

WHAT WE LEARN FROM WILDE'S "CATALOGUE OF THE ANTIQUITIES IN THE MUSEUM OF THE ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY."

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As a contribution to our knowledge of the armour, weapons, dress, and ornaments in use amongst the ancient people of Ireland, the fourth and fifth chapters of Wilde's "Catalogue of the Antiquities in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy," far exceed anything that has yet been written. In a previous article (vol. ii., p. 110) I laid before the Members of the Society the admirable classification on which this Catalogue is based. In pursuance of the plan, the public have now before them a portion double the size of the first instalment of the Catalogue, and profusely illustrated by wood-cuts, in a style of art fully equal to anything of the kind brought out in this country, or England.

In the two chapters which form the recently published portion of the Catalogue, Mr. Wilde treats, firstly, of Animal Materials, and secondly, of Metallic Materials, so far as they are formed of copper and bronze. Useful as the work must prove to those who desire to make a thorough examination of our great national Museum at the Royal Irish Academy, it is no less useful to the student of Irish archæology, who, far away from the advantages of the metropolis, reads it in his own study. In proof of this, I shall proceed to give examples, almost taken at random from the work. Under the head of Class iv. Species iv. we find "articles of household economy, furniture, domestic use, and the toilet, &c.," treated of; and our fair members may not be indisposed to learn the fashion of ancient Irish combs:—

"On Tray **A** is arranged a collection of forty-four combs, in either a perfect or fragmentary stage, numbered from 116 to 172. From their shape it is evident they were used more for toilet purposes than as ornamental objects; indeed, we have not as yet met with any ancient combs in Ireland specially used for holding up the female hair. If the hair was plaited, it was, in all probability, fastened as well as decorated with a bodkin of bone or metal. We have no warrant for supposing that the early Irish were acquainted with the manufacture of such horn combs, nor were they likely to have had much knowledge of ivory, or the use of tortoise-shell; and there is no evidence to show that our females, in early times, retained the hair in position by means of a comb of any kind, the introduction of which fashion is modern. The Irish, both males and females, were celebrated for the length to which they wore their hair (hence called *glibbs* and *cuil-fion*); and it is not unlikely that the latter sex

adopted the fashion of plaiting it. (See Walker's 'Essay on Irish Dress,' and also Lady Moira's paper in the 'Archæologia,' vol. vii.).

"The combs in the Academy's collection may be divided into three varieties,—the long rack-comb, the single fine-tooth comb, and the double fine-tooth comb. The first vary in length, from No. 123, which is about 4 inches, to No. 120, Fig. 175, which, judging from the half that remains of it, must have been 10 inches: in breadth they range from half an inch to $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches. With the exception of Nos. 135, 136, and 137, which appear to be ornamented pocket-combs, there are no specimens in this collection formed out of a single piece. The sides of these rack-combs are generally hog-backed, and taper from the centre to the extremities, the great majority of them being highly decorated, many with pleasing patterns. Between these sides are set the pectinated portions, varying in breadth from half an inch to an inch and a quarter, according to the size of the bone out of which they were cut, the whole being fastened together with metal pins, generally brass, riveted on each face of the side. The back of the pectinated portion generally rises above the handle in the centre and at each extremity, as may be seen in the following illustration,

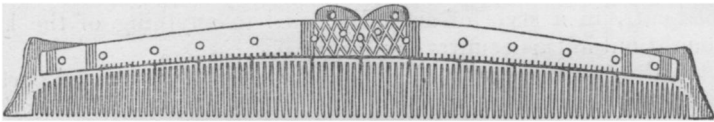


Fig. 175. No. 120.

Fig. 175, restored from the remaining half of No. 120, which must have been 10 inches in length, and $1\frac{3}{4}$ wide. These toothed portions are in separate pieces, on account of the grain of the bone, as well as the cavity in its centre: for it is manifest that a durable comb of this size could not have been cut out of a single bone without great liability to fracture. By this ingenious contrivance, also, the pectinated portion, if worn or broken, could easily be repaired by driving out a rivet in the side-pieces, withdrawing the injured part, and inserting a new toothed portion.

"The accompanying illustrations, drawn two-thirds the natural size,

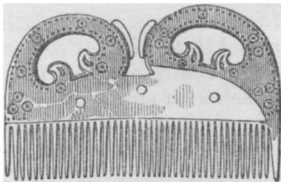


Fig. 176. No. 137.

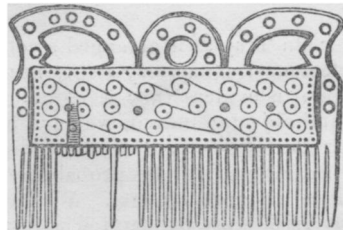


Fig. 177. No. 159.

present us with two beautiful specimens of the short one-sided or single fine-tooth comb, and both of which are highly decorated. No. 137, on Tray A, Fig. 176, is $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches long by $1\frac{3}{8}$ deep, and formed out of a single piece. Its decoration chiefly consists in its graceful outline, and the

number of dotted lines and circles upon its sides. The three elevated rivets projecting above the toothed portion fastened metal plates, which, either in the original formation, or when the article had been accidentally broken, were attached to it. Figure 177, drawn from No. 159 in Rail-case **H**, numbered in continuity with the combs on Tray **A**, is the finest specimen of its class in the Collection. It is $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, and $1\frac{3}{4}$ deep, and the three pectinated portions are held together by flat sides, decorated with scrolls and circles. The top or handle shows a triple open-work decoration, and the side-pieces are grooved at one end for receiving the clasp of a metal tooth, which replaced one of the lost bone ones. It was procured from the Ballinderry crannoge (see Proceedings, vol. vii., p. 129).

“The third variety resembles very much the modern fine-tooth comb, and generally varies from 3 to $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length, and from $1\frac{1}{4}$ to $2\frac{1}{4}$ across, the teeth portions being double, and passing through and through the sides to which they were riveted. The specimen, here figured two-thirds the natural size, is a good example of this variety. The tooth part was originally in five pieces, and fastened between the sides with metal rivets.”

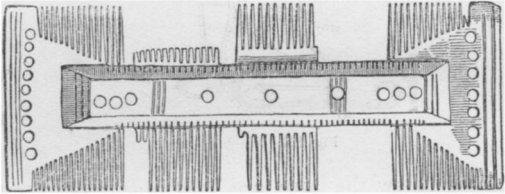


Fig. 178 No. 149.

Dress and Personal Ornaments (Species v.) come next under review. Here is what we learn from the “Catalogue” as to the ancient Irish dress in general:—

“Our only authentic histories afford but meagre references to dress or personal decoration; and the Fenian tales and bardic romances, in the garb in which they now appear, present too many anachronisms and incongruities to be worthy of quotation until they have been carefully edited and annotated.

“The figures in the Books of Durrow and Armagh are altogether ecclesiastical. In the Book of Kells, a Latin vellum MS. of the Gospels, said to be as old as the sixth century,¹ and undoubtedly one of the most beautifully written and most elaborately illuminated works of its period in Europe, there are a few lay figures introduced by the artist, for the mere purpose of decoration, or to fill up space. As the work is thoroughly Irish in every respect, these figures may fairly be presumed to represent the costume of the country at the time they were painted. In some instances the illuminated initial letters are composed of human figures; and although the attitudes are of necessity grotesque, the costume appears to be, in most respects, identical with that of the figures alluded to. The following facsimiles (traced and cut by Mr. G. Hanlon), give perhaps the oldest representations of Irish costume now extant. Fig. 190, from folio

¹ See the Rev. Dr. Todd’s paper on ‘Irish Church,’ in the Irish Ecclesiastical Journal for 20th Sept., 1846, No. 75.”

200, is evidently that of a soldier, armed with a spear and round target and placed either in the act of receiving an enemy, or compressed by the artist to suit the space on the page unoccupied with writing. The head-dress is yellow, with a mitred edge along the brow, as occurs on many other human heads in that work. The coat is green; the breeches, which come



Fig. 190.



Fig. 191.

down below the knee, are light blue, picked out with red; and the beard and moustache brown. The legs and feet are naked. The shield is yellow; and the spear-head blue, exactly resembling some of those of iron in the Academy's Collection, in which the cross rivets project considerably beyond the socket. A line of red dots surrounds the outline of the figure—as is usual in the Book of Kells, and as may be seen in many of the initial letters, especially those used in this Catalogue, which are all copied from that work. At folio 201 there is a sitting figure, in the act of drinking



Fig. 192.



Fig. 193.

from a circular goblet (Fig. 191), wearing a sort of turban, principally yellow, with a flesh-coloured border; the cloak is dark red, bound with yellow; the tunic blue, with a yellow border and green sleeve; the feet are naked, and partially concealed by the letters, which shows that the illumination was made after the text had been completed.

“In the two small equestrian figures on page 300, we have another phase of costume. Figure 192, from folio 89, shows the ancient short

cloak remarkably well, and, from a careful examination of both figures, it would appear that the horses were also clothed or caparisoned. The cap is yellow, fitting tightly to the head, and hanging down behind—or this head-dress may represent the natural hair. The cloak is green, with a broad band of bright red, and a yellow border; the breeches green; the leg covered, but the foot naked. The cover of the horse is yellow; but the head, tail, and such portions of the right legs as appear, are green. The word over which it is placed is engraved, to show the position of the illumination. Fig. 193 occurs on folio 255; the parchment has been injured underneath the cloak, but a sufficiency of the colour remains to show that it was green; the cap is yellow.

“If we seek for documentary evidence before the period of the Anglo-Norman invasion, the earliest accessible authority upon the subject of costume is the ‘Book of Rights,’ already quoted in this work. There, among the tributes paid by the different states or kingdoms of the Irish Pentarchy, we read of the cloak or *brat*, the outer garment,—of which the following varieties are specified:—‘A thousand cloaks not white—speckled cloaks,—cloaks with white borders,—red cloaks,—red cloaks not black,—blue cloaks,—royal cloaks,—green cloaks,—and ‘green cloaks of even colour,—cloaks of strength,—coloured cloaks,—chequered cloaks of lasting colours,—napped cloaks, with the first sewing, which are trimmed with purple,—purple cloaks of fine brilliance,—purple cloaks of fine texture,—purple cloaks of four points,—and cloaks with golden borders.’ The *cohall*, hooded cloak or cowl, is seldom mentioned among these tributes.

“The *matal* (which word is not translated by O’Donovan), was probably smaller than the cloak, and may have been worn beneath it, or as an ordinary coat, and it is remarkable that on only one occasion, where we read of its having a ‘golden border,’ is it mentioned that that article of dress was decorated; but we read of ‘fair beautiful matals,—royal matals,’ and also of ‘matals soft in texture.’”

“The tunic, *inar*, formed a considerable portion of the ancient tributes, and is described as ‘brown red,—deep red,—with golden borders,—with gold ornaments,—with golden hems,—and also ‘with red gold.’

“The *leann*, translated by O’Donovan ‘mantle,’ would appear to have been a white woollen garment, probably a sort of loose shirt; but, from its being almost invariably mentioned along with ‘coats of mail,’ it lends probability to the conjecture that it was only used in connection with armour. Thus, the chief of Cinèl Eana was entitled, among other tributes, to receive ‘five mantles, five coats of mail;’ and the king of Tulach Og, to ‘fifty mantles, fifty coats of mail,’²—but ‘mantles [*leanna*] of deep purple’ are also enumerated.

¹ ‘Matal was probably another name for the *Fallaing*, which in latter ages was applied to the outer covering or cloak; but this is far from certain. Matal is applied in *Leabhar Breac* to the outer garment worn by the Redeemer.’—See note to *Leabhar na g-Ceart*, p. 38.”

² The subject of mail and armour will be considered under the head of Bronze and Iron Weapons. Dr. O’Donovan has afforded

the writer the following note:—‘The word *lean* (which has nothing to do with *leine*, a linen shirt) is explained in a MS. in Trinity College Library, H. 3, 18, p. 75, and in Cormac’s Glossary, *sub voce lenn*, as a white *brat* of wool; and the word is understood in this sense by Colgan and the writers of the seventeenth century. The word is simply rendered *brat* by O’Clery.’ The Gaulish term *lenna* occurs in Isidore.”

“When flax and hemp were first introduced, has not been recorded. Linen shirts were in use at the time of the English invasion, and are said to have been of immense size, and dyed a saffron colour. Notwithstanding the suitability of our soil to the growth of flax, it was only on the suppression of our woollen manufacture, and the introduction of the Huguenot and Dutch settlers into Ulster that this article of native produce attained celebrity.¹ We do not possess any specimen of ancient linen in the Academy’s Collection; and the only articles containing flax or hempen fibre of any great age are the sewings of some vellum manuscripts, in particular the *Leabhar na h-Uidhre*; but several of our old works of that class are sewn to horse-skin bands, with strong twisted silk.

“The variegated and glowing colours, as well as the gorgeous decorations of the different articles of dress enumerated in the Book of Rights, added to the brilliancy of the arms, must have rendered the Irish costume of the eighth and ninth centuries very attractive. It is remarkable that, except helmets, Benean, in his relation of the Tributes and Taxes, does not enumerate any form of head-dress. Most of the Irish appear to have used their luxuriant hair as a natural covering for the head, even in the time of Elizabeth, and the only term employed by authors for our ancient head-dress is that of *barread* (from the mediæval Latin word, *birretum*), a high conical cap, somewhat between that known as the Phrygian, which was common in England in Saxon times, and the pointed grenadier’s cap of the last century, or the present Persian, with which all oriental travellers are acquainted;² but the material of which it was composed has not been determined; perhaps it was formed of different textures or skins. The Irish helmet, of which we possess a specimen, was of this shape.

“In the plan or perspective view of the taking of the Earl of Ormond in 1600, preserved in the Library of Trinity College, the figure of O’More is represented in a short, red cloak, fringed round the neck, a high conical cap or barread of a light colour, and tight-fitting pantaloons.

“Cloaks—the *cochail*, and the *fallaing*—were, however, the chief articles of dress in early times, but were probably different either in shape or material. In Cormac’s Glossary, the former term is derived from the Latin *cucullus*; and, says Ledwich, ‘if any reliance is to be placed on the legendary life of St. Cadoc, cited by Ware, the Irish *cocula*, in the middle of the sixth century, was a cloak, with a fringe [such perhaps as that figured at p. 295] or shaggy border at the neck, with a hood to cover the head.’³ *Antiquities of Ireland*, p. 359.

“Scarlet cloaks were commonly worn by the Irish chieftains in the

¹ See an Essay on ‘The French Settlers,’ in the *Ulster Journal of Archæology*, vol. i., page 209.”

² The cap of rushes made by children gives a good idea of the ancient *barread*, of which it is possibly an imitation. The *old leprechaun*, or fairy shoe-maker, was always described as wearing knee breeches and a conical cap; although the moderns usually represent him in a three-cocked hat.”

³ Mr. Whitley Stokes’s ‘*Irish Glosses*,’ published by the Archæological and Celtic Society, contains much valuable information

on the true etymology of these Irish words; and will be a lasting monument of the deep learning and vast research of the author. *Cocall* glosses *Cassulla*, and is, he says, one of those Celtic words which, by the influence of the Church, has become universal. ‘The *Cuculla*, sometimes called *casula* and *capa*, consisted of the body and the hood, the latter of which was sometimes specially termed the *casula*.’ In Breton it is *kougoul*, in Cornish *cugol*, and in English *cowl*. *Stéstan*, according to the same writer, was ‘probably a cloak covering the thighs and hams,’—and *fallaing*,

fourteenth century, and, as already stated at p. 297, dark crimson-red was the prevailing colour of those used by the female peasantry until the last few years. In early times the cloak was furnished with a hood, which could be drawn over the head like the Suliot capote; but it does not seem to have been worn much longer than the time of Spenser, when enactments were made forbidding its use.¹ It was fastened either in front or on the right breast with a pin or brooch; and the very general use of this and other cloak or scarf-like garments may account for the circumstance of so many fibulæ of different kinds being found in this country. Walker, in his 'Historical Essay on the Dress of the Irish,' gives the figure of a king draped with a long flowing cloak, fastened with a brooch across the breast, and reaching to the ground (see Plate V., Fig. 1). This he calls the '*canabhas*.' It was a long, graceful robe or cloak used by kings, brehons, and priests, and of which we have a vestige in the heavy-caped frieze *cota-mor* of the modern Irish, often worn hanging from the shoulders. The ancient cloak, no doubt, varied in shape, size, and probably colour, at different times and in different localities; but it was evidently the analogue of the sagum of the Celtic Gauls, described by Plutarch as 'particoloured;' the thick, woollen læna of the Belgæ; the reno of the early Germans; the chlamys of the Greeks; the pallium or toga of the Romans; the bornous of the Arab; the plaid of the Highlander; the capote of the Albanian; and the abbas of the Turk and most oriental people, including the Hebrews.

"In the twelfth century, Giraldus Cambrensis thus briefly describes the costume of the Irish: they 'wear thin, woollen clothes, mostly black, because the sheep of Ireland are in general of that colour; the dress itself is of a barbarous fashion; they wear cappuces, which spread over their shoulders, and reach down to the elbow. These upper coverings are made of fabrics of different textures, with others of divers colours stitched on them in stripes. Under these they wear woollen fallings (*phalingæ*) instead of the pallium, and large loose breeches and stockings in one piece, and generally dyed of some colour.'—*Topographia Hiberniæ*, Book iii., chap. ix. This description of the braccæ or trowsers accords perfectly with a specimen of this portion of dress in the Academy's Collection. The same author tells us that the native Irish went 'naked and unarmed to battle;' by which latter assertion he must have meant unprovided with defensive armour, in contradistinction to the Anglo-Norman soldiery, who, at that period, wore metal breast-plates and helmets. That armour had, however, been used by some classes of the Irish, is proved by the fact,

a mantle, may, he says, be connected with *pallium*; and he quotes the Welsh expression in which the same word is used, *mal y Gwyddyl am y ffalling*, 'like the Irishman for the cloak.' In a MS., quoted in the same work, we find *broit buit* used in a passage thus translated, 'an old man in a yellow cloak, in a blue tunic of full size,' which, while it explains the meaning of the word *brat*, is also illustrative of the colours used in Irish costume."¹

¹ In Dineley's Account of his Visit to Ireland in the reign of Charles II., published by Mr. E. P. Shirley in the Kilkenny Archæ-

ological Journal, it is stated—'The common people of both sexes weare no shoes, after the English fashion, but a sort of pumps called brogues. The vulgar Irish women's garments are loose-body'd without any manner of stiffening.' And again, of these common Irish, he states—'Never at any time using hats, after y^e manner of the vulgar English, but covering and defending their heads from rain with a mantle, as also from the heat of the sunne, to which Spanish lazy use the Irish men apply their cloaks.'—*Journal of the Kilkenny and South-East of Ireland Archæological Society*, vol. i., N.S., p. 186."

that 'coats of mail' (in Irish *luireacha*, from the Latin *lorica*) are enumerated among the Irish tributes, at least two centuries prior to the visit of the Welsh historian. (See Book of Rights.) The former statement is possibly founded on fact; for we know that another Celtic race, the Highlanders of Scotland, stripped off the greater portion of their clothes at the battle of Killiecrankie, several hundred years later.

"From an illuminated copy of Giraldus, in the possession of Sir Thomas Phillips, Bart., some small sketches have been given by Mr. Planché, in his History of Costume, in which the cloak and trews, as well as a short jacket, like the *bauneen*, or flannel vest of the modern Connemara peasant, are represented. Diarmaid Macmurrrough is figured in a short tunic and tight trews; with a long beard, and uncovered head, as shown in the accompanying figure, given the natural size, from the drawing in the original manuscript, and for which we are indebted to that distinguished antiquary, Mr. Albert Way. The ex-king of Leinster being at that time an ally of the English, this portrait may very probably have been taken from life. He is armed with a long-handled hatchet or battle-axe, the blade of which is shaped like some specimens in the Museum (see the Iron Collection in the Southern Compartment on the ground-floor, Trays **I** and **K**). It does not resemble the gallowglass axe of later times; but is that known by the name of the Sparthe—a '*sparthe de Hibernia*,' such as 'Gentel Mortimer' had in his armoury at Wigmore Castle, in 1322. The hair is sandy; the tunic or short coat (*inar*) is of a brown colour, fastened round the waist with a belt, and bound tightly to the wrists with bands, that were probably ornamented. The tight-fitting trews are green. Of this memorable Irish character, Giraldus elsewhere says: 'Dermon Mac Morogh was a tall man of stature, and of a large and great bodie, a valiant and a bold warrior in his nation; and by reason of his continuall halowing and crieng, his voice was hoarse; he rather choce and decided to be feared than to be loved: a great oppressor of his nobilitie, but a great advancer of the poore and weake. To his owne people he was rough and greevous, and hatefull to strangers; he would be against all men, and all men against him.'



Fig. 195.



Fig. 196.

he would be against all men, and all men against him.

“Mr. Way has also furnished us with the two following illustrations from the same source . . . That given above (Fig. 196) shows the short cloak or falling of olive green, like those in the Book of Kells, already described at page 300. The trews are, in the original, of a light brown; this figure also wields the sparthe or battle-axe, but with a shorter handle than in the foregoing.

“In 1824, a male body, completely clad in woollen garments of antique fashion, was found in a bog, six feet beneath the surface, in the parish of Killery, county of Sligo. No weapon was discovered near the body; but a long staff lay under it, and attached to the hand by a leather thong was said to have been a small bag of untanned leather, containing a ball of worsted thread, and also a small silver coin, which was unfortunately lost. The head-dress, which soon fell to pieces, is said to have been a conical cap of sheep-skin, probably the ancient *barread*.

So perfect was the body when first discovered, that a magistrate was called upon to hold an inquest on it. In the accompanying figure, drawn from a photograph of a person clad in this antique

suit (except the shoes, which are too small for an adult of even medium size) we are enabled to present the reader with a fair representation of the costume of the native Irish about the fifteenth century. The cloak or mantle, composed of brown soft cloth, closely woven with a twill (but not so fine as that in the coat), is straight on the upper edge, which is nine feet long, but cut into nearly a segment of a circle on the lower. In the centre, where it is almost four feet across, it consists of two breadths, and a small lower fragment; the upper breadth is fifteen, and the lower twenty inches wide. It is a particularly graceful garment, and is in a wonderfully good state of preservation.

“In texture, the coat consists of a coarse brown wollen cloth or flannel, with a diagonal twill, or diaper. In make it is a sort of frock or tunic,

and has been much worn in the sleeves. The back is formed out of one piece, extending into the skirt, which latter is two feet long, and made very full all round, by a number of gussets, like the slashed doublets of Spanish fashion. It measures 8 feet in circumference at the bottom. Gussets, broad at the top, are also inserted between the back and breast, below the armpits, and meet the gores of the skirt gussets at the waist. It is single-breasted, and has fourteen circular buttons ingeniously formed out of the same material as the coat itself, and worked with woollen thread. The breadth of the back is 18 inches, which was probably the width of the cloth. The collar is narrow, as in some of the most fashionable frock-coats of



Fig 207.

the present day. The sleeve consists of two portions joined at an angle across the elbow, below which it is open like that of the modern Greek or Albanian jacket, and has twelve small buttons extending along the outer flap. Where the sleeve joined the back, a full gusset is inserted, and the cuff consists of a slight turn-in, an inch and a half wide. The inside and lower portion of each sleeve has been much worn, and is patched with a coarse felt-like material of black and orange plaid, similar to that in the trousers found on the same body. All the seams of this garment are sewn with a woollen thread of three plies.

“The trousers or trews are of a coarser material than the coat, and consists of two distinct parts, of different colours and textures. The upper is a bag of thick, coarse, yellowish-brown cloth, 19 inches deep, double below, and passing for some way down on the thighs. It is sewn up at the sides, and made full behind. The legs are composed of a brown and orange yellow (or saffron colour) plaid, in equal squares of about an inch wide, and woven straight across; but each leg-piece has been cut bias, so as to bring the diagonal of the plaid along the length of the limb, and it is inserted into a slit in the front of the bag, extending inwards and upwards from the outer angle. The legs are as narrow as those of a pair of modern pantaloons, and must have fitted the limbs tightly; they are sewn up behind, with the seam outside, while in the bag portion the seams are inside. Below, the legs are scolloped or cut out both over the instep and the heel, the extremities coming down to points at the sides. The angle in front is strengthened by an ingenious piece of needlework like that used in working button-holes. It is said that these ends were attached behind to the uppers of the shoes, Nos. 16 and 17, described at page 291. All the sewing in this garment was also effected with woollen thread, but of only two plies. These close-fitting trousers are evidently the ancient Celtic *braccæ* or chequered many-coloured lower garment, the *triubhais* or *truis*, now drawn from nature, and explaining by the way they were attached to the sacculated portion above, and the shoes below, many hitherto unaccountable expressions in Giraldus, especially when he says, ‘The Irish wear breeches ending in shoes, or shoes ending in breeches.’”

Here I shall conclude the present brief and necessarily imperfect notice of this truly national work, which I hope soon to bring again under the notice of the Members. The reader, when turning over its pages, is carried back to the period of which it treats, and has vividly brought before him the old Celts, as they lived, and dressed, and fought; and that, not by the invention of wild theories, but as illustrated by the actual remains of the several periods, preserved in the matchless Museum of the Royal Irish Academy. Every Member of the Kilkenny and South-East of Ireland Archæological Society should procure (at the small cost of 7s. 6d.) this most important volume; and so, whilst adding a valuable work to his library, aid in the completion of the forthcoming portion of the Catalogue.