

FOLK-LORE.—No. II.

BOVINE LEGENDS.

BY WILLIAM HACKETT, ESQ.

IN a paper read at the May meeting of this Society, a connexion between our oral legends and many topographical terms was alluded to; a MS. was cited as embodying details of a character harmonising with folk-lore in general, and reference was made to certain Hindoo and other traditions. The present paper purports to follow out the subject on a similar plan, and a MS. of the class known as *Tain Bo*, is selected. This tract is called *Tain Bo Cuailgne*. It commences with the familiar sentence, "once upon a time," and tells of a king and a queen. To enter at length on the details of the *Tain Bo Cuailgne* would be incompatible with the space allotted to this paper; let it suffice that the tract in question is extremely mysterious, undoubtedly ancient, and, if it were fully translated, would prove highly interesting in a literary point of view. Although the manuscript occupies 138 closely-written quarto pages, a few words will afford what may be necessary to the present object. The queen, *Meiv*, of *Connaught*, hearing of a certain renowned bull in *Ulster*, sends to make sundry large offers, and tenders pledges, in order that she may obtain even the loan of this wonderful animal for one year; not attaining her object by fair means she determines on having recourse to force, collects all the *Connaught* troops, obtains the assistance of *Meath*, *Leinster*, and *Munster*, and ascending her war chariot marches at the head of her forces into *Ulster*; thus all Ireland is engaged in a war, which lasts seven years. Many lengthened details of the exploits of various warriors is given, after which the story ends with an account of a single combat, not between two heros, but between two bulls; one, the *Connaught* bull, is named *Fionn Banagh*, the other and more renowned, is named *Donn Cuailgne*. The battle is fought in the presence of all the troops, for the space of an entire day, on the plains of *Hae*, it is continued in almost every spot in Ireland during the night, and next morning *Donn Cuailgne* returns loaded with the ponderous carcase of the vanquished *Fionn Banagh*. Irish topography appears to have received many additions from this nocturnal conflict; places with the following names, for instance—*Cloth-na-d-Tarv*, *Drom-na-d-Tarv*, *Rath-na-d-Tarv*, *Bearna-na-d-Tarv*, *Magh-na-d-Tarv*. The conquering bull arrives at the spot of the previous day's conflict; all the warriors allow him to pass quietly. On the plain, the *hae*, or lungs of the dead bull, fall from him, hence the place is called *Magh Hae Fionnbanagh*. Whether the warriors accompany him on his way to *Ulster* does not appear. The bull proceeds thither, drinking two rivers dry, of which one is no less

than the Shannon at Athlone. Various places on his road are named from the scattered limbs of the dead bull; a river called Fionn Leithe, from the *leithe*, or shoulder, having there fallen, whilst Donn Cuailgne was stooping to drink; Athlone, from the *luan*, or loins; Trim, from the *druim*, or chine. The archæological reader need not be here reminded of the various scattering of limbs which abound in oriental and other mythology. Finally, the renowned Donn arrives at his own territory of Cuailgne, where, overcome with all his hardships and sufferings, he falls dead. Various attributes are ascribed to this wonderful animal. He was possessed of human intelligence. The Irish tongue he understood perfectly well; but whether his knowledge extended to foreign languages does not appear. Two somewhat similar fables occur in Irish history, in the reign of Dermud Mac Fergus Cearbheoil, which monarch slew his eldest son for forcibly taking a cow from a female hermit, and on another occasion he waged a furious war against Guaire, King of Connaught, for taking a cow from a religious recluse. This monarch ascended the throne, A.D. 538, and if the transactions had any foundation in fact, they would read as if he protected a lingering form of idolatry, although professing himself a Christian. But the probability is, that the two stories are folk-lore incidents pressed into the service of history, and that they belong to the same category as the Tain Bo Cuailgne. Now whether all may find a parallel in Hindoo mythology, can be judged by a comparison with the following extracts, premising that both in the Tain Bo Cuailgne and in the story of the king's killing his son, much stress is laid on a hospitable entertainment and sumptuous repast.

In Moore's *Hindoo Pantheon*, p. 160, we read that the 41st section of Ramayana details an entertainment given by Vashishta to Viswamitra and his whole army. "But Viswamitra not contented with the entertainment, coveted also the donor (a cow), and after endeavouring in vain to purchase the cow, took her from Vashishta by violence;" hence, curses and battles between these two sages and their adherents, as detailed at tiresome length in the 42nd and following sections of the Ramayana. In page 190 of the same work is the following:—"Iamadagni was entrusted by Indra with the charge of the wonderful boon-granting cow . . . and on one occasion regaled the Rajah Diruj in so magnificent a manner as to excite his astonishment . . . he demands the animal from his host, and on refusal, force and stratagem were employed, which ended in the death of Iamadagni, but without success as to the acquisition of the desired animal, which disappeared."

If these coincidences are deemed insufficient to elicit further enquiry, the details, if given at full length, would supply the deficiency. Supposing a strong coincidence to be exhibited, the first question it would suggest would be—did the Irish obtain their fables from the Hindoos? It is not probable that they did, but that both are vestiges

of what we may term the original oral legends of the patriarchal world.

A specimen of folk-lore is now submitted which has not been noticed in any of those manuscripts which circulate in the south of Ireland. The story is told in that land of legends, the barony of Imokilly. Here, on the strand of Ballycroneen, as a few fishermen were strolling along, they observed a "berugh," or mermaid, sleeping near the edge of the ocean. After some deliberation they resolved on capturing this inhabitant of the sea. Upon her awaking and seeing that she could not escape, she ordered them to procure a cloak or covering, and gave directions that she should be conveyed to a farmer's house adjacent. There she took up her abode, and being placed beside the hearth, received every mark of respect, not only from the farmer's family, but from all the people of the country round, who came in crowds to visit her. She remained with them for some time, giving every kind of good advice, and foretelling future events. At length, on a May-eve, she gave directions that she should be conveyed back to the strand. Accordingly she was removed, and a great concourse of people went to witness her departure; she continued talking to them, prophesying to the last moment, when she finally told them all to assemble on that same spot on the following May-eve, for that then the three cows would arrive out of the sea. Accordingly, on that day twelve months, all the people of Ireland assembled on the cliffs, and waited from the dawn of day, expecting the cows. At mid-day they began to despair of their arrival, but about an hour afterwards they observed them lifting their heads from beneath the waves, at a short distance from the beach. They swam in until they were able to walk, and then they stood on the beach, shaking the water from their bodies and gazing on the people, who were all shouting with joy at their arrival. At this time, says the legend, there were no roads in Ireland. The cows stood for a time as if deliberating, and the people observed that one was white, another red, and the third black. After a short time all three walked abreast up from the strand, and great was the wonder of the multitude on observing that a fine broad road was already formed for them to walk upon. They continued walking abreast until they had gone about a mile from the sea, where they found two other roads; here the three cows parted, the white cow going to the north-west, towards the county of Limerick, the red cow turning to the west, by a road running all round the coast of Ireland, and the black cow going to the north-east, towards Lismore, in the county of Waterford. The roads are pointed out in many places at present, and are known as "Bohur na Bo Finne," the road of the white cow, "Bohur na Bo Ruadh," of the red cow, and "Bohur na Bo Duibhè" (pronounced "dee"), of the black cow. The legends appended to this landing of the three cows are so numerous that, if each were distinguished by a separate title, a list only of them would occupy too much time. A singular coincidence presents

itself in this legend and the following extract from the apocryphal Book of Enoch. The writer there allegorically describes Noah as a white cow, who became a man, and who taught the other cows a mystery. The man who had been a white cow now builds a ship, the deluge is described, after which the man, again termed a white cow, goes out of the ship and with him three other cows (chap. lxxxviii. v. 13).—"One of the three cows was white, resembling that cow, one of them was as red as blood, and one of them was black, and the white cow left them." In the eighteenth verse of this extraordinary chapter we read of a white cow bringing forth a black wild sow and a white sheep; but, as these animals do not pertain to the section now treated of, they need not be further alluded to here. The book of Enoch, the prophet, in which these details appear, was translated from a manuscript Abyssinian bible by the erudite Dr. Lawrence, archbishop of Cashel, who satisfactorily proves the time in which it was composed to have been shortly after the first promulgation of the gospel. The apostle Jude quotes the traditions of Enoch, the prophet, but it does not appear that the quotation is from this book. The apostle was familiar with the traditions; perhaps all Jews were generally acquainted with them, and the author of the apocryphal Book of Enoch, evidently a converted Jew, embodied it in a work whose object was to set forth the prophecies of the incarnation, if possible, in a stronger light than they are exhibited in Holy Writ. Does not the coincidence between the oral traditions of the Jews of old and those of the Irish give an insight into the mysteries of folk-lore? Do they not appear like oral descriptions of symbolic delineations familiarly understood in the original patriarchal state of society, and and from that period transmitted in all directions through the whole human family? Does it not go further and show, that most, if not all, systems of Paganism are but abused perpetuations of ancient symbolism, originally conveying the truths of revealed religion? How can we better reconcile the many features of strong resemblance in various systems of Paganism, not only with each other but with original revelation, however depraved the ultimate perversion may have become?

That these traditions were general throughout Ireland is very evident almost from topography alone. Numerous are the lakes, islands, and pastures of the white cow—Lough Bo Finne, Inis Bo Finne, &c. The mystic bed associates them with idolatry, as the bed of the white cow, *Leaba na Bo Finne*, so of the other cows. Writers heretofore ascribed these terms to the fertility of the soil where they occur, but many of these terms are applied to sterile lands which never were fertile, and this process fails in accounting for the names of the numerous rocks of the bull, cow, and calf, which pervade all our coasts, and with most of which are corresponding local legends. Some of these are evidently fables, conveying moral precepts, nevertheless they savour strongly of mythology. The fame of the *Garlach Coilleanach*

has spread from Connaught throughout all parts of Ireland where the national language still lingers. This story commences by stating that he was originally a farmer's servant employed to mind cows. One bright sunny day, having charge of a large herd, he observed "high up in the air" a small black cloud which descended rapidly towards the earth, at the same time he heard a voice in the air, which said "this is the Tarv Connaire, he will descend on one of the cows; whoever drinks the first milk of that cow will have the gift of prophecy." The Garlach Coilleanach adopted the suggestion, in due time drank the milk, left his master, and "travelled the world, giving knowledge in all parts." Of a similar tendency is the story of Carrul O'Dawla. He was also originally a cow-herd; attending to his task one misty morning, he could scarcely see one of his cattle; on a sudden the mist appeared to close in from all sides until it became a small black cloud, settling over a furze bush, through which it disappeared. Watching attentively, he observed one of the cows, which was grey, walk at once and browse upon the furze. This struck him as so singular, that he went and waked the farmer, who was still in bed, the farmer rejoiced at the intelligence, gave him a piggin, ordering him to fill it with the milk of the Bo Riagh. Carrul drank the milk, and told his master that he had accidentally spilled it; the master, in great agitation, sent him out a second and third time with a like result. So the farmer discharged him, and he went about the world, as Garlach Coilleanach did either before or after.

Fables with a very different moral are more general. The cow, Glas Gowlawn, according to the traditions of the country, presented itself every day before each house in Ireland, giving a plentiful day's supply. So she continued until an avaricious person laid in a quantity for traffic, whereupon the Glas Gowlaun, left Ireland, going into the sea off the Hill of Howth. Numerous roads called Boherglass are ascribed to this valuable animal. This cow is remembered, by tradition, in Glen Gavlin, county of Cavan, where her udder, as she passed along, formed a gap called Berna-na-Glaisè. She is said to have gone to Scotland. Similar legends, in the south of Ireland, describe the cows as going to Wales; and the peasantry of Imokilly are aware of the fact of the bones of the cow being preserved in Redcliff Church, Bristol; these, they say, belonged to a cow which, being struck with a spencil and cursed by a red-haired woman, swam over to England, where she was kindly received, every respect shown her, and when she died they kept her bones (similar supposed bones of the dun cow are preserved in Mulgrave and Warwick Castles). But of all cows the most famous is the Glas Gaibhnach, part of whose history may be seen in a note to O'Donovan's edition of the "Annals of the Four Masters," vol. i. p. 18, *note*^s which Mr. Getty has faithfully quoted in the second number of the "Ulster Journal of Archæology," in his admirable paper on Tory Island. The Glas Gaibhnach, or, as the name is expressed frequently, Gaibhneach, is known

in many parts of Ireland, where all other enchanted cows may have been forgotten; she, too, dispensed milk to "the country round," until a woman, having filled all her vessels, at length produced a "dilldarn," or sieve, on perceiving which the Glas Gaibhneach gave no more milk. Avarice, on the one hand, and imprudence on the other, are two vices frequently pointed at in Irish folk-lore; whilst a firm reliance upon Providence for our daily sustenance is principally inculcated.

At the river Deel, in the county of Limerick, is a legend of a cow which frequently came out of the river and fed on its banks. The farmer at last intercepted her and drove her into his dairy. If she were milked one hundred times a day she would each time fill a can. The farmer built a house, using the milk in making the mortar; the rafters of his house were made of iron. When the woman who had been in the habit of milking her died, another, who was red-haired, was put in her place; at her first milking, the cow kicked and spilled the milk—"Bad luck to you for that same," said the red-haired woman; immediately off went the cow into the river, and was never more seen. In that part of the river where the cow disappeared there is always a "Billeog Vaite" or Lotus, twisting round and round. An eel, like a serpent, rises there every seven years and gives three screeches like a duck. It is an unlucky spot, the peasantry say, and they tell that a Mr. Casey was hunting there and his horse leaped in and was drowned with his master.

At Innislinga, in the parish of Inniscarra, in the county of Cork, is a legend which embraces a section of country about eleven miles north and as many south. The ancient name of this place was Ionad Coinne, the place of meeting; for here a bull came every day from near Bandon to meet a cow which came from the plain near Drimíneen Castle on the banks of the Blackwater, west of Mallow. The place of meeting is pointed out by two low banks of earth, the almost erased fences of the old road called the Bohureen-na-Bo-Ruadh (road of the red cow). Some legends say that another bull accompanied the cow from the Blackwater, as may be seen in an extract from a communication made by one of our most eminent Irish scholars, it is dated June, 1853:—"Last year I was able to trace the Bohur or course alluded to; it runs south of Dripsey river, in Cummer-na-Bo, to the feeding place near the Blackwater. I perambulated through the parishes of Grenough and Donoughmore; from several persons I heard of this 'Bo Ruadh,' pronounced by some 'Bo Ruach.' The legend and corresponding localities are very well known, especially about Tobar-Lachteen; the road is described as having passed through Bleain-a-goul, by the Rev. Mr. Cotter's, by Bohureen-an-aiffrinn, Forenought, &c. The bull and the cow always moved together, the cow stopped to give milk to all the people who wanted it, and the milk was a great 'cure.'" Then follows the story of the sieve, ending by saying that when the cow saw the milk spilling "she fretted

and gave no more." On making enquiries at the spot mentioned, near the Blackwater, the road is pointed out as running from Glantane to Drimineen Castle. The scenery here, and indeed throughout the district involved in this legend, is eminently romantic.

A short legend is given relating to a locality a few miles lower down the Blackwater, opposite Castle Hyde. Here a spotted cow grazed at Glen-na-Bo, but, like the Bo Ruadh, she disdained to drink from the adjacent river; every day she walked through where the town of Fermoy now stands, to drink from a well on a rock called Carrig-a-Bric, which, according to the legend, obtains its name from this Breac, or spotted cow. Whether the ancient name of the river Blackwater has any association with these legends, may be difficult to ascertain. In the life of St. Mochuda the river is called Nimh, a word which signifies poison. Another cow resorted near the scene of the last legend, at a place called Currach-na-Druiminne, the bog of the white-backed cow. This animal did not yield her milk for the benefit of the "country round;" it was the exclusive property of the giants, or Fenians, and they were nourished by it for many years, when on a sudden the milk ceased. The perplexed giants, unable to account for this sudden stoppage of their supply, resolved on sending for Fionn. For a short time after his arrival, he was equally at fault, so he determined to watch the cow by night. He thus discovered that a great serpent emerged from a river and abstracted all the milk of the white-backed cow; he attacked the animal, which escaped, and for a time evaded his pursuit, but he finally detected it, in the shape of a ferocious four-legged beast with enormous teeth and blazing eyes. This animal's name was Lun, he had his abode near the summit of Carran Tierna, at a place still called "Leaban Lun." Here he made a formidable resistance, but was finally killed by Fionn and his dog. After this the white-backed cow gave milk enough to the giants. Near the town of Bantry is a lake called Lough-na-Bo-Finne, of the white cow; the legend runs that a white cow emerged from this lake, and having met a bull they both walked together to Dursey island. Here they rested, and the cow having calved, gave abundance of milk, but upon being cursed and struck by a red-haired woman, bull, cow, and calf rushed into the sea, and were drowned, where the rocks, so called, now appear above the waves. Another oral legend embraces a large topographical range, no less than from Tober Gowna, in the county of Longford, to Ballyshannon, in the county of Donegal. This district comprises Lough Gowna, upper and lower Lough Erne, with the outlet-river Samer. (It may be incidentally remarked of this river that it has its name from a dog killed there by Partholan, an early colonist of Ireland; and in Hindoo mythology we read that the deity Krishna had a dog with the very same name). The legend is one very generally met with, of a woman who had charge of a calf carefully locked up in a house, with strict injunctions that the door should be always closely

watched, lest the calf should escape. It so happened that in the same house was a well¹ to which the woman resorted for water; on one occasion, whilst so occupied, she heard her child cry, and running to it she unfortunately forgot her duty. Too late she perceived that the calf had escaped, and through the door volumes of water were rushing out. The calf was skipping and leaping from side to side of a then valley, now lake Gowna; the water rose to the height of the calf's track. Onward danced the calf "across and athwart" the valley, now upper Erne, and so northwards to lower Lough Erne, through the vale, now the river Samer, finally leaping into the sea, over a cliff at Ballyshannon, now the cataract known in history as Eas Aodha Ruaidh (pronounced Ass Ay Rua), like Thalassa Erythros, a hero of the same name, having been drowned in Arabia, as Ay Ruadh was here. All the region round this scene of action, and many of the islands in the lakes correspond with this Arkite tale, a term which cannot be withheld from it by any one who has ever perused the erudite writings of Jacob Bryant or the Rev. George Stanley Faber; the latter venerable personage still lives, and if Irish mythology be developed by competent literary research, he may survive to see the most ample corroborations of those portions of his writing, which have been too much overlooked by Irish archæologists. One theory of the former great writer would closely identify the name of Lakes Erne here and in Scotland with the mysterious worship termed Arkite, as may be seen in his *Analysis*, vol. ii. p. 251, of the quarto edition.

The story of these Irish Ernains forms a sort of episode in Irish history, and the first incident respecting them is plainly a druidical religious ceremony, dressed up in a not very edifying manner, in the reign of the monarch Aonghus Tuirveach, or the shameful.

In addition to what has been said of the red cow, it may be remembered that when the white cow left her she commenced perambulating on the Bohur-na-Bo-Ruadh, which extended all round the coast of Ireland. This road is said to have been made three casts of a dart from the high-water mark. Some have ascribed the making of this road to the celebrated Brien Boru; it is, however, probable that the king's title and the name of the road have their mutual origin in the source of our oral legends. Brien enjoyed two titles, which are frequently confounded. He was styled Brien Boirmhe, from his numerous tributaries; and Boru, from the most remarkable spot adjacent to his palace at Kincora. This place is still called Ball Boru, a name which it probably enjoyed before even Brien's ancestors had landed in Ireland.²

¹ This legend, as we are informed by Dr. O'Donovan, was taken down by that gentleman at *the well*, and was communicated to Mrs. S. C. Hall by Major Larcom, from one of Dr. O'Donovan's letters.—Eds.

² History and tradition both assert, according to Dr. O'Donovan, that this is the place where Brien kept the Borumean tribute of Leinster. This would seem to account sufficiently for the name—Eds.

In my paper on Porcine Legends one passage in particular, probably, appeared somewhat more singular than well sustained; that was the allusion to the Hindoo name of Europe, which, according to major Wilford, was "*Varaha Dwipa*," the region of the boar. The same highly ingenious and equally ingenuous scholar, tells us (*Asiatic Researches*, vol. viii. p. 361) that the pronunciation of the word is "*Warapa*," closely resembling the word Europe. Supposing that derivation untenable, let the former section of our folk-lore be deprived of it, and let us, in obedience to classical etymologists, ascribe the origin of the word to Europa, the daughter of Agenor. In that case what is taken from the former paper must be added to the present, for the sentiment of the Phœnician princess finds an apt parallel in that of the Connaught queen, Meadhbh.

Whether all these legends tend to commemorate a once prevailing system of worship, how far the animals mentioned may have been considered sacred, are questions beyond the scope of this paper. Allusions, however, have been made tending to elicit attention to that view of the subject, and, in conclusion, may be offered the passage from the ingenuous, though not over ingenious, Geoffry Keating, in which he says, "that one of the objects of worship of the ancient Irish was a golden calf, as mentioned in the reign of Cormac Mac Art." *History of Ireland*, vol. i. p. 429.

From the neglected state in which our national muniments now exist has arisen a general impression, that to develop the former and early features of Irish Paganism would be a hopeless undertaking. But if a full collection of oral legends were obtained, and that they were collated with corresponding extracts from our manuscripts, doubtless much light would be thrown on the subject. A reference for this purpose to a manuscript in Trinity College, Dublin, entitled *Tain Bo Flio-dhaise*, would be valuable, as also to that curious work, the *Leabhar na Huidhre* (pronounced Heera), or book of the Dun Cow.

OLDEN POPULAR PASTIMES IN KILKENNY,

BY JOHN G. A. PRIM.

THE investigation of the popular sports and amusements of a country or a district, at various periods of its history, and the changes in the pastimes of the people as civilization crept slowly forward—marking so well the spirit of each generation—must be a subject of much interest to the antiquary, the historian, and even the political economist; for statesmen have, from the earliest times, recognised the necessity of in some degree providing for and superintending the recreations of the humbler classes. There is no branch, indeed, of the science of