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Magnus MacLean

THE HEROIC AND OSSIANIC LITERATURE

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BY

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THE HEROIC AND OSSIANIC LITERATURE.

Ireland and Scotland had practically a common language and literature until the fall of the Lordship of the Isles and the time of the Reformation, and even after these events, the ebb of Irish influence was felt in our earliest printed works and in the style of orthography and of language adopted. This close connection existed at least a thousand years, for in the fourth century the Picts and Scots were united together against the Romans and their dependants. The colonising of Argyllshire by Irish settlers—Scots they were called—is placed in the beginning of the sixth century; it is believed that a previous wave of Gaelic Celts—the Caledonians—had over-run and then held lordship over the rest of the country, having mingled with the previous bronze-age Picts, whose language, at least, the Gaelic was rapidly extinguishing. Be this as it may, the Scots from Ireland were a cultured and literary colony, and Columba, with his priests, soon followed in their wake. The Irish *Fili*, or poet, again followed in the wake of culture and Christianity, carrying the tales and poems of his country among a kindred people, and doubtless receiving in turn whatever Albanic genius was able to add to the common stock of Goidelic literature. This went on for centuries, and Scotland was a second home for the Irish Culdee, and for the Irish poet and harper. "Even in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries," says Dr Sullivan, "the Irish poets and

musicians included Scotland in their circuit, and took refuge, and sought their fortune there. We shall mention one instance as it happens to be instructive in another way, that of Muireadhach O'Daly, better known on account of his long stay in Scotland as Muireadhach Albanach, or Muireach the Scotchman." This Muireach Albanach is believed to have been the ancestor of the Mac Vurrichs, hereditary bards to Clanranald, and one of them figures in the Ossianic controversy. The literary language remained Irish throughout, from the sixth to the sixteenth century, and our first printed book is couched in the Irish of its time, the sixteenth century. That work is Bishop Carswell's Gaelic Prayer-book. And it, as the famous Irish scholar O'Donovan said, "is pure Irish, and agrees with the Irish manuscripts of the same period in orthography, syntax, and idiom." The literature, equally with the language, was common to both countries; the mythic, heroic, and historic tales were the same, practically, in each country. But the end of the fifteenth century saw a change begun; a masterful policy was adopted towards the Highlands, and the Lordship of the Isles, the great bond between Ireland and Scotland, and indeed the great Gaelic headship of the country, was broken up. The Gaels of Scotland, thrown on their own resources, advanced their own dialect to the position of a literary language, and tried to discard the Irish orthography. The first effort in this line is the Dean of Lismore's Book, about 1512. Little, however, was done in the matter of writing down literary compositions, so that the next considerable MS. is that of Fernaig in 1688. At the same time the religious literature still appeared in the Irish form, such as Carswell's book, Kirke's works, and the Bible. A compromise was effected last century; the popular dialect became the literary language, as it ought, but the Irish orthography was adhered to still.

Scotland also dealt with the ballad and tale literature in much the same way. The purely popular part of the old Irish-Scottish literature was retained; the tales and ballads of Fionn and his heroes were almost the only survivors of the mighty literature of the middle and early ages. We see the change beginning in the Dean of Lismore's book; the favourite heroic ballads are those in regard to Fionn, but Cuchulinn is not neglected. Nevertheless, last century Macpherson could, without a word of protest from friend or foe, bring Cuchulinn and Fionn together as contemporaries; so much was Cuchulinn's real position in the Gaelic literary cycles unknown.

This pre-Reformation literature, common to both Ireland and

Scotland, may be called not old Gaelic literature, for Gaelic is ambiguous, but "Goidelic" literature. It is the literature of the Goidelic or Gaelic branch of the Celtic race, as opposed to the Brythonic branch—the Welsh, Cornish, and Breton. The Goidelic literature suffered sadly at the hands of time; first the monks gave it their peculiar twist in trying to eliminate paganism from it; then the unhappy history of the country of Ireland, with its continuous wars since the advent of the Norse in the eighth century onwards, checked the growth of literature, and much of it was thereafter lost in the social wars that lasted on to our own times; for at times it was dangerous even to possess an Irish MS. Goidelic literature is divisible into three cycles or groups. There is, first, the mythological cycle; this deals with the history and ethnology of Ireland and Scotland; second, the Cuchullin cycle; and, third, the Fionn or Ossianic cycle. The first cycle deals with the mythical history of Ireland; it was completely recast by the monks of the early middle ages. Consequently the Irish gods became merely earthly sovereigns, chiefs of an early race that seized on and colonised Ireland. Monkish manufacture begins Irish history before the flood, when the Lady Cesair took the island. But she and her company were drowned, all except Finntan, who survived the flood in a Druidic sleep and lived for generations to relate the tale. Several post-deluvian "takings" of the island then follow; but the outstanding invasions amount to four. These are, the Fir-bolgs, overcome by the Tuatha-De-Danann, both of whom were successively annoyed by the Fomorians or sea-rovers; and, lastly, came the Milesian or the real Gaelic Irish race. The Fir-bolg, Fomorians, and Tuatha-De-Danann fight with each other by means of Druidic arts mostly, and it is incontestably established that the Tuatha-De, as indeed the name shows, were the higher gods of the Gaels. The Fomorians were the gods of misrule and death; that is also clear. The Fir-bolg may have been earth-powers, or they may have been the pre-Celtic inhabitants; it is hard to say. When the Milesians arrived they found the Tuatha-De-Danann in possession; the Tuatha kept them at bay by Druid magic, but at last came to terms with the Milesians or Gaels, gave up Ireland to them, and themselves retired to the *Sids* or fairy mounds, and to the Land of Promise, from which places they still watched and tended the actions of men. Now these facts, such as they are, appear in sober chronological order in the Irish annals, with minute details and genealogies. The Tuatha-De came to Ireland in the year 1900 B.C., and the Milesians in 1700. Such is the

mythological cycle. Now we pass over close on 1700 years, for all of which, however, Irish history finds kings and minute details of genealogies. A few years before our era there was a Queen over Connaught named Meave (Medb), whose consort and husband was Ailill. He was a weak and foolish man, and she was a masterful woman, very beautiful, but not very good. Some tales make her half divine — that a fairy or Sidé was her mother. This Ailill was her third husband. She had been married to Conchobar Mac Nessa, King of Ulster, but they mutually divorced each other The reign and rule of Conchobar is the golden age of Irish romance; it is in fact the "Cuchulinn" cycle. It was in his reign, that the third of the Sorrowful Tales of Erin was enacted. The first concerned the children of Lir, a prince of the Tuatha-De, whose children were enchanted by their stepmother, and became swans, suffering untold woes for ages, until their spells were broken under Christian dispensation. The second sorrowful tale had, as its theme, the children of Turenn, whom Luga, prince of the Tuatha-Dè, the sun god, persecuted and made to undergo all sorts of toils and dangers. The third tale concerns the reign of Conchobar, not the age of the gods. The subject of it is the woes of Deirdre, well known in both Scotland and Ireland. Deirdre was daughter of the bard Feidlimid, and, shortly before her birth, the Druid Cathbad prophesied that she should be the cause of woes unnumbered to Ulster. The warriors were for killing her, but Conchobar decided to bring her up to be his own wife, and evade the prophecy. She was kept apart in a *lis* (fortress), where she could not see a man until she should wed Conchobar. Her tutor and nurse alone saw her. The tutor was one day killing a calf in the snow, and a raven came, and was drinking the blood of the calf. Deirdre said to her nurse that she would like to have the man who would have the "three colours yonder on him; namely, his hair like the raven, his cheek like the blood, and his body like the snow." The nurse told her such a person was near enough—Nois, the son Uisnech. There were three brothers of them, Nois, Ardan, and Ainle, and they sang so sweetly that every human being who heard them were enchanted, and the cattle gave two-thirds additional milk. They were fleet as hounds in the chase, and the three together could defy a province. Deirdre managed to meet Nois and boldly proposed to him to fly with her. He refused at first, but she prevailed. He, his brothers, and their company fled with her. After wandering round all Erin, they were forced to come to Alba. They made

friends with the king of Alba and took service under him. But the king came to hear of Deirdre's beauty and he must have her. The men of Alba gathered against the brothers and they had to fly. Their flight was heard of in Erin, and Conchobar was pressed to receive them back. Fergus Mac Roich, Conchobar's stepfather, and Cormac, Conchobar's son, took the sons of Uisnech under their protection, and brought them to Ulster. Conchobar got some of his minions to draw Fergus and Cormac away from them, and then the sons of Uisnech were attacked, defenceless as they were, and were slain. Conchobar took Deirdre as his wife, but a year afterwards she killed herself, by striking her head against a rock, from grief for Nois and from Conchobar's cruelty.

The Scotch version of the tale differs from the Irish only in the ending. Deirdre and the sons of Uisnech were sailing on the sea; a fog came on and they accidentally put in under the walls of Conchobar's town. The three landed and left Deirdre on board; they met Conchobar and he slew them. Then Conchobar came down to the sea and invited Deirdre to land. She refused, unless he allowed her to go to the bodies of the sons of Uisnech:

"Gun taibhrinn mo thri poga meala
Do na tri corpa caomh geala."

On her way she met a carpenter slicing with a knife. She gave him her ring for the knife, went to the bodies, stretched herself beside them, and killed herself with the knife.

Macpherson's poem of Darthula opens with an invocation to the moon, and then we are introduced to the sons of Uisnech and Darthula, on the sea near *Cairbar's* camp, driven there by a storm, the night before their death. This brings us *in medias res*, as all true epics should do, and the foregoing part of the story is told in the speeches of Darthula and Nathos, a somewhat confusing dialogue, but doubtless "epic." These previous facts are, that Darthula is daughter of Colla. Cairbar, who usurped the Irish throne on the death of Cuchulinn, regent for young Cormac, and put Cormac to death, was in love with Darthula. Cuchulinn was uncle to the sons of Uisnech, and Nathos took command on his death, but had to fly, for the Irish army deserted him for Cairbar. On his way to Scotland he fell in with Darthula, and rescued her from Cairbar; they put out for Scotland, but were driven back. Cairbar met them and killed them with arrows, one of which pierced Darthula. Macpherson naively says: "The poem relates the death of Darthula differently from the common tradition. This account is the most probable, as suicide seems to

have been unknown in those early times, for no traces of it are found in the old poetry." Yet Boadicea, queen of the Iceni, committed suicide only fifty years later, to escape Roman tyranny and lust! The oldest Irish version is in a MS. written nearly 700 years ago, and the composition may be much older, yet there Deirdre unpoetically knocks out her brains, evidently because no weapon could be had. The Scotch version ends far more poetically than either Macpherson's or the Irish one.

Fergus Mac Roich and Cormac Conloingeas, son of Conchobar, who had taken the sons of Uisnech under their protection, took vengeance for the sons of Uisnech, as far as they could, and then withdrew to the court of Queen Meave. Fergus was there her chief counsellor and friend.

Now we come to Cuchulinn, son of Sualtam, "fortissmus heros Scotorum," as Tigernach says. Like all mythic and fairy-tale heroes, strange tales are told of his birth. Dechtine, sister of Conchobar, lost a foster-child of somewhat supernatural descent. On coming from the funeral she asked for a drink; she got it, and as she raised it to her lips a small insect sprang into her mouth with the drink. That night the god Luga of the Long Arms appeared to her and said that she had now conceived by him. As a result, she became pregnant. As she was unmarried, the scandal was great, but a weak-minded chief named Sualtam married her. She bore a son, and he was called Setanta, and this Setanta latterly got the name of Cuchulinn. The way Setanta got the name of Cuchulinn was this. Culand the smith invited Conchobar and his train to spend a night and a day in his house, and when closing the door for the night he asked Conchabar if he expected any more of his people to come. He did not. Culand then let loose his house dog and shut the door. But the boy Setanta came late and was set on by the furious animal. A severe fight took place, but Setanta killed the animal. The smith demanded *eric* for the dog and Setanta offered to watch the house until a pup of that dog should grow up. This he did, and hence got the name of Cu-chulaind, the dog of Culann.

This is evidently a myth founded on a popular etymology of Cuchulinn's name, and, though a smith, always a Druidic and mythic character, is introduced, it may have no further significance. Some of his youthful exploits are told. He prayed his mother to let him go to his uncle's court among the other boys; he goes, and appears a stranger among the boys playing hurley or shinty before the castle. They all set on him and let fly all their "camags" and balls at him; the balls he caught and the hurleys

he warded off. Then his war rage seized him. "He shut one eye till it was not wider than the eye of a needle; he opened the other till it was bigger than the mouth of a meal-goblet." He attacked the youths and set them flying every way. Conchobar recognised him and introduced him to the boys. The next thing was the choosing of arms when he was fit to bear them. Conchobar gave him first ordinary weapons, but he shivered them with a shake. Fifteen sets did he so break in ever rising grade of strength. At last Conchobar gave him his own royal weapons. These he could not shiver. Fifteen war-chariots did he break by leaping into them and shaking them, until he got the king's own chariot, which withstood him. He and the charioteer then darted off, reached Meath, challenged and slew three champions, and came back again to Emania, his uncle's capital, safe and sound.

A wife had now to be got for him, and Conchobar searched all Erin for a suitable partner, but in vain. The ladies of Erin greatly loved him, as the records say—"for his splendour at the feat, for the readiness of his leap, for the excellence of his wisdom, for the melodiousness of his eloquence, for the beauty of his face, for the lovingness of his countenance. For there were seven pupils in his royal eyes, four in the one and three in the other for him; seven fingers on each of his two hands and seven on each of his two feet." And another says, after the usual profusion of colour and minutiae as to garments—"I should think it was a shower of pearls that was flung into his head. Blacker than the side of a black cooking-spit each of his two brows; redder than ruby his lips." The Highland ballad of the Chariot of Cuchulin describes him even better and certainly in true Celtic style of successive epithets. Cuchulinn himself set out for a wife, and fell in with Emer, daughter of Forgill, a "noble farmer" holding extensive lands near Dublin. "Emer had these six victories upon her," says the tale, "the victory of form, the victory of voice, the victory of melodiousness, the victory of embroidery, the victory of wisdom, the victory of chastity." Emer did not immediately accept him, though latterly she was violently in love with him. Her father would not have him at all; he did not like professional champions. He got him to leave the country to complete his military education with the celebrated lady Scathach in the Isle of Skye. Cuchulinn went to Scathach, whose school was certainly no easy one to enter or pass through. Here he learned all those wonderful feats—*cleasa*—for which he is so famous in story. His special *cleas* was the *gae bolg* or belly-dart, a mysterious weapon mysteriously used, for it could only be cast at fords on water. It was at Scat-

hach's school that he fell in with Ferdia MacDamain, the Fir-bolg champion, who was the only man that could match Cuchulinn. Their friendship was great for one another, and they swore never to oppose one another.

Aoife or Eva, daughter of Scathach, and also an amazon, fell in love with Cuchulinn, and he temporarly married her, but like those heroes, he forgot her as soon as he left her. His son by her, Conloch, was not born before he left. When Cuchulinn returned to Erin he married Emer, daughter of Forgill, taking her by force from her friends.

We now come to the great "Tain Bo Chualgne," the "queen of Celtic epics," as Kennedy says. The scene shifts to Meave's palace at Cruachan. She and Ailill have a dispute in bed one night as to the amount of property each had. They reckoned cattle, jewels, arms, cloaks, chess-boards, war-chariots, slaves, and nevertheless found their possessions exactly equal. At last Ailill recollected the famous bull Finn-beannach (white-horned), which, after having ruled Meave's herds for a while, left them in disgust, as being the property of a woman, and joined the cattle of Ailill. Much chagrin was her portion, until she recollected that Daré of Fachtna in Cualgne possessed a brown bull, *Donn Chuailgne*, the finest beast in all Erin. She sent Fergus Mac Roich, with a company, to ask the bull for a year, and he should then be returned with fifty heifers and a chariot worth 63 cows. Daré consented, and and lodged Meave's deputies for the night. But getting uproarious in their cups, they boasted that if Daré would not give the bull willingly, they would take it by force. This so annoyed Daré that he sent Meave's embassy back without the bull. The queen was enraged, and at once summoned her native forces, including Ferdia and his Firbolg, and invited Fergus and Cormac to join her with all their followers. This they did, but unwillingly. So the large army moved against Ulster, Meave accompanying them in her chariot—a lady of large size, fair face, and yellow hair, a curiously carved spear in her hand, and her crimson cloak fastened by a golden brooch.

The people of Ulster, meanwhile, were suffering from a periodical feebleness that came upon them for a heinous crime committed by them. They were, therefore, in a condition of childish helplessness, and they could neither hold shield or throw lance.

But when Meave, at the head of her exulting troops, approached the fords which gave access to the territory of Daré, there stood Cuchulinn. He demanded single combat from the

best warriors of her army, laying injunctions on them not to pass the ford until he was overcome. The spirit and usages of the time put it out of Meave's power to refuse, and there, day after day, were severe conflicts waged between the single Ultonian champion and the best warriors of Meave, all of whom he successively vanquished. Meave even called in the aid of magic spells. One warrior was helped by demons of the air, in bird shape, but in vain, and the great magician, Cailetin and his twenty-seven sons, despite their spells, also met their doom. Cuchulinn further is persecuted by the war goddess, the Morrigan, who appears in all shapes to plague him and to frighten the life of valour out of his soul. Cuchulinn is not behind in daimonic influence, for with the help of the Tuatha-Dè—Manannan especially—he does great havoc among Meave's troops, circling round them in his chariot, and dealing death with his sling. Meave is getting impatient; time is being lost; the Ultonians will soon revive, and Cuchulinn must be got rid off. She calls on Ferdia, the only match there exists for Cuchulinn, but he refuses to fight with his school days' friend. Nay, he would by his vows be forced to defend him against all comers. The queen plies him in every way with promises, wiles, and blandishments; he will get Findabar, her daughter, for wife, and lands and riches; and, alas! he consents, he binding himself to fight Cuchulinn, and she binding herself to fulfil her magnificent promises. Fergus goes forward to apprise Cuchulinn of what occurred, that his friend and companion, Ferdia, was coming to fight with him. "I am here," said Cuchulinn, "detaining and delaying the four great provinces of Erin, since Samhain to the beginning of Imbulc (spring), and I have not yielded one foot in retreat before any one during that time, nor will I, I trust, before him." Cuchulinn's charioteer gets his chariot yoked, with the two divine horses—those mystic animals that the gods had sent for Cuchulinn, the Liath Macha "Grey of Macha," the war-goddess, and the Dub-sanglend. "And then," says the tale, "the battle-fighting, dexterous, battle-winning, red-sworded hero, Cuchulinn, son of Sualtam, sprang into his chariot. And there shouted around him Bocanachs, and Bananachs, and Geniti Glindi, and demons of the air. For the Tuatha-De-Danann were used to set up shouts around him, so that the hatred and the fear and the abhorrence and the great terror of him should be greater in every battle, in every battlefield, in every combat, and in every fight into which he went."

Ferdia's charioteer, who does not wish his master to fight with

his friend, Cuchulinn, hears Cuchulinn coming thundering to the ford, and describes the sound and its meaning to Ferdia in verse, following the introductory narrative. And he was not long "until he saw something, the beautiful, flesh-seeking, four-peaked chariot, with speed, with velocity, with full cunning, with a green pavilion, with a thin-bodied, dry-bodied, high-weaponed, long-speared, warlike *creit* (body of the chariot); upon two fleet-bounding, large-eared, fierce, prancing, whale-bellied, broad-chested, lively-hearted, high-flanked, wide-hoofed, slender-legged, broad-rumped, resolute horses under it. A gray, broad-hipped, fleet, bounding, long-maned steed under the one yoke of the chariot. A black tufty-maned, ready-going, broad-backed steed under the other yoke. Like unto a hawk (swooping) from a cliff on a day of hard wind; or like a sweeping gust of the spring wind on a March day, over a smooth plain; or like the fleetness of a wild stag on his being first started by the hounds in his first field, were Cuchulaind's two horses with the chariot, as though they were on fiery flags; so that the earth shook and trembled with the velocity of their motion."

The heroes met at the ford--Cuchulinn is always connected with ford-fighting. They fought for three days, and on the fourth the fight was terrible and the feats grand; Cuchulinn hard pressed calls for his gae-bolg—a feat which Ferdia was unacquainted with, and Cuchulinn slays him. Cuchulinn mourns over his friend's body in piteous strains, and weak with grief and wounds he leaves his place at the ford, which he had defended so long and well.

Meave now passed into Ulster, seized the Donn Chualgne, and sent it to Connaught; she ravaged Ulster to the very gates of its capital, and then began to retire. But now the spell that bound the men of Ulster was broken, they woke and pursued; a great battle was fought in which, as usual, the combatants and arms are described minutely; indeed throughout the Tain we are treated to a profusion of colour—of red or yellow hair on the warriors' heads, coloured silk *leiné* or blouses, mantles held by rich brooches, and finely wrought shields. The Queen was defeated, but the Donn Chualgne reached Connaught nevertheless. This wonderful animal finding himself among strange pastures, gave vent to his wonder and vexation in a serious of mighty bellows. These brought the Finnbeannach on the scene at once; they fought, the Donn overcame and raising his rival on his horns rushed homewards, leaving detached parts of the Finnbeannach here and there on his way; such as at Athlone, which signifies the ford of the loin. His rage ceased not when he reached Cualgne, but he

went charging against a rock there thinking it was his rival, and thus dashed out his own brains.

Such is the story of the epic of the "Bo Chualgne." This does no justice to the spirit and vigour of the original, its wealth of description of men, arms, and colours, its curious customs, its minutiæ, its wordlists of descriptive epithets, all which are characteristic of the Celtic imagination—profuse, minute, and boldly original. As a repertory of manners and customs, it is invaluable. These are in their general form Homeric, literally Homeric; but there are differences—there is always the Celtic smack in the facts seized on and made prominent, and, in other matters, though for instance we have chariots and horses and bronze arms enough, we meet with no body armour, not even a helmet.

In Scotland, Tain Bo Chualgne is little known; the Cuchulinn Cycle altogether, indeed, belongs to the literary rather than the popular epos. But this Society has been lucky enough to get almost the only popular account of the Tain that exists in the Highlands. In the Second Volume of our Transactions, Mr Carmichael gives an excellent version of it, much degraded though it be in the shape of a mere popular tale. Yet it practically repeats every feature of the tale we have told. Macpherson, too, got a copy the tale, and it appears as that inveterate episode, in Book II. of Fingal, but sadly shorn of its dignity, and changed to suit his theme. Cuchulinn, after his defeat by Swaran, attributes his ill-luck to his having killed his dearest friend, Ferda, the son of Damman. Ferda was a chief of Albion, who was educated with Cuchulinn in "Muri's hall" (*sic*), an academy of arms in Ulster. Deugala, spouse of Cairbar, who was "covered with the light of beauty, but her heart was the house of pride," loved Ferda, and asked Cairbar to give her half of his herd and let her join her lover. Cairbar called in Cuchulinn to divide the herd. "I went," he said, "and divided the herd. One bull of snow remained. I gave that bull to Cairbar. The wrath of Deugala rose." She induced Ferda most unwillingly to challenge Cuchulinn to mortal combat. "I will fight my friend, Deugala, but may I fall by his sword! Could I wander on the hills and behold the grave of Cuchulinn?" They fought and Ferda fell.

The eighteeneth century sentimentality of Macpherson's Ferda is very different from the robust grief and practical sense shown by Ferdia in his relations with Meave in both the Irish and Highland version of the tale. Ferdia there consents under the influence of wine and female blandishment, but nevertheless takes heavy

guarantees that Meave will fulfill her promises, especially as to the money and lands. Curiously too, in the Iliad, the Greeks always fight for Helen *and the riches* she took with her to Asia. There is little sentiment in the matter. But if we argue merely *a priori* as to what sentiments or customs existed in ancient times, we are certain to go wrong, as Macpherson always did.

The rest of Cuchulinn's life is shortly told, and this portion of it is also the one that has taken most popular hold, and hence is known best here. We have mentioned that he left a son unborn in Scathach. This was Conloch. His mother educated him in all warlike accomplishments possible, save only the "gae-bolg." She then sent him to Ireland under "geasa" not to reveal his name, but he was to challenge and slay if need be the champions there. She secretly hoped in this way that he would kill his father Cuchulinn, and so avenge her wrongs. He landed in Ireland, demanded combat, and overcame everybody. He lastly overcame and bound Conall Cernach, next to Cuchulinn the best champion of Erin. Then Conchobar sent for Cuchulinn; he came—asked Conloch his name, but he would not divulge it. Conloch knew his father Cuchulinn, and though Cuchulinn pressed him hard, he tried to do him no injury. Cuchulinn, finding the fight go against him, called, as in his extremity he always did, for the Gae-Bolg. He killed Conloch. Then follows a scene of tender and simple pathos, such as not rarely ends these ballads of genuine origin. The story is exactly parallel to that of Soohrab and Rustem in Persia, so beautifully rendered in verse by Matthew Arnold.

A wild and pathetic story is that of Cuchulinn's death. Meave, determined to avenge herself on him for the Tain Bo Chualgne, suddenly attacked him with a force that took her years to get ready. For instance, the six posthumous children of Cailetin, the magician, whom Cuchulinn killed on the Tain, appeared against him. The omens were against Cuchulinn's setting out; the divine horse, the Liath Macha, thrice turned his left side to him; he reproached the steed; "thereat the Gray of Macha came and let his big round tears of blood fall on Cuchulinn's feet." He went; the Tuatha-Dè evidently and plainly deserted him; the magician children of Cailetin had therefore open field. He fell by his own spear, hurled back by the foe. But Conall Cernach came to avenge his fall; and as he came, the foe saw something at a distance. "One horseman is here coming to us," said a charioteer, "and great are the speed and swiftness with which he comes. Thou wouldst deem that the ravens of Erin were above him. Thou wouldst deem that flakes of snow were specking the

plain before him." "Unbeloved is the horseman that comes," says his master, "It is Conall the victorious on the Dewy-Red. The birds thou sawest above him are the sods from that horse's hoofs. The snow flakes thou sawest specking the plain before him are the foam from that horse's lips and the curbs of the bridle." A true piece of Celtic imagination! Conall routs the foe and returns with the heads of the chief men to Emer, Cuchulinn's wife, whom the ballads represent as asking whom each head belonged to, and Conall tells her in reply. The dialogue is consequently in a rude dramatic form.

We now come to the Fionn or Ossianic cycle. The chroniclers, as already stated, place this cycle three hundred years later than the Cuchulinn cycle. Whether we accept the dates or not, the Ossianic cycle is, in a literary sense, later than the Cuchulinn cycle. The manners and customs are changed in a most marked degree. In the Cuchulinn cycle, the individual comes to the front; it is champion against champion, and the armies count for little. Indeed Cuchulinn is, like Hercules and the demi-gods, alone in his feats and labours. But in the Ossianic cycle we have a body of heroes; they are indeed called in the chronicles the Irish "Militia." Fionn is the head and king, but he by no means too much outshines the rest in valour and strength. Some of the Feni are indeed braver champions than he. However, he alone possesses divine wisdom. And, again, in the Fenian cycle, we no longer have chariots and war-horses. Cow-spoils disappear completely, and their place is taken up with hunting and the chase. On the whole the Fenian cycle has more of a historic air; that is, the history in it can be more easily kept apart from the supernatural; though, again, there are more tales of supernatural agencies by far in it than in the Cuchulinn cycle—fairy tales which have no historical basis. It will be better, therefore, to look at Fionn first as a possibly historical character, and then consider him as the fairy-tale hero.

The literary and historical account of Fionn and the Feinè is briefly this. The Feinè was the militia or standing army of the Irish kings in the third century. They fought the battles and and defended the kingdom from invasion. There were seven battalions of them. Their privileges were these:—From Samhain (Hallowe'en) till Beltane (May-day) they were billeted on the inhabitants; from Beltane till Samhain they lived on the products of the chase, for the chase was all their own. Again, no man could settle his daughter in marriage without first asking if one of the Feinè wished her as wife. But the qualifications of Fenian

soldiers were high: he must, first, give security that no *eric*, or revenge, must be required for his death; second, he must be a poet—at least compose a war song; third, he must be a perfect master of his weapons; fourth, his running and fighting qualities must pass test by the band; fifth, he must be able to hold out his weapon by the smaller end without a tremble; sixth, in the chase through plain and wood, his hair must continue tied up—if it fell, he was rejected; seventh, he must be so light and swift as not to break a rotten stick by standing on it; eighth, he must leap a tree as high as his forehead, and get under a tree no higher than his knees; ninth, without stopping, he must be able to draw a thorn from his foot; also, he must not refuse a woman without a dowry, offer violence to no woman, be charitable to the poor and weak, and he must not refuse to fight nine men of any other nation that might set upon him. Cumal, son of Trenmor O'Baisgne, was Fionn's father, and he was head of the militia in King Conn Ced-cathach's time (122-157, A.D.). Tadhg, or Teague, chief Druid of Conn, lived at Almu, or Almhinn (Allen in Kildare), and he had a beauty of a daughter named Muirne. She was asked in marriage by ever so many princes, and amongst others by Cumal. Her father refused her to Cumal, because his magic knowledge told him the marriage would force him to leave Almhinn. Cumal took Muirne by force and married her. The druid appealed to Conn, who sent his forces against Cumal. Cumal was killed in battle at Cnucha by Aed, son of Morna, and Aed himself was wounded in the eye, whence his name of Goll, or one-eyed. This is the celebrated champion and Fenian rival of Fionn—Goll Mac Morna. Her father wished to burn Muirne, evidently because of his prophetic knowledge of personal disaster, but she escaped to Cumal's sister. Here she gave birth to Fionn or Demni, as he was first named. He, when he grew up, forced Tadhg to give him Almhinn as *eric* for his father, and he also got *eric* from Goll, with whom he made peace. Another fact, historically recognisable, is Fionn's marriage to Grainne, daughter of Cormac, son of Art and king of Ireland. She eloped with Diarmad; Fionn pursued them, and after various vicissitudes captured them, but the Feinè would not permit him to punish the runaways in any way. Their privileges made the Feinè troublesome, and King Cairbre, son of Cormac, tried to disband them, owing more immediately to dynastic troubles, and in any case the Clan Morna, headed by Goll, were at daggers drawn with the Clan Baisgne, Fionn's family. Cairbre, aided by the Clan Morna, met the Clan Baisgne at Gabhra in 284, and a great fight was fought. Oscar

commanded the Clan Baisgne; there was great slaughter and almost extinction for Oscar's side. Cairbre and he mutually slew each other. Ossian and Caoilte were the only survivors of note. The historical accounts place Fionn's death in the year before this battle, though the ballads and popular tradition are distinctly against such a view. Fionn was slain, it is said, at Rath-breagha, on the Boyne, by a treacherous fisherman named Athlach, who, wished to become famous as the slayer of Fionn. Fionn had retired there in his old age.

Both in Scotland and Ireland there are some historical ballads that connect Fionn with the invasions of the Norsemen, but these can hardly be seriously considered as containing historical truth, that is, if we trust the above account, which places the Feinè in the 3rd century. The Norsemen made no invasions into Ireland sooner than the 8th century; that is a historical fact. The period of the Norse and Danish invasions are, roughly, from 800 to close on 1300. The ballads of Manus and Earragon may have a historical basis; there is little supernatural or impossible in them. Manus is a well-known name in both Scotland and Ireland, and, without a doubt, the great Magnus Barefoot, who was killed in Ireland in 1103, is meant. At the same time, the ballad must be rejected as history; it is a popular tale, where St Patrick, Ossian, and Magnus appear as nigh well contemporaries. The popular hero of the romantic tale is Fionn, and hence anything heroic and national that is done, be it in an early age or in a late, is attributed, by the popular imagination, to the popular hero. Manus, a historical character, stuck to the popular fancy, because he was the last important invader of Ireland. It could not be expected that our romantic ballads would not receive both additions and local colouring in coming through the ages of Norse invasion. Fionn and his heroes are lay figures, to which were attached any striking or exciting events that the nation may have had to go through.

So much for the Fionn of history. Let us now turn to the hero of the romantic and fairy tales. Fionn in history, such as it is, is merely a great warrior and champion, but in the popular imagination he belongs to the race of the giants, and has kinship with the supernatural powers. He is in fact a mortal champion moving in a fairy atmosphere. Nor is the popular notion of Fionn of late growth; we shall, indeed, find reason to suspect that it anteceded the historical conception—that what is historical is merely rationalised myth. A charter of the reign of Alexander the Second in the early part of the 13th century

speaks of Tuber na Fein, which is glossed by "feyne, of the grett or kempis men callit ffenis, is ane well." This, which is only a hundred years later than the oldest Irish MS. account of Fionn, is exactly the present day popular notion of the Feine. They were giants. About 1500 Hector Boece can thus write of Fyn Mak Coul:—"Virum uti ferunt immani statura, septenum enim cubitorum hominem fuisse narrant, Scotici sanguinis omnibusque insolita corporis mole formidolosum." Thus, much to the disgust of Keating, the Irish historian, he makes him a giant some seven cubits high, makes him also a Scotchman, and fixes his date about 450 A.D.; and he further tells us that Fyn was renowned in stories, such as was told of King Arthur. Bishop Leslie in the same century says that Fynmacoul was a "man of huge size and sprung, as it were, from the race of the giants." Gavin Douglas, about 1500, also speaks of

> "Greit Gow Macmorne and Fyn Mac Cowl, and how
> They suld be goddis in Ireland as they say."

Dunbar, the contemporary poet, says:—

> "My fore grandsyr, hecht Fyn Mac Cowl,
> That dang the deil and gart him yowll,
> The skyis rained when he wald scoull,
> He trublit all the air:
>
> He got my grandsyr Gog Magog;
> Ay whan he dansit the warld wald schog;
> Five thousand ellis gaed till his frog,
> Of Hieland pladdis, and mair."

The world shook when Fionn danced! Martin, in his "Western Isles," calls him a "gigantic man." And in Ireland also, as in Scotland, Fionn and his heroes are among the people considered to be giants, "the great joiant Fann Mac Cuil," as Kennedy calls him, after the style of the peasantry who relate tales of Fionn. Mr Good, a priest at Limerick in 1566, speaks of the popular "giants Fion Mac Hoyle, and Oshin (read Osgur) Mac Oshin." Standish O' Grady, in his lately published History of Ireland, places the Fianna back in the dawn of Irish history— gigantic figures in the dusky air. "Ireland is their playground. They set up their goals in the North and South in Titanic hurling matches, they drive their balls through the length and breadth of it, storming through the provinces." Macpherson found the ballads and stories full of this, and as usual, he stigmatises them as Irish and middle-age. He quotes as Irish this verse:—

"A chos air *Cromleach*, druim-ard,
Chos eile air Crom-meal dubh,
Thoga Fion le lamh mhoir
An d' uisge o Lubhair na sruth."

With one foot on lofty Cromlech, and the other on black Crom-meal, Fionn could take up the water in his hand from the river Lubar! Yet the hills can still be pointed out in Macpherson's native Badenoch where Fionn did this; but Macpherson, as usual, gives them his own poetic names. Carn Dearg and Scorr Gaoithe, at the top of Glen-Feshie, are the hills, and the *Fionn-tag*, a tributary of the Feshie, is the poetic "Lubhar." He has therefore to reduce the Fionn of the popular tales and ballads, to proper epic dimensions—to divorce him, as he says himself, from the "giants, enchanted castles, dwarfs, palfreys, witches, and magicians," which he thinks were imposed on the Fionn epic in the fifteenth century, and continued still to be the popular idea of Fionn and his heroes.

The popular imagination accounts for this tallness in a rationalistic manner worthy of any euhemerist historian. In Campbell's Popular Tales, this is how the Een was set up. An old King of Erin, hard pressed by the Lochlinners, consults his seneschal as to the best course to pursue. The latter advises him to marry 100 of the tallest men in the kingdom to the same number of the tallest women; then again to intermarry 100 of each sex of the tallest of their descendants, and so on to the third generation. This would give him a gigantic race able to cope with any foe. The thing was done. And in the third generation a gigantic race was the result. Their captain and king was Cumal, and he defeated the Lochlinners and forced them to terms of peace.

There are various turns given to the story of Fionn's birth, but they all agree that his father was killed before his birth, that he was carried off and reared in secret, that he did great youthful feats, that his first name was Demni, and that he was called Fionn from his white head. Most tales also tell how he ate the salmon of knowledge. The best form of the whole tale is this. Cumhal was going to battle, and in passing a smithy, while his horses were being shod, he went in to see the smith's daughter. The smith on learning what happened cursed the king, and hoped he would not return safe from the fight. Smiths and druids were uncanny in those days, and his wish was gratified; Cumhal fell in the battle. The new king heard of the smith's daughter, and ordered her to be imprisoned. If she gave birth to a daughter,

the daughter might be allowed to live, but a son must be put to death, for he would be the true heir to the throne. She brought forth a daughter, and all his watch rushed to tell the King; but, before the night was through, she also brought a boy into the world. The nurse, Luas Lurgann, rolled the child up in the end of her gown and rushed off to the woods, where she brought him up in secret. She exercised him in all kinds of feats—running, *cleasa* of all kinds, and arms. She took him one day to play hurley—shinty—with the boys of the King's town. He beat everybody and then began to maul and kill right and left. The king heard of it and came out; "Co e an gille *Fionn* ud," said he, "tha mortadh nan daoine?" (who is that *Fair* lad killing the people?) The nurse clapped her hands for joy and said:—"Long hast thou wanted to be baptized, but to-day thou art indeed baptized, and thou art *Fionn* son of Cumhal son of Trenmor, and rightful king of Erin." With this she rushed away, taking the boy on her shoulders. They were hotly pursued; Luas Lurgann's swiftness of old was failing her. Fionn jumped down, and carried her in turn. He rushed through the woods, and when he halted in safety he found he had only the two legs of his nurse left over his shoulders—the rest of her body had been torn away in the wood. After some wanderings he came to Essroy, famous for its mythic salmon—the salmon of all knowledge. Here he found a fisher fishing for the king, and he asked for a fish to eat. The fisher never yet had caught fish though he had fished for years. A prophecy said that no fish would be got on it till Fionn came. The fisher cast his line in Fionn's name and caught a large salmon—it was too large for Fionn, he said, and he put him off each time. Fionn got the rod himself and landed a bigger salmon still. The fisher, who had recognised who he was, allowed him to have a small fish of his lot, but he must roast it with the fire on one side the stream and the fish on the other, nor must he use any wood in the process. He set fire to some sawdust, and the wind blew a wave of fire over to the fish and burned a spot on it. Fionn put his thumb on the black spot; it burnt him and he put the thumb in his mouth. Then he knew everything; the fisher was Black Arcan who slew his father. He seized Arcan's sword, and killed him. In this way he got his father's sword, and also the dog Bran, both of which the fisher had. And, further, by bruising his thumb in his mouth, the past and the present were always revealed to him. He then went in secret to his grandfather's house—the smith's house. Thereafter he appeared in the king's court; the king gave wrong judgment, and if one of royal

blood did this, Temra the palace(?) fell; and if one of royal blood gave the right judgment, it rose again. Temra fell; but on Fionn giving the judgment rightly, Temra was restored again. He was at once recognised, and again pursued. The king then hunted every place in Erin for him, and at last found him as steward with the king of Colla. Colla and Fionn rose together against Cairbre, and slew him, and so Fionn recovered his patrimony and kingdom.

Besides Fionn's powers in knowing present and past events, he was also a great medicine man. He possessed the magic cup, a drink from which could heal any wound, unless from a poisoned weapon. The Dord Fionn was again a kind of wail or music raised when Fionn was in distress. His men, whenever they heard it, came to his help.

The leading heroes among the Feinè were:—

Fionn himself.

Gaul Mac Morna, leader of the Clann Morna. He served under Fionn, but as Goll had killed Fionn's father, they had no great love for each other. Yet Fionn's praise of Goll is one of the best of the ballads; more especially as showing us what characteristics pleased best the Feiné, or rather the Gaelic people.

Ossian, son of Fionn, the renowned hero-poet.

Oscar, his son, the bravest of the Feiné, youthful, handsome, and kind-hearted.

Diarmad O'Duinn, the handsomest of the Feinè, the darling of the women, "the Adonis of Fenian mythology, whose slaughter by a wild boar is one of the most widely scattered myths of the Ossianic Cycle." He had a beauty spot—"ball-seirc"—which if any woman saw, she fell in love with him at once.

Caoilte MacRonan, Finn's nephew; he was the swiftest of the Feinè. They had always to keep a *speireach* (?) on his foot, for otherwise he would go too fast for the rest.

Fergus Finn-vel, son of Fionn, a poet, warrior, and adviser.

Conan Maol, the Thersites or fool of the Feinè. He is the best marked character of the whole. He was large-bodied, gluttonous, and most cowardly. Everybody has a fling at Conan, and he at them.

The story of the Feinè may be considered under the following heads:—

(1) Foreign Messengers.
(2) Distressed people, especially women.

(3) Foreign combatants and invaders.
(4) Enchantments—by far the largest class.
(5) Fights with beasts.
(6) Battles and internal strifes.
(7) Ossian after the Feiné.

Messengers from Lochlinn play an important part in the ballads. They are called "athachs"; there is one eye in the middle of their forehead, and one hand which comes from the breast, and they have one foot. It may be noted that the god Odin himself appears in the Norse tales in an almost equally monstrous form. The "athach," on one occasion, invited Fionn and his men to Lochlinn; the king's daughter was much in love with Fionn. Before they set sail, they provided themselves with daggers, besides their other arms. They went; their arms were piled in an outhouse, but their daggers they secretly kept. At the feast, they were so arranged that one of Fionn's men was between two Lochlinners. Lochlinn's king began asking the heroes uncomfortable questions—who slew this son and that son of his. Each hero answered as the case was. Finally, there was a rush to arms, but the Feinè with the secret daggers slew their men. The Feinè escaped safely home, taking "nighean Lochlinn" with them. This story is the foundation of the episode of Agandecca in Macpherson's Fingal, Book III.

The Muileartach is a sort of female counterpart to the "athach." She is Manus' foster-mother, and she came to fight the Feinè; and they had a tough job conquering her. She seems to be a personification of the Atlantic sea.

An "athach" appears also another day:—

"Chunncas tighinn o'n mhagh
An t-oglach mor is e air aon chois,
Le chochal dubh ciar dubh craicionn,
Le cheann-bheirt lachduinn is i ruadh-mheirg."

They asked his name. He told them he was Lun Mac Liobhain, smith to the king of Lochlinn, and he put them under *geasa* to follow him to his smithy.

"Ciod am ball am beil do Cheardach?
Na'm fearrda sinne g'a faicsinn?"
"Faiceadh sibhse sin ma dh' fhaodas,
Ach ma dh' fhaodas mise, chan fhaic sibh."

They set after him, and Daorghlas kept pace with him, and when, on reaching the smithy, one of the smiths asked, in reference to

Daorghlas, who this *fear caol* was, Fionn answered that his name was *now Caoilte.* Here they got victorious arms, but they had to be tempered in human blood. Fionn, by a stratagem, got the smith's mother to take the place that fell to him by lot, and she was unwittingly killed. And Fionn's own sword was tempered in the smith's own blood.

> "B'e Mac an Luin lann Mhic Cumhail,
> Gum be Drithleannach lann Oscar,
> 'S b'i Chruaidh Chosgarrach lann Chaoilte,
> Gum b'i an Liomharrach lann Dhiarmad,
> Agam fein bha Gearr-nan-colann."

Every hero's sword had a name, as we see from this.

Distressed people came to the Feinè for protection. In Macpherson, nearly every other poem presents such, but in the ballads, there is only one good Macphersonic case. This is found in "Duan na h-Inghinn," or Essroy of the Dean of Lismore. The daughter of the King of Under-waves Land flies from the love of the son of the King of the Land of Light (Sorcha). She comes in a gold "curach" to Fionn. Her lover follows on his steed riding on the waves. He fights the heroes and falls. Some ballads represent him as killing the Nighean, others that she was with Fionn in the Feinè a year. This is nearly exactly the same as Macpherson's Maid of Craca and Faine-soluis. It is the only poem of his that agrees with the ballads in any satisfactory respect. But his language differs widely, though the plot is the same.

Foreign invaders are numerous. Sometimes they are single-handed, as in the case of Dearg, and his son Conn after him. Other times there is a regular invasion. The stories of single invaders are all of a type; he comes, challenges the champions and lays them low in ones, twos, tens, and hundreds. Then Goll or Oscar goes, and after a stiff fight annihilates him. Their wounds are healed by Fionn. The Kings of Lochlinn are the chief invaders. Manus we have already considered. Earragon, another Lochlinn king, got his wife stolen by Alde, one of Fionn's men, and came to Scotland to fight them over it. The ballad is called "Teanntachd Mhor Na Feinè," and forms the groundwork of Macpherson's Battle of Lora, or as he says himself, calling it Irish of course—"It appears to have been founded on the same story with the 'Battle of Lora,' one of the poems of the genuine Ossian"! A most serious invasion of Ireland was made by Dare Donn or Darius, King of the World, helped by all

the rest of the world. The scene was Ventry Harbour. The battle went on for a year and a day. In some versions, it is a Kilkenny cat business, where everybody is killed and some others besides; for Fionn and his Feinè are represented all as falling, though they were helped even by the Tuatha-Dè. Other forms of it represent the heroes as finally victorious. The ballad in the Dean of Lismore's book is the only Scotch representative of this tale.

Enchantments form the largest class of these poems and tales. There are various "Chases," where the Feinè, singly or altogether, get lost and enchanted. Again, they may be enchanted in a house, as in "Tigh Bhlair Bhuidhe" and the "Rowan-tree Booth." Then some of them may be tricked away, as in the story of the "Slothful Fellow"—An Gille Deacair. Here they land in Tir-fo-Thuinn, and the Happy Land. These stories display the highest degree of imaginative power: they are humourous, pathetic, and at times tragic.

Another class of legends is that relating to the killing of dragons and like monsters. There is scarcely a lake in Ireland but there is some legend there about a dragon, or *biast*, which Fionn, or one of his heroes, or one of the Saints, destroyed. Fionn had some tough fights with these terrible animals, and his grandson, Oscar, was likewise often engaged in the same work. On one occasion, as an old Lewisman used to tell, Oscar was fighting with a huge *biast* that came open-mouthed towards him. He jumped down its throat at once, and cut his way out, and thus killed the brute. We have read of Odin being thus swallowed by the wolf, but have never heard of his appearing afterwards.

Internal dissension is seen in the armed neutrality maintained between Fionn and Goll. They at times have open strife. But the most serious defection is that of Diarmad, who ran away with Fionn's wife. Of course he refused her at first, but she laid him under *geasa* to take her. This he did. The pursuit began soon after, and they went round Erin. Many feats were performed, some of which were of a magic and supernatural nature. They were caught at last, but Fionn was forced to spare them, because Oscar would not allow him to wreak vengeance at the time. Fionn, however, revenged himself at the hunt of the magic boar. Diarmad killed the boar, escaping unscathed; Fionn was disappointed at this, so he asked Diarmad to measure the boar; he did. Fionn then asked him to measure it *against* the bristles. His foot, which was the only vulnerable part of his body, was stabbed in

the process by the bristles, and as the beast was a magic and poisonous animal—a Torc Nimhe—he was fatally wounded. Nor would Fionn cure him though he could. So Diarmad died.

A sad event happened just before the close of the Feinè's career. The men went off to hunt, leaving Garaidh at home with the women. The prose tales say that he stayed purposely to find out what the ladies took to eat and drink that always left them so rosy and youthful. In watching for this, he fell asleep, and they pinned his long hair to the bench. Then they raised a battle shout. He got up in furious haste, but, if he did, he left his scalp behind him. Mad with rage, he rushed out, went to the woods and brought home plenty fuel. He locked the women in, and then set fire to the house. The flames were seen by those that were hunting, and they rushed home. If the *speireach* were off Caoilte, he might have been in time to save the house. They jumped Kyle-rhea on their spears, but one of them, Mac-Reatha, fell into the Kyle, and hence the name. Wives and children were lost, and the race of great men left alone in the world. Fionn, by bruising his thumb in his mouth, knew it was Garaidh that did the deed. They found him hid in a cave, but he would not come out until he was allowed to choose the manner of his own death. They allowed him. He asked to be beheaded by Oscar on Fionn's knee. Now Oscar never could stop his sword from going through anything he drew the sword upon, and they had to bury Fionn's knee under seven feet of earth, and even then it was wounded. Fionn then journeyed to Rome to get it healed.

When Fionn was away, King Cairbre thought he might as well get rid of the Feinè. He invited Oscar to a feast. There he wished to exchange spear-heads with him, which was considered an insult in those days:

> "Ach malairt cinn gun mhalairt crainn,
> Bu eucorach sud iarraidh oirnn."

They quarrelled; their troops were got ready and a battle engaged in. Both leaders fell by each other's hands. Ossian and Fionn just arrived from Rome to receive Oscar's dying words. The battle of Gabhra ended the reign of the Feinè.

Fionn himself was killed by a treacherous person who invited him to jump on to an island, in the way he did. Fionn did the jump. Then the man jumped the same backways, and challenged Fionn to do so. Fionn tried it, but fell up to his head in the water. The man, finding him thus immersed, and with his back to him, cut off his head.

Ossian had, however, before this, run away with the fairy Niam to Tir-nan-og, the Land of the Ever-young. Here he remained two hundred years. He returned, a great giant, still youthful, on a white steed, from which he was cautioned not to dismount, if he wished to return again to Tir-nan-og. He found everything changed; instead of the old temples of the gods, now there were Christian churches. And the Feinè were only a memory. He saw some puny men raising a heavy block of stone. They could not manage it; so he put his hand to it and lifted it up on its side; but in so doing he slipped off his horse, and fell to earth a withered and blind old man. The steed at once rushed off. Ossian was then brought to St Patrick, with whom he lived for the rest of his life, ever and anon recounting the tales of the Feinè to Patrick, the son of Calphurn, and disputing with him as to whether the Feinè were in heaven or not.

He tried once by magic means to recover his strength and sight. The Gille Ruadh and himself went out to hunt, and he brought down three large deer and carried them home. The old man had a belt round his stomach with three skewers in it, so as that he should not need so much food. The deer were set a-cooking in a large cauldron, and the Gille Ruadh was watching it, with strong injunctions not to taste anything of the deer. But some of the broth spurted out on his hand and he put it to his mouth. Ossian ate the deer one after the other, letting out a skewer each time; but his youth did not return, for the spell had been broken by the Gille in letting the broth near his mouth.

Are the actors in these cycles—those of Cuchulinn and Fionn—historical personages? Is it history degenerated into myth, or myth rationalised into history? The answer of the native historian is always the same; these legends and tales contain real history. And so he proceeds to euhemerise and rationalise the mythic incidents—a process which has been going on for the last thousand years; mediæval monk and "ollamh," the seventeenth century historians, the nineteenth century antiquarian and philologist—all believe in the historical character and essential truth of these myths. The late Eugene O'Curry considered the existence of Fionn as a historical personage, as assured as that of Julius Cæsar. Professor Windisch even is led astray by the *vraisemblance* of these stories, and he looks on the mythic incidents of the Fionn Cycle as borrowed from the previous Cuchulinn Cycle, and the myths of the latter, especialy the birth incidents, he thinks drew upon Christian legend. As a consequence, the myths and legends are refined away, when presented as history, to such an extent that

their mythic character does not immediately appear. But luckily alongside of the literary presentment of them and before it, there runs the continuous stream of popular tradition, which keeps the mythic features, if not in their pristine purity, yet in such a state of preservation that they can be compared with the similar myths of kindred nations, and thus to some extent rehabilitated. This comparison of the Gaelic mythic cycles with those of other Indo-European nations shows in a startling degree how little of the Fionn Cycle, for instance, can be historical fact.

The incidents in the lives of the mythic and fairy heroes of the Aryan nations have been analysed and reduced to a tabulated formula. Von Hahn examined 14 Aryan stories—7 Greek, 1 Roman, 3 Teutonic, 2 Persian, and 2 Hindoo--and from these constructed a formula, called the "Expulsion and Return" formula, under 16 heads. And Mr Alfred Nutt examined the Celtic tales and brought them under the range of Von Hahn's headings, adding however, at heading 9, two more of his own. Mr Nutt's table is as follows:—

I. Hero, born out of wedlock, or posthumously or supernaturally.
II. Mother, princess residing in her own country. [Cf. *beena* marriage.]
III. Father, god or hero from afar.
IV. Tokens and warnings of hero's future greatness.
V. He is in consequence driven forth from home.
VI. Is suckled by wild beasts.
VII. Is brought up by a childless (shepherd) couple, or by a widow.
VIII. Is of passionate and violent disposition.
IX. Seeks service in foreign lands.
IX.A He attacks and slays monsters.
IX.B He acquires supernatural knowledge through eating a magic fish.
X. He returns to his own country, retreats, and again returns.
XI. Overcomes his enemies, frees his mother, and seats himself on the throne.
XII. He founds cities.
XIII. The manner of his death is extraordinary.
XIV. He is accused of incest; he dies young.
XV. He injures an inferior, who takes revenge upon him or upon his children.
XVI. He slays his younger brother.

We give the incidents of the Fionn Cycle in this tabulated form, placing side by side the Fionn of history and the Fionn of popular fancy :

History.	*Tradition.*
I. In marriage (?), posthumously.	Out of marriage, posthumously, and one of twins.
II. Muirne, daughter of Chief Druid	Muirne (?), daughter of a smith. Lives with her father.
III. Cumal, leader of Militia.	King Cumhal : is passing house.
IV. Tadg, Druid, knows he will be ejected by hero.	Greatness foretold by a prophet, and known to be rightful heir to throne.
V. Driven to an aunt's house.	Into the wilderness.
VI.	Nourished by fat and marrow in a hole made in a tree.
VII. By his mother or aunt (?)	By his nurse, Luas Lurgann.
VIII.	Drowns the schoolboys or overcomes them at shinty, or both. Causes his nurse's death.
IX.	Serves as house steward. [Scholar to Fionn, the Druid.]
IXA.	Slays the Boar Beo ; kills lake monsters *(biasta)*.
IXB.	Eats of the magic Salmon.
X.	Wanders backwards and forwards over Erin.
XI. Forces Tadg to abandon Almu. Gets headship of Feinè	Kills father's murderer. Overcomes Cairbre and gets throne.
XII.	Builds forts, *dimes*, &c.; founds a great kingdom.
XIII. Slain by a fisherman for sake of fame.	Dies, mysteriously slain in jumping lake.
XIV.	
XV.	
XVI.	

A candid examination of these tabulated results must convince one that the historic account is merely the myth in a respectable and rationalised form. The historic account of Fionn and his men is poor and shadowy. In fact, outside the "birth" incidents of Fionn himself, there are only three historical facts, such as they are : (1) The Feiné were an Irish militia (!) in the third century ; (2) they were overthrown in the battle of Gabhra, where also King Cairbre, a real personage without a doubt, fell in 284 ; (3) Fionn himself married Cormac's daughter, and Cailte killed Cairbre's successor, Fothaidh Airgtheach, in 285. Evidently some difficulty was found in fitting the heroes of the mythic tales into history, a difficulty which also exists in Arthur's case. He, like Fionn, is not a king in history—there is no place for him—

but he is a "dux belli" or "militia" leader. Yet the popular imagination is distinctly in favour of the idea that these heroes were also kings.

The further question as to the origin and meaning of these mythic and heroic tales is as can be seen, one of Aryan width: the Celtic tales are explained when we explain those of the other Indo-European nations. Until scientists agree as to the meaning of these heroic myths, we may satisfy ourselves with adding our stone to the cairn—adding, that is to say, Cuchulinn and Fionn to the other national heroes of Aryan mythology. Yet this we may say: Fionn son of Cumal (Camulus, the Celtic war-god ?) is probably the incarnation of the chief deity of the Gaels—the Jupiter spoken of by Cæsar and the Dagda of Irish myth. His qualities are king-like and majestic, not sun-like, as those of Cuchulinn. He is surrounded by a band of heroes that make a terrestrial Olympus, composed of counterparts to the chief deities. There is the fiery Oscar (*ud-scar*, utter-cutter ?) a sort of war-god; Ossian, the poet and warrior, corresponding to Hercules Ogmius; Diarmad, of the shining face, a reflection of the sun god; Caelte, the wind-swift runner; and so on.

The next question is as to the transmission and formation of these mythic tales. Oral tradition is evidently continuous, and is thus unlike literature and history. They are fixed with the times; but popular tales and traditions are like a stream moving along, and, if we fancy the banks are the centuries and years, with their tale of facts and incidents, then naturally enough the stream will carry with it remembrances of its previous, more especially of its immediately previous, history. Hence it is that though these tales are old as the source of time, yet they are new and fresh because they get tinged with the life they have just come through. Hence we may meet with the old heroes fighting against the Norsemen, though the Norsemen appear late in the history of the people.

The Irish literature takes us back over a thousand years at least, and it shows us very clearly how a heroic literature does arise. The earliest Irish literature is of this nature. The narrative is in prose, but the speeches and sayings of the chief characters are put in verse. That is the general outline of the literary method. Of course all the speeches are not in verse; descriptive speeches are often not. Narrative, too, may appear in verse, especially as a summary of a foregoing prose recital. It is a mistake to think that the oldest literature was in verse. Narrative and verse always go together in the oldest forms. But as time goes on and contact with other literatures exists, the narrative too

is changed to verse. Hence our ballads are in their narrative part, as a rule, but rhymed prose, done in late times, three or four hundred years ago, more or less—probably more. These tales and verses have no authors; they are all anonymous. Poets and singers were numerous as a guild in Ireland and Scotland, and were highly honoured; they were the abstracts and chronicles of the time—newspapers, periodicals, and especially novels, all in one. But they were a guild where the work of the individual was not individually claimed. We hear of great bards, but we never hear of their works, unless, indeed, they are introduced as saying or singing something after a narrative or within a prose tale. This literary style remained till very late, and it produced among other things those remarkable colloquies between Ossian and Patrick so well known in later Irish and in Gaelic literature. Patrick asks questions and Ossian answers, going on to tell a tale in verse. But it was not imagined for a moment that Ossian composed the poem; he only *said* those verses--the poet put them in his mouth, nor did Patrick compose his share of the dialogue. The anonymous poet alone is responsible for his puppets. The Dean of Lismore is the first that attributes the authorship of the poetry to those who merely say the poetry. Thus he introduces as authors of the poems Fergus, Caoilte, Ossian, and others. In this way Conall Cernach is made responsible for "Laoidh nan Ceann" though Emer bears her share of the dialogue. The figure of Ossian relating his tales to Patrick took hold of the popular imagination, and Macpherson, in an unfortunate hour, jumped to the conclusion that here was a great poet of antiquity. Immediately the world resounded with the old hero's name, though he was no more a poet, nor less so, than any others of his heroic companions. It was merely because he happened, so the tales said, to survive till Christian times, that he was responsible for telling those tales. Curiously enough the Gaelic mind, in its earlier literature, always made responsible some such survivor from past times, for the history of those times. Thus, Finntan told the history anterior to and after the Deluge, for he lived on from before the Deluge till the sixth century. Fergus Mac Roich, Cuchulinn's friend, was raised from the dead to repeat the Tain Bo Chualgne in the sixth century. And Ossian came back from Tir-nan-Og to tell the Fenian *epos* to Patrick.

The construction of the verse in these ballads must be noted. The true ballad is made up of verses of four lines: four is always the number of lines in the verse of the heroic poetry. The second

and fourth lines end in a rhyme word, and there are four feet in each line. That is the old heroic measure. At times consecutive lines rhyme, and in lyrical passages other measures come in, as, for instance, in Fionn's "Praise of Goll." The feet are now-a-days measured by four accented syllables, but it was quite different in old Goidelic poetry. The rules there were these:—Every line must consist of a certain number of syllables. As a rule the last word was a rhyme-word corresponding to one in the next or in the third line. These rhyme-words bound the lines into either couplets or quatrains. Every line had a pause or cesura in it, and the words before this cesura might rhyme with each other. Accent or stress was disregarded, and this accounts for some of the irregularities in our old ballads in regard to rhyme and metre. Thus, some make the last or unaccented syllable of a dissyllable rhyme with an accented monosyllable. On the whole, the ballads have rectified themselves to suit the modern style of placing the accent or stress on the rhymed syllables, and of having a certain number (4) of accents in the line.

A word as to Macpherson's heroic Gaelic poetry. He has at times the old heroic quatrain, but as often as not his lines are mere measured prose. The lines are on an average from seven to eight syllables in length. Sometimes rhyme binds them together, sometimes not. Evidently three things swayed his mind in adopting this measure or rather no-measure. It was easy, this measured prose; and his English is also measured prose that can be put in lines of like length with the Gaelic. Secondly, he had a notion, from the researches of Dr Lowth on Hebrew poetry, that primitive poetry was measured prose. Hebrew poetry consists of periods, divided into two or more corresponding clauses of the same structure and of nearly the same length; the second clause contains generally a repetition, contrast, or explanation of the sentiment expressed by the first. The result of these responses or parallelisms is a sententious harmony or measured prose, which also appears even in the English Bible. Macpherson was a divinity student when he began his Ossianic work, and not merely does the form of the English translation and Gaelic original show his study of Hebrew poetry, but his poems show distinct imitations—even plagiarisms—from the Bible. Notably is this the case in the poem Comala. Macpherson, thirdly, had an idea that rhyme was a modern invention, probably non-existent in Ossianic times. Unfortunately he did not know that rhyme is a Celtic invention, and possibly much older than the period of Ossian and his compeers, if they lived in the 3rd century. Had he known this, we might

now possess heroic Gaelic poetry of the proper type in quatrains and with rhymes; but, instead of this, Macpherson's Gaelic "original" is merely poetic prose—a halt between the Hebrew Psalms and Pope's rhymes. It is an irritating compromise, with good quatrains stuck mid wastes of prose to remind us of "what might have been," and its mere structure is enough to disprove both its antiquity and authenticity.

The consideration of the heroic literature of the Gael cannot be closed without a reference to Macpherson's "Ossian." A mere summary of his position in regard to the heroic cycles is all that need be given. Macpherson always aimed at the antique, but everywhere ended in sham-antique, for, last century, the ideas prevalent in regard to the primitive stages of society were highly Utopian, poetical, and vague—totally unlike the reality which this century has proved such states of society to be. The ultra-naturalism of his time led Macpherson to confine his prisoners in caves, to make his heroes drink from shells, and to cause them to use the bosses of their shields for drums and war-signalling—a piece of gross archæological nonsense. The whole life of the heroes is open air, with vague reference to halls. Now what did they eat or drink, or how were they dressed or housed? We know, in the real tales, this often in too minute a fashion; but in Macpherson everything is vague and shadowy. And when he does condescend on such details, he falls into gross errors. He arms his heroes in mail and helmet; now, the real old tales speak of neither, and it is undoubtedly the fact that defensive armour was not used by the Gaelic Insular Celts. Bows and arrows fill a prominent place in his plots; yet bows and arrows were not used by the ancient Gael, nor, indeed, by the ancient Celt. Again, his mythology is unspeakably wrong; ghosts appear everywhere, in daylight or night-time; they are a nuisance in fact. Yet ghosts have no place at all in the real ballads and tales. True, Cuchulinn's ghost is raised by Patrick, and Fergus MacRoich's by some saints later on; but those ghosts are as substantial as when alive, and as gorgeous and glorious. Macpherson's heaven is a mixture of classical reminiscences, with some Norse mythology, and a vague, windy place in cloudland is faintly pictured. And his references to religous rites show that he believed Toland's theories as to the Druids and their altars and circles. Then, the machinery of his poetry is all modern: fogs and mists, locks flowing on the wind, green meteors, clouds, and mountains, storms and ghosts, those eternal ghosts!—maids in armour—always love-sick— and always dying on their lovers'

bodies. And there are further his addresses to natural objects, such as the sun and moon; and his sympathy with nature, and description of lone mountains and moors, have no counterpart in the real ballads. Descriptions we do have in the ballads, minute and painstaking, but they are of persons, dress, houses, arms, or of human interests of some kind. Then his similes and metaphors are done to excess; both are rare, indeed full-blown similes are absent, in the grave directness of the original ballads. Some of his similes sin against the laws of their use, as comparing things to things unknown or imagined, as actions of men illustrated by actions of ghosts riding on winds. Then, thinking that he was at liberty to play any tricks with the history which these myths pretend to hold, and thinking, too, that he had an open field for any vagaries in regard to pre-Christian Irish and Scotch history, he has manufactured history on every hand. Bringing the Scandinavians upon Ireland in the third century is but a small part of his sins. The whole of "Temora," save the death of Oscar, is manufactured in history and plot. "Fingal" is founded distantly on the ballad of Manus, but its history of Ireland is again manufactured, and the terrible blunder of bringing Cuchulinn and Fionn together, though always separate in the tales by years and customs, is enough itself to prove want of authenticity. Most of the poems are his own invention pure and simple, while those whose kernel of plot he imitated, are changed in their epic dress so far as to be scarcely recognisable. In fact, there are scarcely a dozen places where the old ballads can at all be compared to his work. These are the opening of "Fingal" (slightly), Cuchulinn's Chariot, Episodes of Ferda, Agandecca (slightly), and Faine-soluis, Ossian's Courtship, Fight of Fingal and Swaran (Manus), Death of Oscar in Temora, plots of Battle of Lora, Darthula, and Carhon (founded on the Cuchulinn and Conloch story), and these are all that can be correlated in the present editions. There is not a line of the Gaelic given the same as the Gaelic of the ballads. Indeed, Macpherson rejected the ballads as "Irish," and Dr Clerk says that they cannot be of the same authorship as Macpherson's Ossian. And he is right. Yet these ballads were the only poetry known among the people as Ossian's, and it is to them that the evidence taken by the Highland Society always refers as basis for the parts the people thought they recognised of Macpherson's Ossian. Gallie and Ferguson actually quoted them in support of the authenticity, and others named or described them specially. Yet Macpherson and Clerk reject them as non-Ossianic. Macpherson's Gaelic was written after the English, often long after,

for, in one place, he gives Gaelic in his 1763 edition in a note (Temora, VIII. 383-5) quite different from what he gave when he came to write the poem consecutively. The Gaelic is very modern, its idiom is tinctured strongly with English, while out of its seventeen hundred words, fifty at least are borrowed, and some forty more are doubtful. The conclusion we come to is simply this:—Macpherson is as truly the author of "Ossian" as Milton is of "Paradise Lost." Milton is to the Bible in even nearer relation than Macpherson is to the Ossianic ballads. Milton retained the essential outlines of Biblical narrative, but Macpherson did not scruple to change even that. Macpherson's Ossian is therefore his own poetry; it is pseudo-antique of the type of Virgil's Æneid, and, in excellence of poetry, far superior to the work of the Roman, though in its recklessness of imagery and wildness of imagination, Macpherson wants the classic chasteness and repose that marks Virgil. He deserved the place he appropriated in Westminster Abbey; he knew it was his and not Ossian's. This last act of his, therefore, eloquently proves that he was in his own eyes the real author of the Ossian which he gave to the world, and which he hesitatingly, though tacitly, claimed in his 1773 preface.

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