

Geoffrey Keating, *The History of Ireland/Foras Feasa ar Eirinn*

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Keating's Introduction

Translated by David Comyn

THE AUTHOR TO THE READER.

Note: page numbers occur at the top of each page. Latin sentences given in Comyn for quotations from classical writers and modern historians have been omitted in this copy. For these and other critical enquiries, see the copy at CELT [<https://celt.ucc.ie/published/T100054.html>]. The digital text in use here has been sourced from ExClassic.com, where Comyn's scholarly notes, including original Latin sentences, have been lodged in a ensuing notes section [<http://www.exclassics.com>].

I.

WHOSOEVER proposes to trace and follow up the ancient history and origin of any country ought to determine on setting down plainly the method which reveals most clearly the truth of the state of the country, and the condition of the people who inhabit it: and forasmuch as I have undertaken to investigate the groundwork of Irish historical knowledge, I have thought at the outset of deploring some part of her affliction and of her unequal contest; especially the unfairness which continues to be practised on her inhabitants, alike the old foreigners who are in possession more than four hundred years from the Norman invasion down, as well as the native Irish who have had possession during almost three thousand years. For there is no historian of all those who have written on Ireland from that epoch that has not continuously sought to cast reproach and blame both on the old foreign settlers and on the native Irish.

Whereof the testimony given by Cambrensis, Spenser, [5] Stanihurst, Hanmer, Camden, Barckly, Moryson, Davies, Campion, and every other new foreigner who has written on Ireland from that time, may bear witness; inasmuch as it is almost according to the fashion of the beetle they act, when writing concerning the Irish. For it is the fashion of the beetle, when it lifts its head in the summertime, to go about fluttering, and not to stoop towards any delicate flower that may be in the field, or any blossom in the garden, though they be all roses or lilies, but it keeps bustling about until it meets with dung of horse or cow, and proceeds to roll itself therein. Thus it is with the set above-named; they have displayed no inclination to treat of the virtues or good qualities of the nobles among the old foreigners and the native Irish who then dwelt in Ireland; such as to write on their valour and on their piety, on the number of abbeys they had founded, and what land and endowments for worship they had bestowed on them; on the privileges they had granted to the learned professors of Ireland, and all the reverence they manifested towards churchmen and prelates: on every immunity they secured for their sages, and the maintenance they provided for the poor and for orphans; on each donation they were wont to bestow on the learned and on petitioners, and on the extent of their hospitality to guests, insomuch that it cannot truthfully be said that there ever existed in Europe folk who surpassed them, in their own time, in generosity or in hospitality according to their ability. Bear witness the literary assemblies which were proclaimed by them, a custom not heard of among any other people in Europe, so that the stress of generosity and hospitality among the old foreigners and the native Irish of Ireland was such that they did not [7] it sufficient to give to any who should come seeking relief, but issued a general invitation summoning them, in order to bestow valuable gifts and treasure on them.

However, nothing of all this is described in the works of the present-day foreigners, but they take notice of the ways of inferiors and wretched little hags, ignoring the worthy actions of the gentry: yet

as far as regards the old Irish, who were inhabiting this island before the Norman invasion, let it appear whether there has been in Europe any people more valiant than they, contending with the Romans for the defence of Scotland. For they compelled the Britons to make a dyke between their portion of Britain and Scotland, to protect (Roman) Britain from the incursion of the Irish; and notwithstanding that there were usually fifty-two thousand of a Roman army defending the dyke, and two hundred (scouts) riding about, and twenty-three thousand foot and thirteen hundred horse with them (besides), defending the frontier and harbours of the country against the violent attacks of the Scots and of the Picts]; yet, with all that, the Irish would burst over the dyke, and the country would be harried by them, despite these great hosts, according to Samuel Daniel in his chronicle. Cormac, son of Cuileannan, says also in his *Saltair*, that, as a result of the violence of the Irish (or Scots) and of the Crutheni (who are called Picts) against Britain, the Britons three times conspired against the Roman governors set over them, as a means of purchasing peace with the Scots and Picts. Observe, moreover, the straits in which the Irish had placed the Britons whilst Vortigern was king over them, whence it arose that he subsidised Hengist, with his German [9] host, as may be read in Geoffrey of Monmouth. It is stated by Samuel Daniel that the Romans had fourteen garrisons to oppose the Scots and Picts, and that the Scots and Picts kept disturbing Britain, despite the Romans, from the time of Julius Cæsar to that of the Emperor Valentinian the Third, during the space of five hundred years; and the year of the Lord was four hundred and forty-seven when the Romans abandoned the suzerainty of Britain: and it is before that epoch a dispute arose between Theodosius and Maximus, whence it resulted that Maximus led with him a great body of the people of Britain to [French] Armorica, which is called [little] Brittany, and having banished the people who were before them in the land, he gave the country to the company who went with him to inhabit, so that some of their posterity are still there.

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II.

There are some ancient authors who lay lying charges against the Irish; such as Strabo, who says in his fourth book that the Irish are a man-eating people. My answer to Strabo is, that it is a lie for him to say that the Irish are a people who eat human flesh; for it is not read in the ancient record that there was ever one in Ireland who used to eat human flesh, but Eithne the loathsome, daughter of Criomhthann, son of Eanna Cinnsiolach, king of Leinster, [who was in fosterage with the Deisi of Munster]: and she was reared by them on the flesh of children, in hope that thereby she would be the sooner marriageable. For it had been promised to them that they should receive land from the man to whom [11] she would be married; and it is to Aonghus, son of Nadfraoch, king of Munster, she was married, as we shall relate hereafter in the body of the history. Understand, reader, since the antiquaries do not suppress this disgusting fact, which was a reproach to the daughter of a king of Leinster, and the wife of a king of Munster, that they would not conceal, without recounting it in the case of lesser people than they, if it had been a custom practised in Ireland: wherefore it is false for Strabo to say that it was a custom for the Irish to eat human flesh, since this was never done among them but by the aforesaid girl, and even that in time of paganism. My answer also to St. Jerome, who relates this same thing, writing against Jovinian, is that it must have been a base asserter of lies who informed him, and therefore it ought not be brought as a charge against the Irish.

Solinus, in the twenty-first chapter, says that there are no bees in Ireland; and he says, that it is from the point of a sword the first bit is tasted by a male child in Ireland. He says, moreover, that the Irishman is wont, when his enemy is slain by him, to bathe himself in the blood. It is clear from the ancient record, which will be (found) in the history, that every one of these things is false. Pomponius Mela, in the third book, says these words, speaking of the Irish, “a people ignorant of all the virtues”]; and so of many other ancient foreign authors who wrote rashly without evidence concerning Ireland, on the lying statements of false witnesses, whom it would not be right to trust in such a matter: wherefore Camden, setting down the testimony of these people concerning Ireland, says these words: “*We have not (says he) [13] credible witness of these things.*” It is clear that it is false to say that there were not bees in Ireland, according to the same Camden, where he says, speaking of Ireland: “Such is the quantity of bees there, that it is not alone in apiaries or in hives they are found, but (also) in trunks of trees, and in holes of the ground.”

III.

We shall set down here a few of the lies of the new foreigners who have written concerning Ireland, following Cambrensis; and shall make a beginning by refuting Cambrensis himself, where he says that Ireland owed tribute to King Arthur, and that the time when he imposed the tax on them at Caerleon was, when the year of the Lord was five hundred and nineteen, as Campion sets forth in his chronicle, in the second chapter of the second book, where he says that Gillamar was then king of Ireland. Howbeit, notwithstanding that (the author of) Polychronicon, and (Geoffrey of) Monmouth, and others of the new foreigners assert this Gillamar to have been king of Ireland, I defy any of their followers (to show) that there is a lay or a letter from the ancient record of Ireland in which there is mention or account of Gillamar having ever been king of Ireland: unless it be to Muirheartach the Great, son of Earc, they call it, who was king of Ireland, and was a contemporary of King Arthur; and Muirheartach could not have been tributary to King Arthur, because, that he himself was mighty in Ireland and in Scotland, and that it was he who sent his six brothers into Scotland, and that it was one of them became the first king [15] of the Scotie race in Scotland, namely, Feargus the Great, son of Earc; and moreover, that it was by the Scots and the Picts King Arthur himself was slain. This Feargus, whom I have mentioned, was the first king of Scotland of the Scotie race: for, notwithstanding that Hector Boetius, in his history of Scotland, enumerates thirty-nine kings to have ruled over Scotland before this Feargus, yet, according to the ancient record, there was not any king of the Scotie race in Scotland before him: and it is not true for him where he says that it is Feargus, son of Fearchar, king of Ireland, who was the first king of Scotland of the Scotie race, for there never was a king of Ireland named Fearchar, and so Feargus, son of Fearchar, was not king of Scotland, as Hector Boetius says: and, granted that Muirheartach the Great wished his brother Feargus (son of Earc) to become king of Scotland, yet, withal, the title which is given to Muirheartach himself, in the annals of Ireland, is ‘King of Scots,’ to signify that he had supremacy over the Scots, both in Ireland and in Scotland; and it is not conceivable that he, who was in so much power, should have been tributary to King Arthur. And, moreover, Speed says in his chronicle, that it was not tribute King Arthur had from the king of Ireland, but an alliance of [17] friendship in war, so that whichever of them should be attacked by enemies, it was obligatory on the other party to send an auxiliary force to him who should be attacked: and the name Speed calls this co-operation is “mutual obligation of war,” such as exists between the king of Spain and the Emperor; for each of these sends aid in time of need to the other, and it is not to be understood from this that the Emperor is tributary to the king of Spain, or the king of Spain to the Emperor. In like manner, if there existed a close alliance of war between King Arthur and Muirheartach, son of Earc, king of Ireland, so that they were accustomed to aid each other whenever an attack was made on either of them, it must not be thence inferred that either was tributary to the other. The truth of this matter is still more to be understood from what (William of) Newbury says in the twenty-sixth chapter of the second book of his history, where he speaks of Ireland: here is what he says:— “Ireland never lay under foreign dominion.” Cambrensis himself corroborates this matter in his twenty-sixth chapter, where he says:— “From the first, Ireland has remained free from the invasion of any foreign nation.” From these words it is evident that neither Arthur, nor any other foreign potentate, ever had supremacy over Ireland from the beginning till the Norman invasion: and, moreover, it is not conceivable that the Britons had any control over Ireland, since even the Romans did not venture to meddle with it, and it is not alone that the Romans, or other foreigners, had no control over Ireland, but it is Ireland that was a refuge to the other territories to protect them from the violence of the Romans and other foreigners.

Here we may see how Camden corroborates this in the book called Camden’s ‘Britannia,’ where he says:— “When the Romans had widely extended their dominion, there came, without doubt, many hither (speaking of Ireland) from Spain, from France, and from Britain, in order to extricate their necks from the most grievous yoke of the Romans.” From this it may be understood that it is not alone that the Romans did not come to Ireland, but even that it is there the people [19] of other countries were protected from the Romans. Here also is what the same Camden says, refuting the folk who say, according to (their) opinion, that the Romans had power over Ireland:— “I should find it difficult to persuade myself that Ireland had ever been under the authority of the Romans.”

Cambrensis says, in his ninth chapter, that in Ireland the men used to marry the wives who had been married to their brothers, upon the death of their brothers: and he says that the tithe used not to be paid in Ireland, and that there was no regard for marriage there till the coming of Cardinal John Papiron; this, however, is not true for him, as we shall prove in the body of the history, and as will be evident from this same introduction shortly hereafter. He says, in his seventh chapter, where he treats of the wonders of Ireland, that there is a well in Munster which presently makes a man grey when he washes his hair or his beard in its water, and that there is likewise a well in Ulster which prevents greyness. Howbeit, there are not the like of these wells in Ireland now, and I do not think there were in the time of Cambrensis, but these wonders were (merely) set forth as a colouring for his lies.

Cambrensis says, in his twenty-second chapter, that whenever the nobles of Ireland are making a compact with each other, in presence of a bishop, they kiss at that time a relic of some saint, and that they drink each other's blood, and at that same time they are ready to perpetrate any treachery on each other. My answer to him here (is), that there is not a lay nor a letter, of old record or of ancient text, chronicle or annals, supporting him in this lie: and, moreover, it is evident that it was obligatory on the antiquaries not to [21] conceal the like of this evil custom, and even to put it in (their) manuscript on pain of losing their professorship, if it had been practised in Ireland.

Wherefore it is clear that it is a lie Cambrensis has uttered here. Cambrensis says, in his tenth chapter, that the Irish are an inhospitable nation: here is what he says:— “Moreover, this nation is an inhospitable nation (says he). However, I think Stanihurst sufficient in his history by way of reply to him in this matter; here is what he says, speaking of the generosity of the Irish:— “Verily (he says), they are a most hospitable people; and there is no greater degree in which you may earn their gratitude, than freely, and of your own will, to make your resort to their houses.” Hence it may be inferred, without leave of Cambrensis, that they are hospitable people, (and) truly generous in regard to food. Cambrensis says, where he writes concerning Ireland, that it was the wife of the king of Meath who eloped with Diarmuid of the foreigners; yet this is not true for him, but she was the wife of Tighearnan O'Ruairc, king of Brefny, and daughter to Murchadh, son of Flann, son of Maoilseachlainn, king of Meath, and Dearbhforgaill was her name. He says, moreover, that it is from Sliev Bloom' the Suir, Nore, and Barrow take their rise, though that is not true for him, for it is clear that it is from the brow of Sliev Bloom, on the east side, the Barrow springs, and that it is from the brow of Sliev Aldun, which is called the mountain of the Gap in Ikerrin, the Suir and the Nore rise.

Again, he says, in the twenty.fifth chapter of his narration concerning Ireland, that the king of Cinéal Conaill, [23] i.e. O'Donnell, used to be inaugurated in this wise: an assembly being made of the people of his country on a high hill in his territory, a white mare being slain, and being put to boil in a large pot in the centre of the field, and, on her being boiled, he to drink up her broth like a hound or a beagle with his mouth, and to eat the flesh out of his hands without having a knife or any instrument for cutting it, and that he would divide the rest of the flesh among the assembly, and then bathe himself in the broth. It is manifest that this thing Cambrensis tells is false, according to the ancient record of Ireland, for it is thus it describes the mode in which O'Donnell was proclaimed, to wit, by his being seated in the midst of the nobles and of the council of his own territory; and a chief of the nobility of his district used to stand before him with a straight white wand in his hand, and on presenting it to the king of *Cinéal Conaill*, it is this he would say to him, to receive the headship of his own country, and to maintain right and equity between each division of his country: and, wherefore the wand was appointed to be straight and white, was to remind him that so ought he to be just in his administration, and pure and upright in his actions. I marvel at Cambrensis reporting this lie, and I conceive that it was through malice he inserted it in his work. For it is well known that they have been at all times devout and religious people; and that many of them forsook the world, and finished their lives under religious rule, and, moreover, that from them came many saints, such as Columcille, Baoithin, Adhamnan, and many other saints whom we shall not mention here. Besides, it is not credible that the nobility of Ireland would permit the king of *Cinéal Conaill* to have in use that barbarous custom [25] which Cambrensis mentions, seeing that the Catholic religion has lived among them from the time of Patrick to the Norman invasion, and, accordingly, I consider that it is a malicious unwarranted lie Cambrensis has uttered here.

IV.

Spenser, in his narrative, says that Egfrid, king of the Northumbrians, and Edgar, king of Britain, had authority over Ireland, as may be read in the thirty-third page of his history: yet this is not true for him, because the old records of Ireland are opposed to that, and, moreover, British authors themselves confess that the Saxons did not leave them any ancient texts, or monuments, by which they might know the condition of the time which preceded the Saxons. For Gildas, an ancient British author says, that the monuments, and consequently the history of the Britons, were destroyed by the Romans and by the Saxons. Samuel Daniel, in the first part of his chronicle, agrees with this author on the same matter, and Rider, in the Latin dictionary he wrote, where he treats of this word Britannia; moreover he says, that it is not from Brutus Britain is called Britannia, and, if it were, that it should be Brutia or Brutica it should be called; and it were likely, if it had been from Brutus it was named, that Julius Cæsar, Cornelius Tacitus, Diodorus Siculus, or Bede, or some other ancient author would have stated whence is this word Britannia; and since they knew not whence is the name of their own country, it was no wonder they should be in ignorance of many of the ancient concerns of Britain, and, therefore, it is not strange that Spenser likewise should be ignorant of them.

It is a marvellous thing Spenser took in hand to trace up [27] antiquity concerning some of the nobles of Ireland, and to assert that they are foreigners in regard to their origin. Seven surnames, in especial, of the nobles of the Gael are mentioned by him, to wit, Mac Mahon, Mac Sweeny, Mac Sheehy, Macnamara, Cavanagh, Toole, and Byrne. He says that it is from Ursula (or Fitz Urse, a surname which is in England) Mac Mahon is derived, and that 'ursula' and bear' are equal, and that 'bear' and 'mahon' are alike (in meaning), and, accordingly, that it is from that house Mac Mahon of Ulster came. My answer to this reasoning is, that it is not more probable that Mac Mahon of Oriel should have come from that house, in such fashion, according to the derivation of the word, than Mac Mahon of Thomond, or O'Mahony of Carbry, and as neither of these is from the house of Fitz Urse, or Bear, in England, neither is Mac Mahon of Ulster: but truly he is of the posterity of Colla-dá-Chríoch, son of Eochaidh Doimhléan son of Fiachadh Sraibhtheine, son of Cairbre Lifeachar of the race of Eireamhón. The second race, the Mac Sweenys, he says that it is from a house in England which is called 'Swyn,' they have come; howbeit, 'Swyn' and 'Sweeny' are not equal, and, accordingly it is not from that house Mac Sweeny has sprung, but truly he is of the race of Niall: for it is from the posterity of Aodh Athlamh son of Flaithbheartach of the pilgrim-staff, Mac Sweeny comes. He also says that the Mac Sheehys are of the foreigners; however, that is not true, for it is known that they are of the posterity of Colla Uais, and that they have sprung from Sítheach, son of Eachdunn, son of Alastar, son of Dómhnull from whom are named the Mac Donnells of Ireland and Scotland. Again he says that the Macnamaras [29] are of the foreigners, and that they came from a family of the Normans called Mortimer; however, that is not true, for it is from a person named Cúmara they are called children of Cúmara: the proper surname for them is the race of Aodh, and it is from Caisin, son of Cas, son of Conall of the swift steeds, of the race of Éibhear, they are derived, as may be read in the genealogical account of the Dal Cas. He states, likewise, that it is from Great Britain came these three following surnames, Byrne, Toole, and Cavanagh; and the proof which he offers for this statement is unreliable, where he says that these three words are British words. First, he says that 'brin' and 'woody' are alike (in meaning); I allow that 'brin' and 'woody' are the same, yet it is not from this word 'brin' the Byrnes are called, but from the name of a young warrior called Brannút. Secondly, he says that 'tol' and 'hilly' are alike, and that it is from it the Tooles are named; I allow that 'tol' and 'hilly' are equal, yet 'tol' and 'Tuathal' are not like each other, for it is from the name of a warrior called Tuathal they are (called): wherefore the opinion of Spenser is false. Once again he says that 'caomhan' and 'strong' are alike, and that it is from it the Cavanaghs are named. My answer to him is, that 'caomhan' is the same as a 'mild' or pleasant person, and that the Cavanaghs were so named from Dómhnull Caomhanach, son of Diarmuid of the foreigners. The epithet adhered to Domhnall himself from his having been nurtured in Kilcavan, in the lower part of Leinster; and it is from the Kinsellachs [31] they are by descent. Moreover, it is manifest, according to genuine record, that these three peoples are of the Gael, and that these three surnames are of the posterity of Fiachadh Aiceadh, son of Cathaoir the Great, king of Leinster, as may be read in the genealogical account of Leinster. I am surprised how Spenser ventured to meddle in these matters, of which he was ignorant, unless that, on the score of being a poet, he allowed himself license of

invention, as it was usual with him, and others like him, to frame and arrange many poetic romances with sweet-sounding words to deceive the reader.

V.

Stanihurst asserts that Meath was the allotted portion of Slainghe, son of Deala, son of Loch; howbeit, that is not true for him. For, according to the Book of Invasion, there was of Meath, in Slainghe's time, but one district of land only, which lies hard by Usna, (and so) till the time of Tuathal the Welcome: and where he says that it is from Slainghe the town of Slane is called, and, consequently, that Meath was the allotted share which came to him from his brothers, it is not more reasonable to suppose that it was his share than to suppose that it was the province of Leinster that was allotted to him, and that it is from him is named Inver Slaney which flows through the midst of Leinster to Lochgarman (or Wexford); and that it is from him is named Dumha Slainghe, otherwise called Dionnriogh, on the bank of the Barrow, between Carlow and Leighlin, on the west side of the Barrow, and that it was his fortified residence, and that it was there he died. [33]

It is no marvel that Stanihurst should be without knowledge of this matter, since he had never seen the records of Ireland, from which he might have known her previous condition; and I fancy he did not make any great inquiry after them, since he is so ignorant about Irish affairs that he asserts Rosmactriu to be in Munster, and that Meath is a province, (or 'fifth'), in opposition even to Cambrensis, who does not reckon Meath as a province, and contrary to the Book of Invasion of Ireland. As Stanihurst divides Ireland, he makes up one half from the race of the foreigners apart, and the other half of Ireland outside that (jointly) between Gall and Gael; and, moreover, he says that the least colonist among the race of the foreigners would not deem it fitting to form a matrimonial alliance with the noblest Gael in Ireland; thus, he says, in his chronicle:—"The most lowly of the colonists who dwell in the foreign province would not give his daughter in marriage to the greatest prince among the Irish." I ask Stanihurst which were the more honourable, the more noble, or the more loyal to the crown of England, or which were better as securities for preserving Ireland to the crown of England, the colonists of Fingall, or the noble earls of the foreigners who are in Ireland, such as the earl of Kildare, who contracted alliance with Mac Carthy riabhach, with O'Neill, and with others of the nobles of the Gael; the earl of Ormond with O'Brien, with Mac Gil Patrick, and with O'Carroll; the earl of Desmond with Mac Carthy mór, and the earl of Clanricard with O'Ruarc. I do not reckon the viscounts nor the barons, who were as noble as any settler who was ever in Fingall, and by whom [35] frequently their daughters were given in marriage to the nobles of the Gael. It is, moreover, manifest that it is more frequently the English authorities entrusted the care of defending and retaining Ireland to the charge of the earls {whom we have mentioned} who made alliance with the native Irish, than to the charge of all the settlers that ever were in the English pale. Wherefore I conceive not whence it is that they do not contract alliance with the nobles of Ireland, unless it be from disesteem for their own obscurity, so that they did not deem themselves worthy to have such noble Gaels in their kinship.

From the worthlessness of the testimony Stanihurst gives concerning the Irish, I consider that he should be rejected as a witness, because it was purposely at the instigation of a party who were hostile to the Irish that he wrote contemptuously of them; and, I think, that hatred of the Irish must have been the first dug he drew after his first going into England to study, and that it lay as a weight on his stomach till, having returned to Ireland, he ejected it by his writing. I deem it no small token of the aversion he had for the Irish, that he finds fault with the colonists of the English province for that they did not banish the Gaelic from the country at the time when they routed the people who were dwelling in the land before them. He also says, however excellent the Gaelic language may be, that whoever smacks thereof, would likewise savour of the ill manners of the folk whose language it is. What is to be understood from this, but that Stanihurst had so great a hatred for the Irish, that he deemed it an evil that it was a Christian-like conquest the Gaill [37] had achieved over Ireland and the Gael, and not a pagan conquest. For, indeed, he who makes a Christian conquest thinks it sufficient to obtain submission and fidelity from the people who have been subdued by him, and to send from himself other new people to inhabit the land over which his power has prevailed, together with the people of that country.

Moreover, it is the manner of him who makes a pagan conquest, to bring destruction on the people who are subdued by him, and to send new people from himself to inhabit the country which he has taken by force. But he who makes a Christian conquest extinguishes not the language which was before him in any country which he brings under control: and it is thus William the Conqueror did as regards the Saxons. He did not extinguish the language of the Saxons, seeing that he suffered the people who used that language to remain in the country, so that it resulted therefrom that the language has been preserved from that time down among the Saxons.

Howbeit, it is a pagan conquest which Hengist, the chief of the Saxons made over the Britons, since he swept them from the soil of Britain, and sent people from himself in their places; and having altogether banished everyone, he banished their language with them. And it is the same way Stanihurst would desire to act by the Irish; for it is not possible to banish the language without banishing the folk whose language it is: and, inasmuch as he had the desire of banishing the language, he had, likewise, the desire of banishing the people whose language it was, and, accordingly, he was hostile to the Irish; and so his testimony concerning the Irish ought not to be received.

[39]

Stanihurst also finds fault with the lawgivers of the country, and with its physicians: although I wonder how he ventured to find fault with them, seeing that he understood neither of them, nor the language in which the skill of either class found expression, he being himself ignorant and uninformed as regards the Gaelic, which was their language, and in which the legal decisions of the country and the (books of) medicine were written. For he was not capable of reading either the law of the land or the medicine in their own language, and if they had been read to him, he had no comprehension of them. Accordingly, I think that it is the same case with him, depreciating the two faculties we have mentioned, and the case of the blind man who would discriminate the colour of one piece of cloth from another: for as the blind man cannot give a decision between the two colours, because he does not see either of them, in like manner, it was not possible for him to form a judgment between the two aforesaid faculties, inasmuch as he never understood the books in which they were written, and did not even understand the doctors whose arts these were, because the Gaelic alone was their proper language, and he was out and out ignorant of it.

He finds fault also with those who play the harp in Ireland, and says, that they have no music in them. It is likely that he was not a judge of any sort of music, and especially of Irish music, he being unacquainted with the rules which appertain to it. I think Stanihurst has not understood that it is thus Ireland was (being) a kingdom apart by herself, like a little world, and that the nobles and the learned who were there long ago arranged to have [41] jurisprudence, medicine, poetry, and music established in Ireland with appropriate regulations: and, therefore, it was not seemly for him to have formed and delivered a hasty rash judgment censuring the music of Ireland. It is a marvel to me that he had not read Cambrensis in the nineteenth chapter, where he praises the music of the Irish, unless it were that he had determined to attain a degree beyond Cambrensis in disparaging the Irish: for there is nothing at all in which Cambrensis more commends Irishmen than in the Irish music. Here is what he says in the same chapter:— “In instruments of music alone I find the diligence of this nation praiseworthy, in which, above every nation that we have seen, they are incomparably skilful.” As he says further, according to the same chapter, here is the information he gives concerning Irish music, praising it:— “Their melody, says he, is perfected and harmonized by an easy quickness, by a dissimilar equality, and by a discordant concord.” From this it may be understood, on the testimony of Cambrensis, that it is false for Stanihurst to say that there is no music in Irish melody. It is not true for him, either, what he says, that the greater part of the singing folk of Ireland are blind; for it is clear that, at the time he wrote his history, there was a greater number of persons with eyesight engaged in singing and playing than of blind people, so from that down, and now, the evidence may rest on our contemporaries.

Understand, reader, that Stanihurst was under three deficiencies for writing the history of Ireland, on account of which it is not fit to regard him as an historian. In the first [43] place, he was too young, so that he had not had opportunity for pursuing inquiry concerning the antiquity of this country, on which he undertook to write. The second defect, he was blindly ignorant in the language of the

country in which were the ancient records and transactions of the territory, and of every people who had inhabited it; and, therefore, he could not know these things. The third defect, he was ambitious, and accordingly, he had expectation of obtaining an advantage from those by whom he was incited to write evil concerning Ireland: and, moreover, on his having subsequently become a priest, he promised to recall most part of the contemptuous things he had written concerning Ireland, and I hear that it is now in print, to be exhibited in Ireland.

Stanihurst says that when Irishmen are contending, or striking each other, they say as a shout with a loud voice, 'Pharo, Pharo,' and he thinks that it is from this word 'Pharao,' which was a name for the king of Egypt, they use it as a war-cry: howbeit, that is not true for him, for it is the same as 'watch, watch O,' or, 'O take care,' telling the other party to be on their guard, as the Frenchman says, 'gardez, gardez,' when he sees his neighbour in danger.

VI.

Dr. Hanmer states in his chronicle that it was Bartholinus who was leader of the Gaels at their coming into Ireland, and it is to Partholón he calls Bartholinus here. However, according to the ancient record of Ireland, there were more than seven hundred years between the coming of Partholón and the [45] coming of the children of Míleadh to Ireland. For at the end of three hundred years after the deluge came Partholón, and at the end of a thousand and four score years after the deluge came the sons of Míleadh to Ireland. And in the opinion of Camden, it is more fitting to rely on the history of Ireland in this matter than on the words of Hanmer. Here is what he says:— "Let its due respect be given to antiquity in these things," (says he): and if it should be given to any record in the world on the score of being ancient, the antiquity of Ireland is indeed worthy of respect, according to the same Camden, in the book which is called 'Camden's Britannia,' where he says, speaking of Ireland:— "Not unjustifiably was this island called 'Ogygia' by Plutarch, *i.e.* most ancient." Camden furnishes a reason for this, and here is what he says:— "From the most profound memory of antiquity they derive their own history (speaking of the Irish), insomuch that there is not in all antiquity of all other nations but newness or almost infancy," beside the antiquity of Ireland: and, therefore, that it is more fitting to rely on it than on Dr. Hanmer, who never saw the old record of Ireland.

The same author says that it was a king of Scandinavia, whose name was Froto, was king of Ireland when Christ was [47] born; however, that is not true for him, for according to the ancient history, it is during the time of Criomhthann Nia Náir being in the sovereignty of Ireland that Christ was born; and according to that, it was not Froto, king of Scandinavia, who was king of Ireland at that time. It is marvellous how Hanmer, an Englishman, who never either saw or understood the history of Ireland, should know who was king of Ireland at the time Christ was born, he being without definite information as to who was king of Great Britain itself. For Samuel Daniel, Gildas, Rider, and Nennius, and many other authors who have written the history of Great Britain, acknowledge that the old account they have themselves on the ancient condition of Britain was inexact, because the Romans and Saxons deprived them of their records and their ancient texts; insomuch that they had but a conjecture or an opinion to offer concerning the ancient affairs of Britain before the Saxons and the Romans: and, therefore, the learned Camden himself says that he knew not whence it was that Britain was called Britannia, but to give his opinion like any man. He says also that he did not know when the Picts came to inhabit the northern part of Great Britain; and since there were many of the ancient transactions of Great Britain obscure to him, it was no wonder their being still more obscure to Hanmer, and that there should be greater obscurity than that in his case concerning the ancient affairs of Ireland: and, accordingly, he is not a trustworthy warrant as regards the king of Scandinavia having been king of Ireland at the time of the birth of Christ.

He says, likewise, that it is not Patrick, the apostle of Ireland (he by whom the Catholic faith was first propagated in the country), who discovered the cave of Patrick's purgatory in the island of purgatory, but another Patrick, an abbot, [49] who lived in the year of the Lord, eight hundred and fifty. Nevertheless, this is not true for him according to holy Caesarius, who lived within six hundred years of Christ, and consequently flourished two centuries and a half before this second Patrick. Here is what he says in the thirty-eighth chapter of the twelfth book he wrote, entitled 'Liber

dialogorum':— "Whoever casts doubt on purgatory, let him proceed to Ireland, let him enter the purgatory of Patrick, and he will have no doubt of the pains of purgatory thenceforward." From this it may be understood that it is not that second Patrick whom Hanmer mentions, who discovered Patrick's purgatory in the beginning, but the first Patrick. For how could it be possible that it should have been the second Patrick who discovered it, seeing that two centuries and a half elapsed from the time Cæsarius wrote on the purgatory of Patrick to the time the second Patrick lived; and moreover, we have the record and the tradition of Ireland stating, that it was Patrick the apostle who discovered purgatory at first in Ireland. Wherefore, it is clear that it is a malicious lie Hanmer has stated here, in hope that thereby the Irish would have less veneration for the cave of Patrick.

Another thing he says, in his twenty-fourth page, that Fionn, son of Cumhall, was of the Scandinavians of Denmark; though this is not true for him, according to the chronicle, but he is of the posterity of Nuadha Neacht, king of Leinster, who came from Eireamhón, son of Míleadh. He says also, in the twenty-fifth page, that the person whom authors call Gillamar, king of Ireland, was son to the king of Thomond; howbeit, we deem the confutation we have already given this thing sufficient.

[51]

I think that it is mockingly Hanmer inserts the battle of Ventry, deceitfully ridiculing the antiquaries, so that he might give the reader to understand that there is no validity in the history of Ireland, but like the battle of Ventry. However, it is clear that the 'shanachies' do not, and did not, regard the battle of Ventry as a true history, but that they are assured that it is a poetical romance, which was invented as a pastime. The same answer I give to every other story he recounts concerning the Fianna. It is untrue for him also where he says that Sláinghe son of Deala, was thirty years in the sovereignty of Ireland, whereas, according to the record, he reigned but one year only.

It is untrue, likewise, for him to say that the archbishop of Canterbury had jurisdiction [53] over the clergy of Ireland from the time of Augustine the monk. For it is certain that the archbishop of Canterbury had no jurisdiction over the clergy of Ireland until the time of William the Conqueror, and even then he had not jurisdiction, except over the clergy of Dublin, Wexford, Waterford, Cork, and Limerick; and it is those clergy themselves who placed themselves under the control of the archbishop of Canterbury, through affection of kinship with the people of Normandy, they being themselves of the remnant of the Danes usually called Normans, and also through dislike of the Irish; and I do not think there was authority over those same (clerics), but during the time of three, archbishops who were in Canterbury, namely, Radulph, Lanfranc, and Anselm. Therefore it is false for him to say that the archbishop of Canterbury had jurisdiction over the clergy of Ireland from the time of Augustine the monk.

It is also false what he says that Murchadh Mac Cochlain was king of Ireland in the year of the Lord one thousand one hundred and sixty-six, for it is certain that it was Ruaidhri Ua Conchubhair who was at that time assuming the headship of Ireland, and that that time was four years before the Norman invasion.

Again, he says, that it is in Great Britain Comhghall, abbot of Beannchar in the Aird of Ulster, was born: yet that is not true for him, for it is read in his life that it was in Dal n-aruidhe in the north of Ulster he was born, and that he was of the race called Dal n-aruidhe. It is wherefore Hanmer thought to make a Briton of Comhghall, because that it was Comhghall founded the abbey of Beannchar in the Aird of Ulster, which was the mother of the abbeys of all Europe, and that he founded another abbey in England beside west Chester, which is called Bangor: and if it should happen to Hanmer to convince the reader that Comhghall was a Briton, that he would give him consequently to understand that every excellence which adorned the abbey of Beannchar of Ulster would tend to the renown of the Britons in regard to Comhghall belonging to them; or that all the fame which Beannchar of Ulster had earned would be imputed to the abbey named Bangor, which is in England.

Hanmer says that Fursa, Faolan, and Ultan were bastard children of a king of Leinster; although truly they were children of Aodh Beannan, king of Munster, according to the account of the saints of Ireland. So also for many other of [55] the lies of Hanmer writing on Ireland, and I pass on without pursuing them further, because it would be tedious to mention them all.

John Barckly, writing on Ireland, says these words:— “They build (says he, speaking of the Irish) frail cabins to the height of a man, where they themselves and their cattle abide in one dwelling.” I think, seeing that this man stoops to afford information on the characteristics and on the habitations of peasants and wretched petty underlings, that his being compared with the beetle is not unfitting, since he stoops in its fashion to give an account of the hovels of the poor, and of miserable people, and that he does not endeavour to make mention or narration concerning the palatial princely mansions of the earls and of the other nobles who are in Ireland. I consider also that the repute of an historian ought not to be given to him, nor to any body else who would follow his track in the same degree: and thus, with one word, I discard the witness of Fynes Moryson who wrote jeeringly on Ireland; for, though his pen was skilful for writing in English, I do not think that he intended by the power of the pen to disclose the truth, and so I do not consider that it is worth (while) giving him an answer. For, the historian who proposes to furnish a description of any people who may be in a country, ought to report their special character truthfully [on them], whether good or bad; and because that it was of set purpose, through evil and through a bad disposition (at the suggestion of other people, who had the same mind towards the Irish), he has left in oblivion, [57] without estimating the good qualities of the Irish, whereby he has abandoned the rule most necessary for an historian to preserve in his narrative, and, therefore, the status of history ought not to be accorded to his writing. These are, indeed, the rules which should be most observed in writing history, according to Polydorus, in the first book he has written *‘de rerum inventoribus,’* where he treats of the fittest rules for writing history: here is the first rule he sets down — “*That he should not dare to assert anything false.*” The second rule:— “*That he should not dare to omit setting down every truth*”: here are the author’s words: “*in order (says he) that there should be no mistrust of friendship or unfriendliness in the writing.*” He says, moreover, in the same place, that the historian ought to explain the customs and way of life, the counsels, causes, resolves, acts, and development, whether good or bad, of every people who dwell in the country about which he has undertaken to write: and, inasmuch as Fynes Moryson has omitted to notice anything good of the Irish, he has neglected to observe the aforesaid rules, and, accordingly, the dignity of history cannot be allowed to his composition.

Whoever should determine to make a minute search for ill customs, or an investigation into the faults of inferior people, it would be easy to fill a book with them; for there is no country in the world without a rabble. Let us consider the rough folk of Scotland, the rabble-rout of Great Britain, the plebeians of Flanders, the insignificant fellows of France, [59] the poor wretches of Spain, the ignoble caste of Italy, and the unfree tribe of every country besides, and a multitude of ill-conditioned evil ways will be found in them; howbeit, the entire country is not to be disparaged on their account. In like manner, if there are evil customs among part of the unfree clans of Ireland, all Irishmen are not to be reviled because of them, and whoever would do so, I do not think the credit of an historian should be given him; and since it is thus Fynes Moryson has acted, writing about the Irish, I think it is not allowable he should have the repute of an historian: and so I say also of Campion.

Camden says that it is usual in Ireland for the priests with their children and concubines to dwell in the churches, and to be drinking and feasting in them: and moreover, that it is a habit there to call the children of these clerics, son of the bishop, son of the abbot, son of the prior, and son of the priest. My answer to him here is, that the time the clergy of Ireland began that bad system was after the eighth Henry had changed his faith, and, even at that time and thenceforward, there did not practise that bad habit but such of them as followed their own lusts, and denied the lawful superiors who were set over them. Camden himself concurs with this reply, where he says, speaking of Ireland:— “*Whoever among them (says he) give themselves to a religious life, restrain themselves even to miracle in a condition of austerity, governed by rule, watching, praying, and fasting for their mortification.*”

Here is what Cambrensis says in the twenty-seventh chapter, speaking also of the clergy of [61] Ireland:— “*The clergy of this land (says he, speaking of Ireland) are abundantly commendable as to the religious life, and amongst every other virtue which they possess, their chastity excels all the other virtues.*” From this it may be understood that chastity prevailed among the clergy of Ireland in Cambrensis’ time: and, moreover, it may be inferred from this, that it is not every body of the clergy of Ireland who followed that evil custom, but only the lustful set who broke their obligation, and went schismatically in disobedience to their ecclesiastical superiors.

Stanihurst agrees with this thing in the narrative which he wrote concerning Ireland, in the year of the Lord one thousand five hundred and eighty-four. Here is what he says:— “*The most part of the Irish (says he) have great regard for devotion or the religious state.*” From this it may be understood that that bad practice which Camden mentions was not common in Ireland, except only among the clergy who rejected their obligation as we have said above.

Camden says that the marriage bond is not strictly observed in Ireland, outside of the great towns: however, this is not true for him, and casts great discredit on the true aristocracy of Ireland, both native and foreign, because that it is in the country they mostly reside. Howbeit, I say not that there be not some of them lustful, as there be in every country, those who are not obedient to their ecclesiastical superiors: and, accordingly, it is unjust for Camden to charge this offence, rarely occurring, as a reproach against the Irish who reside in the rural districts. For, if there were one or [63] two, or a few, of them unruly, the inhabitants of the entire country should not be censured because of these: and, consequently, it is not fair of Camden to say that marriage is seldom regarded among the Irish, except among the people of the large towns and cities: and as for the folk who say that a marriage contract for a year is customary in Ireland, it is certain that it was never practised there, but by misguided people who were not submissive to their ecclesiastical superiors, and, for that reason, a general reproach should not be flung at the Irish because a few indocile unrestrained individuals practise this.

Campion says, in the sixth chapter of the first book of his narrative, that the Irish are so credulous, in a manner, that they will regard as truth whatever their superior may say, however incredible, and he propounds a dull fabulous tale in support of this. That is to say, that there was a greedy prelate in Ireland who was capable of imposing on his people anything he might say, and, being straitened for money, and in hope that he might obtain assistance from them, he made known to them that, within a few years, Patrick and Peter had been contending with each other concerning an Irish galloglass whom Patrick wanted to have admitted into the kingdom of Heaven, and that Peter became angry, and with that he struck Patrick on the head with the key of Heaven, so that he broke his pate, and Campion says that the prelate obtained a subsidy by this story. My answer to him here is, that he is like a player who would be recounting jeering stories on a platform rather than an historian. For, how [65] could it be possible that any Christian who was in Ireland would believe that Patrick’s crown could be broken, and he having died more than a thousand years before: and moreover, as everybody knows, that it is a key of authority Peter had, and not an iron key by which any headpiece could be broken. Wherefore I think it was a silly lie Campion invented in making up this thing about the Irish; and orasmuch as he admits himself in the epistle he writes at the beginning of his book, that he spent but ten weeks in writing the history of Ireland, I think that it is not worth making areply to any more of his lies.

Here is the testimony which Mr. Good, an English priest who was directing a school in Limerick, gives concerning the Irish in the year of the Lord fifteen hundred and sixty-six:— “*A nation this, (he says) which is strong of body, and active, which has a high vigorous mind, an acute intellect, which is warlike, lavish of its substance, which is gifted with endurance of labour, cold, and hunger, which has an amorous turn, which is most kind towards guests, steadfast in love, implacable in enmity, which is credulous, greedy of obtaining renown,*

impatient of enduring insult or injustice.” Here is also the testimony which Stanihurst gives of them:— “*A people much enduring in labours, beyond every race of men, and it is seldom they are cast down in difficulties.*”

Spenser says that it was from the Irish the Saxons first [67] received the alphabet, and, according to that, the Saxons had no knowledge whatever of literature till they acquired it from Irishmen.

VIII.

John Davies finds fault with the legal system of the country, because, as he thinks, there are three evil customs in it. The first custom of these is that the tanist takes precedence of the son of the lord of the soil. The second custom is the division which was made on the land between brethren, which the Galls call ‘gavalkind,’ where a subdivision of the land is made between the kinsmen. The third custom is to take ‘eric’ for the slaying of man. My answer in this matter is, that there is not a country in the world in which a change is not made in statutes and customs, according as the condition of the country alters. For, those customs were not sanctioned in the law of the land until the Irish had entered upon war and conflict between every two of their territories, so that they were usually slaying, harrying, and plundering each other: and as it was apparent to the nobles of Ireland, and to their ‘ollavs,’ the damage which ensued from the disunion among the inhabitants, they deemed it expedient to ordain those three customs.

In the first place, they understood that the ‘tanistry’ was suitable in order that there should be an efficient captain safeguarding the people of every district in Ireland, by defending their spoils and their goods for them. For, if it [67] were the son should be there, instead of the father, it might happen, occasionally, for the son to be in his minority, and so that he would not be capable of defending his own territory, and that detriment would result to the country from that circumstance. Neither was it possible to dispense with the second custom obtaining in Ireland at that time, that is to say, to have fraternal partnership in the land. For, the rent of the district would not equal the hire which would fall to the number of troops who would defend it: whereas, when the territory became divided among the associated brethren, the kinsman who had the least share of it would be as ready in its defence, to the best of his ability, as the tribal chief who was over them would be. No more was it possible to avoid having the ‘eric’ established at this time: for, if any one slew a man then, he would find protection in the territory nearest to him, and since it was not in the power of the friends of him who was slain to exact vengeance or satisfaction from him who did the deed, they would sue his kin for the crime, as punishment on the slayer; and inasmuch as his kin had no privity of the slaying, it would not be lawful to shed their blood; nevertheless, a fine was imposed on them as punishment for him who had committed the crime, and I notice the same custom obtaining among the Galls now, where the ‘kin-cogaish’ is adopted by them. Indeed, ‘eric’ and ‘kin-cogaish’ are alike; for ‘cion’ and ‘coir,’ (*i.e.* a crime) are equal, and ‘comghas’ and ‘gaol,’ (*i.e.* kinship) are equal, and what ‘kin-cogaish’ signifies is to exact a tax or payment in ‘eric’ or honour-price for the hurt or the loss which anyone causes (though it be slaying or other evil deed), from his [71] friend or from his kindred; and I perceive that the Galls keep up that system now, since the ‘kin-cogaish’ is adopted by them. Wherefore, it is not honest in John Davies to find fault with the native jurisprudence because of it; and, as far as regards the other two customs, there was no way of doing without them in Ireland when they were appointed, and, therefore, the native law of the land should not be censured on their account. For, though they are not suitable for Ireland now, they were necessary at the time they were established.

Camden says it is a system among the Irish for their nobles to have lawgivers, physicians, antiquaries, poets, and musicians, and for endowments to be bestowed on them, and also their persons, lands, and property to enjoy immunity. Here is what he says, speaking of them: “*These*

princes (he says) have their own lawgivers, whom they call 'brehons,' their historians for writing their actions, their physicians, their poets, whom they name 'bards,' and their singing men, and land appointed to each one of these, and each of them dwelling on his own land, and, moreover, every one of them of a certain family apart; that is to say, the judges of one special tribe and surname, the antiquaries or historians of another tribe and surname, and so to each one from that out, they bring up their children and their kinsfolk, each one of them in his own art, and there are always successors of themselves in these arts."

[73]

From these words of Camden it is clear that the order is good which the Irish had laid down for preserving these arts in Ireland from time to time. For they assigned professional lands to each tribe of them, in order that they might have sustenance for themselves for the cultivation of the arts, that poverty should not turn them away; and, moreover, it is the most proficient individual of one tribe or the other who would obtain the professorship of the prince of the land which he held; and it used to result from that that every one of them would make his best efforts to be well versed in his own art in hope of obtaining the professorship in preference to the rest of his tribe: and it is thus it is done beyond the sea now by many who go to obtain (college) chairs in consideration of their learning. It was all the more possible to preserve these arts, as the nobility of Ireland had appointed that the land, the persons and the property of the 'ollavs' should enjoy security and protection; for when the native Irish and the foreigners would be contending with each other, they should not cause trouble or annoyance to the professors, or to the pupils who were with them for instruction, hindering them from cultivating the arts. It is read in Julius Cæsar, in the sixth book of his history, that the 'druids' who came from the west of Europe to direct schools in France enjoyed a similar immunity, and I think that it was from Ireland they brought that custom with them.

[75]

IX

The refutation of these new foreign writers need not be pursued by us any further, although there are many things they insert in their histories which it would be possible to confute; because, as to the most part of what they write disparagingly of Ireland, they have no authority for writing it but repeating the tales of false witnesses who were hostile to Ireland, and ignorant of her history: for it is certain that the learned men who were conversant with antiquity in Ireland did not undertake to enlighten them in it, and, so, it was not possible for them to have knowledge of the history and ancient state of Ireland. And Cambrensis, who undertook to supply warrant for everything, it is likely in his case that it was a blind man or a blockhead who gave him such a shower of fabulous information, so that he has left the invasion of the Tuatha Dé Danann without making mention of it, although they were three years short of two hundred in the headship of Ireland, and that there were nine kings of them in the sovereignty of Ireland: and (yet) he had recounted the first invasion of Ireland, although it were only the invasion of Ceasair, and that the antiquaries do not regard it for certain as an invasion, notwithstanding that it is mentioned by them in their books. Truly I think that he took no interest in investigating the antiquity of Ireland, but that the reason why he set about writing of Ireland is to give false testimony concerning her people during his own time, and their ancestors before them: and, besides, it was but brief opportunity he had for research on the history of Ireland, since he spent but a year and a half at it before going (back) [77] to England; and his history not being finished (in that time), he left a half year's portion wanting (to be completed) of it under the care of a companion of his, named Bertram Verdon.

Wherefore, I have hope that whatsoever impartial reader shall read every refutation which I make on Cambrensis, and on these new foreigners who follow his track, will trust the refutation

I make on their lies rather than the story-telling they all do, for I am old, and a number of these were young; I have seen and I understand the chief historical books, and they did not see them, and if they had seen them, they would not have understood them. It is not for hatred nor for love of any set of people beyond another, nor at the instigation of anyone, nor with the expectation of obtaining profit from it, that I set forth to write the history of Ireland, but because I deemed it was not fitting that a country so honourable as Ireland, and races so noble as those who have inhabited it, should go into oblivion without mention or narration being left of them: and I think that my estimate in the account I give concerning the Irish ought the rather to be accepted, because it is of the Gaels I chiefly treat. Whoever thinks it much I say for them, it is not to be considered that I should deliver judgment through favour, giving them much praise beyond what they have deserved, being myself of the old Galls as regards my origin.

If, indeed it be that the soil is commended by every historian who writes on Ireland, the race is dispraised by every new foreign historian who writes about it, and it is by that I was incited to write this history concerning the Irish, owing to the extent of the pity I felt at the manifest injustice which is done to them by those writers. If only indeed they had given their proper estimate to the Irish, I know [79] they should not put them in comparison with any nation in Europe in three things, namely, in valour, in learning, and in being steadfast in the Catholic faith: and forasmuch as regards the saints of Ireland, it needs not to boast what a multitude they were, because the foreign authors of Europe admit this, and they state that Ireland was more prolific in saints than any country in Europe; and, moreover, they admit that the dominion of learning in Ireland was so productive, that she sent forth from her learned companies to France, to Italy, to Germany, to Flanders, to England, and to Scotland, as is clear from the introduction to the book in which were written in English lives of Patrick, Columcille, and Brigid: and forasmuch as concerns the ancient history of Ireland, it may be assumed that it was authoritative, because it used to be revised at the assembly of Tara every third year, in presence of the nobility, the clergy, and the learned of Ireland; and since the Irish received the faith, it has been placed under the sanction of the prelates of the Church. These chief books following which are still to be seen, will testify to this; namely, the Book of Armagh; the ‘Saltair’ of Cashel, which holy Cormac, son of Cuileannan, king of the two provinces, of Munster and archbishop of Cashel, wrote; the Book of Uachongbháil; the Book of Cluaineidhneach of Fionntan in Leix; the Saltair na rann, which Aonghus the ‘Culdee’ wrote; the Book of Glendaloch; the Book of Rights, which holy Benen, son of Sesgnen wrote; the ‘Uidhir’ of Ciaran, [81] which was written in Clonmacnois; the Yellow Book of Moling, and the Black Book of Molaga. Here follows a summary of the books which were written in those, namely, the book of Invasion, the book of the Provinces, the Roll of Kings, the book of tribes, the book of synchronism, the the book of famous places, the book of remarkable women, the book which was called ‘Cóir anmann’; the book which was called ‘Uraicheapt,’ which Ceanfaolaidh the learned wrote, and the book which is called the ‘Amhra’ of Columcille, which Dallan Forgaill wrote shortly after the death of Columcille. There are yet to be seen in Ireland many other histories, besides the chief books which we have mentioned, in which there is much of ancient record to be discovered, such as the battle of Magh Muccraimhe, the siege of Druim Damhghaire, the fates of the knights, the battle of Crionna, the battle of Fionnchoradh, the battle of Ros-na-Ríogh, the battle of Magh Léana, the battle of Magh Rath, the battle of Magh Tualaing, and many other histories which we shall not mention here.

Furthermore, the historical record of Ireland should be considered as authoritative, the rather that there were over two hundred professors of history keeping the ancient record of Ireland, and every one of them having a subsidy from the nobles of Ireland on that account, and having the revision of the nobility and clergy from time to time. Because of its antiquity, likewise, it is the more worthy of trust, and, also, that it has not suffered interruption or suppression from the violence of strangers. For, notwithstanding that the Norsemen had been troubling Ireland for a

period, there were such a number of learned men keeping the ancient record that the historical compilation [83] was preserved, even though many books fell into the hands of the Norsemen. Howbeit, it is not thus with other European countries, because the Romans, Gauls, Goths, Vandals, Saxons, Saracens, Moors, and Danes destroyed their old records in every inroad (of their kings) which they made upon them: yet, it fell not to any of these to plunder Ireland, according to Cambrensis, in the forty-sixth chapter, where he says, speaking of Ireland: "*Ireland was, from the beginning, free from incursion of any foreign nation.*" From this it may be understood that Ireland was free from the invasion of enemies by which her ancient history and her former transactions would be extinguished; and it is not so with any other country in Europe. Wherefore I think that it is more fitting to rely on the history of Ireland than on the history of any other country in Europe, and, moreover, as it has been expurgated by Patrick, and by the holy clergy of Ireland, from time to time.

Understand, nevertheless, O reader, that I have made a change in the computation of the years which are stated to have been in the reign of a few of the pagan kings of Ireland apart from how it is set down in the Roll of Kings, and in the poems which have been composed on them; and the reason I have for that is, that I find them not agreeing with the enumeration of the epochs from Adam to the birth of Christ, according to any reputable foreign author. I have, besides, another reason, that it seems to me that an undue number of years is assigned to some of them, such as Síorna the long-lived to whom three fifties of years are attributed, and that we may read in the old book of Invasion that Síorna was an hundred years old before he assumed the sovereignty [85] of Ireland, and if I set down his being thrice fifty years in the sovereignty, I would not be believed. Wherefore I give him one and twenty years, according to the verse which is in his reign, which gives to Síorna but a year and twenty, as will be clear to the reader. They allow fifty years of reign to Cobhthach 'Caolmbreágh,' although there should be given to him but thirty: for Moiriath, daughter of Scoiriath, king of Corca Duibhne, loved Maon, who was called Labhra 'loingseach,' he being then in exile in her father's house, he a youth and she a young maiden; and, after he had returned to Ireland from his exile, and after the slaying of Cobhthach, it is she who became wife to him, and bore him children. Wherefore, if I were to give fifty years of reign to Cobhthach, she would be three-score years, when she bore children to Labhra the navigator, and since this cannot be true, Cobhthach cannot have been in the sovereignty fifty years. Also, for other reasons, I make a change in the number of years of the reign of a few of the kings of Ireland before the Faith: but I think it was not through the ignorance of the antiquaries this change became necessary, but through the ignorance of some people who copied after them, who had no skill save only to practise the art of writing: because, since the time the suzerainty of Ireland passed to the Galls, the Irish have abandoned making the revision which was customary with them every third year of the ancient record, and so the professors of archæology have neglected its purification, having lost the immunity and the emolument which it was customary with them to obtain from the Gaels in regard of preserving the ancient record; and because, moreover, [87] there has been continual dissension between Galls and Gaels in Ireland, by which unrest was caused to the professors — preventing them from revising and purifying the record from time to time.

And if any one be surprised at the discrepancy which exists among some of the authors of our ancient record as to the calculation of time from Adam to the birth of Christ, it is no cause for wonder, seeing that there are few of the standard authors of all Europe who agree together in the computation of the same time. Let us take as witness of this, the disagreement which these chief authors following make with each other:

In the first place, of the Hebrew authors:—

Baalsederhelm, 3518: the Talmudists, 3784: the New Rabbis, 3760: Rabbi Nahsson, 3740: Rabbi Levi, 3786:

Rabbi Moses, 4058: Josephus, 4192.

Of the Greek authors:—

Metrodorus, 5000: Eusebius, 5190: Theophilus, 5476.

Of the Latin authors:— St. Jerome, 3941: St. Augustine, 5351: Isidore, 5270: Orosius, 5199: Bede, 3952: Alphonsus, 5984.

Here is the reckoning of the twelve men and three score on the four first ages of the world, together with the calculation which the wise learned men who have followed them in the direct track have given on the epochs from the creation of the world to the birth of Christ, dividing them into five parts, *i.e.* from Adam to the deluge, 2242, from the deluge to Abraham, 942, from Abraham to David 940, from David to the captivity of Babylon, 485, from the captivity to the birth of Christ, 590:— Sum, 5199: it is why the authorities [89] who follow the seventy-two men place the fifth period as their own time, because it is thus this era is completed, 5199, from the creation of Adam to the birth of Christ: and it is to the authors who follow the seventy-two men in the four first periods, *i.e.* Eusebius, who counts in his history from the creation of the world to the birth of Christ, 5199; Orosius, in the first chapter of his first book, says that there are from Adam to Abraham, 3184, and from Abraham to the birth of Christ, 2015; and the sum of both is 5199. St. Jerome says, in his epistle to Titus, that six thousand years of the age of the world had not been completed to the birth of Christ. St. Augustine, too, says, in the tenth chapter of the twelfth book ‘de civitate Dei,’ that six thousand years are not computed from the creation of the world to the birth of Christ. Let both be set on that part that they agree with these calculators, in the number of the count from the creation of the world to the birth of Christ nineteen years on four score, on one hundred, on five thousand. Another proof of the same computation is the Roman Martyrology, which declares the total of these epochs, from the creation of Adam to the birth of Christ, five thousand, one hundred, ninety and nine.

And since these chief authorities agree not with each other in the computation of the time which is from Adam to the birth of Christ, it is no wonder that there should be discrepancy among some of the antiquaries of Ireland about the same calculation.

However, I have not found among them a computation I rather think to be accurate than the numbering which some of them make four thousand, fifty and two years, for the time from Adam to the birth of Christ; and (it is) what I desire is to follow the standard author who comes nearest to this reckoning in the synchronism of the [91] sovereigns, of the epochs, of the popes, and of the general councils at the end of the book in their own proper places.

If anyone should charge it upon me as a strange thing wherefore I give many verses as evidence for the history out of the old record, my answer to him is that my reason for that is, that the authors of the ancient record framed the entire historical compilation in poems, in order that thereby the less change should be made in the record; and also, that in this manner, it might the more be committed to memory by the students who were attending them: for it is through being in verse metre the saltair of Tara was called to the chief book which was in the custody of the king of Ireland’s own professors, and the ‘saltair’ of Cashel to the chronicle of Cormac, son of Cuileannan, and the ‘saltair’ of the verses’ to the record of Aonghus the ‘culdee’: for, as psalm’ and ‘duan’ (poem) or ‘dán’ (song) are alike, equal are ‘saltair’ or ‘psalterium’ and ‘duanaire,’ in which there would be many poems or songs: and forasmuch as in the poems are the bone and marrow of the ancient record, I think that it is expedient for me to rely on it as authority in treating of the history.

Therefore I have often said, in opposing the authors who have been refuted by us, that the ancient record was against them, because I considered that the record which was common and

had been frequently revised, had more of authority, as we have said, than any one solitary author of those who are in the history.

Some people profess astonishment how it should be possible to trace to Adam the origin of any man. My answer to that is, that it was easy for the Gaels to keep [93] themselves (traced) even to Adam, because they had, from the time of Gaedheal down, 'druids' who used to preserve their generations of descent and their transactions in every expedition (of all) that befel them up to reaching Ireland, as is clear from the history following: and, moreover, they had an affection for science, insomuch that it was owing to his learning Níul, the father of Gaedheal, obtained every possession he got; and also the length the Gaels have been without change in the possession of one and the same country, and the excellence of the order they laid down for the preservation of the record, as we have said. Here follows an example from a British author, where he gives the pedigree to Adam of a king who was over Britain, from which the reader will allow that it was possible for the Gaels to do the same thing; and the author's name is Assher: here is the name of that king — Aelfred, son of Aethelwulf, son of Egbert, son of Etalmond, son of Eafa, son of Eowua, son of Ingeld, son of Coenred, son of Coelwald, son of Cudam, son of Cutwin, son of Ceawlin, son of Cenric, son of Creoda, son of Cerdic, son of Elesa, son of Gelwus, son of Brond, son of Beld, son of Woden, son of Fritilwald, son of Frealaf, son of Fritilwulf, son of Fingodwulf, son of Gead, son of Caetwa, son of Beawua, son of Sceldwa, son of Eremod, son of Itermod, son of Atra, son of Hwala, son of Bedug, son of Japhet, son of Noah, &c., &c.

Here is a vindication or defensive introduction to the groundwork of knowledge on Ireland, in which is a compendium of the history of Ireland briefly: which has been [95] gathered and collected from the chief books of the history of Ireland, and from a good many trustworthy foreign authors by Geoffrey Keating, priest and doctor of divinity, in which is a brief summary of the principal transactions of Ireland from Partholón to the Norman invasion: and whoever shall desire to write fully and comprehensively on Ireland hereafter, he will find, in the same ancient books, many things desirable to write of her which have been purposely omitted here, lest, putting these all in one work, thereby this compilation should less likely come to light from the greatness of the labour of putting them in one writing.

The history is divided into two books: the first book makes known the condition of Ireland from Adam to the coming of Patrick into Ireland; the second book from the coming of Patrick to the invasion of the Galls, or down to this time.

I think that there is not a reader, impartial and open to conviction, whom it concerns to make a scrutiny into the antiquity of Ireland, but such as will be pleased with what we have said in this introduction: and if it should happen that he deems insufficient every explanation which I have given, it is beyond my ability he would go. Wherefore, I take leave of him, and let him excuse me, if it happen to me to go out of the way in anything I may say in this book, for if there be anything blameworthy in it, it is not from malice it is there, but from want of knowledge.

Your ever faithful poor friend till death,
GEOFFREY KEATING.