

THE OLD BARDS OF ULSTER.

BY HERBERT FRANCIS HORE.

“ I had heard of our bards, and my soul was on fire
 At the rush of their verse, and the sweep of their lyre.

* * *

Ultonia's old heroes awoke at the call,
 And renew'd the wild pomp of the chase and the hall;
 And the standard of Fionn flash'd fierce from on high,
 Like a burst of the sun when the tempest is nigh.

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And it seem'd that the harp of Green Erin once more
 Could renew all the glories she boasted of yore.”

The Exile's Return to Ulster.

Having continued some researches into the history of the Irish Bards, in order to supply memoirs that may serve for a full account of this remarkable professional caste, a portion relating to Ulster is now offered. The rich collection of Gaelic poetry in the library of the Royal Irish Academy having been generally noticed in my former paper on the “ Munster Bards,” I need do no more than extract the ensuing notices of the poetry relating to this province, from the elaborate catalogue of those MSS., compiled by the learned Mr. Eugene Curry.

Among the Irish tales preserved in this repository is a very characteristic one called *The Plunder of the Cows of Cuailgne*, or Cooley, near Carlingford, a story which vividly elucidates the pastoral and predatory habits of the ancient Ultonians. The tale commences by relating how the King and Queen of Connaught indulged in rival exhibitions of their wealth; her majesty enjoying, *more patriæ*, a separate property, which consisted in jewels, apparel, flocks of sheep, herds of cows and swine, and a stud of horses. Against these the king produces their equal in value, and, in excess, a beautiful young bull, not to be matched in the herds of his consort, who immediately despatches her head-messenger to seek out a match. At length one is found in the possession of Fergus, King of Ulster, who declares he will give it to the queen of the West. In the meanwhile, the messenger, exulting in his success (and it may be, whilst under the influence of metheglin), is heard to boast that if the beauteous bull had not been given up it would have been taken. This truculent speech causes Fergus to recal his promise. Her majesty, in her discontent, offers her loveliest daughter to the Ulster prince, but in vain; and this *spretæ injuria formæ* is avenged by a war, in which Cuchulainn and the knights of the Red Branch are defeated, and the coveted bull, with all the plunder of the North, which had been sent for safety to the Glens of Carlingford, is carried off.

The real archæologic value of old tales and romances, such as this, "King Arthur," &c., consists, of course, in the fact that, as the writers usually depicted the state of things as they were in their time, and such compositions shed tolerably true lights on ancient manners and customs. Their date is therefore a matter of interest: but in the present case I cannot offer any opinion on this point.

Another antique tale, called "*Brickreud's Feast*," is equally graphic, narrating how Brickreud, a poet and satirist, the great mischief-maker of the Ultonians, set the King of Ulster and the Knights of the Red Branch and their wives at loggerheads during a feast, by means of his praises, which excited calumny and envy. This short story is replete with curious incidents, sometimes wild and always racy of the soil, portraying ideas and facts truthfully and interestingly. It is followed by a story relating how that king and his knights were constrained to procure a wife for the over-fascinating Cuchulainn. This poetic *conte immoral*e also preserves many traits of social manners. A MS. entitled "Conchulinn's Acts," was in the library of the ninth Earl of Kildare. A Fenian poem, by Oisín, in the former depository, and of a similar erotic character, is founded on the same idea as that of the British ballad which describes the presentation of a miraculously shrinking mantle, as a touchstone of fidelity, to the ladies of King Arthur's court. Next follows "*The Decline of Cuchulainn, and the Jealousy of his wife, Eimir*," written in very archaic language, and containing some curious cases of Druidism, witchcraft, and the supernatural interference of fairies and evil spirits. Tales like these are of historic interest, if their traditions and analogies tend to prove such points as the extraction of the Irish from the British Celts, and their connection with the Scandinavian Scots.

Another versification is addressed to O'Melaghlin, descendant of the once powerful branch of the O'Neills, who long were chieftains of Meath, by Dermot Mac-an-Bhaird, (MacWard) deprecating the assumption of the Red Hand on the banner of this house, because the ensign belonged exclusively, as the bard declared, to the Clan Magennis. Owen O'Donnely, following MacWard, argues in measured rhymes on the same side, contending that the symbol in dispute was derived from the Knights of the Red Branch, and that, for this reason, it appertained to Magennis, as senior representative of Conall Cearnach, the most distinguished of those heroes, and not to any O'Neill, whose ancestors, although having no connexion with those chivalrous soldiers by descent, had usurped the sovereignty of Ulster, and assumed their terrible cognizance. Unfortunately we cannot quote any bardic counsellors on the side of the defendants: yet, doubtless, the heraldic question raised by the honest *Senachie*, (which opens up researches of some interest, but too remote for our theme, being no other than the origin of those semi-mythic guardsmen, styled "of the Red Branch"), was as warmly contested as the celebrated controversy between Scrope and Grosvenor, about a coat of arms, in which Geoffrey Chaucer figured as a witness.

Having already commented in this *Journal* on the poetic relics called Ossianic, I will merely remark that these fragments of metrical lore are well worthy of attention if they lead the student into impartial researches as to the origin of the inhabitants of this kingdom. This primary

class of native poetry contains grains of historic wheat in its heap of chaff. Some of these ancient poems, if published, would tend largely to elucidate our pre-historic period; for example, the illustrious chief of the Finians, the remarkable Fionn MacCumhal, prototype of "Fingal," gave laws to Erin, couched in verses which were extant so recently as the time of the author of *Ogygia*.

Although most of the entries in Irish chronicles that date prior to the Christian era are too apocryphal to merit full credence, we must notice the record that Ollav Fodhla, who is said to have become king of Ireland, A.M. 3882, derived his name, as asserted, from having been *ollav* or chief poet of the kingdom. Can it be implied from this semi-rhythmic legend, that he owed his regal power to his supremacy over the bardic tribes? The derivation of his name is also an interesting question, since our province is said by some to have derived its name from his. This poet-monarch is declared to have been the first Irish prince that made some sage attempts towards establishing a feudal monarchal dynasty, for it is he that is traditionally stated to have appointed a chieftain and inferior tenants to every cantred, or barony, in the kingdom, with royal service as their tenure; he also constructed a walled house on Tara Hill, in the central plain of Erin; and, as a means of inviting loyalty, instituted the annual supper or feast at Tara, attendance at which was held to be a sign of loyalty. No institution could be better calculated than this yearly gathering, considering the times and the people, for ensuring a full court; since the festive board was a congenial theatre for inculcating nationality, supported as it was by an orchestra of harps and a chorus of bards. Yet the times and the country were clearly insufficiently advanced to permit a king to use the mildest instead of the severest form of feudality. The ceremony of *Dal-ina-teagh*, (or, coming to the house of a chief), might be considered, as it was, a sign of vassalage; yet there could be no monarchal power, no right, without the ability to enforce it. The design of feudal tenure was to organize a nation, which the customs of tanistry and royal elections, without authority to dispossess rebels to government, could not do. In this point of view, it is to be regretted that the Irish bards did not combine to support the sagacious design of this chief poet and king, by announcing their determination to satirize all opponents of the sensible monarch and his constitutional successors, and to uphold the principle of taking fee-land from men who had made bad use of it, and giving it to supporters of law and order.

According to a learned note in Reeves's *Life of St. Columba*, the bards were, under Christianity, the representatives of the old pagan *Magi*, or Druids, of Ireland. They were, says the annotator, a very influential class at all times; and, from their numbers, when superadded to the clergy, a very oppressive one. From their exorbitant demands, arose the legend of their *Cori panti*, i.e. basket of covetousness, which was the depository of their gains. They are said to have been in danger, on three occasions, of expulsion from the kingdom, and each time to have found in a king of Ulster a successful intercessor. On this point the ensuing passage is derived from Mr. E. Curry's elaborate catalogue above cited, which explains the circumstances under which Dallan

Fergall composed an eulogium on Columbkille, considered by scholars the most difficult piece of composition in the Irish language, and held as the test of proficiency in the antique form of this Celtic dialect. Its origin is as follows:—a meeting was held, A.D. 590, at Drumceat, near Derry, at which a Scottish king was present, attended by Columbkille, from Iona. One matter of state requiring settlement at this assembly was the case of the poets and literary men of Ireland, who were become so numerous and burthensome that it had been resolved to banish them. Columbkille, however, made such efforts in their behalf, that it was arranged they should be maintained for three years longer, on condition that the extravagant number of their attendants should be reduced. In gratitude, the reprieved masters of verse composed and then sang, in joyous chorus, a poem in praise of their preserver, arranged to a peculiarly noble and melodious air. Among the rest came this blind *Fergall*, improvising an ode to the saint, who, however, modestly desired that, as the style was elegiac, the proposed extempore, or *pro re natá*, poem should be reserved until it would serve *pro re defunctá* after his decease.

Among the poetry attributed to St. Columba himself are verses of some curiosity, in illustrating the cotemporary state of the country:—thus, at the close of one poem [*Life*, p. 275], the saint observes, that he has loved Erin, “*all but its government*,” a sentiment quite intelligible when collated with other verses of his [*Irish Arch. Misc.*, vol. i., p. 8], in which he speaks of “an island in the middle of a lake” as the only position in which life might be deemed tolerably secure. To such islands, verily, fled the saints of early Christian ages, when they were as much persecuted, as exponents of novel doctrines and interests, as in later ages were the bards, as exponents of old ones.

Having largely quoted *The Book of Rights* in my paper on the Munster Bards, in order to demonstrate the ancient importance of the bardic order, in their capacity of oral registrars of rights and usages, I will not dip further into that valuable record than to notice certain curious “prohibitions” attached to the King of the clan O’Neill, who, it seems, was forbidden

“To make peace with the Dal Araidhe ever,
And war with Conall.”

Now, I may remark, on this verse, that the Dal Araidhe were the *dal*, or tribe, descended from Fiach *Araidhe*, chief of the Ulster Cruithne, or Picts, who, probably, were the original possessors of Ulster, and who, therefore, were to be subdued by the conquering Clanna Neill. On the other hand, the prohibition against war, or the necessity of peace, between the cognate clans, the Cineal Eoghain (O’Neills), and Cineal Conaill (O’Donnells), was founded on experience; and it is remarkable that the war made by Shane O’Neill on the O’Donnells, in the middle of the sixteenth century, was the proximate cause of his ruin, and that the enmity between O’Neill and O’Donnell, at Kinsale, in 1602, was the cause of their signal defeat there, and of the downfall of both races.

Passing from that book to the bardic relic next in point of chronologic sequence, we come to the historically valuable poem, entitled “*The Circuit of Ireland by Muirheartach MacNeill*,

Prince of Aileach," written in the year 942, by Cormacan *Eigeas*, *i.e.*, the poet, an attendant of this chief, who was commonly called "Murtoogh of the Leather Cloaks," from having provided mantles of hides for his soldiers on the wintry expedition described in the poem. The value of this metrical narrative, published by the Irish Archæological Society, consists in its political and social revelations. Bearing intrinsic evidence of its contemporary, authentic nature, it is to be regarded as one of the earliest north European historical ballads. Its argument is, that the king of Aileach (a cyclopean stone fort on Lough Swilly), in order, by striking terror through Ireland, to ensure his accession to the monarchy, made the following *coup d'état*. In the depth of winter, when all were unexpecting and unprepared, he suddenly set out with a force of one thousand chosen men, to make "the circuit of Ireland," and either seized and carried off the persons of the provincial kings, or obtained hostages from them. On the literary style of this singular poem, we may remark, although no judges of its merits in the original Gaelic, that it is free from wordiness and bombast, and is humorous, and expressive. The poet declares that, on the day of the adventurous march of the brave ten hundred—

"Many were the tears down beauteous cheeks,
Among the fair-haired women of Aileach."

The leader of the erratic band was accompanied, however, by Dan Cupid, as far as the trenches of Dublin, (Ath-cliaith) where he had an love adventure—Cormacan *cecinit* :—

"We were a night at fair Ath-cliaith ;
It was not pleasing to the Galls (*i.e.*, the Danes) ;
There was a damsel in the strong fortress (*dun*),
Whose soul the son of Niall was ;
She came forth until she was outside the walls,
Although the night was constantly bad."

Let us hope the gallant prince lent the maiden his leather cloak.—During other nocturnal bivouacs, the troop was enlivened with music and dancing. Dublin was evidently too well fortified and defended for Murtagh and his thousand to dare to attack it. Other seats of power being less well protected, the terror-striker surprised and carried off several provincial kings as hostages ; and by this circuitous course of intimidation, paved the way for being acknowledged, on the death of the titular King of the Irish Gael, successor to this sovereign, the merely nominal character and valueless nature of whose power are proved by the fact that, instead of punishing Murtagh for surprising and imprisoning some of his nominal subjects, he sent a message applauding him for what he done.

Certainly all the invaders of Ireland gained less by their valour than from the miserable dissensions of the native chieftains, whose frequent quarrels, arising out of questions of subordination or of disputed territory, were constantly submitted to the doubtful arbitration of the sword, in default of a central court of judicature, and of a monarch powerful enough to enforce its decrees. The claim of O'Neill to seniority over O'Donnell was a lasting and fertile feud. In the year 1258, when

Godfrey, the latter chief, lay wounded to death in an island-fortress in Loeh Veagh, his adversary deeming the opportunity favourable for subduing the "sick man," assembled forces and invaded him. Rousing his departing spirit for the contest, the brave chieftain, whose wounds had been received in an encounter with Lord Justiciary FitzGerald whilst expelling the invaders from the west, ordered his clan to be marshalled, and caused himself to be carried on a bier in the midst of their ranks to battle. The opposing army was defeated, and, during the return of the victors, the bier on which their leader lay being set down in the street of Conwal, his soul departed;—"the death," as the bardic chroniclers of his clan truly say, "of a hero." His successor, a mere youth, refused also to acknowledge any obedience, appealing to the celebrated proverb, in the Scottish Gaelic, that "every man should have his own world." It was in the same year that the last instance occurred in which the native chiefs attempted to unite and elect a sovereign, an instance that has escaped the notice of historians. Meeting at Belleek, on the Erne, they conferred the dignity on Brian O'Neill, who, soon after, fought the Englishry of the North in the battle of Down. One of the most ancient, best authenticated, and least varnished of Irish poems^a is that composed on "the Battle of Down," by the bard of Brian O'Neill, the defeated chieftain, who was slain in that engagement, which was fought in 1260, and this versified lament was composed soon after the event. The battle was gained by Stephen de Longespée, who, as Lord Justiciary of the English colonists, led their levies of armed men up to the scene of action. Our bard, in accounting for the disastrous defeat of his chief, lays stress on the contrast presented by the combatants as to means of defence, for while the assailants were provided with panoplies of armour, the natives had but shirts:—

"The foreigners from London,
The hosts from Waterford,
Came in a bright green body thither,
In gold and bright armour.
Unequal engaged in the conflict
The Gaels and the foreigners;
Mere linen shirts on the Clan O'Neill,
But the foreigners one mass of iron!"

Indeed, all the native combatants from the mountain districts in the British islands met the English under the immense disadvantages which uncivilized races have to contend with when opposed to a united and wealthy people. At Bannockburn, the Welsh troops, under Sir Maurice Berkeley, amazed even their ill-clothed conquerors by appearing simply in shirts; and at the battle of Wakefield, one of the hardest contested fields during the sanguinary Wars of the Roses, the Irish, under Lord FitzGerald, "fought," says a contemporary chronicler,^b "with astonishing bravery; but, having their bodies uncovered, according to custom, they were cut to pieces." It

^a *Miscell. of Celtic Society.*

^b *Polydore Virgil.*

would seem that they stripped themselves either quite naked, or retained a mere wisp of linen about their loins, as their countrymen continued to do in the sixteenth century, and as the Highlanders did in the last century. At Killiecrankie and Sheriffmuir, the Highlanders threw off their plaids, or their coats, and went down naked to the death-struggle. In modern warfare, in which "villainous saltpetre" plays, from the cannon's and the musket's mouth, the part performed of old by arrows, the Celtic custom of stripping to the shirt for battle, and even, if the work prove hot, to the skin, might perhaps prove a sensible preliminary to charging with the bayonet. Our bard, unaware of the politico-economic truth, that superiority in implements of war generally ensures victory to those who possess it, discovers the cause of the disaster in the fact that Sunday was the day chosen by the defeated chieftains for going into action! Superstition so powerful as this was certain to retard progress, and in the meanwhile, a less scrupulous enemy had but to press on an engagement on the day that would dishearten his over-timid foes.

After the battle, the head of the slain O'Neill was forwarded to the King of England, as a trophy; but instead of being placed on a pole on London Bridge, according to ordinary usage, it was buried in that city with the honourable decency due to this noblest part of a brave and independent prince of the Gael, who had boldly and patriotically withstood the conquerors of his country. Poetry in another language than our own loses much by translation, yet we find, in the following version of the bard's burst of sorrow, a touching simplicity and pathos:—

"There is in London, under a white flag-stone,
A head which the Gael would dearly ransom.
All my cattle, although thou hearest it not, O head!
I would give to ransom thee!"

Cattle, indeed, were the mourner's sole wealth; and we can believe his heart-felt, reiterated exclamations that he would give all he ever possessed to see his king alive again. He declares that he owed whatever he once had to the bounty of his dead lord. His simple statements of that gratefully remembered liberality disclose the rude state of his country and times. He was an old man, but recollected how, in former days, when King Brian ruled over central Ulster, the kings were wont to encourage and reward his poetic talent by gifts which, although appearing strange and unsuitable in our eyes, were more valuable to the laureate of a king of herdsmen than the pension Queen Elizabeth promised to the author of the *Fuérie Queen*. MacConmidhe writes:—

"He gave (at one time) twenty horned cows
For my poem, it was a goodly purchase,
And my honour was greater and better
Than if they had been golden-horned.
I brought away with me on another day
Twenty cows at May-day,
Along with much other wealth besides,
Not counting gold or raiment.

I received a better gift,
 The blessing of the chief king ;
 The reward for my poem was not trifling ;
 But more lasting was the fame of his blessing.”^c

This is, in true feeling and loyalty, not inferior to the well-known sentiments placed by the master-hand of Scott in the mouth of another chieftain’s bard.—Our elegiast next deplures that since the defeat and death of his sovereign and protector, his substance has been a spoil and a prey:—

“ All have poured from east to west
 Upon my cattle, since the good Brian departed ;
 They and the king passed away at the same time ;
 The noble Brian ! from whom I received them.
 Yet, were we without house, without cow,
 For want of them we would not repine ;
 And there would not be want felt in my house
 If the good king of Ulster were living.”

These extracts, though taken from a literal, unpolished translation, cannot but be admired, since they contain the very germ of sympathy in the truth of the grief uttered by the aged bard in bewailing his bereavements. If one may pass from grave to gay, in the vein of those ancient, mad wits, Shakespeare’s “fools,” scatter-brained fellows that jumped from melancholy to mirth and then back again with reckless agility, one might say that our poet, who was paid in cows, and plainly lived on their mild produce, is by no means milk-and-watery ; considering, besides, the title he gives his poem, styling it and beginning it with the forcible and thoroughly Irish expression for the sense of deep sorrow:—“Death of my Heart!” The learned translator of this specimen of Gaelic antique poetry passes by unnoticed these fresh and life-warm bursts of elegiac minstrelsy, and concludes his comments on the historic value of the composition thus:—

“ This poem affords curious glimpses into the distracted state of Ireland at the period, and, into the kind of monarchal sway which the family of O’Neill claimed. The bard boasts of victories gained by Brian and his ancestors in their own province over their neighbours in Eastern Ulster, and over the kindred race of the O’Donnells. He next speaks of the *proud* circumstance, that Brian’s ancestors had in their hall a chess-board, formed of the bones of their hereditary enemies, the Leinster men, which is rather a barbaric boast in 1260.” O’Neill’s forefather, Muircheartach,

^c In comparison with this liberality of O’Neillmore to his bard, MacConmidhe, the butt of sack yearly doled out by the King of England to his laureate was a miserable stint. The price of the precious metals, as a circulating medium, diminishes as they become more plentiful, while the value of so common an animal as the cow must continue comparatively stationary: so that we may judge how a literary man was appreciated in the fourteenth century,

when O’Mulconry, “ a chief chronicler and very authentic author,” having been slain in chance-medley, the offender was mulcted to the extent of 126 cows.” No doubt MacConmidhe qualified the milk of his cows with whiskey, according to the custom of the O’Neills. His surname is now usually spelt MacNamee. Eleven of this name, all “ rhymers,” obtained state pardons in 1604.

King of Ulster, had, it seems, in his memorable "circuit," made in the year 942, carried off the body of a king of Leinster, and made a "pair of tables," either for chess or back-gammon, of his bones, "which," say the annals, "for a long time after were kept as a monument in the King of Ulster's house." The translator's comments continue:—

"The only fact referred to, worthy of an Irish prince of the house of O'Neill, or which can be considered national glory, is the carrying off" (by the same Muirheartach) "of hostages and tribute from the Danes of Dublin. Not a single victory over the English is referred to, and the bard had nothing to say on this subject, except that they had achieved nothing in Ulster until they slew his hero."

This is a crushing criticism on a mere provincial elegy, simply sung by an old bard, nearly six hundred years ago, under *Sliabh Sneachta*, (i.e. "the snow-capped mountain" now *Sliav Snaght*), in an uttermost wild of Donegal, whither the hero of the verse had often retreated with his clan before any irresistible Norman incursion. When first sung, that rude lay was history; it is even more so to us; and, in possessing evident innate truth, has value in our eyes. For of its hero chief we are not to imagine that, because one of his ancestors, some three centuries back, had played a hit at *beg-camaun*, i.e., the little game, with men carved out of an hereditary foe's bones, that his position was not much superior in civilization to that of a contemporary chief of Mohawks or Cherokees. On the contrary, even if he was not nearly as polished as Fergus M'Ivor was when hunting the deer on the hills, his personal and mental qualities were such that he was chosen among the chiefs of the whole country to be their head and leader against the invaders; and it appears by his effigy on his signet seal (lately found near Beverley, in Yorkshire), that he owned, besides this civilized appliance, as long a sword as his slayer, De Longespée, would have drawn against him.^d At any rate, to his old bard and elegiast we are obliged for a very curious insight into the history of those dark days.

Some of the traditional nomenclature in this poem is suggestive. Thus, when reading of the *muintir mílidh Teamhrach*, as designating the monarchal and pseudo-Milesian race, the O'Neills, we incline to believe that the word *mílidh* is the Gaelic form of the Latin *míletes*,^e and that it was first

^d Celtic Society's Miscellany of Tracts.

^e It seems that the *muintir mílidh*, or military people, were called by the Hibernians *Scúitha*, a name latinised *Scoti*, whence St. Patrick writes of them by this term, and implies that they were the rulers of the Hibernians. The origin of this word seems to be the *Skuthai* of Greek writers, and *Scythæ* of Roman. In the sixth century, Gildas calls the Irish sea *Scythica Vallis*, probably because it was infested by Scotie marauders. Malachi, in his statements to St. Bernard, which, probably, give the truest insight into the ancient state of Ulster, shows

that the rulers there called themselves Scots. The obviousness of the above derivation of the term "Milesian" is seen in the acknowledgement in Connellan's Translation of the Irish Annals, that the first man who bore it was so called because he was a famous *mílidh*, or military commander. *Ech-mílidh*, i.e., the horse-soldier, was a not uncommon name in our northern province, and it is likely that the "Knights of the Red Branch" were no other than horse-guards, who wore red coloured twigs as their cognizance in battle.

used to designate the Scottish soldier-guards of the original Pictish dynasty of Tara. Again, the men of Oriel, whose ancestors appear by the "*Book of Rights*" to have been *luhd-tighe*, or household troops, and to have been subsequently known as the Fianna, or clan of hired militia, are mentioned as "the soldiers of Eamhain," which seems to imply that they were mercenary guards of the Pictish kings of Emania. Further on, we come upon "Magnus O'Cathain of Inver-Abhaidh," whose name and residence suggest a vik-ing extraction and employment. Then, with regard to the ancient feud between the northern and southern Irish, to which our mediæval bard alludes in his plenitude of rancour, and which lasted with such constant bitterness that it prevented the Confederate Catholics of 1646 from combining for national objects, does not his record of this great enmity serve to warrant an idea that the northerns and southerners were of distinct races, and that the Scotie O'Neills ousted the Pictish, or British Lagenians from Tara? We venture to think these suggestions may tend to develop the truth of the mythic or semi-fabulous portion of the history of our country.

Whatever distinction there may have been between certain bards of various extraction, such as those of British or Pictish immigrant race, commonly called Celtic or Gaelic, and those of Scandinavian or Teutonic extraction, commonly called Danish, it is difficult to perceive the difference now. The general features of bardism in Ireland are in common with those of Britain; yet it would seem that some of the bards of this country were of Scandinavian descent, and it is likely that the *skalds* and Irish *sgéalaidhe*, or story-tellers, were much alike.

The bards may have attributed antique native origin to the O'Neills, though conquerors of the aborigines, in order to give antiquity to their title, though it is clear from the annals that they displaced the original possessors of Tara and the surrounding country. In my opinion, the ancestors of the O'Conors were a Pictish race, in possession of Tara. It is certain that the *Cruithnigh*, *i.e.*, painted men, synonymous with British, were settled in Roscommon, the region of the O'Conors, and in Down and Antrim. Reviewing bardic accounts, it would seem that, broadly considered, the following clans were of British origin:—Almost all the Leinster septes, as the O'Conors-Faly, after their expulsion by Scotie usurpers; all those in whose names *Bren*, *i.e.*, Briton, enters, as the Brennaghs, Brennans, Briens, Byrnes, Breens, Siol-branagh, and also Siol-malaoir; but excepting the M^cDubhgalls, or Doyles, M^cDonnells, and some others. Some likewise of the Ulster septes, as the Dal-a-raidhe, or Clan-Rory, the race styled by the bards "of Ir;" and the M^cQuillans, *i.e.*, Mac-Llewellyns. The following Ulster clans would seem to be paternally of Scotie, perhaps of Scandinavian origin:—The Hy-Niall, M^cSweeneys, M^cCabes, M^cMahons, and M^cGilmores. These races probably gave the name of Scotia to this country.

On the name of Ireland, it may be observed that Iar-land is the Western Land, and that *Eir-e*, the chief appellation, pronounced as two syllables, means the Western Island.

Besides the above-mentioned breeds of bards, there were the minstrels of Norman and English

racés, whom we shall notice under their appropriate province, Leinster, at a future time; for the present merely remarking that a notable historic event, the slaughter of the Earl of Louth and his friends, in 1333, at Ballybragan, is noticeable for two attendant incidents bearing on my theme—viz., that an old nurse warned the victims of their fate, in a song commencing—"All the joy of my heart is the hearing," and that in the massacre was slain one O'Carroll, who is declared to have been the most famous musician of his day.

The annalist Friars of Donegal record that, in the year 1387, Niall O'Neill, King of Ulster, built a house at Eamania (now Navan Fort, near Armagh), for the entertainment of the learned men of Ireland. Eamania, or Navan-hill, was an apt Parnassus for the northern bards, whom the scene, and the vicinity of Creeveroe, *i.e.*, the red branch, would inspire to sing of the glories of the time when Eamania flourished as the site of a dynasty, and when Cuchullin "led the Red Branch Knights to danger." During that century, O'Dugan, in a topographical poem on Ulster, celebrates this province as "the land of hospitality and spears," and passes an encomium on two of the principal chieftains by declaring that "their plunders are *great* plunders." Yet although those chiefs may not have wanted, any more than the chieftains of the Rhine, much that conquerors should have, their eulogists appear to have been less prosperous, since Fearfassa O'Gneeve, a distinguished scion of the family of hereditary poets to the Clanneboy O'Neills, laments, in verses dated 1450, commencing—"Alas, that I have followed the science of my fathers!"—the destitution of the bards of his day. Under a date ten years subsequent, the annalists record the death of Felim O'Neill, an eminent protector of the learned, and one who had purchased more poetry, and had a larger collection of poems than any other man of his time. His son, Brian, is also stated to have been "illustrious for hospitality, and for dexterity at arms, and for his purchase of poems and songs." In that age, when public opinion was much directed by a bardic ballad, in either praise or dispraise, it is likely that a liberal patron of the literature of the day obtained a good share of eulogy. Indeed, to gratify a poet seems to have been the only recognised way of dealing with him, for, since his person and property were sacred, there was no means of punishing him, save by denying him a gift or a dinner, and this course was almost sure to sharpen his wits for the effusion of satire. The only way in which bards were deterred from resorting to chieftains' houses is noticed in a passage in the *Annals of the Four Masters*, which states that some of the order were frightened by the heads of enemies stuck on poles over the walls of the court-yard of a castle. Yet as it is not to be supposed that any of these trophies was a poet's head, it does not appear why the bards should have been terrified, like hawks on seeing birds of prey nailed to a barn-door. On the other hand, there is much testimony to the pleasing fact, that wandering singers and minstrels were usually warmly welcomed in Irish houses, which their talents and knowledge of news served greatly to entertain. According to my paper on "Gaelic Domestic," it does not appear that bards were retained in lords' houses, for they seem to have lived apart on free land of their own. The

only musical domestic was the harper. The bardic class were independent, subsisting on their own property, improving their livelihood by instructing youth, and receiving presents for poetry. However, they were doubtless frequently inmates of great houses. An ordinary function of theirs is described in an old account of the Maguires, published in Connellan's *Annals of the Four Masters*, which gives a picture of manners and customs in Fermanagh in the fourteenth century. In this a chieftain is represented as "ordering all his professional men to be called into the bed-chamber of his house at Port-Dobrain: then came the bards, good professional men, persons of various offices, and the musicians of the household; and they played for the chieftain melodious tunes on their stringed instruments, and recited the songs of their ancestors, and continued drinking and carousing together." In the subsequent century, Katherine ni Gryneill, wife of John Maguire, Prince of Fermanagh, caused the beautiful mether, known as the "Dunvegan Cnp," to be "built," as its inscription says. This drinking vessel, which was shown in the Dublin Exhibition, being in the possession of the McLeod family, was thought to be of Hebridean make, until its Irish origin was proved. It was, no doubt, carried off from Fermanagh by the "Redshanks" during one of their marauding excursions. We know the Scots took our sweetest airs and liveliest songs;—and in this instance they ran off with a fountain of poetry.

The *cliaraihbh*, i.e. the schools of learned, of Ulster, viz., the brehons, poets, historians, bards, harpers, gamesters, jesters, &c., included the following septs, exercising their several professional functions in certain clans. O'Haughian was poet to O'Neillmore; O'Gneeve was poet to O'Neill of Clanneboy; O'Rooney was bard to Magennis; O'Mulvany was ollav to O'Cahan; O'Hamill was bard to O'Hanlon; O'Sgingin was ollav-in-history to the Cinel-Connell, or O'Donnells; O'Keenan was ollav of Oriel. These were only a few of the learned castes in our province. How numerous the bards were in the south-west has been shown in the Munster article. In fact these learned people were the lawyers, oral records, vocal books, schoolmasters, and innkeepers, besides comprising, as singers, jesters, harpers, &c., the amusing class of the time.

Reflecting on the importance of a faithful preservation of the various verses which established human interests among the Gael, we can well understand why a bard and a brehon ranked, as is declared, next to a king, since the bard was the sole referee on questions of right, and the brehon was the Lord Chancellor, whose decisions were enforced by the clan king. Knowledge of this sort was in great measure oral, down to even the close of the sixteenth century. In the year 1590, Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, writes, in a petition to the English Privy Council, of "the incivility of his country, where Her Majesty," observes this great chief, "hath neither law, judge, nor government, save such as is received by tradition." But the real truth was, the queen had little control over the traditional mode of administering the affairs of that country; and it was the existence of this independent *imperium in imperio* that required the Crown to assert a sovereign authority which was frequently denied and braved by the native chiefs of that uncivi-

lized region. The great mistake was, that the Irish, in their ignorance, over-rated their own strength, and under-rated that of the English crown.

During the time that Shane O'Neill, styled the Ambitious, reigned over Ulster as its tyrant king, the powers of poetry were among the forces employed by the English for his reduction. Yet, this means was but in retaliation of a similar method, put in practice by the popular voice, of bringing his great adversary, the Earl of Sussex, into contempt:—it had been learnt from “the Irish enemy,” who, remarks this viccroy, “are of singular wit,” a talent they frequently utilized in political squibs and lying rumours, to serve the turns of the times. The Earl, in a despatch written after the disastrous action with the northern chief, on the 31st July, 1561, near Armagh, notices the magnitude and malignity of “the reports” current concerning the English losses, and observes:—“Such be like enough to grow into the nature of Sir John Gaskon’s tales, who, devising them himself, believed, by often telling of them, that they were true.” This false knight is probably a mere myth, or personification of gasconaders in general. The Lord Lieutenant subsequently, in a letter to the Secretary of State, quotes “a ditty” then in vogue, to show the spirit of the nation against him, the subject being his actions in Ireland. The name of this satirical song seems to have been “The Land of Perdition,” and its burden, his Excellency’s failures. Three years afterwards, when O’Neill was expecting to be created Earl of Tyrone, yet feared to give the Lord Deputy a meeting, one of his demands was, that “a rhymer that had misused him should be punished,” evidently believing that the offence had been instigated by the English. Some details respecting this ill usage have been given in the second volume of this *Journal*, to which we may now add, that the bard who had venally employed his talent against his patriotic countryman, seems to have been a certain Ferganonym (*i.e.* “the anonymous”) O’Daly, a follower of Lord Justice Fitzwilliams. This peccant poet, “a man without a name,” for so the prefix to his surname implies (*fear gan ainm*) showing that he had not been baptized, was in some trouble, in 1561, when Lord Kildare refused to give him up to his master. On the 30th January, 1566, the Lord Deputy and Council assure the offended chief that they will award the punishment to the rhymer of whom he complains; but, on being examined in Dublin Castle, he denied having made any such verses. Whether he was guilty or not is a matter of indifference: but it is to be regretted that this ephemeral satire on a chieftain, “foremost once in fame,” even if it was penned by a bard who “sleeps without a name,” must be classed among fugitive pieces.

It is likely that this attack, (if it happened), of one of the bardic order on Shane O’Neill, was a singular case; for, as the native hero of resistance to the English government, he was particularly popular. Campion relates that an Irish jester who was standing by, in 1561, when proclamation was made declaring this proud chieftain a “traitor,” and who thought, in his ignorance of the herald’s language, that the announcement was that of a patent of nobility creating the O’Neill Earl of Tyrone, the simple man declared that, unless *traitor* were a more honourable name than

O'Neill, Shane should never take it with his consent! The successor to the chieftaincy, however, nearly lost his life by the hand of a jester or bard. Holinshed relates how that Turlogh Lynogh, chief of the O'Neills, was, in 1569, being at supper with his wife, a sister of the Earl of Argyle, "shot through the bodie with two pellets out of a caliver, by a jester or rimer of the Doniloghs." The clan proceeded to elect a new ruler; but the hardy veteran recovered. This attack may have proceeded from his inhospitality to some poets, of which the story is told in *Walker's Bards*, I. 205; but, more probably, was the revenge of the Donnellys, who were foster-brethren of the late chief, for Turlogh's infamous desertion, though tanist, of that ill-fated man.

Several items in a state-paper account of the expenses of the chivalrous Walter Devereux, Earl of Essex, during the time he was "Lord General of Ulster," bear some evidence as to the extent to which musicians were retained in this country at that time. I also quote other entries in this account-book for the curious insight which they likewise give of other points of social manners. The first items are of gifts to "singing men of Melifont, 10s," and to "servants of the house of Melifont, '20s.'" This house was a dissolved priory, inhabited by the grantee, Edward Moore, Sheriff of Louth. A harper at Sir John Bellew's, in the same county, received 3s. The next entry of the Earl's account is:—"Certain of Captain Berkeley's soldiers, for guarding your lordship in hunting, 10s.," showing that the chase in that part of Ireland, and at that period, had its peculiar perils. "A boy that brought your lordship a brace of greyhounds," received a small donation. "M'Genis, that brought your lordship two staggs" received 13s. 4d., a sum equivalent to about £7 of our money, and, no doubt, willingly accepted by the chieftain. Sir Peter Carew's servants, at Leighlin, and "the boys of the kitchen," there were gratified with a *vale*, or farewell donation, now corruptly called a *vail*. "Crues, my lord of Ormond's harper," received 40s., an extravagant honorarium, probably on the occasion of his master's castle, at Kilkenny, being visited by the generous English nobleman. Passing southward to New Ross, his lordship made "singing men" there a present, and proceeded to "Sir Nicholas Devereux's house," the servants of which received no less than 50s. This house was Ballymagir, on the south coast of Wexford County. This visit of Essex to the Anglo-Irish knight was in recognition of a kinsmanship dating from the twelfth century, when the latter's ancestor came over as a colonizer. "The officers of the Bishop's house, at Fethard," received 40s. "The Earl of Ormond's musicians," 20s. "Mrs. Fagan, wife of the Mayor of Dublin," was complimented with a piece of taffeta, "for good entertainment;" and a merchant of Carrickfergus was paid £49 9s. for "aquavitæ given to sundry Irishmen," of whom some were, perhaps, Ulster bards.

Generally the bards were in violent opposition to all Teutonic colonists, whatsoever the date of their settlement. This natural and inevitable hostility is well pourtrayed in the spirited ballad, by

C. G. Duffy, entitled "*O'Donnell and the Fair FitzGerald*," emblazoning an episode in the life of one of the heroes of—

"That strain of native blood
That last the Norman lance withstood;
And still, when mountain war was waged,
Their spaths among the Normans raged,
And burst through many a serried line
Of Lacy, Burke, and Geraldine."

One of the most characteristic and cleverest specimens of translated Irish verse, is the Lament of the princes of Tyrone and Tyrunnell buried at Rome. Among the modern specimens in the Academy collection is a singular poem on the dilapidated state of Donegal Castle, which was dismantled by the heroic Hugh *roe* O'Donnell to prevent it from being used as a barrack by the enemy.

Enough has now been shown to prove the obvious truth that whatever persecution the Irish bards suffered, they brought it on themselves, by their active hostility to the conquering nation. How strong their antipathy was, and how potent its effects, we see by the following paragraph:—The author of *A Discourse for the Reformation of Ulster*, written in 1598,¹ touching as follows on some peculiarities of the Irish character and prejudices, bears testimony to the prevalence of popular rhymes, and the potent influence retained by the prophetic poets. It is declared that the Irish "so despised the English language as even to think themselves injured by listening to it; that Con O'Neill, Prince of Ulster, upon his death-bed, left his curse to any of his posterity that would learn it, or sow wheat, or build; saying that language bred conversation, and, consequently, their confusion; that wheat gave sustenance with like effect; and that, in building, they would do but as the crow doth, make her nest, to be beaten out by the hawk. For the rest," continued this comparer of the two nations, "such as in habits, English manners of attendance, &c., they do much abhor them, as they count all those that use them but *Boddagh Gall*, that is, foreign boor or churl; and in their rhymes and daily jests they hold nothing more ridiculous and reproachfull. As for husbandry, handycrafts, and such like, they hold them so base that they curse those that acquainted them first with such vile waies of living. So much for marks of difference. Also, their Bards and prophecies do soe lull them asleepe with such tickling hopes, as they count no present miserie burthensom, in respect of their future expected felicitie."

Poetry, as the proper vehicle for the expression of passion, had long, indeed, served the Irish people as a medium and resource, and did also, in after times, when, as Sir T. Phillips wrote to Charles I., the native tenants under the London Planters in Ulster looked to be relieved by rebellion from their heavy landlords. Among the Jacobite relics of poetry in the Irish Academy's collection are verses assuring bankrupt Celtic farmers, who were suffering from distraint on their cows by Crom-

¹ Brit. Mus., Titus, B. xii., p. 3.

wellian landlords, that recent events on the Continent would tend to so order matters, that lands as well as cows would be restored. It also appears by Phillips's letter, that the British colonists in Ulster were infected with the native disposition for song and satire; for, when the king issued a commission to inquire into their derelictions in the matter of colonizing, they sang ballads deriding it, and prepared a play, under the title of "Much to do about Nothing." So powerful were the bards in their action on public opinion, that their power is alluded to in the Act of Parliament of 1634, referring to hospitality being enforced by the intimidatory "fear of a scandalous rhyme." Many instances are preserved of their turn for satire, shown in malicious epigrams, spiteful retorts, and lampooning songs on the new colonists. Their professed contempt for everything of foreign origin, and the faculty they possessed of propagating false anecdotes in disparagement of Anglo-Irish families, must have combined to render these peripatetic scandal-mongers peculiarly odious to the British settlers; and far beyond and above this form of obnoxiousness, was their quality as political partisans, which they possessed highly and used powerfully. In a future notice of the Connaught Bards I propose to include some curious accounts of the satiric character of our old poets.

THE FOMORIANS AND LOCHLANNs.

PEDIGREES OF MACCABE OF IRELAND AND MACLEOD OF SCOTLAND.

THIS short account of the Fomorians and Lochlanns has been taken from MacFirbis's Genealogical work, Lord Roden's copy, p. 774 *et seq.* Duaid MacFirbis, who was the last of the hereditary historians of Lecan, in the county of Sligo, compiled his great genealogical work in the college of St. Nicholas at Galway, in the year 1650. See *Hy-Fiachrach*, introduction, p. vi., vii., viii. &c., and *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. xviii. He refers to a great number of MSS., which he either had then in his possession or had read, and which are now lost or missing. The two specimens of Danish genealogies given by him, bear out the Scottish tradition that MacLeod of Arran is of Scandinavian descent. This descent has been latterly doubted by Mr. Skene, in his history of the Highland clans: he is of opinion that the tradition of the Norwegian descent of MacLeod is not very old, and that it is not borne out by any historical authority. However, it is quite clear that the pedigree of MacLeod, as preserved by MacFirbis, is the only one ever known or received in Ireland or Scotland; but what weight it will have with Mr. Skene remains to be tried. We quote his words, as already printed in his *Highlanders of Scotland*, vol. ii.—"There are few of the Highland clans whose Norwegian origin has been more strenuously asserted, or more generally believed, than that of the MacLeods; and yet, for that origin there is not the vestige of authority.