

Perhaps the most deeply interesting tradition in the obscurity of ancient Irish history, is that well-assured belief of the commercial intercourse between this country and the Mediterranean, conducted by the Phœnician mariners, at a period when the rest of western Europe was sunk in barbarism, unknown and unvisited by those nations who were then the most powerful and enlightened. In the most prosperous days of Carthage, about the fifth century before our era, two expeditions were fitted out for maritime discovery. One, commanded by Hanno, sailed southwards, and doubling the Cape of Good Hope, performed the celebrated "Periplus," which has excited so much controversy amongst the learned. The other, under Himilco, steering northwards by the coast of Spain, from thence stretched across the Estrumnides, or Tin Isles, (the Scilly Isles,) two days' sail from which is the "larger Sacred Isle, inhabited by the Hiberni; and in the neighbourhood of the latter the island of the Albiones extends."

"In this short but circumstantial sketch, the features of Ireland are brought into view far more prominently than those of Britain. After a description of the hide-covered boats, or currachs, in which the inhabitants of those islands navigated their seas, the populousness of the isle of the Hiberni, and the turfy nature of its soil, are commemorated. But the remarkable fact contained in this record—itsself of such antiquity—is, that Ireland was then, and had been from ancient times, designated 'The Sacred Island.' This reference of the date of her early renown, to times so remote as to be in Himilco's days ancient, carries the imagination, it must be owned, far back into the depths of the past, yet hardly further than the steps of history will be found to accompany its flight."

From the records of this expedition, preserved in a temple at Carthage, Festus Avienus obtained the materials of this description of Ireland for his Latin poem "De Oris Maritimis," written in the fourth century. Ireland, it is supposed, derived her title of the "Sacred Island," from the fact of her having become "the chosen depository of the Phœnician worship in these seas." This superstition consisted in the adoration of the Sun, and of the elements; and Mr. Moore conceives, that for the celebration of the rites of this worship the Round Towers were erected. From the discussion of the identity of the Sacred Island, as described in ancient authors, we transcribe the following passages:

"But the fragment of antiquity the most valuable for the light it throws upon this point, is that extracted from an ancient geographer, by Strabo, in which we are told of an island near Britain, where sacrifices were offered to Ceres and Proserpine, in the same manner as at Samothrace. From time immemorial, the small isle of Samothrace, in the Ægean, was a favourite seat of idolatrous worship and resort; and on its shores the Cabiric Mysteries had been established by the Phœnicians. These rites were dedicated to the deities who presided over navigation; and it was usual for mariners to stop at this island on their way to distant seas, and offer up a prayer at its shrines for propitious winds and skies. From the words of the geographer quoted by Strabo, combined with all the other evidence adduced, it may be inferred that Ireland had become the Samothrace, as it were, of the western seas; that thither the ancient Cabiric gods had been wafted by the early colonisers of that region; and that, as the mariner used on his departure from the Mediterranean to breathe a prayer in the Sacred Island of the East, so in the seas beyond the Pillars, he found another Sacred Island, where to the same tutelary deities of the deep his vows and thanks were offered on his safe arrival.

"In addition to all this confluence of evidence from high authentic sources, we have likewise the traditions of Ireland herself,—pointing invariably in the same eastern direction,—her monuments, the names of her promontories and hills, her old usages and rites, all bearing indelibly the same oriental stamp. In speaking of traditions, I mean not the fables which may in later times have been grafted upon them; but those old, popular remembrances, transmitted from age to age, which, in all countries, furnish a track for the first footsteps of history, when cleared

of those idle weeds of fiction by which in time they become overgrown."

A large portion of this volume is occupied by an account of the numerous learned men, who from the fifth to the eighth century spread abroad the fame of Irish genius. The career of St. Patrick is given at some length. The character of John Scotus Erigena, of whom a brief notice was given in the 8th number of the Journal, is summed up in the following words:

"In addition to the honour derived to his country from the immense European reputation which he acquired, he appears to have been, in the whole assemblage of his qualities, intellectual and social, a perfect representative of the genuine Irish character, in all its various and versatile combinations. Combining humour and imagination with powers of shrewd and deep reasoning—the sparkle upon the surface as well as the mine beneath—he yet lavished both these gifts imprudently, exhibiting on all subjects almost every power but that of discretion. His life, in its social relations, seems to have been marked by the same characteristic anomalies; for while the simplicity of his mind and manner, and the festive play of his wit, endeared him to private friends, the daring heterodoxy of his written opinions alarmed and alienated the public; and rendered him at least as much feared as admired."

Among the most renowned of these ancient doctors, Mr. Moore's account of whom is very interesting and satisfactory, were Columba, the Apostle of the Highlands; Columbanus, the founder of the Monastery of Bobbio, in Italy; and Virgilius, who asserted the sphericity of the earth, and the existence of antipodes—a notion which shocked the orthodox divines of those ignorant days, and had nearly brought him into unpleasant collision with the pope; who, however, according to Mr. Moore, was satisfied with Virgil's explanation, and afterwards made him Bishop of Salzburg.

But our space will not permit us to notice further, at present, the many eminent Irishmen who, it appears, were almost the only beacons of learning to Europe, during that dreary period of the stagnation of intellect.

#### THE ADVANTAGES OF MEMORY.

It has been justly remarked by Lord Bacon, that a good memory is to the actions of the mind, what animal vigour is to the movements of the body. Just as the limbs move with more elasticity and gracefulness when all the muscles are in healthful tone, so the intellectual movements are more lively and agile, when the memory is strong and retentive. This is a truth which every day's experience will serve to attest; it cannot be denied but that men possessing good memories, (though their mental powers in other respects be but moderate,) excel, at least in the public professions of life, others who have the reflective powers much more strongly developed. To the public speaker a good memory is absolutely indispensable: by it he is enabled to retain in mind the various arguments of his opponent, as well as his own arrangement in reply. Some persons exceed others in conversational talent, which arises mostly from a good memory, faithfully retaining what they have read, and being able to use it on occasion. Locke calls memory the storehouse of our ideas, and remarks, that invention and quickness of parts, which is commonly called genius, are the results of a good memory, or the being able immediately to call up those ideas which the mind has before received. It is hard to say on what peculiar mental organization this power of the mind depends; some suppose that it is a natural gift not to be attained by human exertion; others, on the contrary, maintain that it is only dependant upon other actions of the mind, which it is in our power to increase or relax—for instance, that a person giving earnest attention to a subject (which is a mere matter of volition) will find his memory good as relates to that subject. It is more than probable, that truth lies between the two; and that though a good memory depends in some degree upon the natural power of the mind, yet that it can be much aided by exertion upon our part. Locke seems to be of this opinion, when he says that attention and repetition are helps to the memory.