

a forest saint. He lived to govern the Church of Utrecht for many years, but he ceased not to sigh for the hour of his release. It came at length, and not without a warning from his angel-friend, a year before that it was at hand. Often during that year he visited the tomb of Lambert, and recommended himself to his prayers; and when the day was come which he knew would be his

last, he preached a farewell sermon to his people, and then lay down to die. When the last moment drew near, he rose in his bed, and joining his hands with the simplicity of a child, he recited the Creed and the Our Father, and so expired on May 30, in the year 727. His body, and the golden key of St. Peter, are deposited in the Collegiate Church of St. Peter in Liège.

war, of love, and of social life in general, are portrayed, often with considerable power of description and great brilliancy of language; and there are besides several sacred tracts and poems, amongst the most remarkable of which is the *Liber Hymnorum*, believed to be more than a thousand years old. The Trinity College collection is also rich in lives of Irish saints, and in ancient forms of prayer; and it contains, in addition to all these, many curious treatises on medicine, beautifully written on vellum. Lastly, amongst these ancient MSS. are preserved numerous Ossianic poems relating to the Fenian heroes, some of them of very great antiquity.

## IRISH READINGS

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### THE OLD BOOKS OF ERINN

(From O'Curry's Lectures on the *Manuscript Materials of Irish History*.)

Not only were the old Irish nobility, gentry, and people in general, lovers of their native language and literature, and patrons of literary men, but even the great Anglo-Norman nobles themselves who effected a permanent settlement among us appear from the first to have adopted what doubtless must have seemed to them the better manners, customs, language, and literature of the natives; and not only did they munificently patronise their professors, but became themselves proficient in these studies; so that the Geraldines, the Butlers, the Burkes, the Keatings, and others, thought, spoke, and wrote in the Gaedhlic, and stored their libraries with choice and expensive volumes in that language; and they were reproached by their own compatriots with having become *ipsis Hibernis Hiberniores*—"more Irish than the Irish themselves." So great indeed was the value in those days set on literary and historical documents by chiefs and princes, that it has more than once happened that a much-prized MS. was the stipulated ransom of a captive noble, and became the object of a tedious warfare; and this state of things continued to exist for several centuries, even after the whole framework of Irish society was shaken to pieces by the successive invasions of the Danes, the Norsemen, and the Anglo-Normans, followed by the Elizabethan, Cromwellian, and Williamite wars and confiscations, and accompanied by the ever-increasing dissensions of the native princes among themselves, disunited as they were ever after the fall of the supreme monarchy at the close of the twelfth century.

With the dispersion of the native chiefs, not a few of the great books that had escaped the wreck of time were altogether lost to us; many followed the exiled fortunes of their owners; and not a few were placed in inaccessible security at home. Indeed, it may be said that after the termination of the great wars of the seventeenth century, so few and inaccessible were the examples of the old Gaedhlic literature, that it was almost impossible to acquire a perfect knowledge of the language in its purity.

With such various causes, active and long-continued, in operation to effect its destruction, there is reason for wonder that we should still be in possession of any fragments of the ancient literature of our country, however extensive it may once have been. And that it was extensive, and comprehended a wide range of subjects—justifying the ex-

pressions of the old writers who spoke of "the hosts of the books of Erin"—may be judged from those which have survived the destructive ravages of invasion, the accidents of time, and the other causes just enumerated. When we come to inquire concerning the fragments which exist in England and elsewhere, they will be found to be still of very large extent; and if we judge the value and proportions of the original literature of our Gaedhlic ancestors, as we may fairly do, by what remains of it, we may be justly excused the indulgence of no small feeling of national pride.

Notwithstanding, however, the irreparable loss of the before-named books, there still exists an immense quantity of Gaedhlic writing of great purity, and of the highest value as regards the history of this country. And these MSS. comprise general and national history, civil and ecclesiastical records, and abundant materials of genealogy; besides poetry, romance, law, and medicine; and some fragments of tracts on mathematics and astronomy.

The collection in Trinity College consists of over 140 volumes, several of them on vellum, dating from the early part of the 12th down to the middle of the last century. There are also in this fine collection beautiful copies of the Gospels, known as the Books of Kells and Durrow, and Dimma's Book, attributable to the sixth and seventh centuries; the Saltair of St. Ricemarch, Bishop of St. David's in the 11th century, containing also an exquisite copy of the Roman Martyrology; and a very ancient ante-Hieronymian version of the Gospels, the history of which is unknown, but which is evidently an Irish MS. of not later than the 9th century; also the *Evangelistarium* of St. Moling, Bishop of Ferns in the 7th century, with its ancient box; and the fragment of another copy of the Gospels, of the same period, evidently Irish. In the same library will be found, too, the chief body of our more ancient laws and annals—all, with the exception of two tracts, written on vellum; and in addition to these invaluable volumes, many historical and family poems of great antiquity, illustrative of the battles, the personal achievements, and the social habits of the warriors, chiefs, and other distinguished personages of our early history. There is also a large number of ancient historical and romantic tales, in which all the incidents of

The next great collection is that of the Royal Irish Academy, which, though formed at a later period than that of Trinity College, is far more extensive, and, taken in connection with the unrivalled collection of antiquities secured to this country by the liberality of this body, forms a national monument of which we may well be proud. It includes some noble old volumes written on vellum, abounding in history as well as poetry; ancient laws, and genealogy; science (for it embraces several curious medical treatises, as well as an ancient astronomical tract); grammar, and romance. There is there also a great body of most important theological and ecclesiastical compositions, of the highest antiquity, and in the purest style perhaps that the ancient Gaedhlic language ever attained.

The most valuable of these are original Gaedhlic compositions, but there is also a large amount of translations from the Latin, Greek and other languages. A great part of these translations is, indeed, of a religious character, but there are others from various Latin authors, of the greatest possible importance to the Gaedhlic student of the present day, as they enable him by reference to the originals to determine the value of many now obsolete or obscure Gaedhlic words and phrases.

Among these later translations into Irish, we find an extensive range of subjects in ancient mythology, poetry, and history, and the classical literature of the Greeks and Romans, as well as many copious illustrations of the most remarkable events of the middle ages. So that anyone well read in the comparatively few existing fragments of our Gaedhlic literature, and whose education had been confined solely to this source, would find that there were but very few indeed of the great events in the history of the world, the knowledge of which is usually attained through the classic languages, or those of the middle ages, with which he was not acquainted. I may mention, by way of illustration, the Irish versions of the Argonautic Expedition; the Destruction of Troy; the Life of Alexander the Great; the Destruction of Jerusalem; the Wars of Charlemagne, including the history of Roland the Brave; the History of the Lombards; the almost contemporary translation into Gaedhlic of the Travels of Marco Polo; etc., etc.

It is quite evident that a language which has embraced so wide a field of historic and other important subjects, must have undergone a considerable amount of development,