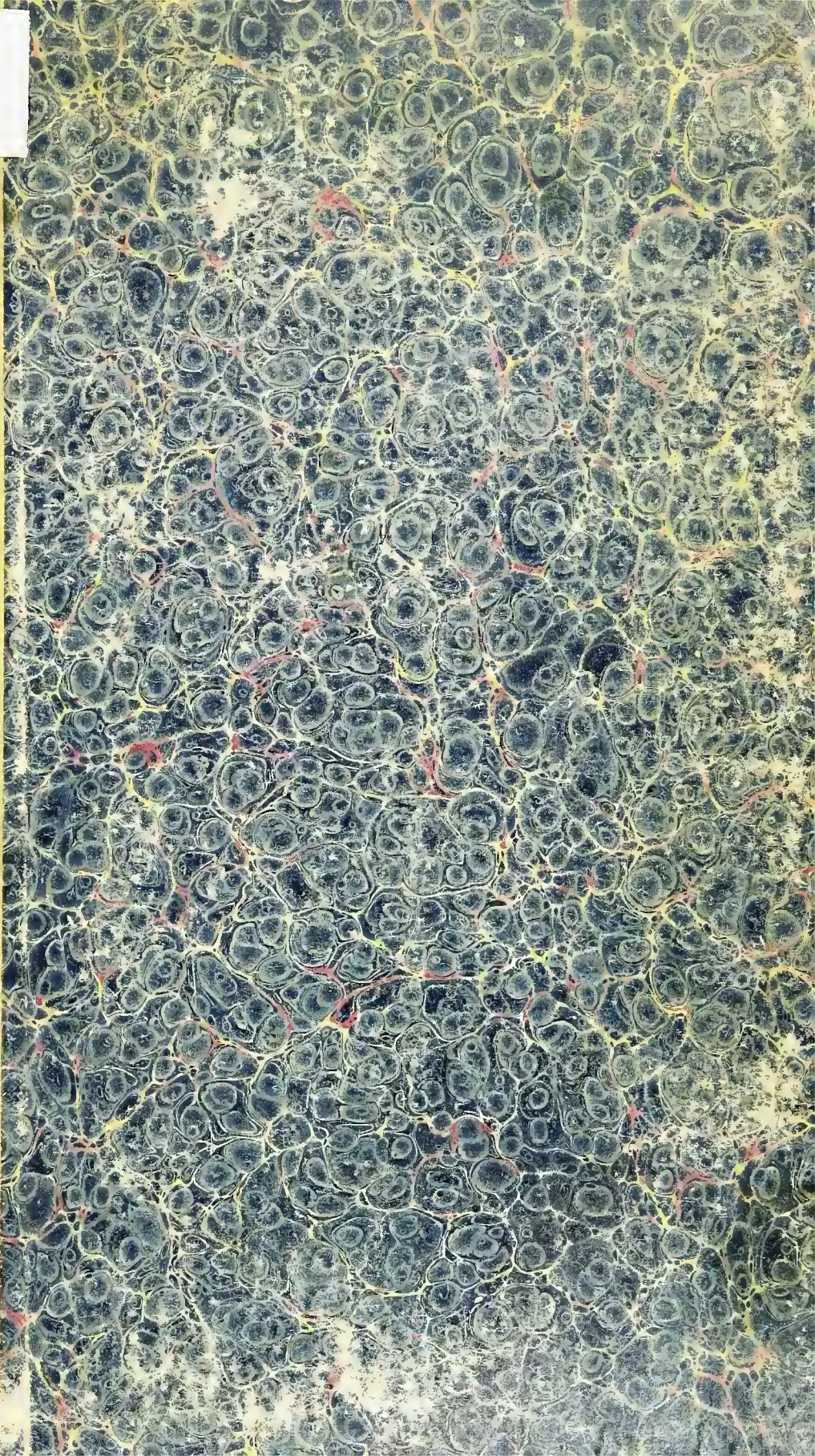


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AN IRISH ANALOGUE OF THE LEGEND OF ROBERT  
THE DEVIL

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By

DR. RONALD S. CRANE

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## AN IRISH ANALOGUE OF THE LEGEND OF ROBERT THE DEVIL.

EVER since Liebrecht in 1869 first proposed the theory,<sup>1</sup> no one has seriously questioned that the source of the medieval legend of Robert the Devil was a popular tale belonging to the large and widely diffused cycle of "der Grindkopf." Subsequent studies have cleared up many obscure points in the development of the story, and have added many new variants to the few given by Liebrecht;<sup>2</sup> but, without a dissenting voice so far as I am aware, scholars have accepted the main hypothesis of a folk-lore origin as established.<sup>3</sup> It is the purpose of this article to call attention to some hitherto unnoticed evidence, strongly confirmatory of the prevalent opinion, but also of a character to throw new light on the diffusion of the story throughout medieval Europe.

The fundamental theme of the group of folk-tales to which Liebrecht gave the name of the "Grindkopf" cycle<sup>4</sup> may be stated as follows:<sup>5</sup> A man and a woman, very often a king and queen, have

<sup>1</sup> *Göttingische Gel. Anzeigen* (1869), 976-9; reprinted in *Zur Volkskunde* (1879), 106-7.

<sup>2</sup> The most notable studies of the Robert legend in its relation to popular story are those of Karl Breul (*Sir Gowther*, Oppeln, 1886) and of E. Löseth (*Robert le Diable: roman d'aventures*, Paris, 1903). The subject is treated incidentally by Emil Benezé (*Orendel, Wilhelm von Orense und Robert der Teufel. Eine Studie zur deutschen und französischen Sagengeschichte*, Halle, 1897) and by Friedrich Panzer (*Hilde-Gudrun: eine Sagen- und Literargeschichtliche Untersuchung*, Halle, 1901). The most complete list of variants is that of Panzer, *l. c.*, 252-4. To these may be added three modern Irish folk-tales translated by Dottin, *Contes Irlandais* (1904), 24-31, 31-39, 222-32.

<sup>3</sup> See the references given by Löseth, *Robert le Diable*, xxxi.

<sup>4</sup> From the title of a story published by Reinhold Köhler, in *Jahrb. f. rom. u. engl. Liter.*, VIII (1867), 253-6. Other names applied to the cycle are "männlichen aschenputtel" (Breul, *l. c.*, 117), "teigneux" (Löseth, *l. c.*, xxx; cf. *Romania*, VI, 212-6), and "goldenermärchen" (Panzer, *l. c.*, 251). These names obviously apply only to the latter part of the story as analysed above. The beginning is sometimes (as by Breul, *Sir Gowther*, 117) classified by itself as forming a separate cycle, that of the "kinderwunsch." See below, note 9.

<sup>5</sup> I have made use here of the analyses given by Breul (*l. c.*, 118-29), Benezé (*l. c.*, 11-18), Panzer (*l. c.*, 254), and Löseth (*l. c.*, xxxi-xxxii), as well as of the following variants of the tale; Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, No. 136;

been married for a number of years, but to their great grief they have no children. One day a stranger appears and promises that they shall have a child (or, in some variants, children) provided that at the end of a specified period they will give it (or one of them) back into his keeping. They agree, and the woman bears a son—sometimes two or more.<sup>6</sup> He grows up quickly and becomes a marvel of beauty and strength. At the end of the period fixed upon, however, he falls into the power of the stranger, who proves in some variants to be a demon, in others, a sorcerer, and in still others, a wild man of the forest; and is carried off to his captor's abode. One day, through curiosity, he disobeys one of his new master's commands by touching a forbidden object or entering a forbidden chamber; immediately his hair turns yellow, and his master sends him forth into the world to learn poverty. In some tales the episode of the golden hair does not occur; the boy leaves the demon's house against the latter's will, and usually with supernatural aid.<sup>7</sup> After wandering about some time, he takes service as a menial in the palace of a king. Here his golden hair, which he has attempted in vain to conceal, attracts the notice of the king's daughter, who falls in love with him. From this point the different versions of the legend vary considerably. In some, the lad and the princess marry at once against the wishes of the king. In others, the king arranges a contest in which the person who catches an apple thrown by his daughter shall have her as his wife. The youth is victorious three times in succession. The third time, however, as he rides away, he is wounded by a knight sent in pursuit of him by the king; and the spear (or sword) breaks off, leaving the point in the wound. By means of this wound he is subsequently able to identify himself as the winner of the apple. In still a third group of tales, the king's enemies declare war on him and advance in great force against his city. Through the assistance of the stranger, his former master, the boy obtains secretly the equipment of a warrior, and without telling anyone of his intention, rides forth

*Jahrb. f. rom. u. engl. Liter.*, VII, 253-56; cf. R. Köhler, *Klein. Schriften*, I, 330-334; Cosquin, *Contes pop. de Lorraine*, I, 133-154; 155-165; II, 89-97; 164-67; Laistner, *Zeit. f. deutsch. Alterthum*, XXXVIII, 113 ff.

<sup>6</sup> Cosquin, I, 139, 140, 158, 164; Dottin, *Contes Irlandais*, 31-32. Cf. Breul, *Sir Gowther*, 120.

<sup>7</sup> Breul, *l. c.*, 124-5.

and defeats the invaders. He does this on three successive days, and on the third day is wounded in precisely the same manner as in the stories describing the contest for the apple. Finally—and this trait is in all the variants—he marries the princess and subsequently ascends her father's throne.

Where or when this story originated we have no sure means of determining; and the point is of little importance in the present study. We know only that it has left traces in the traditional lore of most of the leading peoples of eastern and western Europe, including the Slavs, the Greeks, the Germans, the Italians, the French, and the Irish; and that tales containing parts of it have been collected in such widely-separated lands as India and Africa.<sup>8</sup> Possibly, as Breul supposed,<sup>9</sup> it was not in the beginning one story, but two—a tale of a child born to childless parents through the help of a supernatural being having been fused with a tale of the adventures of a lad with golden hair at a comparatively late stage in the evolution of both. However this may be, Breul's investigations have shown that we may be certain of at least one thing: that a popular tale not greatly different from the one analysed above was current in the oral tradition of western Europe, and particularly of France, as early as the twelfth century; and that during the course of that century, if not before, it developed into the legend of Robert the Devil.

This evolution involved a rather thorough transformation of the traditional narrative. The stranger who appeared to the childless couple became the Devil of Christian theology, to whom the wife appealed in her despair when all her prayers to God for a child had failed. The woman's promise to restore the child to the stranger was retained, as was likewise the description of the lad's extraordinary beauty and strength; but there was introduced an account of the mother's terrible sufferings at his birth, and the story of his abduction was changed into a simple case of demoniacal possession.

<sup>8</sup> *E. g.*, Stokes, *Indian Fairy Tales*, No. 10; Steere, *Swahili Tales*, 381. Cf. *Romania*, VI, 216-8.

<sup>9</sup> *Sir Gowther*, 117. Benezé, on the other hand (*Orendel*, 13), and after him Löseth (*Robert le Diable*, xxxii, note 4), are of opinion that the two parts of the story were originally connected. The question, which is obviously incapable of a real solution, has no bearing on the present investigation.

The episode of the golden hair, now no longer in point, naturally disappeared,<sup>10</sup> and for it was substituted a narrative of the boy's ferocity and deeds of cruelty, especially toward clerics. The whole first part of the story, in short, was made over with a view to picturing a man completely in the spiritual power of the Devil, and capable, therefore, of every kind of sin. From this state only one way of escape was open—repentance and absolution; accordingly, the boy's flight from the house of his master was transformed into a pilgrimage to Rome and an appeal to the Pope, who sent him for penance to a neighboring hermit. With the carrying-out of this penance, which involved as one of its provisions total silence on the part of the sinner, the legend again fell back on the popular tale, and followed it, with a few changes of no significance in the present connection, until the end. The end itself was altered: instead of marrying the princess, the hero announced his intention of retiring from the world and of becoming a hermit.<sup>11</sup>

It is obvious that such a remaking of the old folk-tale could be the work of none but an ecclesiastic. The part played by the Devil, the boy's sinful youth, the repentance and penance, and finally the ascetic ending, all point to a purpose of religious edification. It is not surprising, therefore, that one of the earliest of the extant versions of the medieval legend should be found in a collection of exempla, that of Etienne de Bourbon in the first half of the thirteenth century. In this version, which the author professes to have heard "a duobus fratribus, a fratre, qui hoc se legisse asserebat," the name of the hero is Robert, and his father is described as a "certain count."<sup>12</sup>

Even before this, however, the story had penetrated into the world of laymen. Toward the end of the twelfth century a poet of northern France recounted the life of Robert in a "roman d'aventure"

<sup>10</sup> If, indeed, it were present at all in the version, or versions, of the popular tale known to the ecclesiastic who constructed the legend of Robert the Devil.

<sup>11</sup> This ending appears in the four earliest versions of the story. In the later versions the hero, as in the folk-tales, marries the princess and ascends her father's throne. See Breul, *l. c.*, 129, and Löseth, *l. c.*, xxix, note 5. For an interesting attempt to reconstruct the primitive form of the legend on the basis of the earliest existing texts, see Löseth, *l. c.*, xx-xxix.

<sup>12</sup> *Anecdotes historiques légendes et apologues . . . d'Etienne de Bourbon*, 145-8. On the life of the author cf. *ib.*, ii-xi.



of upwards of five thousand lines, entitled *Robert le Diable*.<sup>13</sup> Much more circumstantial in his account than the writer of the version preserved by Etienne de Bourbon, he was also in some respects less faithful to what must have been the original form of the Robert legend, omitting, for example, the woman's promise to return to the Devil the child she should have by his aid—a trait clearly of no significance in the story as he conceived it. Moreover, though in this he may have been only following his own immediate source,<sup>14</sup> he took pains to attach the legend to a definite locality; Robert was the son of Aubert, a good and valiant Duke of Normandy.

Once introduced into the polite literature of western Europe, the legend of Robert the Devil enjoyed an extraordinary vogue in both the clerical and lay worlds, a vogue which lasted until well after the introduction of printing, and called forth a long series of new versions.<sup>15</sup> Nor was this popularity confined to the region in which the story had taken form. By the fifteenth century it had penetrated into Germany in the form of a prose tale,<sup>16</sup> and into England in the form of a metrical romance;<sup>17</sup> by the end of that century, thanks to the printing press, into Spain; and in the course of the sixteenth, into England again in a new version, and into the Netherlands.

But the story of our legend in the Middle Ages is not completed when we have examined the versions produced on the continent of Europe. In a document which, so far as I can ascertain, has not hitherto been brought into the discussion of the subject, there is

<sup>13</sup> Ed. Löseth, 1903 (*Société des anciens textes français*). For discussion of manuscripts, see *ibid.*, i-v; of dialect, xlv-xlvii; of date, xlvii-xlviii.

<sup>14</sup> That such a source existed, and was literary rather than traditional in character, appears from such expressions as the following: "Si com jel truis en mon traitié" (l. 4550); "Si com jel truis en mon dité" (4765); "Si com l'estoire nous retrait" (5038).

<sup>15</sup> These are enumerated and described by Breul, *l. c.*, 50-67, 70-106, 198-207.

<sup>16</sup> See Karl Borinski, "Eine ältere deutsche Bearbeitung von Robert Le Diable," *Germania*, XXXVII (1892), 44-62.

<sup>17</sup> *Sir Gowther*. See the edition by Breul, 1886. The sources of *Sir Gowther*, and particularly its relations to the story of Robert the Devil, are treated by Florence L. Ravenel, "*Tydorel and Sir Gowther*," *P. M. L. A.*, XX (1905), 152-78. Her conclusion is that the English romance exhibits a fusion of elements from *Robert le Diable* and the lai of *Tydorel* (ed. G. Paris, *Romania*, VIII, 1879, 66-72).

clear evidence that at a date earlier than that of the earliest extant continental versions, a tale closely parallel to the first part of Robert the Devil was current in Ireland. This tale forms the first half of the *Imram Húi Corra*, a work preserved in the fifteenth century Book of Fermoy, but in all probability composed as early as the eleventh century.<sup>18</sup> It belongs in all its essential features to a large and characteristic group of early Irish writings, those, namely, which narrate the voyage of a saint out over the western ocean to the Celtic otherworld.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, it is clear that the author of the existing text, who was evidently a cleric, had in mind as he wrote one of the most remarkable examples of this *genre*, the *Imram Mailduin*.<sup>20</sup> The work as he left it recounts the careers of three Irish saints, the brothers Lochan, Enne, and Silvester, whose feasts had been celebrated from at least the ninth century.<sup>21</sup> It comprises

<sup>18</sup> Edited, with translation, by Whitley Stokes, *Revue celtique*, XIV (1893), 22-69. An analysis is given by O'Curry, *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History* (1878), 289-92, and a translation into German, by Zimmer, *Zt. f. deut. Alter.*, XXXIII (1889), 183-97. On the manuscripts see Stokes, *l. c.*, 22; on the date, *ibid.*, 24-5, and Zimmer, *l. c.*, 197-211. Beyond the fact that a story with the same title is referred to in the Book of Leinster (middle of the twelfth century) and that the Húi Corra "with their seven" are mentioned elsewhere in the same manuscript, the evidence for the date of composition is altogether internal. Stokes, a generally cautious scholar, thinks that the various criteria (chiefly linguistic in character) "point to the eleventh century." Zimmer holds that the piece as we have it cannot be older than the twelfth century, but argues, chiefly from the obvious lack of connection between the two parts of the extant version and the circumstance that the Húi Corra themselves play a very inconspicuous rôle in the voyage from which the story obtains its title, that the introductory portion was probably composed at a much earlier date, and had originally a different sequel. So far as the events of this part of the story can be called historical at all, they seem to belong to the period of the conflict between paganism and Christianity, perhaps the sixth or ninth century. See Zimmer, *Gött. gel. Anz.* (1891), 191, and note 25, below.

<sup>19</sup> On the "Imrama" in general see Zimmer, *Zt. f. deut. Alter.*, XXXIII, 144-220; Hull, *A Text Book of Irish Literature* (1906), Pt. I, 127-37; Dottin, *The Gaelic Literature of Ireland*, tr. Dunn (1906), 26-7; Boswell, *An Irish Precursor of Dante* (1908), 120 ff.

<sup>20</sup> Ed. Stokes, *Revue celtique*, IX, 447-95; X, 50-95. The following sections of the *Imram Húi Corra* show traces of influence from the *Imram Mailduin*: 43 (*Mailduin*, ch. I), 47 (chs. VII, X), 48 (ch. XXXI), 49 (ch. XXVII), 50 (ch. XXV), 51 (ch. XXVI), 62 (ch. XIV). For other sources probably utilized by the redactor of the present version of the *Imram Húi Corra*, see Zimmer, *Zt. f. deut. Alter.*, XXXIII, 198-204.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Féilire Oengusso Céili Dé*, ed. Stokes, Henry Bradshaw Society, XXIX (1905), vii, 255, and *Féilire Húi Gormáin*, ed. Stokes, *ibid.*, IX (1895), 251.

two parts clumsily fused together—an account of the births and early lives of the saints, and a narrative of their penitential voyage in search of the otherworld, the *Imram* proper. Colored as the work is with Christian conceptions, it yet reveals in both its parts numerous traces of more primitive imaginings. The first part, which alone concerns us here, is as follows:<sup>22</sup>

There once dwelt in the province of Connaught a princely landholder, “a man happy, wealthy, exceeding prosperous,” named Conall the Red. He was married to Caerdeg, the daughter of the erenagh of Clogher; and the two had only one grief—they had no heir, all the children that had been born to them having died in infancy. “So one night, in his bed, the landholder said to his wife: ‘It is sad for us,’ says he, ‘not to have a son to be a fitting successor in our place after us.’ ‘What wouldst thou fain do therefore?’ says the wife. ‘This is what I would fain do,’ says the householder, ‘make a communion with the Devil, if perchance he would give us a son or a daughter as successor, who would take our place after us.’ ‘So let it be done,’ says the wife. Then they fasted against the Devil,<sup>23</sup> and the lady forthwith became with child, and was nurturing her pregnancy till the end of her nine months. Thereafter came unto the lady great efforts and mighty birth-pangs, and she bore three sons in that great bringing-forth, to wit, a son at the beginning of the night, and a son at midnight, and a son at the end of the night. And they were baptised according to the heathen baptism,<sup>24</sup> and these were their names, even Lochan, and Enne and Silvester.”

The three lads grew up to be “swift and strong on sea and land, so that they outwent their coevals in every play and in every fair discipline; and full lips and constant tongue had every one who used to hear them or see them at that time.” Indeed, the only complaint that any one could think to make of them was that they had been baptised into the Devil’s possession. When the three sons heard of this remark, they said to each other: “If it is the Devil who is our king or lord, it is hard for us not to rob and plunder and persecute his enemies, that is, to kill clerics and to burn and wreck churches.”

<sup>22</sup> I have followed in this analysis the English version of Whitley Stokes. Professor A. C. L. Brown has kindly verified the translation of several passages.

<sup>23</sup> On this custom, which was widespread among the early Irish, see F. N. Robinson, “Notes on the Irish Practice of Fasting as a Means of Dstraint,” Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1909 (reprinted from the Putnam Anniversary Volume, 567-83); and C. Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, I, cxx ff., cxxx.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. J. A. MacCulloch, *The Religion of the Ancient Celts* (1911), 308-9, and the references there given.

Accordingly, they formed themselves into a band of brigands, and proceeded to rob and burn churches and to maltreat clerics, till at the end of a year they had destroyed one more than half of the churches of Connaught, and the fame of their evil deeds had spread throughout Ireland. One day at the end of the first year, Lochan said to his brothers: "We have been very forgetful, and our lord the Devil will not be thankful to us concerning it." "What is this?" ask the others. "Our grandfather," Lochan replied, "even our mother's father; we have not killed him and burnt his church upon him." Thus reminded of their neglect, the three sons did not delay, but set out at once for the dwelling-place of their grandfather, the erenagh.

When they arrived at his church, they determined to postpone the execution of their plan until nightfall. In the meantime, the erenagh, who had somehow become aware of their intention, set before them food and ale, "so that they became exhilarated and mirthful." Afterward couches were spread for them and they fell asleep. While sleeping, Lochan was taken in a vision to see the joys of Heaven and the pains of Hell. What he saw so impressed him that on awaking he related it to his two brothers and counselled them to quit their weapons and in the future to follow God. This they agreed to do, and having been assured by the erenagh that God would accept their repentance, they exchanged their spears for staves, and went to seek Findén, "the foster-father of Ireland."<sup>25</sup>

"Thus was it done by them. They fare forward on the morrow to Clonard, to the place where Findén was biding. There was he then, on the green of the stead. 'Whom have we here?' say the clerics who were along with the saint. 'These are the Húi Chorra, the marauders,' says one of them. All who were along with Findén fled and left him alone. It seemed to them that the Húi Chorra had come to kill them."<sup>26</sup> To reassure the clerics, the brothers threw away their staves, and knelt down before Findén. "'What is your desire?' says the elder. 'We are fain,' say they, 'to believe and be

<sup>25</sup> Findén died in 548 A. D. See Zimmer, *Zt. f. deut. Alter.*, XXXIII, 197. On the place which tradition assigned to him among the early bishops of Ireland, see *Betha Fhindein*, ll. 2640-5, 2778-82 (in Stokes, *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore*, 79, 83; trans., 226, 230).

<sup>26</sup> Similar episodes occur in two of the early versions of the story of Robert the Devil. In *Robert le Diable* (ll. 353-68, ed. Löseth, 26-7) the hero is represented as of so terrible an aspect that at his entrance into Arques the inhabitants dare not come near him. In a German prose version preserved in a fifteenth century manuscript, the young king of France (who corresponds to Robert in the French versions) goes unbidden to a court which is being held in his dominions; as he approaches, the princes and lords flee in terror (*Germania*, XXXVII, 47, ll. 22-31).

pious and to serve God, and to quit the lord with whom we have been hitherto, even the Devil.'” Rejoiced at their resolution, Findén led them into the stead, before an assembly of clerics, who should impose a fitting penance for the brothers' sins. “Then the assembly made a resolve, to wit, that a son of the Church should be instructing them, that they should speak to no one save their tutor, and that their instruction should continue till the end of a year.”

At the end of the year they went again to Findén, and asked him to pass judgment on them for the great evils they had done—namely, burning one more than half of the churches of Connaught and killing the bishops and clerics. He replied that they might restore all of the churches they had destroyed together with their contents, and that he would give each of them for this the strength of a hundred men. One day, after they had completely carried out his directions, and were resting at Kinvara, they went down to the edge of the harbor and stood watching the sun as it traveled westward, and “they marvelled much concerning his course. ‘And in what direction goes the sun,’ say they, ‘when he goes under the sea? And what more wondrous thing,’ say they, ‘than the sea without ice, and ice on every other water.’”

This was the beginning of their project to go on a pilgrimage, “to seek the Lord on the sea and on the mighty main,” the narrative of which occupies the second half of the piece.

It will be readily seen from the foregoing analysis that in some traits the *Imram Húi Corra* resembles more closely the folk-tale, and in others the fully developed medieval legend of Robert the Devil. Like the folk-tale, it presents the lives of the three brothers as in the beginning free from sin, and their possession by the Devil as a later development. Like the legend of Robert the Devil, it exhibits traces of pronounced ecclesiastical influence: the being through whose agency the sons are born is the Christian Devil, and the act by which they come under his power, the purely religious rite of “heathen baptism.” Between the Irish and the French stories, moreover, is a rather striking parallelism of incident. In both is a description of the extraordinary sufferings of the woman at the birth of the children; in both emphasis is laid on the heroes' antipathy to clerics; in both an account is given, differing to be sure in details, of the sudden repentance of the marauders; in both we have a narrative of a journey to the head of the Church, in the one case to the Pope, in the other to Findén, the chief bishop of Ire-



land; in both, finally, at least one element of the penance is the same—like Robert, the sons of Corra must preserve silence. Whatever the real relations between the three groups of versions, this much seems certain: the Irish story while preserving some primitive traits not in the existing continental documents is on the whole closer to the medieval legend of Robert the Devil than to the earlier folk-tale.

What, then, is the actual historical relation of the Irish tale of the three sons of Corra to the continental narratives of Robert the Devil? The problem is not so simple as the relative age of the existing versions might seem to indicate; for we have no means of determining how much earlier than the end of the twelfth century the legend of Robert the Devil assumed its present form in France. The possible relations are three, which may be stated in the form of hypotheses, as follows:

1. Although the original folk-tale was unquestionably current in all parts of Europe, it was given the form in which we see it in *Robert le Diable* and the *Imram Húi Corra*—that of an ecclesiastical legend—in one of the Celtic countries. The *Imram Húi Corra* would represent, then, one version of a story which was common perhaps to the whole Celtic world, and which passed thence to the continent, possibly by the same channel as some of the Arthurian legends, and became the basis of the saga of Robert the Devil. This theory would at first sight seem to harmonize with the statement of the author of *Sir Gowther* that he had obtained his story “owt off a lai of Breyteyn”;<sup>27</sup> but the likelihood that this assertion refers only to the twelfth century lai of *Tydorel*, which was almost certainly among the sources drawn upon by the author of the English romance,<sup>28</sup> and the general doubt as to the precise implications of the term “Breton lai,” make it an argument of little worth. And apart from this the theory has not even probability to rest upon. For one thing, there is no evidence that the second part of the story—the lad’s adventures at the court—ever existed in a Celtic version; whereas the two parts are frequently found together in folk-tales current in different corners of the continent.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Ll. 28–30, 751–3; ed. Breul, pp. 136, 165.

<sup>28</sup> Ravenel, “*Tydorel and Sir Gowther*,” *P. M. L. A.*, XX, 152–78.

<sup>29</sup> Compare, for example, *Jahrb. f. rom. u. engl. Liter.*, VIII, 253–6; Cosquin, I, 139–141; Panzer, *Hilde-Gudrun*, 256.

Again, there is nothing distinctively Celtic about the story of Robert the Devil—none of the peculiar marks of Celtic fancy and tradition which in the absence of more positive evidence go far toward convincing one of the Celtic origin of certain other medieval legends. Given the existence in France in the early Middle Ages of the tale of the lad with the golden hair, it is altogether unnecessary to look to Celtic lands for the origin of the legend of Robert the Devil. We may, therefore, dismiss the hypothesis as not only unprovable but also inherently unlikely.

2. At an early date, which could not have been later than the eleventh century, a continental version of the story, already much transformed from the original folk-tale and containing many of the features of the fully developed Robert legend, especially its ecclesiastical coloring, made its way into Ireland, and was there further altered into the legend of the sons of Corra. This theory would account for such similarities of incident between the *Imram Húi Corra* and the twelfth and thirteenth century French tales as the "mighty birth-pangs," the hostility of the young men to clerics, the fear inspired by their presence, their sudden repentance, the journey to the head of the Church, and the imposition of silence as part of the penance. As for the traits in which the Irish differs from the French versions, some of them, as, for example, the number of the children, the character of their childhood, and the details of their repentance, may have been due simply to a desire to adapt the narrative more fully to known facts concerning the saints of whom it was to be told. Or they might well be explained by supposing that the version which reached Ireland contained more primitive material than any of those known to us. For some of them, however, another and quite different explanation seems equally plausible. It will be noted that at least two of the traits in question—the birth of several children, and their early good conduct—occur in a number of variants of the folk-tale, including one current in Ireland,<sup>30</sup> though they are not to be found in any of the extant versions of Robert the Devil. This fact suggests a third hypothesis.

3. The two versions—the Irish and the French—developed independently of each other from the same or a similar folk original.

<sup>30</sup> Dottin, *Contes Irlandais*, 31-2.

At some time earlier than the eleventh century, the märchen of the wish-child who passed into the power of a demon penetrated into Ireland. It there became fixed in popular tradition, so that some of the incidents of the story have survived in Irish folk-tales to the present day.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, precisely as in France, it early attracted the interest of Christian clerics, who took portions of the story and adapted them to the lives of three national saints. In this way was written the first part of the *Imram Húi Corra*. Naturally, while preserving many of the features of the märchen, it reflected Irish life and manners just as *Robert le Diable* reflected French life and manners.

Between the second and third hypothesis it is perhaps impossible, on the basis of our present limited and purely internal knowledge, to decide with any assurance, though it is exceedingly difficult to believe that two narratives exhibiting such close parallelisms in motive and incident could have come into existence quite independently of each other. I am not, however, greatly concerned to press this point. It is enough if this study demonstrates, as I believe it does, first, that Liebrecht was right in claiming for the legend of Robert the Devil an origin in general folk-lore rather than in local historical events, and, second, that its opening incidents were familiar in Ireland fully a hundred years before their earliest known appearance in the literature of the continent of Europe.

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[One is equally justified in assuming either that the Irish tale contains the earliest variant yet noted of a clerical version of a folk-tale, which is represented later by the continental Latin and French versions of *Robert the Devil*, or that this interpretation of a folklore *motiv* was given independently in two versions of a popular tale, written in similar environments. We have Irish versions of widely spread exempla, such as that of the "King who Never Smiled,"<sup>32</sup> and of the "Bees and the Eucharist,"<sup>33</sup> and the author

<sup>31</sup> See note 2, above.

<sup>32</sup> W. Stokes, *Tripartite Life of St. Patrick*, xlv; cf. T. F. Crane, *Exempla of Jacques de Vitry*, 150-151; *Gesta Ramanorum*, ed. Dick, 203; Herbert, *Cat. of Romances*, III, 26-27, 391, 502, 538, 547; *Hist. litt. de la France*, XXXIII, 318.

<sup>33</sup> E. J. Gwynn, *Eriu*, II, 82; cf. A. Schönbach, *Wien. Sitzungsab.*, Phil. Hist. Kl., CLVI, Part I, 58; Herbert, *op. cit.*, III, 23, 388, 448, 517, 555, 613, 639, 647, 648, 719.

of the Irish tale, an ecclesiastic, may have made use of the popular story, told as an exemplum, in the form in which Étienne de Bourbon gives it. On the other hand in an age and community which believed in the actuality of intrigues between human beings and devils, and in the procreation of offspring as a result of such connections,<sup>34</sup> a view supported by the majority of medieval schoolmen, and cherished by Papist theologians down to the present day,<sup>35</sup> one can assume that this same interpretation was given independently by ecclesiastics, especially as a different form was given by them to the same story in the cycle of "L'enfant voué au diable,"<sup>36</sup> whose relations to the original folk-tale and to its other ecclesiastical variants need investigation. But the same class of writers was ready to attribute the birth of their saints to just such miraculous conceptions,<sup>37</sup> which were regarded as the consequence of an ungodly pact with the devil, when found in profane works.

G. L. H.]

<sup>34</sup> Riezler, *Gesch. d. Hexenprozesse in Bayern*, 23-24; Hansen, *Zauberwahn, Inquisition und Hexenprozess im Mittelalter*, 141-144.

<sup>35</sup> Hansen, *op. cit.*, 179-184; Delacroix, *Les procès de la sorcellerie au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 110 ff. Janssen-Pastor (*Gesch. d. deutsch. Volkes*, 14th ed., VIII, 560, 611, 637, n. 2) have the credit of marking out the Protestant theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who had the same belief.

<sup>36</sup> P. Meyer, *Rom.*, XXXIII, 162-178; *Hist. litt.*, XXXIII, 375; Herbert, *op. cit.*, III, 504.

<sup>37</sup> E. S. Hartland, *Legend of Perseus*, I, 110-11; 115-118; *Primitive Paternity*, I, 7, 16-17; C. Plummer, *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae*, I, lxxvii, n. 6, cxxxxii, clviii ff.













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