

the Irish historian—a difficulty insurmountable by the exertions of any individual, and which can be overcome only by the well-directed energies of numbers, employed for years. The scarcity of accredited material, the want of accessible authorities, are, we think, the real obstacles to the obtaining that long-sought desideratum, a faithful and accurate history of Ireland. At present, so few, and so difficult of approach, are the sources whence the inquirer into these subjects must derive his knowledge of the former annals of his country—and so contradictory are they, as well in the statement of fact as in their views of the general state of the island—that the historian, unprovided with the means of deciding between their clashing testimony, either refuses credit to both, or yields implicit confidence to the one, totally despising the evidence of the other. In fact, all who have treated of Irish antiquities hitherto, have ranged themselves into two opposing parties—the one obstinately asserting the claims of ancient Ireland to all the glory, and to the almost antediluvian antiquity, which the bards would arrogate to her; while the other, as dogmatically deaying her right to any share of her former fame, endeavour to prove that she was involved in the darkness of unmitigated barbarism, until the preaching of Christianity, or the invasion of the English—for there are many grades of belief on both sides. Mr. Moore, however, with keener sagacity, adopts a middle course, and attempts to show, as well as his scanty authorities will allow him, that, when divested of the exaggeration of poetic license, of national jealousy, or of party spirit, (from which, by the way, Mr. Moore himself is by no means free,) the conflicting accounts of these authors may not be so inconsistent with each other, or with the actual state of Ireland, as has been generally supposed. But, as he is unable to support his views, which we consider decidedly the most rational of any yet brought forward, by sufficient authority, this volume becomes rather a series of suggestions, adapted to reconcile opposing testimony, than a narrative of authenticated historical events. These circumstances, which would of themselves deprive this work of the character of a complete and standard History of Ireland, will, in like manner, render futile any similar attempt, until the deficiencies we have pointed out be supplied—until the bardic and historic records of Ireland, which now uselessly encumber the cabinets of many public and private libraries throughout the United Kingdom, be examined and published under the care of competent editors. We are confident, and it is the general belief, that many manuscripts, calculated to throw light on the obscure annals of ancient Ireland, may be found, though now unknown and unvalued, in the Libraries of Trinity College, of the Royal Irish Academy, as well as in many private collections in this country; and in the British Museum, at Stowe, &c. in the sister kingdom. Until these secret receptacles of knowledge be broken up and opened to the world, it will be equally vain to expect, or to attempt a trustworthy History of Ireland.* Mr. Moore's work, though it will not supply this great want, will confer, at least, this benefit on his country, that the celebrity of the author, and the charms of his style, cannot fail to draw the attention of many to the subject, and to spread the knowledge of its history—to be ignorant of which was hitherto considered to be fashionable. The book is illustrated with copious notes, referring to the authorities on which the text is founded: it is written in a smooth and graceful style, not without vigour; and on the whole, will, we think, confirm the author's extended fame.

We have already observed, that Mr. Moore's view of ancient Irish history appears to us a most reasonable hypothesis. Rejecting the fables of the bards, our author follows the more trustworthy annals, which, it is believed, were compiled from the royal records preserved in the palace of Tara. The most authentic of the annalists, Tigernach, dates the commencement of certain history from the reign of Kimbooth, who is supposed to have flourished about two hundred years before our era, but

whom Mr. Moore conceives to have lived at a much later period; yet notwithstanding the evidence of this high authority, the bards, and their modern followers, hesitate not gravely to narrate the annals of Ireland, and to give lists of her kings from an epoch which they place one thousand years before Christ. Mr. Moore is of opinion, that the prime error in the accounts of the bards and *seanachies*, or antiquaries, is the distortion of the dates, while the facts they mention may be in general relied on. In their zeal to establish for the celebrated Milesian colony an overstrained antiquity, they have transferred the period of the coming of that people to a most distant era, while it still holds its place in the succession of events—thus dislocating the entire course of Irish history, and thereby bringing suspicion and discredit even on authenticated facts, by throwing them back to a time utterly beyond the reach of all record. The argument by which he exposes the improbability of the pretended antiquity of the Scotic settlement—an argument, to our mind, of great force—is prefaced by the following paragraph, which—say the paltry ebullition of party feeling, wholly unworth the historian—exhibits a favourable example of the style and spirit in which the work is composed:

“It is a task ungracious and painful, more especially to one accustomed from his early days to regard, through a poetic medium, the ancient fortunes of his country, to be obliged, at the stern call of historical truth, not only to surrender his own illusions on the subject, but to undertake also the invidious task of dispelling the dreams of others who have not the same imperative motives of duty or responsibility for disenchanting themselves of so agreeable an error. That the popular belief in this national tale should so long have been cherished and persevered in, can hardly be a subject of much wonder. So consolatory to the pride of a people for ever struggling against the fatality of their position has been the fondly imagined epoch of those old Milesian days, when, as they believe, the glory of arts and arms, and all the blessings of civilization came in the train of their heroic ancestors from the coasts of Spain, that hitherto none but the habitual revilers and depreciators of Ireland, the base scribes of a dominant party and sect, have ever thought of calling in question the authenticity of a legend to which a whole nation had long clung with retrospective pride, and which substituting, as it does, a mere phantom of glory for true historical fame, has served them so mournfully in place of real independence and greatness. Even in our own times, all the most intelligent of those writers who have treated of ancient Ireland, have each, in turn, adopted the tale of the Milesian colonization, and lent all the aid of their learning and talent to elevate it into history. But, even in their hands, the attempt has proved an utter failure; nor could any effort, indeed, of ingenuity succeed in reconciling the improbabilities of a story, which in no other point of view differs from the fictitious origins invented for their respective countries by Hunibald, Suffridus, Geoffrey Monmouth, and others, than in having been somewhat more ingeniously put together by its inventors, and far more fondly persevered in by the imaginative people, whose love of high ancestry it flatters, and whose wounded pride it consoles.”

The Scots, it seems to our author, were a people from the north of Europe; the traditions that they came from Spain he refers to the Phœnician voyagers, who, ages before, carried on a commercial intercourse between Ireland and the coast of Galicia. The first inhabitants of this island are supposed to have migrated from Spain; and to these Celts the tradition may relate also. It would be vain for us to enter into the arguments with which he supports his views: those curious in such researches we refer to the volume itself. It is our intention now merely to point out some of the most remarkable passages of the book. In a subsequent article we may give a sketch of the state of civilization to which Ireland had attained in those distant ages, as evinced by the progress she had made in the useful arts, as well as by the constitution of society in general; and which appears to be laid before us, as amply as the circumstances would permit, in Mr. Moore's very interesting chapters on these subjects.

* There is at present in course of publication, at the expense of Government, a series of documents of great value and interest to Irish history; but relating to a much later period than that of which we are now speaking.