

**A TEXT BOOK OF
IRISH
LITERATURE. PART II**

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A Text Book of Irish Literature. Part II by Eleanor Hull

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ELEANOR HULL

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A Text Book of Irish Literature

Part II.

BY

ELEANOR HULL

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"FAGAN IRELAND," ETC.

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PREFACE.

THE general outline of the theory here advanced as to the origin and spread of the Fenian Legends was suggested to me by reading in proof, some time ago, Mr. John Mac Neill's introduction to his volume containing a portion of the collection of Ossianic poems known as "Duanairé Finn," just published by the Irish Texts Society. I had long been pondering the special features presented by these legends and endeavouring to construct some theory of their origin which would combine such facts as are at present known. The suggestions offered in Mr. Mac Neill's essay regarding the genealogies of Finn, and the general consensus of opinion among the Irish mediæval genealogists that he was sprung from the pre-Milesian or old inhabitants of the country, known by the name of the Fírbolg race, seemed worthy of consideration, and I endeavoured to work out the idea in greater detail. The result will be found in the notes on the legends which occupy the first five chapters of this volume. The theory seems to explain much that was obscure as to the early origin of the tales and their very general hold on the people, in spite of the fact that they do not seem, until a late period, to have been considered by the official scribes as worthy of a place in their collections. It may be objected that a text book for students is not the place in which to advance or discuss new theories of any kind; but whether the explanation here offered be finally accepted or not, it has at least this advantage, that it brings to light and combines a large number of details met with in the tales themselves which could not without some

such theory be satisfactorily presented to the student at all. Thus cohesion is gained in what is otherwise a mere confused mass of data. To my mind, a theory which explains many difficulties, and which takes its stand on the historical conceptions of the writers who recorded the legends is likely to have some foundation of truth. It would be singularly improbable that the highly popular tradition of Finn and his followers should be connected in all the genealogies with the despised races who had been conquered by the Gaels and who were regarded by them as inferior, unless the tradition of their connection were very strong; unless, in fact, these later settlers had themselves received the traditions from or through the older races. The genealogies are not to be regarded as the pedigrees of real personages; but they are real in the sense that they represent the opinion of the learned of an earlier day upon the origin and source of the legends; and they are unanimous in ascribing the origin of Finn to the Firbolg races, that is, to the pre-Milesian tribes then still scattered through the country. It is interesting to reflect that the memory of these despised and conquered people, in describing whom their successors could find no words sufficiently black, has survived in a great body of legend which is as fondly regarded by their conquerors as it ever could have been by the races among whom it first sprang up.

Mr. John Mac Neill has kindly read the chapters relating to the Fenian legends, and I have also to thank Mr. J. J. O'Kelly and Tadhg O'Donnchadha for helpful suggestions in the chapter on Geoffrey Keating and in the Chronology, and Mr. A. Nutt for assistance in the Bibliography.

CHRONOLOGY.

(The references are to pages in the text, which the Chronology is intended only to supplement.)

- f. 1560. FEARFLATHA O'GNIVE, bard of the O'Neills of Clannaboy, accompanied Shane O'Neill to London in 1562, when he was summoned by Elizabeth. His poems had much influence in rousing O'Neill to action in the North, and in stirring up the Irish nobles in other parts of the kingdom. His best known poem is the "Downfall (or 'stepping-down') of the Gael," a lament over the condition of Ireland and the inaction of the chiefs. This O'Gnive, or more probably another bard of the same name, wrote a lament on the death of Teigue Dall O'Higgin, who was murdered in 1617 by the O'Haras.
- 1550 (?). LOGHLIN ÓG O'DALY. O'Reilly gives the above date, but he seems from his poem, "Whither are gone the Gael?" to have lived on into the period of the Ulster plantations (*infra* p.159). He wrote also an address to Owny O'Loughlin of Burren in Clare, and a poem on the expulsion of the Franciscan friars from their convents.
- d. 1570. ANGUS O'DALY FIONN, called *na diadhachta* or "The Divine," a voluminous religious poet. O'Reilly gives fifteen poems by him chiefly penitential or in praise of the Blessed Virgin, and others are known. A particularly sweet

poem is his *Grian na maighdean mathair Dé*,
"Sun of all Virgins the mother of God."

- d. 1617. ANGUS O'DALY, called the "Red Bard" or "Angus of the Satires," wrote a poem lampooning the chief families of Ireland (pp.174-6) for Carew, in whose service he seems to have been retained. He lived at Ballyovrone, Co. Cork. Stabbed in revenge by one of the servants of O'Meagher.
- fl. 1566. JOHN MAC TORNA O'MULCHONAIRE of Ardchoill in Thomond. A fine ode on the inauguration of Brian na Murtha "of the Bulwarks" O'Rourke, as chief of Breifney, on the death of his brother Hugh in 1566, was written by him. It is in a difficult dialect, and a gloss was added by Thaddeus O'Rody in the seventeenth century. O'Rourke was one of the most powerful and determined opponents of Elizabeth. In 1592 he was delivered over to the English queen by James VI. of Scotland, to whom he had fled for refuge, and was hanged at Tyburn.
- fl. 1600. FLANN MAGRATH OR M'CRAITH. Poem on Ireland's shepherdless condition, beginning "Many the complaints that Ireland utters." Poems on Thomas Butler, tenth Earl of Ormond (d. 1614), and on Death and Judgment. Some of the M'Craiths were poets to the O'Byrnes of Co. Wicklow, and of Ranelagh, near Dublin, and there are numerous poems by them to members of the family.
- fl. 1584. DERMOT O'COBHTHAIGH (O'Coffey), poet of the barony of Rathconrate, Co. Westmeath. Lament for the death of his kinsman Uaithne