

Sylvester O'Halloran, *A General History of Ireland* (London 1778)

A Preliminary Discourse

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Nothing has proved so great an obstacle to the study of ancient history as the very great uncertainty in ancient chronology, The Babylonians, the Chaldeans, the Egyptians, and the Chinese, have carried their different chronologies so amazingly far back, that to credit them, one would be almost tempted to suppose the world eternal! The Greeks came much later into the custom of recording historical events; and, it must be confessed, that where they have touched on remote periods, their æras are, to the last degree, uncertain. Even in sacred writ we meet with great discordance in point of chronology; the Septuagint translation of the Bible, and many of the fathers, reckoning 3513 years from the creation to the vocation of Abraham; whilst the Hebrew text, and some of the principal fathers of the church, fix it at 2023! It is on account of this great uncertainty in ancient chronology, that Varro, the most learned historian and philosopher of ancient Rome, deemed every relation, which preceded the first Olympiad [ii] (i.e. the year of the world 3232) to be obscure, fabulous, and unworthy public notice!

A variety of causes have concurred to make chronology so unsettled, and of course its concomitant history so unsatisfactory. No two nations of antiquity are in accord as to any fixt epocha, nor even as to the length of the year, or the time when it should commence. The Greeks began their æra of certain history from the Olympiads, and the Romans from the foundation of their city. Some have counted time from the solar, others from the lunar year. Even in the Christian world some centuries had passed, from the Incarnation, before it was agreed to compute time from that epocha. To this may be added the different periods in which letters were introduced into countries, the repeated convulsions and revolutions which every nation of the continent has experienced, and the neglect and destruction of annals and records, ever attendant on such general calamities!

The nation, whose History I have the honour of presenting to the public, has experienced none of these misfortunes, at least not in so remarkable a degree as to destroy all her annals, or bring her chronology into any kind of doubt. They appear to have been, from the most remote antiquity, *a polished people*, and with propriety they may be called, *The Fathers of Letters!* [iii] Sequestered in a remote island, giving laws to neighbouring states, and free from foreign invasions for the certain space of 2060 years, they had time and leisure to attend to their history and antiquities; and they certainly exceeded all nations of the world in their attention to these points! As I have endeavoured to elucidate by a variety of obscure parts in ancient history, and to determine many controverted æras in ancient chronology, by the annals of Ireland, it is but just that the candid critical reader should receive the clearest evidences and the fullest information, as to their authenticity. This matter satisfactorily explained, he will then, no doubt, naturally inquire, why an history, so manifestly interesting to letters, and which throws such lights on the early laws, religion, and customs of the Celtæ, should lie so long concealed from public view, especially in ages learned and inquisitive as this and the last have proved? But of these points in their order; and first as to our chronology.

The Milesians began their own immediate history with Phænius, the inventor of letters, and their great ancestor. They have not determined on the precise period of time in which he flourished; but yet the generations and names of his lineal successors, to the sons of Milesius,

have been preserved with such care and accuracy; and the same subject, from that period to [iv] this day, has been continued with such unexampled fidelity, that it will require little trouble to determine it, with precision and certainty, by admitting of the following reasonable computation. Twenty-three generations are counted from Phœnius to Heber, and I have allowed thirty-five years to each generation, which I think, (considering the remoteness of the time and longevity of the people) will be deemed a fair and reasonable medium, If to this we add eighty-one years for the supposed extent of his life, it will make up the gross sum of eight hundred and eighty-six years. By the Reim-Riogra, or Royal Chronology of Giolla-Caomhain, a writer of great antiquity, ninety monarchs of Ireland are reckoned from Heber to Conaire the Grand, in whose administration the Incarnation happened; and the reigns of these princes, one with another, according to his computation, amounts to 1657 years. But, in this list, a reign of seventy-seven, of seventy, and of sixty years, is allowed to some princes; to one in particular (and, it would seem, merely on account of his surname of Soaglach, or the Long-lived) an hundred and fifty is given! But, in Ireland, the monarchy was elective with respect to persons, though hereditary in point of blood. Minors were declared incapable of governing; and no prince could become a candidate for the throne who had not passed the age of twenty-five. Revolutions [v] were frequent, and the longest sword always determined the contest. Sound criticism and plain sense seem to concur in reducing so improbable a period to a reasonable time, and will, I think, justify me in lopping off an exuberance of three hundred and ninety-three years from this account; so that, from the birth of Phœnius to the Incarnation, comprehends a space of 2146 years, in which a clear chronology, subject to the severest scrutiny, is exhibited, and which, if not under, does not exceed true time.

From this period the Irish chronology is allowed to be accurate by the most critical judges of the matter; yet, as Sir James Ware, and, from him, most British writers, who were very incompetent judges, have affirmed, that our chronology at best is but uncertain till the landing of St. Patrick; let us, for argument sake, admit it to be so, and endeavour to reconcile the number of reigns in this interval to reason and chronology. Loaghaire began his reign A. C. 428, four years before the landing of St. Patrick, and twenty-nine princes intervened between him and Conaire. From the landing of Patrick the most incredulous have not doubted our chronology : nor could it be otherwise, as the time of his legation was so well known to foreign as well as domestic writers. Fifty-one monarchs swayed the Irish sceptre from the days of Loagaire to those of Roderic O'Connor, [vi] last emperor of Ireland. Now, if we compare the number of reigns in the first and second sages of our history, or from Heber to Conaire, and from him to Loagaire, with those in the third, or *uncontrovertibly true time*, we will see a very close agreement, and that the periods preceding this last epocha, are rather contracted than enlarged. Let us suppose upon an average, that the reigns of these princes, one with another, did not exceed fourteen years each; and when we consider the nature of an elective government, where each prince generally fell by the sword of his successor, it seems a fair medium. The number of reigns from Heber to Conaire are $90 \times 14 = 1260$, just four years less than the time assigned! From Conaire to Loagaire were $29 \times 14 = 406$, which is twenty-two years less than true time; and fifty-one reigns from Loagaire to Roderic, multiplied by fourteen, produce but 714 years, which is about forty years less than the real time. Thus it appears (I apprehend), evident, that instead of extending, I have sensibly contracted our ancient chronology, and that if it does not want half a century of true time, it cannot be deemed a day beyond it. From this chronology, the periods in which the following interesting facts happened, appear thus — The invention of letters by Phœnius, (computing from the Hebrews), was in the year of the world 1912, the fifty-second year of his age, and sixteenth of his reign.

[vii]

The introduction of letters; of arts, and sciences into Egypt by Niul, the son of Phœnius took place, in the year of the world 1941.

The Cretans received the Phœnician alphabet from Cadmus the high-priest, son to Sru, and brother to Heber Scot, in the year of the world 2046; and this at once explains a matter very doubtful and very interesting to ancient history. The Greeks, unable to determine the time in which Cadmus lived, have conjectured it to be after the days of Moses. Now in his days, the Hebrew alphabet contained twenty-two letters, which is six letters more than the Cadmean; and the Israelites, then bordering on Phœnicia have made some literati suppose, that this last alphabet must have contained more letters than antiquity has attributed to it; but we now plainly see, that Cadmus preceded Moses by more than four centuries, which at once removes all doubts, and justifies the reports of antiquity,

The first Phœnician settlement in Africa took place in the year of the world 2279, For it is agreed on, that long before the days of Joshua a Phœnician colony had made a settlement about Carthage, though, till now, the time has not been determined on with any kind of precision.

Briotan, the son of Feargus, with his followers, retired from Ireland to Britain A. M. 2380; and from him the country took this name, (its more ancient one, being Inismore [viii], or the Great Island), as all our antiquities declare.

From the settlements in Wales, the people were called Cimri, not from being the descendants of Gomer, Gumar in Irish denoting an hilly country, as Wales undoubtedly is. The Firbolgs, or Belgæ, entered Britain, A.M. 2541; the Damnonii, or Tuatha da Danaans, A.D. 2736; the Picts took possession of Albany, A.M. 2744; and the Irish Brigantes, of Cumberland, &c. A. M. 2749.

The Brigantes of Spain (so called from Breogan, grandfather to Milesius), became a respectable, warlike, and commercial people, about the year 2600; and a part of their posterity conquered Ireland, in the year of the world 2736.

As to the history of the people, on which this chronology is founded, every evidence and every circumstance that can in reason be expected, seem combined to stamp authority on it. From Phœnius to the sons of Milesius, their exploits, their travels, their successes, and disappointments, have been narrated from age to age, with such an air of native simplicity and candour, that it would be hard to conceive—even supposing it an imposture—what could be proposed by the deception. The shortness of the voyages; their coasting from land to land; and the length of time they were tossed about, so as to take some years in passing from Phœnicia to Getulia, plainly shew, that this expedition was undertaken in the very infancy [ix] of navigation. Their posterity remained near three centuries after this on the African coast, (though a commercial people), before they ventured to sail beyond the Pillars of Hercules; and from the time of Bratha's landing in Galicia, to the conquest of Ireland by the sons of Milesius, included the space of an hundred and fifty years; so formidable did the venturing to launch into the great Atlantic ocean appear to this people. Nay, the circumstance of their being at this time furnished with reflecting and refracting glasses, evidently points out the progress they had made in navigation. But when we find accounts so reconcileable to reason, wonderfully strengthened by the collateral evidences of foreign nations, and THROWING DAY on the obscurest parts of their different histories, can we in justice refuse our assent to them? That the Milesian colony were a learned and a polished people, when they landed in Ireland, the circumstance of their transmitting to posterity the records of the nations who preceded them there, seems alone strongly to prove. Amhergin was then their high-priest. A part of his duty, as well as that of his successor, was, the care of history and genealogy. We have yet preserved in the Leabhar-Lecan part of his writings, particularly a relation of the landing of his brethren and their followers in Ireland, with the numbers who perished in the attempt, in a beautiful style of poetry. From this [x] epocha, we behold a regular succession of princes, all great. encouragers of arts and letters, and some highly celebrated for their erudition and for their writings, We trace the rise of literary societies, the modes by which adepts passed: doctors in different faculties, and the great immunities which this order of men possessed, confirmed by Czsar, with respect to the Gauls, many centuries

after, we behold arts, manufactures, and commerce, keep equal pace with letters, as well as their eternal concomitants, wealth and power!

The very form of the Irish constitution shews to demonstration, that it could not subsist without letters. We see from the prince to the peasant, the nation divided into different classes, and all posts of honour, trust, and profit, in these different orders, hereditary in certain families even in the hierarchy, for above seven centuries, the episcopal order was confined to certain septs though our history had been silent on this head, yet we should conclude, that a class of people must have been set apart to preserve the genealogies of these different families. How could order or subordination be otherwise preserved? Cæsar tells us, that the Gauls were divided into different classes; and by way of explaining this, does he not at the same time proclaim the flourishing state of letters there, and the great privileges granted to this order of men?*

* Comment. lib. vi.

[xi]

But modern sceptics affirm, that the Irish knew not the use of letters till the landing of St. Patrick, But if this apostle first introduced letters into Ireland, they must undoubtedly be the Roman, And did the Roman alphabet THEN contain no more than seventeen letters? Were these arranged like ours, or were they of similar structure? If all these interrogatories are to be answered in the negative, as they undoubtedly must, what will become of our visionaries? But to remove for ever so great an obstacle to true history and chronology, Cæsar himself tells us, that the Gaulish letters in his days resembled the Greek, and such is the Irish letter even at this day! Now, as from this remark of Caesar, it becomes evident, that the Gauls and Romans had different kinds of alphabets, it must be a certain consequence, that the Irish could not borrow their letters from ancient Rome, and our history sufficiently proclaims them the eternal enemies of that people.

But, besides all this, the more critically we examine, and the deeper we explore the annals of Ireland, the more convinced we shall become of their genuineness. The monarchy in every period of our history, was confined to the posterity of the three sons of Milesius only, except in three instances in the line of Ith, who were in main of the same royal stock. Though all descended from one common ancestor, yet they were divided in [xi] interests; and the clearest head and longest sword generally gained the monarchy. If any doubt had ever been entertained of the veracity of Irish history, must it not have come out some time or other, in the many bloody contests for sovereignty, so disgraceful to our annals? Would it not even serve as a political stimulus, the more to inflame the contending parties? But no such thing! though of different interests, and highly inimical to each other, yet were they in perfect unison, as to their being of one common stock! And nothing can more fully prove this, than the very mode of inaugurating our different princes, as well monarchical as provincial, which *in no instance* was ever deviated from, after the election was declared, and before the coronation oaths were administered, the chief senachie or antiquarian stepped forth, and after bending the knee to the throne, announced to the people aloud, "That Brien-Boirumhe, ancestor to the present earl. of Inchiquin, (for instance) the son & of Cineidi, the son of Lorcan, the son of Lachtna, the son of Core, son to Anluan, son of Mahon, the son of Turelach, the son of Cathil, the son of Aodh-Caomh, the son of Conal, the son of Eochadh, and so on to Gollamh or Milesius, and from him to Phænius, &c. was monarch of Ireland and Albany." And this is the reason that our antiquarians have been so careful to recite the pedigrees, and note the houses from which our different [xiii] monarchs came; which though disgusting in many instances to readers, yet we see was observed for the wise purpose, of preserving both the constitution and the history of the kingdom pure. In every particular, except the right of governing, they were in perfect accord, The line of Heber or house of Munster, being descended from the eldest son of Milesius, claimed a kind of prescriptive right to the monarchy, yet the Heremonians, though the youngest

branch, gave infinitely more monarchs to Ireland. The Heberians deemed this a kind of usurpation, and the Heremonians contended, that in a country w[h]ere the sword determined the dispute, power and intrepidity, not seniority, sanctified the claim. We have yet preserved a poem, wrote by Torna-Eigeas, chief bard to Niall the Grand, in the fourth century, reciting the bloody contests between him and Core, king of Munster, for the monarchy. In this, he with great elegance and delicacy, lays before his reader, the pretences of both houses, and the arguments used by their different advocates, and recapitulates the bloody wars carried on from the days of Heber to his own time, for this object an irrefragable proof surely, even then, of the authenticity of our earlier annals. St. Patrick in the next age presided over the literati in several conventions; and our annals, such as we now find them, were then, and in every succeeding age to the last century, never [xiv] called in question by those who had the best right to judge of them. The uncommon care taken to preserve them pure and uncorrupt, when attended to, must satisfy the most incredulous.

Every province had its history; every powerful chief, his poet and antiquarian, Their persons were declared sacred, and their ample possessions unmolested. The different provincial records and histories were every third year examined by a committee of the national assembly; and nothing was admitted into the Seanachas-more, or Great Antiquity—so called as being the national history — but what was strictly true. The greatest punishments awaited on such antiquarians as attempted to disguise truth, or impose fals[e]hoods; and no instance is recorded of any one's being convicted of these crimes! These hereditary bards and historians flourished through every period of our history. They existed in Thomond, in Conaught [sic], and in Ulster in some degree, *even to the Revolution*.

We are yet possessed of copies of the Book of Munster. It recites the travels of the Gadeliens, from their dereliction of Egypt, to the conquest of Ireland; and notes down, with great precision, the different generations that intervened, From this period the history is confined to the exploits of this house only, as kings of Leath-Mogha, or monarchs of Ireland, just as it happened. The line [xv] of Ith, or Brigantes of Munster, had their hereditary antiquarians also; and Forchern, one of our most celebrated senachies, was poet to Conrigh, the son of Darius, of the Deguids of Munster, who was contemporary with Julius Cæsar.

The Book of Leinster begins with Jughaine the Great, (from whom Jiggin's-Town, near the Naas), monarch of Ireland, A.M. 3587; and through his son LoagaireLorc, pursues the exploits and actions of his successors as kings of Leinster. The Book of Leth-Cuin, traces the Heremonian line from the conquest of Ireland to the reign of Jughaine, and then, through his son Cobthaig, continues the same subject to the twelfth century, This psalter got the title of Leth-Cuin, as it treated of all the stock of the Heremonians, in the northern division of Ireland, according to the famous partition treaty in the second century. Keating and other writers of the last century, mention a noble copy of this work on vellum, with the coats of arms of the principal chiefs of Ulster and Conaught, elegantly blazoned on its margins. The Conaught book is quoted by Usher and others, and several extracts from it may be found in the Leabhar-Lecan. The house of Emania, or line of Ir, which cut so conspicuous a figure in our annals, these great protectors of the literati of Ireland on several occasions, could not be without their bards and antiquarians; and to their [xvi] care it is owing, that their exploits and those of the Craobh-Ruadh, have been so well preserved, As soon as a new government was established in a part of Ulster, in the fourth century, on the ruins of that great house, we find also a new chronicle to commence, under the title of the Book of Orgial, so called from the new name given to that territory, in which the exploits of these conquerors and their successors, with their pedigrees, are accurately noted down.

Besides these are the Book Synchronisms, in which the provincial kings are synchronised with the monarchs of Ireland, and the Reim-Riogra, or Book of Reigns, which exactly notes down

the number of years each of these monarchs governed. From these records principally, are almost all the other books and annals of the kingdom taken, with the genealogies of families. It is by their means that the Irish are enabled to trace their pedigrees, so much higher than other nations, and that, as Camden himself acknowle[d]ges, “The antiquities of every & other nation compared to that of Ireland, is but as if of yesterday!” This unexampled protection afforded to letters, and care of their history and antiquities, made the Irish deem all the neighbouring states barbarous. In the life of St. Fiacre in the seventh century, on meeting his countryman St. Chilian in France, he thus addresses him. — “Quid te charissime frater, ad has barbaras gentes [xvii] gentes deduxit?” No wonder then if a people who traced their pedigrees from the Scythians and the Egyptians, the noblest races of antiquity, should glory in their ancestry, and look down with condescension and pity on the pretensions of other nations! If the histories of Britain, Gaul, and Germany cannot be traced higher than the fifth century, and that, beyond this æra, no traces, even of their princes, can be found, how absurd then attempting to carry the pedigrees of private families higher? But, in Ireland, not only the blood royal, but the genealogies of the entire Milesian race, have been carefully preserved, with the numbers of saints and illustrious men their principal families produced. It could not, from the nature of the constitution, be possibly otherwise, since rank and subordination depended on it. This reminds me of an anecdote that happened soon after the late war in Germany. The prince of Saxe Hilburghausen, being one day, in a large circle, descanting on the high antiquity of his house, and that his ancestors were dukes in the reign of Charlemagne, general O’Donnel (descended from Niall the Grand, monarch of Ireland in the fourth century) fatigued with his vanity, coolly answered, Mon prince, vous etez bien heureux d’avoir atre né en Allemagne — si vous etiez chez moi, à peine auriez vous, le droit de b[o]urgeois!”

[xviii]

The very names of territories, rivers, lakes, and mountains, and even the surnames of families, allude to different periods of our history. None durst impose arbitrary names on places or people. They were first to be proposed by the antiquarians, and approved of by the national representatives—at least by the literati—and these names, and the reasons why they were imposed, were entered into the national records. From these it is, that, even at this day, we know, for instance, why from Ealgnait, or Ealga, wife to Partholan, the first invader of Ireland, the country got the name of Inis-Ealga, or Ealga’s island; and that after her children different lakes and mountains were called. The names of almost all the territories, rivers, and lakes, through the kingdom, are, in like manner, explained by our history, As to surnames, when first assumed in Ireland, they were not arbitrarily imposed, but with great taste and judgment, were directed to be taken from some illustrious ancestor belonging to the family, to which the epithets O’ or Mac was to be prefixed, which implied the son or successor of such a man. Can the Greeks or Romans bring such proofs of the authenticity of their histories and antiquities? Had they men set apart, endowed with uncommon privileges and immunities, to attend to these great objects; and were their different accounts examined, from time to time, by [xix] committees of the national assemblies? Josephus, in his Discourse against Apion, upbraids the Greeks for their shameful ignorance of early history and chronology, and accounts for it by observing, that they kept not public registers, nor had they hereditary antiquarians to superintend this department.— “Not so, says he, with the Phœnicians, the Chaldeans, and with us (the Jews), who have, from remote antiquity, *by means of registers, and the care of persons particularly appointed to this office*, preserved our histories beyond all other nations.” May not this retort of Josephus on the Greeks be, with equal propriety, applied by the Irish to the enemies of their high antiquity — *the only thing they have now left to boast of!*— And is it not a strong defence of our history after the same manner preserved? What authorities had Livy to ground his early history on? It is true, some mention is made of Pictor and Piso, and of registers kept by the high priests; but does not Livy himself confess, that almot all of these were

destroyed by the Gauls, in their sacking of Rome, and by others? and yet, who doubts the veracity of this history, because some records must have undoubtedly remained? If we find the genealogies of our princes noted in the different reigns, is not the same method observed in the Bible, the historical parts of which were preserved by persons set apart for that office? Our princes appeared in battle with crowns of [xx] gold on their heads; and such was the established custom among the Jews.* In the battle of Muirtheimne, fought before the Incarnation, in that of Magh-Lena, in other subsequent ones, to the death of Ceallachan and Brian-Boirumhe, it was usual for a prince or great commander to lament, in extempore odes, the loss of heroes slain in battle. Instances of this we frequently meet with, and yet the custom was not peculiar to Ireland, since we find it observed by the Jews also. Thus David makes a song of lamentation for the deaths of Saul and Jonathan!†

* 2 Samuel, chap. i. ver. 10. 1 Chron, chap. xx, ver. 2, &c. † 2 Samuel, chap. i, ver, 17, &c.

Too much pains cannot certainly be taken to prove the veracity of our history, and the certainty of our chronology; since both are capable of throwing such new and interesting lights on history and antiquity; and whilst I become thus a professed advocate in the cause of my country, I persuade myself that *I am pleading the cause of letters in general*. To pass by the sunshine which our history throws on that of the early Greeks, and other neighbouring nations, were we to consider that it is the only key to the Greek and Roman accounts of the religion, laws, and customs of the ancient Celts, that alone should intitle it to the particular attention of the literati of Europe. Cæsar's account of the constitution of Gaul, and [xxi] the Druidical order*, are only reconcileable to reason and truth by recurring to Irish history; the Samnothei, and other orders of religious among the Celts, are, in like manner, elucidated by applying to the same pure fountain. But of all these matters I have already sufficiently descanted in the first part of my *Introduction to Irish History*. The moment the Romans could acquire any certain knowle[d]ge of Ireland, (which was in the days of Agricola) that moment they proclaimed its power and consequence. Tacitus tells us,† that her ports were then more resorted to by foreign merchants than those of Britain, By his relation the Romans seemed well acquainted with its value, and the great advantages they should derive by its acquisition, He even expressly declares the impossibility of keeping Britain in due obedience to Rome without the reduction of Ireland, the country which supplied the malcontents with the means of revolting on every occasion. From that period, to the dereliction of Britain, we shall behold Ireland the very soul of all the confederacies formed there against Rome.

* Commentar. lib. vi. 9 Vita Julii Agricol. |

Though Ireland constantly braved the power of Rome, yet we see, so early as the year 431, Palladius sent by pope Celestin as apostle— “to the Scots believing in Christ” Tor so were the Irish then, and for many centuries [xx] after, called. The next year he consecrated Magonius, well versed in the Irish language, for that mission; and to add greater dignity to this embassy he created him a PATRICIAN—for a title, not a name, it undoubtedly was. Need it be told that this was an institution of Constantine the Great, much more honourable than that of the patricii of heathen Rome; and that several Kings of France afterwards gloried in the title! Thus Ireland, exempt from Roman power, had Palladius, and after him Magonius, or, as he is generally called, Patrick, sent to Ireland early in the fifth century; whereas Britain, so long a Roman province, did not receive Augustine for a century and an half after! Long before this period our writers notice numbers of : Irish Christians labouring to spread its tenets through the neighbouring states; and, soon after, all Europe proclaimed the erudition and piety of her sons, insomuch, that through them, the the nation, by universal consent, got the glorious and unexampled titles of INSULA SANCTORUM ET DOCTORUM! It was not enough that they sent their missionaries, and of the purest blood in the kingdom, to instruct, in letters and Christianity, the (then) barbarous circumjacent nations, but they opened for them colleges in different parts of the kingdom, on so

extensive and generous a plan, that not only (says the Venerable Bede) were these strangers supplied with meat, drink, and lodging, but [xxiii] even with BOOKS gratis.* They were, at this time, eminent in sculpture, painting and music, and possessed the sciences in an exalted degree! Could they have borrowed these from Rome? They had little connection with her. Would not the technical terms in arts and sciences savour of the country from whence they acquired them? They are all pure native Irish! But if the Romans gave arts and sciences to the Irish, why did they with-hold them from the rest of Europe? Or why pitch on a people, as the conveyancers of them, so remote, and with whom they had no friendly correspondence? The truth is, Rome had not those arts and sciences, in an eminent degree, at this time; and the inundations of different enemies pouring into the empire will explain it.

* Histor, Eccles. Brit, lib. iii. cap. 27.

If then Ireland, in these early days of Christianity, became so renowned for arts and sciences, that when a lettered man of Britain, or of the continent, was for any time absent, it became a common proverb—*Amandatus est ad disciplinam in Hiberni* Is it not a strong presumptive proof that she must have possessed them before this period, even though our histories had been silent on this head, which we see was not the case? But the truth is, our history is the only means left to [xxiv] arrive at any tolerable knowle[d]ge of the ancient state of Europe, and the true commentary to the Greek and Roman accounts of it. Modern visionaries tell us, that all Europe was in a slate of barbarity till reclaimed. and civilized by the Romans; and yet the early Greek writers confess, that from the Celts they borrowed many things, both in theology and philosophy, and even adopted the very terms of those people! Cæsar, from his own knowle[d]ge, proclaims the flourishing state of letters in Gaul, and the great immunities enjoyed by its literati. As much have the moderns been in the dark with respect to the feudal government that prevailed over Europe. They have represented it as a barbarous custom, which originated after the destruction of the Roman empire; but it was certainly far removed from this. By the feudal constitution, places, honours, and employments were hereditary. In certain families, and the knowle[d]ge of these ranks could only be preserved by letters. What government could bid fairer for durability than where subordination wae established? and had we wanted other instances, the Irish history would sufficiently prove this; where we behold it to flourish from the reign of Heber to the decline of the twelfth century, including a space of 2437 years; and it continued in Thomond, and in parts of Conaught and Ulster to near the middle of [xxv] of the last age. What a contrast between it and that of ancient Rome under her emperors! There we behold often the vilest of the people, without regard to blood or rank, raised to the purple! What were the consequences? Intrigues, conspiracies, proscriptions, destruction of all subordination, and, in a short time, a final period put to the most powerful and extensive government in the world!

The feudal system, to demonstration, was neither barbarous nor impolitic: it was revived on the continent after the annihilation of Roman tyranny; and this furnishes us with a strong proof how little the Celtæ were improved by the Romans, since neither their laws or customs were adopted by any of the nations subdued by them, which shews in what an abject state they were held. But though they endeavoured to re-establish that mode of government which their ancestors enjoyed in happier days, yet the destruction of their annals and literary foundations, made it impossible for them to bring it to that perfection, in which it flourished among a people unacquainted with such hardships. Such was the Irish nation! Here feudal government flourished in full lustre, and arts and sciences were eminently protected. The crown was hereditary as to blood, but elective as to the person; and this nomination was confined to the chiefs of the people. No female could be [xxvi] vested with supreme command; and the issue of the female line had no pretensions to the succession. Public employments of every kind were hereditary in families; and no overt act of the present possessor could injure the claims of his successors. People were set apart to attend

to the genealogies and exploits of different great families, whilst an higher order took care of the actions and pedigrees of the blood royal. The literati preceded the nobility, and preserved always those privileges and immunities which Cæsar tells us the literati of Gaul possessed in his days.

On the revival of letters on the continent, and the establishment of schools, we read that doctors in different sciences disputed *even with the equestrian order* for precedence, and it was in many instances granted to them. Has not this a manifest allusion to earlier periods? About this time, the kings of France and emperors of Germany received the equestrian order before their coronations, and in Ireland a prince was incapable of command, who had not been entered into the military school at seven years old, and received the Gradh-Gaoisge, an order of knighthood, at eighteen! Though it be universally agreed on, that the equestrian orders of Celtic Europe were not taken from the Romans, yet writers are by no means in accord as to their origin, some dating them from the Crusades, others from an earlier period; but all in unison, that their commencement was after the destruction of Rome. [xxvii] However, Cæsar is positive that they flourished in Gaul in his days; and three hundred years earlier Manlius got the surname Torquatus, from wearing the gold Torques of a Gaulish knight, whom he had killed in battle, and which our Irish knights, by public decree many centuries prior to this epocha, constantly wore!

Thus the laws and customs which prevailed in Europe in the middle ages, and which in some instances operate at this day, have a manifest allusion to remoter periods; and the accounts which Cæsar and Tacitus have given, prove they have. But where shall we look for an elucidation of subjects so interesting? not amongst succeeding Roman writers; this people so much venerated in modern days have destroyed every other vestige of Celtic civilization! But Ireland, free from the incursions of that rapacious and oppressive people only can illustrate by her history, their relations, and rescue the credit of Cæsar as a writer, from the specious objections of moderns. He says, that the letters and religion of the Gauls came from Britain, or more properly the British isles [De Bello Gallico, lib. vi. cap. 13, 14] and that in every thing but their Druid mysteries, they used a Greek letter. But most moderns, as if better acquainted with these matters than a living: witness, affirm, that letters must have been rather brought [xxviii] from the continent to the British isles; though to prove the truth of the reverse we see Cæsar affirm, that, even in his own days, such as chose to excel in letters, repaired hither for farther improvement! But, say moderns, in the days of Cæsar, Britain did not make a figure in letters sufficient to justify his assertion; granted: yet we are not rashly to conclude that he advanced a falshood; we should rather look for an explanation of the matter. Now Ireland and Britain from the earliest times, have been called the British Isles, so that the word Britannia may be as well taken for Ireland; and if its history explains and justifies every thing advanced by Cæsar relative to this matter, why attempt totally to reject such authority? That it does, upon a careful investigation of the matter, cannot be controverted.

[Introduction to Irish History, part i. chap. 2, 3.]

Besides, we see how satisfactorily our annals account for what he says of the Gaulish letter being Greek; as it appears that to our ancestors the Greeks were indebted for their alphabet. Thus Cæsar is in accord with Irish writers, that the learning and religion of the ancient Celts came from Ireland; and to prove this, our history is the clearest comment upon what he and other ancients have advanced on the subject. And as on the revival of letters it is universally confessed, that Ireland was then the grand emporium of learning, we [xxix] may safely presume that had the continental annals of remoter days been preserved, they would confirm her claim, in as fulla manner, Thus, Lucian tells us, that Hercules amongst the Gauls, was represented as an old man with a bald head and long white beard; that through his tongue were several fine gold

wires, which were again fixed to the ears of the people, who seemed to follow him with pleasure. That by this they represented the powers of eloquence, not of strength; and on this account they called him Hercules *Ogmios*. Now when the reader shall be informed, that Ogham was the name of the ancient Irish hieroglyphic character, (and probably of the Gaulish too, the figure of which is exhibited in the present work), he will at once account for the Gauls calling their Hercules *Ogmios*. Again, Florus in his relation of the Allobrogian war, tells us, that amongst the captives who graced the triumph, Bituitus appeared in his silver chariot, and his arms of *different colours*, such as he fought with [Lib. iii. cap. 2]. That the equestrian order in Ireland fought in chariots in early days our annals, testify: that they did so in Gaul, Pausanius and Cæsar declare; and these chariots were highly ornamented with gold, silver, and precious stones. But what can Florus mean by the *discoloribus armis* of Bituitus? Metals were early [xxx] worked here to great perfection; and they took uncommon pains to ornament and enrich their arms. In the reign of the monarch Fochaidh, A.M. 2969, the art of staining swords and javelins, &c. of different colours, was first invented and brought into use, for which reason he was surnamed Faobhar-glass, or of the Green Edge, because his weapons were mostly of this colour!

Having endeavoured, to remove from the mind of the candid and learned reader, those prejudices which malevolence and ignorance have so long thrown on the annals of Ireland, it remains that I should explain, why an history *so highly interesting to letters*, should not only be so little known, but be also so shockingly misrepresented to all Europe. Amongst the ancients, Strabo, Pomponius Mela, and Julius Solinus, have drawn horrible pictures of the manners and customs of the Irish nation. But these same writers are in accord, that the country was as bleak and inhospitable, as the people were savage and barbarous; so that their total ignorance of the nature of the climate, is the best apology for their misrepresentation of its inhabitants. Besides, Ireland was then, and always continued, the avowed enemy to Rome; no wonder then, that her writers should regard her with an inimical eye.

At a very early period Christianity made a rapid progress in Ireland; and on the arrival of Magonius, (or as he is generally called, Patrick, he found an hierarchy [xxxii] established, which for a time seemed very unwilling to acknowledge his superiority. I strongly suspect that by Asiatic or African missionaries, or through them by Spanish ones, were our ancestors first instructed in Christianity, because their connections by trade were greater with these than the Romans; and because they rigidly adhered to their customs, *as to tonsure, and the time of celebrating of Easter*, I know some have advanced, that in these matters of discipline, the Irish differed from the Asiatics; but without attempting to examine farther into this matter, so uninteresting to the public, it is at least evident, that in these customs they differed from Rome, and that for more than two centuries after the death of St. Patrick, though in matters of doctrine and faith, both were in the most perfect unison! Add to this, that the Irish church preserved privileges and immunities peculiar to itself. Archbishops and bishops were appointed without consulting Rome; bishops were multiplied at the wills of the metropolitans; they consecrated bishops for foreign missions, and these missionaries, in many instances of discipline, opposed the mandates of Rome; as Columba in Scotland, Finian and Colman in England, Collumbanus, in France, St. Gall in Germany, &c. For more than five centuries after the death of St. Patrick, we scarce trace any vestiges of a correspondence between Rome and Ireland, and in this interval, in many instances, we find Rome looked upon several of our missionaries with a jealous eye.

[xxxii]

Though these great immunities of the Irish church, were of the utmost consequence in the cause of Christianity, and contributed to spread its doctrine in a most rapid manner, particularly in North Britain, amongst the British Saxons, the Gauls, and the Germans, yet in the eleventh.

century, when paganism was totally abolished, these powers seemed too great, and to endanger the peace of the church. The Irish themselves were highly sensible of this; and councils and synods were held from time to time, in order to bring the church of Ireland to the same subordination to Rome, as those of every other part of Europe.

In the beginning, of the twelfth century, the Irish archbishops made a surrender of their exclusive privileges to Rome; and measures were taking to prevail on the Princes and nobility to give up their right of nomination to archbishops and bishops. St. Malachie, archbishop of Ardmagh, was a flaming advocate for papal power. In 1139, he took a journey to Rome, to consult with Innocent II. then sovereign pontiff, on the speediest means of forming a solid union between Rome and Ireland. He was received with marks of particular reverence, and, after some delay, was dismissed with instructions to prevail on the heads of the nation to surrender their different rights of nomination to bishops, into the hands of his holiness, and his successors, as the archbishops had already done their power of consecrating of bishops at will; and the better to bring [xxxiii] about this reformation he was appointed legate. Malachie was indefatigable in his endeavours to bring about this change (says his biographer St. Bernard), and succeeded so far, that in 1148, he prepared with ample powers for a new journey to Rome, to acknowledge her supremacy in spirituals, in the name of the kingdom, and to demand palliums for the Irish archbishops, but he died at Clareval in his way to Rome, in the arms of St. Bernard. On the death of Malachie, Christian bishop of Lismore, being appointed legate in 1150, repaired to Rome on the same embassy; and the following year pope Eugene sent cardinal Paperon to Ireland, to distribute palliums to the four archbishops, as a manifestation of the lasting union between Rome and Ireland. In 1152, the cardinal presented the palliums, in the presence of the monarch, the princes, and twenty-two bishops, besides five bishops elect, and numbers of abbots and dignified clergy; in the abbey of Kells, in Meath, with great pomp and splendour,

Four years after acts so solemn and public, the reader will no doubt be astonished, to behold a bull of Adrian IV. at the request of Henry II. of England, granting to him the sovereignty of Ireland, on conditions, that he extirpates vice, and establishes true piety, church discipline, and wholesome laws, amongst that uninformed people; and that he causes a penny to be paid annually [xxxiv] out of every house, He will be more so, when he finds this bull confirmed by his successor Alexander III. in which the Irish nation are styled barbarians, and Christians only in name! No wonder then that *bulls*, which were not dictated by the spirit of truth, granted to a Prince who seemed to be the least formed in the world for an ecclesiastical champion, and which made religion a pretence, to promote temporal interests, should have been at all times, even to this day, regarded by pious Irishmen as spurious. They were however published by Henry, in the life-time of Alexander, and soon after complained of by the Irish to his legate in Ireland, cardinal Vivian; they were printed by Baronius and other Roman writers, and the least doubt cannot remain of their authenticity!

But how account for proceedings so arbitrary, so unjust, and so unchristian? As these bulls are made the basis of all the charges so degrading to truth and to Ireland, we will endeavour to account for them, On the death of Malachie, St. Bernard, charmed with his piety and sanctity, set about writing his life. He informed himself minutely of the particular privileges of the Irish church; and being entirely devoted to Rome, the greater these appeared, the more severely he inveighed against them, The power of consecrating and appointing bishops to new sees, he declared to be new and [xxxv] unheard-of; and the custom of preserving episcopacy hereditary in families, he pronounced to be *truly diabolical!* Hence, (said he), that corruption of manners, and relaxation of church discipline! But neither custom was new or wicked, since both existed from the days of St. Patrick, and both were sanctified by Rome! They continued in full vigour from his days, to the middle of the ninth century, during which period, Ireland, by the consent of all Europe, enjoyed the unrivalled title of *Insula Sanctorum!* They remained so to near the middle of the twelfth age, when Bernard declared them diabolical innovations! Not only were

the consequences, which he draws from these privileges, false in themselves, but we see these very privileges entirely relinquished at the time he wrote this life! Nor was there at that time a nation in Europe farther removed from irreligion and barbarity than the Irish. Of this Cambrensis himself soon after gives us a remarkable instance.* Astonished at the outrages and excesses committed *by his countrymen*, he tells us, the clergy of Leth Cuin held a synod at Ardmagh in 1170, to enquire what unexampled crimes the nation had committed against heaven, ‘to bring on it so terrible a scourge as the present?’ after grave deliberation they concluded, [xxxvi] that God permitted this judgment to fall on them, for the shameful custom so long established, of purchasing from the English their children and relations, and *thus converting Christians to slaves!* Without commenting on so puerile a reason, which from pious ecclesiastics, unacquainted with the ways of the world, may pass; I only introduce it here to proclaim the innocence of the people, and their own clergy, who must be best acquainted with their vices and follies, could find no greater crime to charge them with!

* Hibern, Expugn. lib, i. cap. 34.

Pope Adrian was by birth an Englishman. It was a flattering circumstance to be solicited [sic] by an aspiring young prince, (as Henry was *in his days*), for the donation of a kingdom, which cost him nothing; and it was besides a full acknowledg[ement] of the power assumed by Rome, of disposing of kingdoms and empires at pleasure. The charges made by Bernard on the Irish nation, were made the pretences for this donation, though we see: they could not then have a possibility of existence; and one would be tempted to think that the ministers of Alexander, had also consulted Strabo, Mela, and Solinus, to glean materials for his bull! Soon after the publication of these bulls, Cambrensis, bishop of St. David’s, attended the son of Henry II. to Ireland, and was employed to write some account of the country, He could only hope to make his court to his [xxxvii] master, and to Rome, by villifying [sic] and misrepresenting the nation; and when popes and sovereign princes had set the example, we could not expect, that a simple bishop, deeply interested in the same cause, (for many of his relations were amongst the new adventurers), would presume to more virtue than his betters! The works of this writer had for centuries remained in the oblivion they so justly merited, till the year 1602, when Camden caused them to be printed at Frankfort, by which means his calumnies were spread over all Europe. But they did not pass uncensured; and the learned Dr. Lynch, archdeacon of Tuam, under the title of Cambrensis Eversus, published a work, in which the ignorance, malevolence, and misrepresentations-of this writer are so fully exposed, that he is since, by masters of the subject, never quoted as authority to be relied on. The refutation of this work, in which all the calumnies that had ever been published against Ireland, were collected in the strongest point of view, and in an animated style, one should think ought to be deemed the fullest vindication of the country; and yet this writer, whose want of integrity and candour has been so clearly proved, is one of the principal evidences produced by ill-intentioned, and worse informed moderns!

The candid reader may perhaps think I have taken too much pains in thus tracing to their true sources, the [xxxviii] causes by which this nation has been so unexampledly traduced, and misrepresented: to all Europe; but as our annals, properly considered, appear to me so highly interesting to letters, it seemed of the utmost consequence to remove the most distant appearance of doubt, as to their authenticity. And now for some account of the present work.

Though few possess a greater affection and veneration for their native country, or have taken more pains to be early instructed in its history and antiquities, than I have in these of mine, yet I little thought that this knowle[d]ge would one day or another engage me to draw my pen in its defence. So far from it, that, I will ingenuously confess, that my natural disposition was totally averse to such pursuits; but, as the poet has it:

Si natura negat, facit indignatio versus!

The duty I owed to MY MUCH NEGLECTED AND MUCH INJURED COUNTRY, superseded every other consideration, and determined me to publish an *Introduction to Irish History*. This work met with a more favourable reception than I durst have flattered myself with, not only in Britain and Ireland, but on the Continent; and the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles Let[t]res at Paris, have expressed their approbation of it, in terms highly honourable to the [xxxix] author. Here I had resolved that my historical researches should end, but I found myself mistaken. Since that period other writings on the same subject appeared, in which ancient history, and modern hypothesis, are strangely assimilated. It appeared to me, that if some generous attempt at a *General History of Ireland* was not *speedily* undertaken, the annals of our country, *so important to letters*, would be lost for ever; as, at this day, few are found hardy enough to explore a subject so little countenanced and so long neglected, But who bold enough to engage in so arduous a task? That I have attempted; but could I have foreseen the tenth part of the labours and difficulties I had to encounter, in all probability it would never have appeared!

In pursuing this work I have by no means considered myself intitled (as most moderns have) to obtrude my own opinions in the teeth of antiquity, or to take infinitely more pains to contradict or explain away the sense of ancient authors, than to elucidate passages, liable to doubts or difficulties, in them. It is for this reason that, in treating of the Irish colonies antecedent to the arrival of the Milesians, I have not once hinted that they were British emigrants, because my authorities affirm the contrary. This necessarily led me into a defence of ancient history, and an enquiry into the state of ancient navigation, It is admitted, that in the fine arts, as | well [xxxix] well as in most departments of science, the ancients, if they did not excel, at least equalled the most celebrated moderns. Not only sacred, but early profane history, proclaims the ancient state of navigation and commerce; yet because it is not quite clear that they applied the use of the magnet to navigation our moderns will allow them but coasting voyages. Hence the source of the modern system of population, so subversive of truth, and so prejudicial to ancient history! We have lost the art of making glass malleable; and but lately the art of staining glass has been revived, yet no one doubts the existence of both formerly. Printing, gunpowder, and the use of the magnet in navigation, are said to have been known to the Chinese from the earliest periods, though to us modern discoveries; and as it is certain that many properties of the magnet were well understood by the ancients, we should suppose that its property of pointing to the north could not be overlooked. In a word, we would look much more modest and sensible in endeavouring to illustrate and defend ancient historians (except in things impossible or highly improbable) than in boldly contradicting (and that from reasons which probably then could not have existed) what they have asserted for truths. And this enquiry has enabled me to throw fuller and clearer lights on the ancient British colonies, and their very early history, than all the writers who have preceded me, united.

[xli]

As to the particular voyages of our early ancestors, so carefully handed down from age to age, even to this day, there appeared to me nothing either improbable or impossible in them. I carefully examined the mutilated accounts, left us in the early histories of the nations which they then passed through, and have found new and unexpected lights thrown on them, and these have supplied me with further proofs in defence of ancient history.

As to the domestic part of our history, I have left nothing unessayed to gain every intelligence and every information on this head. Besides the numerous MSS. in my possession, and copies of whatever had appeared in print on the subject, I, both by letters to particulars, and by repeated advertisements in the Dublin papers, requested that such as were possessed of Irish MSS. would send the titles of them to Messrs. Bonfield and Young, merchants; and that such as were wanted, would be purchased, or ample securities given for their safe return. With concern I mention, that neither my private solicitations, nor these public applications, were attended with

great success; but I am happy, on this occasion, to return public thanks to my gallant countryman, and learned friend, James Aylmer, Esq. colonel of the regiment of Ultonia, in the service of Spain, for several curious and interesting remarks, Gratitude [] also calls upon me to acknowledge particular obligations to him, as he not only first recommended me to publish this work by subscription, but even procured for me above an hundred subscribers for it in Spain. To my learned friend Doctor Mac Kenna, titular bishop of Cloyne, and a successor worthy the great Doctor O'Brien, I am indebted for a copy of the Leabhar-Lecan, faithfully transcribed from the original in the Irish college at Paris. Doctor O'Cullinan, a clergyman, of great erudition, residing at Mallow, has favoured me with a correct copy of the Reim-Rigra of Giolla-Caomhain, and of its continuation, by Giolla-Moduda. I am obliged to this gentleman also, for several interesting letters on Irish antiquities. As to the rest, whatever other MSS. are quoted in this work, are of my own procuring.

In treating of every particular reign, I have examined whatever had been advanced by different writers, either in print or manuscript, on the subject. Even Routh [Rothe]; Usher, Ward, Colgan, and other ecclesiastical writers, were explored for information; and have rejected whatever seemed improbable or ill-founded; Frequent mention is made, in early days of invasions from Africa, and of transactions between our ancestors and these people. As no other people of Africa but the Carthaginians, were a maritime or commercial people, I [xlili] began to suspect that these were the very Fomharaigs so often spoken of, I consulted their history, compared the æras in question, and satisfied myself, as I hope I shall the public, that my suspicions were well grounded. This explained and justified the extent of our early commerce, the improvements in arts and manufactures, the working of our mines of copper, lead, and iron, the great riches of the country, and the sources from whence they flowed! Besides their extensive commerce, for which the Carthaginians were so renowned, it is a known fact, that, in their wars with the Romans; they hired mercenaries, not only in Iberia and Gaul, but drew troops from the Atlantic isles. To illustrate. this, we find mention made of the Fine-Fomharaig, or African legions, in our early records, who, I take for granted, to be Irish troops consigned to that service; and for this reason, that our bands in Gaul were called Fine-Gall, as, in a subsequent period, those in Scotland were called Fine-Albin, just as the Romans denominated their legions after the countries in which they served. But, to shew that there is something more than conjecture in what is here advanced, it evidently appears, that Carthaginian swords, found near the plains of Canna, and ancient Irish swords, so frequently met with, are, as to shape, size, and mixture of metals, so exactly similar, that the assay master of the mint, [xliv] who examined both, pronounced that they were cast in the same chauldron!* To this let me add, that the Psalter of Cashill positively asserts, that Eochaidh, king of Munster, and afterwards monarch of Ireland, invaded Greece with a large fleet; and this answers to the time of the famous sea-fight between the Carthaginians and Phocians. Our annals note the time that Joughaine the Great entered the Mediteranean with a powerful fleet, and it. exactly accords with the period in which Hannibal, the son of Sisco, invaded Sicily. That they also aided the Gauls, in their invasions of Greece and Italy, will appear certain. In Gaul, but more particularly in Britain, they acted a most conspicuous part against the Romans; so much so; that the Roman relations of these tranfactions, in many instances, become only reconcilable [sic] to reason and truth by the aid of our history. Their accounts of the invasions of Gaul in the fourth and fifth centuries, and the ery progrefs: of these invaders, and their Gallic associates, till they (the Romans) were finally expelled the country, agrees so exactly with our relations of the incursions of Criomthan, Niall, and Dalthi, successive monarchs in this period, that the reader must be struck wan the lights which n history throws on the other!

* Governor Pownal's Account of some Irish Antiquities, read before the Antiquarian Society, Feb. 10, 1774, and afterwards published.

The ruin of the Roman empire gave peace to Europe; and, from this period, all our extramarine expeditions ceased. Ireland, however, on this occasion, exhibited an appearance, if possible, more glorious than the former, in labouring to establish arts, sciences, and piety where she had already *liberty*. Her missionaries crowded [sic] in shoals to Britain, Gaul, and Germany, and by their prayers and exhortations, but much more by their examples, converted thousands! These were not persons of mean birth or small capacities, but of the purest blood and clearest heads in the kingdom. They retired to the most sequestered and least cultivated parts of Britain and Gaul, They reclaimed and cultivated the land, lived by the produce of their own labour, and shared with the adjoining poor the surplus. Their diet was plain and simple, and their beverage the next limpid stream, They opened schools for the instruction of the people, and every hour was devoted to one pious duty or another! Bede is an unexceptionable witness of their zeal, piety, and charity, in Britain; and the Gallic records prove them not less so in Gaul. “Thro’ the labour of their hands (says Mezeray) frightful and uncultivated deserts became soon converted to most agreeable retreats; and the Almighty seemed particularly to favour ground cultivated by such pure and disinterested hands. Shall I mention (adds he) [xlvi] that to their care we are indebted for what remains of the the history of those days” ! Such are the people who have been painted by Hume, and others of his stamp, as a disgrace to Christendom, as a dishonour to humanity!

From this period, to the ninth century, Ireland was deemed, by universal consent, *the Athens of Europe*. Her schools and universities were opened for all the world, and from every part of Europe were they resorted to. Their beneficence was not confined to instruction; “They supplied these strangers (says Venerable Bede) not only with meat, drink, cloaths, and lodging, but *even with books, gratis*” The fame of the university of Lismore alone must shew what must be the case of the other universities of Ireland, and which I have taken from Bonaventura Moronus, † a Tarentin born, in the first Book of his *Cataldiados, or Life of our St. Cataldus, bishop of Tarentum, in Italy*

Undique conveniunt proceres, quos dulce trahebat,
 Discendi studium, major num cognita virtus
 An laudata foret. Celeres vastissima Rheni
 Jam vada Teutonici, jam deseruere Sicambri:
 Mittit ab extremo Gelidos Aquilone Boëmos:
 Albi & Averni coëunt, Batavique frequentes,
 Et quicumque colunt altà sub rupe Gebenas.

* Histoire de France, tom. i. p. 118.

† Usserii de Britan. Eccles. Prim. p. 755| |; 4

[xlvii]

Non omnes prospectat Arar, Rhodanique fluenta
 Helvetios multos desiderat ultima Thule.
 Certatim hi properant diverso tramite, ad urbem
 Lismoriam, juvenis primos ubi transigit annos.

The depredations of the Danes highly injured; but did not destroy letters among us. They could not, because the entire kingdom was at no time under their absolute sway. Certain it is, that, among other excesses, many valuable works were destroyed by them, and others carried away. Application was made, in the late king’s reign, to the court of Denmark, for Irish manuscripts, but none could be found; and Dr. Warner thinks none were ever carried there.* But we have strong proofs to the contrary; for Lombard, archbishop of Ardmagh, who flourished in the days of Elizabeth and James I. tells us, that many volumes of Irish MSS were *then* in the royal library at Copenhagen: that the king of Denmark was so solicitous to have some of them translated, that, by his ambassador, he applied to Elizabeth to procure him some able Irishman for that

purpose. Donatus O'Daly, a learned antiquarian, confined at that time, for his religion, in the King's-Bench prison, was pitched upon for

[xlvi] this business; but, on a council being called, political reasons determined them to forbid it. Here we see a prelate of great learning and sanctity speak of this, as a public action well known to have happened in his own days. He also accuses English Governors of labouring to destroy, or carry away, every monument of antiquity to be come at; and he particularly names lord Grey, in the reign of Henry VIII. Sir Henry Sidney, Sir George Carew, &c. He also laments. the vast; numbers of Irish MSS, so long shut up in the Tower of London," and consigned to oblivion: "works (says he), if translated, would throw new and interesting lights on religion and letters!"

* Introduction to his History of Ireland. †Analect, . 562, 3, 4.

Whatever outrages were committed by the Danes, whatever injuries they had done to letters, were soon remedied by the attention and munificence of the immortal BRIAN BOIRIMHE, and by subsequent princes. To explore the true cause of the destruction, of our annals, and the shameful neglect of our history, we must look nearer home. From the first landing of Henry II. the English adopted a shameful policy, which was steadily pursued for many centuries. They laboured to represent the Irish nation, to all Europe, as 1 most barbarous and savage race of mortals; and, at the same time, they left nothing unattempted to get possession of as many of their records as they could, which they [xlix] either destroyed or conveyed to Britain. From age to age quantities of vellum MSS. were sent out of the kingdom: they still lie scattered in their different public libraries; but no attempt has been ever made to inform the public of their contents! In the reign of Elizabeth, of James I. of Charles I. and II. and even to the Revolution, hereditary antiquarians, poets, lawyers, and physicians, were every where to be found well versed in their different professions, and highly capable of translating into Latin the works in their different departments; yet no measure was taken to further these good ends! On the contrary, to write in favour of Ireland, or Irish affairs, was deemed a proof of enmity to Britain; and this is the reason that all the works which were published in her favour during that period, were printed in foreign countries. Yet it evidently appears, that the early history and antiquities of Britain, can only be satisfactorily explained, by recurring to the history and antiquities of Ireland. I have in a former work taken uncommon pains* to elucidate this matter, and I flatter myself that the present one will prove to demonstration, how deeply interested British antiquarians and historians are in the preservation of what remain of our scattered annals. In what lights they will consider my laborious researches I am [xlix] only to conjecture; but I think, that I may with some confidence affirm, that few have taken more trouble, and no one has been more successful 'in investigating the early history and antiquities of Britain than I.

* Introduction to Irish History, particularly part ii. chap. 8.

In every century, from the days of St. Patrick, I have given an account of the state of letters, and the different writers of Ireland. In this enquiry I did not trust to Harris, though a valuable performance,* much less to Nicholson;§ but carefully consulted not only Usher, Ward, Colgan, &c. but Dupin, Fleury, and other foreign writers. The reader will plainly see, that I did not impose this painful task on myself merely to shew the flourishing state of arts and sciences, in these days of *freedom and independence*, Objects of an higher nature actuated me: my wish to throw some further lights on the state of religion, laws, and letters in the middle ages!

* Writers of Ireland. § Irish Historical Library.

I have been obliged to put down the Irish quotations through this work, in English characters, as no Irish type was to be had in London; and this necessarily impels me to request the reader's

indulgence for some errors of the press, my situation rendering it absolutely impossible for me to attend to such matters. As I have touched on this subject, it is proper that I should: attempt to remove [li] the difficulties attendant on pronouncing the many Irish names which unavoidably occur in the course of this work. Our alphabet contains but seventeen letters, of which number five are vowels. The consonants are divided into mutables and immutables. The mutables are nine, six of which, by an adventitious H change their native sound, as B, C, M, P, S, T, whilst D, F, and G, by the addition of an H, yield scarce any sound. An H after a B, or M, causes them to sound like a V, as Abhran (avran), a song; amhas (avas), a soldier. The sound of C before an H, cannot be easily described, so it may be pronounced as it is read. An H after P, gives it the exact sound of an F; and after S and T, they sound as an H only. The other letters, viz. D, F, G, yield no sound. For instance, Seadhna a man's name, should be pronounced Seana, Lughadh, Lua, and so of words with F before H. The immutables or these consonants which in no instance lose their native sound, are L, N, and R. By observing these few rules, easily attainable, the mere English reader will find little difficulty in reading and pronouncing with tolerable ease to himself, Irish words as they occur.

However ambitious I have been to rescue my native history from the hands of ignorance, and to draw it forth from that oblivion, to which it had been so long [lii] and so shamefully consigned, yet I am not conscious in any single instance of aiming to do it, at the expence of truth. Of all the Scythic and Celtic states of ancient Europe, Ireland alone has preserved her history and antiquities pure and uncorrupted; and what renders them of more universal value, is, that they evidently appear to exhibit an epitome of those laws and customs, which then every where prevailed. If the works of Cæsar and Tacitus, are justly held in the highest estimation; and that more for the lights they throw on the manners and customs of the Britains, Gauls, and Germans, in their own days, than for their mere historic merit, which however is very high; how much more to be prized should not a work like the present be, which is not only the true comment on these writers, but also exposes the real state of Europe, from the remotest antiquity, even to the twelfth century? In confidence that it will be considered in so interesting a light, I offer it to the public.

A work upon so extensive a plan, in the most masterly hands, could hardly be expected to be perfect; how much less so, in those of a person, who can be only accountable for the talents which the Author of nature has given him; and whose vocation must, in many instances, prevent him from paying that close attention to style and [liii] and manner, which the reader may expect. For inaccuracies of this kind, when met with, he requests a favourable indulgence: for errors as an historian, he has none to expect.

Limeric, Jan. 12, 1778.

S. O' HALLORAN

[See also Vol. II at Internet Archive at:

<https://archive.org/details/ageneralhistory00ohagoog/page/n46/mode/2up?view=theater.>]