the river Barrow. Then northward by boat to Leighlin Bridge and into the Ossory country from there ; or else straight across country to Inistioge, upon the river Nore. At Inistiogue this band was met by a hosting of Ossory men and defeated, or at least checked in its advance. [20] So back they made their way as best they could to Waterford, embarked there and sailed far round the coast until they came to Youghall harbour and the mouth of the Blackwater. Well screened by the leafy banks of this river they made up-stream westwards to Lismore. There was a monastery there. This and the church of St. Molaise (now Kilmolash), five miles off, they plundered. Then to their boats again and back to sea, and round to Kinsale Bay, from whence they fell upon Dunderrow and Inishannon, two other rich foundations not far from the coast. Finally we hear of their fleet at Kilpeacon, in the Limerick county. In this raid, the chronicle says, the heathen men utterly demolished Lismore, Dunderrow, Inishannon, and Disert Tipraite—a place not identified. [21] Let this one specimen of a Viking raid suffice. But they were as active in the north as in the south ; only we notice with some satisfaction (if only as a change) that once the Ulstermen gained a rather important victory over the Vikings. We have no details. It is only ‘ a victory of the Ulstermen over the Gaill at Lecale, in which very many men fell.’ [22]

We must take note that in the same year a Viking fleet fell once more upon Iona. The island, we see, had got back its community of monks, since the terrible attack eighteen years before. And among the brothers was one Blathmac, [23] who had joined them in the special hope of finding martyrdom at the hands of the Northmen ; a hope which was now realized. While his comrades sought to hide themselves, he went forward to meet the invaders, and was cut down by Viking swords ; and his memory was kept green (for a little while) by a poet and monk of those days, Walafrid Strabo by name, away in Reichenau, upon the shores of Lake Constance. [24]

The chief fury of the Viking attack seems at this time to have fallen upon the south, upon the Bandon and Blackwater, upon Cork harbour, and the mouth of the Shannon, and generally upon the kingdom of Munster. They plundered the greater part of the churches of Erin, says a chronicler, who writes principally of the southern kingdom. [25]

In raids too many to recount, in varied successes and failures of the invaders, the years passed on, [26] till 831-832, when the Vikings took a new departure, and under the guidance of a man of genius, the ambition of the Northerners aimed at higher achievements, at something like a definite conquest of Ireland—or a part of it. The chronicles tell us that in 831, or 832, [27] a ‘ great royal fleet’ came to the north of Ireland. Its flagship bore the ensign of a certain Turgesius or Thorgisl.

By this time the Finn Gaill had, we may believe, well-established themselves in the Shetlands and Orkneys, and down the western coast of Scotland. We have no record of their deeds in these places ; only we know that, as they passed, they blasted the little communities or solitary hermitages of monks, among the islands and down the coast. And that when history gets sight of these regions again, the hundreds of religious settlements have disappeared ; and in their place the Norsemen have established forts and treasuries, whither to bring their booty and to refit their wrecked barques.

This great expedition which Thorgisl led into North Ireland we may be pretty sure steered down from the Scottish islands. The fleet made its way (up the Bann ? [28]) to Lough Neagh, and in this lough the Vikings gained a signal victory over the Irish—in their poor coracles, most likely. Then they plundered the neighbouring country, and finally fell upon the greatest religious establishment of all Ireland, Ard-Macha, or Armagh. Armagh might call itself then, what it still is, the Primacy of all Ireland. Here dwelt the chief *Comarb* (or heir) of St. Patrick, the first priest of his family or clan, his spiritual successor and his heir in the flesh also. This first plundering of Armagh by the ‘ Gentiles’ took place in 832. But it was not long the only one ; for the place was ravaged thrice in one month, and finally the ill-starred ‘ chief heir of St. Patrick’ (Forannan his name) had to flee away, he and his relics, out of his native land altogether, and migrate to the south-west—the Munster district. There, after wandering for some time forlornly enough, he was picked up by another body of Vikings who happened to be plundering in those parts. [29] One may in these determined attacks upon Armagh suspect Thorgisl and his followers of some more definite hostility to the native Church than was implied by mere raids upon rich shrines—we may suspect this in the light of some of Thorgisl’s subsequent proceedings.

Meantime other expeditions made their way into Ireland by the east and joined forces with the army of Thorgisl. A fleet came to Louth, plundered in Louth and Meath (at Duleek). A victory was gained over the Northern Vikings in Derry in 833. [30] But this did not effectually hinder their advance nor the consolidation of the Viking forces. We have a long catalogue of the descents and plunderings all round the Irish coasts in those years 833-4, in fact on to 840—ravaging of the monasteries of Louth, the burning (for the first time) of Clonmicnois, [31] that great literary monastery in Central Ireland. The expeditions, we see, had begun to spread far inland, and the monasteries in the lakes to share the fate of those upon the sea-coast. We read of the ravaging of Ferns and Clonmore in 835. This last was on Christmas night ; [32] the Vikings having now taken a firm footing in the island, cease to be only summer visitors : a plundering and burning of Mount Garret and Drom-h Ing (Dromin?) ; and in the next year plunderings in Kildare and the ‘ first plundering of East Bregia’ (Bray [33]) In 836 or 837 came two fleets, each of sixty sail, one up the Boyne, the other up the Liffey. [34] At first the men of Bray were victorious ; but their successes did not count for much, and in 837

or 838 we read of an event which is worth remembering ; : the first taking of Ath-Cliath by the Gentiles—Ath-Cliath being the forerunner of the Dublin of our days. [35]

The town and seaport of Dublin, like Limerick, like Waterford and Wexford, and like many other of the seaport towns of Ireland, was a city of Viking foundation. The *Dubh-Linn* (' Black-pool'—English Blackpool, or *Liverpool* if you like) was a particular spot in the Liffey, close to ' the ford of hurdles,' for that is the meaning of Ath-Cliath. A fort had been built to protect the ford, and in the hands of the Vikings, the fort expanded to become the great port and capital of Ireland. Henceforth Dublin was often taken and retaken by the Northmen and the Irish, but it remained in the end the most important of the Norse settlements in Ireland. It, with Limerick and Waterford, eventually constituted the three Norse kingdoms in Ireland.

We have in connection with these raids in the east of Ireland the name of another Viking leader beside Thorgisl (or Turgesius), Saxulf, namely, who probably commanded one of the fleets just spoken of, and who, after ravaging for a while in the Kildare and Meath districts, was slain by the Irish. [36] No doubt the chief stress of these attacks was felt in the north and in the east of Ireland. But there were plenty more in the west and south, and inland among the monasteries which stood on islands of the inland loughs. There were ravagings in Connaught, [37] and again south in Limerick—a long succession of raids, in one of which the unhappy Forannan, Archbishop of Armagh, was captured and his shrine destroyed. [38] These different accounts are difficult to sift ; and we cannot always distinguish the Viking ravages from those which were inflicted by one Irish king upon another. For, alas ! the internal strifes were in no degree allayed by these outward dangers to the state.

We hear of some victories of the Irish—a victory of the Tir Connell at Asseroe, [39] of the Dal Cais, on Lough Derg, of the Southern O'Neill in Ardaccan in Meath. [40] Possibly this was the same battle in which Saxwulf was slain. But these victories were profitless. The Vikings continued to advance and to make firmer their foothold in the northern division of Ireland.

As the upshot of all these attacks, we find Thorgisl and his followers actually taking possession of all the northern half of Ireland, Lethcuinn, just as, in after years, Halfdan and Guthorm and their Danes possessed themselves of the northern and eastern parts of England. When he had settled himself in Lethcuinn, Thorgisl, who had already done away with Armagh, [41] now finally turned the monks out of Clonmicnois and set up his wife Ota there as a kind of Vala or Priestess. At any rate the chroniclers give us a picture of Ota seated on the high Altar of Clonmicnois and ' giving her answers' from it (843) [42]—a single picture gleaming out of the darkness which surrounds the Viking settlements in Ireland, and one which may signify much for us.

This was a memorable event, the establishment of something very like a Norse kingdom over one half of Ireland. By it Thorgisl anticipated by half a century the course of Viking conquest in other countries. Everywhere the history of these raids is much the same. It begins with isolated attacks, as a support to which some island near the coast is seized, which becomes a refuge and an arsenal and treasury for the invaders. Anon they venture further and further inland. They had been like the swallows, only summer visitants ; soon we find them at all times of the year. In the case of Ireland, for instance, we can for the first time detect the Northmen wintering in the country in 835. But it is probable that when once Thorgisl's great expedition had landed it did not again return. We first hear of the Vikings wintering in France in 843 and in England in the year 851. The next stage is when the Vikings think not only of settling in the country and living on their plunder, but of conquering and colonizing some

large part of it. And it is here that Thorgisl's Vikings so far outstripped those in other countries. The taking of Con's half of Ireland fell in 843 or 844. In 878, by the Peace of Wedmore, the English Danes were for the first time settled in like fashion in the Danelag. [43] The settlement of the Danes of Rolf in France and the final establishment of a Norman state there did not take place till the ensuing century in 912.

Lethcuinn, or Con's half, where Thorgisl had seated himself, was the home of the most warlike and powerful of all the Irish clans, the Hy-Njall, or O'Neil. What, we may ask, were the Irish kings and chieftains doing to allow the Norsemen to gain such a footing in Ireland? And we must sorrowfully answer that they were fighting among themselves. In the first place, during nearly all the time of Thorgisl's reign (so to call it) there was a smouldering or active hostility between the King of Munster and the over-king of Ireland. The latter was Njall Caille of the northern Hy-Njall. The King of Munster, Felim [44]—the two Munsters seem to have been united just then under one sceptre—was an ecclesiastical dignitary as well as a political. He was Archbishop of Cashel; and it was the object of his policy to place Cashel on a par with Armagh, South Ireland equal in every respect with North Ireland. Before Thorgisl began his attacks upon Armagh the King of Munster had begun his. The objects of the Vikings coincided with Feidhlimidh's objects; and we have here the example, which was to be so common in after-times, of co-operation between the Gaill and the Gaedhill—the stranger and the native—for the oppression of another Irish tribe or kingdom.

III.

The ambition of these Vikings was not confined to Ireland, but stretched to the neighbouring island of Britain. More than a generation had passed since the great raids on Lindisfarne and Yarrow, and the country had had leisure to forget its troubles. The supremacy among the heptarchic kingdoms had finally passed from Mercia to Wessex. Offa was reigning when the first pirate ships struck the English coast; now Egberht sat upon the throne of Wessex, and all South-Humbria had become tributary to his kingdom. Being a far-sighted ruler, Egberht did not remain indifferent to the danger near at hand, though he had himself had no experience of the terrors of the Vikings. We find him in 833 calling together a council (a *Witenagemót*) to consult for the defences of the kingdom. His measures were not taken too soon: for two years later a Viking fleet—which we have every reason to believe came from Ireland—fell upon the coast of Kent. It came to Sheppey, and, after old Viking fashion, entrenched itself upon the island. [45] One year later, again, a fleet of five-and-thirty sail fought against the English at Charmouth in Dorset and gained a victory. [46] Anon the Vikings politically allied themselves with the West Welsh, or Cornishmen, always ready for an attack upon the English. Their united army was met by Egberht at Hengston and crushed. [47] Nor was this king for the remaining years of his life further troubled by the pirate attacks. Still the storm had begun once more to blow upon England and did not again die down. It was forty-five years since the attack upon Lindisfarne; it would be forty years more of steadily increasing Viking raids before something like rest was brought to this land by the Peace of Wedmore.

And now it seems some change for the better took place in the internal politics of Ireland. It was still the reign of Njall Caille on whom the King of Munster and the Norsemen had pressed so hard. But now Njall had recovered something of his power. We read of a great victory gained by him at Ith over the Vikings (845). [48] And at the same time there arose among the southern O'Neils, the O'Neils of Meath, a famous champion of the name of Malachy (Maelsechlain). [49] He is Malachy I.—not the Malachy of the collar of gold in Moore's song, who reigned as Malachy III. a century and a half later; but he was not less celebrated in his day. He and a certain vassal of his, Tighernach, 'lord' of Loch Gabhar in Meath, may be counted the chief champions of the Irish at this time. And next to these two,

Cearbhall, King of Ossory ; as on the other hand Felim, King of Munster, was the chief ally of the Norsemen. In 845 Malachy by some means—by victory or treachery—got hold of the person of Thorgisl himself, and the great Norse king was drowned in Loch Owel (in Meath). [50] And with the death of its founder the kingdom of Lethcuinn crumbled away, For awhile all went against the Norsemen. Malachy (who had now become Ard-Ri, and so Malachy I.) gained a naval victory over the Vikings ; so that we guess he had been constructing a fleet after their pattern, and anticipating the policy of Alfred the Great in England. Cearbhall, King of Ossory, gained an important victory in 847, [51] and slew 1,200 of the Dublin Vikings. There were victories in Ulster at the same time ; and finally Malachy and Tighernach in concert attacked and took the Norsemen's stronghold at Dublin in 849. [52]

One is glad, too, to read that Felim came to a bad end about the same time. He had been harrying the land attached to the Abbey of Clonmichois, and dedicated to St. Kieran, founder of the abbey. But when he returned from there to Durlass the saint rose from his grave to pursue him—so the chronicle says—and there, appearing to Felim as in a dream, he gave him a blow with his staff, whence sprang internal injuries from which the king died. He died on the 18th of August, 847, [53] ‘ by the miracle of God and Kieran.’ And, knowing what history is, we are not surprised to find that by the ‘ Felim party’ he is described as ‘ the most religious clerk in all Ireland during his day.’

Not that this meant anything at all like a cessation of the Viking raids. They went on as constantly as ever, fresh fleets always appearing to supply the losses of the old. But the invaders did not again attempt to seize a large portion of the country and erect a kingdom there. We must picture them—for we cannot rehearse the wearisome catalogue of their attacks during the second half of this Viking Age—confining themselves henceforth chiefly to settlements upon the coast, which settlements were eventually grouped into three ‘ kingdoms’ (so called)—the three Norse kingdoms of Dublin, Waterford, and Limerick. After a struggle for mastery between the two nationalities of Vikings, for the Danes revisited Ireland in 851, [54] the whole body of Vikings agreed to acknowledge a sort of over-king whose title was no doubt a copy of that of the Irish Ard-Ri, or King of Tara.

The first of these ‘ kings of all the Northmen in Ireland’ is a certain Olaf the White, [55] who has his connections with the rulers of the Scottish islands, the Earls of the Hebrides, and in a remoter way with some of the early settlers in Iceland. Authentic history—that of the Christian chroniclers—almost turns away from the Northmen in Ireland and Scotland during the latter part of the ninth century. But on the other hand the Icelandic traditions begin to take some notice of them.

Before the Norsemen came the Irish had cared little about sea-ports or the use of fleets. Their boats were of the kind known as coracles—a wicker frame covered with skin. The rudest and most primitive form of the coracle is still in use in the west. It is one of those primitive constructions which seem to belong to all ages and all nations. We can find an exact parallel to it in the boat described by Herodotus as being in use upon the Euphrates six hundred years before our era.

It was to the Norsemen that Ireland owed the beginning of a fleet, and of such commercial prosperity as she has ever had. The Vikings of Norse blood were, so far as appears, of rather a different calibre from the Danish Vikings of the Continent and of the later invasions of England. While these last were filled with political ambitions, were colonizers and conquerors, *those* were imbued with commercial notions, and were conquerors and traders. How significant in this light is the discovery of a Viking interment, which was made a year or two ago in the Hebrides. [56] The man had been boat-buried after the heathen rites—though there

were likewise some traces of Christian symbolism, crosses and so forth, on the tomb—and he had been a warrior who had doubtless died in his harness, which, with his sword, spear, and battle-axe, was placed by his side. His horse had been buried with him, and one of the big bones of the horse had been nearly cut in two by a sword or axe—no doubt in the hero's last battle. But along with all this war-gear there was found buried with the Viking leader a pair of scales—curious type of the double nature of his life as a soldier and a tradesman ! It was, let it be remembered, the Norse or Danish kings of Dublin who, about A.D. 1000, introduced the first native *coinage* into Ireland, till which date such a medium of exchange was almost unknown in this backward country.

Though there must be less Scandinavian blood in Ireland than here, the Northmen seem at their first coming to have mingled more with the rest of the people, identified themselves more with the national politics, so to speak, of Ireland, than they did at their first coming into England. The reason of this may very well have been the anarchic condition of the former country, which, whatever the point they wished to attack, secured for the invaders some allies. Let us note one proof only of the admixture of Celtic and Scandinavian blood during the Viking occupation of Ireland—the extreme commonness at this very day in all Scandinavian countries of the name Niel and its derivatives Neilsson, Neilsen, &c.—our Nelson probably. Yet that name is not Scandinavian, it is true Irish ; and every Scandinavian Niel or Njall from (or before) Burnt Njall down to our Niels, Nielssons, and Nelsons, must doubtless have had an Irish ancestor of the race of the northern or the southern Hy-Njall.

Cormac is another Irish or Celtic name which became common in Scandinavian countries, especially in Iceland. Such names would spring from marriages—which very early became fully recognized—between the Vikings and the Irish. It was not long before many of the wild Irish began to abjure their Christianity and their old allegiance, and to embrace the rare opportunities for ‘ agitation,’ which an alliance with the invaders opened out. So that there grew up a new class of heathen Irish who threw in their lot with the Vikings, followed their standards, and fought against their former kings. They were known as the Gaill-Gaedhil, or Irish Foreigners.

On the other hand, as we have seen, it was the Vikings who brought Irish political life down to the sea, and taught the Irish, or retaught them, the uses of navigation for purposes of policy and business and war. Formerly the sea had belonged only to the religious life of the country—the religious and intellectual life. The capital of ancient days had lain in the ‘ middle kingdom’ (Meath). Now the Norsemen brought it down to the coast. They crushed the monasteries, expelled the monks and clerks ; and learning and piety went forth sorrowing to seek new homes, doctors and scholars flocking in immense numbers to the Continent. In the place of the religious homes grew up the trading stations which the Norsemen erected all round the coast, and which held the germs of a certain civilization, though of a new kind.

[1] In Mon. Sangall, the best historical authority for his existence ; Oger in the *Chansons de Geste*.

[2] Orig. ‘ fells.’

[3] The Jotun in this case is really Death.

[4] *Skirnisför*.

[5] In the *Four Masters* the Vikings are at first pirates (sea-robbers), afterwards heathen (Gentiles), or foreigners (Gaill).

[6] Not necessarily Norsemen, I mean.

[7] Mr. Symond's translation.

[8] Cf. Vigfusson in *Sturlunga Saga*, Preface, and *Corp. P. B.* Introd. Cf. also Todd, *War, &c.*, p. xxviii.

- [9] Cf. Joyce, *Irish Names of Places*, p. 100 sqq.
- [10] *F. M.* 802 (Ed. O'Donovan, i. 413) ; *Annals of Ulster* 806 (O'Conor, *Scrip. Rev. Hib.* iv. 196 ; Hennessy (Irish Rolls Series), vol. i. 293).
- [11] *Ann. Ult. s.a.* 810 ; *ibid.* 811 ; *F. M.* 807.
- [12] *Ann. Ult.* 811 ; *F. M.* 807 ; *Gaedhil and Gaill*, c. iv. ; Einhard, *Ann.* 812 ; *Ann. Fuld.* 812.
- [13] *F. M.* 808 ; *Ann. Ult.* 812. It will be seen that the Irish chronicles are very uncertain as to date. The *Annals of Ulster* are generally the most trustworthy, and especially so for Viking raids in the north of Ireland.
- [14] Decuil, *De Mensura Orbis Terrarum*.
- [15] Thus the fleet which attacked Ireland in 812 is called in *Ann. Fuldens.* ' Classis Danorum.' Much the same is the view maintained by Steenstrup in his *Normannerne*.
- [16] See Joyce, *Irish Names of Places*.
- [17] Plunder of Edar (Howth) by the Gaill, who carried off a great booty of women, Four Masters, 819 (O'Donovan i. 430). Cf. *Gaill*, v. ; *Ann. Ult.* 820. The year is that of Coenwulf of Mercia's death, A.D. 822? Cf. Theopold, *Krit. Unters.* p. 24.
- [18] *Ann. Ult.* 823 (824? Steenstrup, 823).
- [19] *F. M.* 822 (O'Donovan i. 434). *Ann. Ult.* 822 and 823. *Chron. Scot.* (Hennessy), p. 132. *Gaill*, vi.
- [20] Exactly what happened is by no means certain. *Ann. Ult.* 824, *F. M.* (823) and *Chron. Scot. l.c.* speak of a defeat of the Ossorymen, which may or may not be identical with the battle fought during the raid of A.D. 825 (See *War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill*, vii.).
- [21] *Gaill*, vii.
- [22] *F.M.* 823 ; *Ann. Ult.* 824.
- [23] *Ult.* 824, ' Blaimhicc mac Flainn' ; *F. M.* 823 ; *Chron. Sc. l.e.* ; Skene, *Celt. Scot.* A.D. 825 ; Steenstrup, *Normannerne*, ii. 35, A.D. 824.
- [24] Migue T. 114, col. 1043-6.
- [25] *Gaill*, vii. (see Intro. xxxvi.) ; cf. *F. M.* 820 and 822 ; *Ult.* 824 ; *Ch. Scot.* 825.
- [26] ' The destruction of Dun-Laighin' [the fort of the Leinster men], in which Conal, King of Fortrenn, was slain' (*An. Ult.* 826). ' Battle at Kilmore' (Id.). ' Fearful battle fought by Lethlobar, King of Dalriada, against the Gentiles' (*A. U.* 827 ; cf. *F. M.* 826). ' Battle gained over the foreigners by Cairbre, lord of Ui-Ceinnsealaigh' (*F. M.* 826). ' Plundering in Louth and capture of Maelbrighde, king of the country' (*A. U.* 830 ; *F. M.* 829).
- [27] I have given an earlier date to the coming of Turgesius' ' great royal fleet' than is given by Munch, Todd, or Steenstrup. Todd gives A.D. 839 ; (but 830? Intro.) ; Steenstrup, A.D. 836 ; Munch, A.D. 838. As *Gaill* distinctly says that Armagh was plundered thrice in one month by Turgesius's Vikings, and as the *F. M.* place the plundering of Armagh thrice in one month in the year 830 and *Ult.*, in 831 , there seems every reason to take ours as the date of the advent of Thorgisl. We must note, too, the great increase in the Viking plunderings reported in *An. Ult.* and the *F. M.* from A.D. 831 onwards. Storm, I gather, would agree to the date I have given (*Bidrag, &c.*, p. 24).
- [28] Steenstrup, *o. c.* ii. 107.
- [29] *An. Ult.* 844.
- [30] *An. Ult. F. M.* 832. [First year of Njail Caille, *i.e.*, 833.]
- [31] *An. Ult.* 833 and 834. The place is called indifferently CluainmicNois and Cluain-mac-Nois, Clonmicnois or Clonmacnois. Cluain-muc-Nois, *Chr. Sc.*
- [32] *An. Ult.* 834 ; *F. M.* 835.
- [33] *Ult.* 835, probably by the Liffey fleet of sixty sail.
- [34] *Ult.* 835, *F. M.* 835. Here is a sort of summary of the plunderings by various bodies of the Gaill more or less under the direction of Thorgisl 835-840 :—
Thorgisl came to Armagh, brought his fleet to Lough Ree, and ravaged both Meath and Connaught.
Plundering of Clonmicnois (near Lough Ree).

- „ Clonfert (Galway).
- „ Lethra (Tipperary).
- „ Terriglas (Tipperary).
- „ Innis Celtra (Inniscattery, at the mouth of the Shannon), with its seven churches.

And all the churches of Lough Derg. Comp. *Gaill*, xi. ; *An. Ult.* 836. Lough Erne, *F. M.* and *An. Ult.* 836.

[35] *F. M.* 837 ; *G.* xii.

[36] *An. Ult.* 836.

[37] *F. M.* 836.

[38] *An. Ult.* 834, 844.

[39] *Gaill*, xxi. (misdated ?) ; *F. M.* 836.

[40] *Gaill*, xxi. [838, Todd] ; *Ult.* 836 speaks also of a victory over the northern O'Neil.

[41] There are many more plunderings in Lough Neagh mentioned in the years 839-841. *An. Ult.* has the entry, 'The Lochlanns (i.e., Norsemen) came into Ireland for the first time *secundum chronicon*' (a. 839), and if we accept this, we must suppose that the first Norsemen were of Thorgisl's fleet, and that he now first came into Ireland.

[42] *Gaedh. and Gaill*, p. xlix. 9, 224-27.

[43] Or we may perhaps call the year 875 the year of the Danish settlement in England.

[44] Feidhlimidh (*say* Felim) was his *immemorable*, apparently unpronounceable, name. It is not quite certain whether Thorgisl or he were the plunderers of Armagh on different occasions.

[45] *A. S. Chron. a.* 833, and *cf. Numism. Chr.*, 1882, p. 61, *sqq.*

[46] *Ibid.* 833 (4).

[47] *ibid.* 835.

[48] *An. Ult.* 844.

[49] Or Maelsechnaill.

[50] *An. Ult.* 844, *Gaill*. xv. 'One year before the drowning of Njall Caille ; two years before the death of Feidhlimidh.' *Gaill*.

[51] *F. M.* 845.

[52] *Ibid.* 847. I am not sure that this date is not erroneous, and that the event referred to is not contemporaneous, and in part connected with, the coming of a Danish fleet into Irish waters.

[53] Probably. See *Gaill*, xv.

[54] *Ult.* 850, 851. *Gaill*, xx.

[55] *F. M.* 851 : *Ann. Ult.* 852.

[56] At Colonsay, West Hebrides. The discovery was made by a descendant of the Hy-Njall, Mr. Malcolm M'Niel, on the estate of Sir John M'Niel, of Colonsay House. The remains were exhibited in the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art by Mr. William Galloway, to whom I have been indebted for a description of them.

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