Reviews

Price £9.00.

Why a new history of Ireland at this juncture? What can be new in the old story that merits retelling? Apart from the fact that the study of source material is continually adding to our knowledge of the past, it is also true, as Professor R. Dudley Edwards points out in his epilogue to this book that “history in Ireland has been written by every generation according to its own predilections”—it might be more true, in fact, to say that each generation seeks to interpret the past in the light of its own needs.

At the present time, when we hear and read so much about the differing communities in Ireland especially in the north of the country, Professor Edwards’ original approach to his subject is a particularly happy one in that he seeks to present it by identifying and discussing the various groups of people who, from earliest times, formed or considered themselves to form the community of Ireland or a part thereof.

Professor Edwards shows us how each intrusive group came, in time, to consider itself as forming a community of Ireland and how, while initially antagonistic to the existing community or communities, it gradually, under pressure from forces external to both, came to identify with them. The process was facilitated when affinity of religious belief formed a bond between the old and the new, but was rendered very difficult, if not indeed impossible, when religious differences were used to perpetuate division. We can see, for example, how the Old Irish and the Anglo-Normans, i.e. the Old English in Ireland, remained mutually antagonistic—the description “more Irish than the Irish themselves” is only superficially true—until pressure from the New Protestant English at the time of the early Stuart Kings forced them to come together in defence of their lands, power, and religion. We can see, furthermore, how the New English and the later Cromwellian settlers came, in the course of time, to regard themselves not merely as an extension of the community of England who happened to reside in Ireland, but as forming the ‘official’ community of the country. This feeling of separateness reached its fullest expression in the agitation which led to the repeal of Poyning’s Law and the setting up of two separate and independent states under a common monarch. It is, indeed, highly probable that had not the Act of Union, which became law in 1801, reversed this arrangement the other, Catholic, community in Ireland would, in time, have coalesced with the ‘official’ community and we would not today be faced with the problem of two apparently irreconcilable communities in Northern Ireland.

When Professor Edwards enters the related field of prehistory he appears to become a little confused. He refers on page 2, for instance, to Neolithic people in Middle Stone Age Ireland, apparently not realising that the term Middle Stone Age, i.e. the Mesolithic, and the term Neolithic are mutually exclusive, and refer to stages in Man’s development rather than to specific periods of time. This is a very minor flaw, however, in an otherwise scholarly and well-written work which should be of no little assistance to this generation of Irishmen in arriving at an understanding of its present difficulties.

Published in Ireland, this book is as fine a single volume history of Ireland as has yet been produced, and is fair value for money at the price.

Patrick Griffin


This is a really attractive little publication, containing a wealth of interesting, varied, and informative material. It is, furthermore, well printed on art paper, well bound (albeit paperbacked), and lavishly illustrated, mainly with fine, clear photographs. Subtitled *The history of the Bruree district, i.e., the history of the parish of Bruree and of the old parish of Tunkardstown*, this book runs to 106 pages (including two title pages, one in Irish and the other in English) but suffers grievously from the want of a table of Contents, a serious (and unnecessary) omission. Such a table would have provided a useful indication of the many varied items covered in the book, as will, it is hoped, be realised from the following: Preparing the Ground (p.11); Myth and Early History.
The Irish Sea Province, so-called, might seem to be somewhat remote from Thomond, but any summary of fact and hypothesis relating to the Irish Iron Age is relevant for the whole of this island. The book under review comprises a series of papers given at a conference of the Council for British Archaeology held at Cardiff in 1969. Three Irish archaeologists took part, the Raferty, Ó Pears and Ó Fada, and our Society's editor, Mr. Rynne.

In the first paper Dr. Joseph Raferty emphasises again and again the urgent necessity for research into problems of the Irish Iron Age, which he defines as the millennium between 500 B.C. and A.D. 500. He believes that a Bronze Age culture continued until c. 200 B.C. and perhaps later. This seems reasonable for, as Dr. Raferty suggests, we should not think of Ireland in terms of a unitary cultural province at this period. The perennial question of identifying the material remains of the ancestors of the historic Celts is referred to, but no conclusions may be drawn from present evidence. He comments that most of the La Tène inspired metalwork is probably of insular origin, although in respect of gold-work the metal must have been derived from the Upper Rhine. Although he would agree that there was movement in the Irish Sea, this movement was commonly in a north-south (sic) direction rather than in a west-east (sic) one.

There follow three chapters on hill-forts, two concerning Britain and one on Irish forts. In the first Mr. A. H. A. Hogg, like Dr. Raferty, questions the notion of an Irish Sea province during the Iron Age. His examination reveals that there is much diversity of plan and construction among the hill-forts of coastal Wales. The recent excavation of Walseland Kirk in Pembroke-shire, however, has revealed a defended settlement of Irish type, the occupation of which continued into the fourth century A.D.

In his discussion of the forts of the Welsh Border Dr. S. C. Stanford takes us further away from problems of the Irish Sea province, which he barely mentions. His ideas on the Marcher hill-forts are important for British prehistorians, however, in particular in his isolation of these forts from those in coastal Wales discussed by Mr. Hogg.

The third chapter on hill forts is that of Mr. Barry Raferty who writes on the hitherto much neglected subject of Irish hill-forts. He makes a distinction between hill-forts sensu stricto and those ring-forts which occupy dominant positions and the larger cliff-top fortresses of the western coastal areas, such as Dún Aengusa on Inishmore. Some fifty hill-forts have been identified in Ireland, and Raferty proposes a three-fold classification: simple univallate, multivallate and inland promontory forts. About half of the total belong to Class I, univallate enclosures, which appear to be concentrated in the eastern part of the country and in the interior of which are often found earlier prehistoric burial structures. The distribution of the fifteen or so Class II multivallate forts with widely spaced defences which is to be found principally in the west and south in areas where univallate structures are rare, appears to be significant. Class III inland promontory forts are fewer in number and form no significant distribution pattern. In the absence of excavation and
recovery of closely dated finds it is not really possible to relate the Irish hill-forts to those of southern Britain. Raferty, however, does offer the hypothesis of possible Scottish and Iberian connections.

The two following papers take us away from defensive structures to other aspects of life in Iron Age Ireland. Professor David Green discusses technical terms derived from early Irish literature in order to reconstruct the appearance of a chariot. He visualises it as having been a lightly-built, two-wheeled vehicle with two seats in tandem, and drawn by a pair of horses yoked to a pole. The wheels had iron tyres, and in some cases there may have been two rearward projecting shafts, reminiscent of more recent Irish practice, but this suggestion is not stressed. It would seem that the vehicle was largely an indigenous development.

Mr. Etienne Rynne's paper is another of his contributions to the study of pagan Celtic stone heads in Ireland. He discusses the stylistic features of all carved stone heads which he can confidently attribute to pre-Christian Ireland. There are six concentrations in Ulster and a seventh in the Fintown area of Co. Kilkenny, and some few isolated heads are spread across the country.

Mr. Rynne compares the heads in toto and in detail with analogues in Britain and on the Continent, basing his arguments on art-historical criteria in the absence of satisfactory archaeological evidence.

In a short note Professor Charles Thomas reviews the presently unsatisfactory knowledge of souterrains in Britain and Ireland and asks several pertinent questions which cannot be answered from a study of available data.

The final paper is by Professor Leslie Alcock who returns to the original theme of the conference, which was largely ignored by the majority of contributors. Professor Alcock's task was both to summarise the state of knowledge on the eve of the conference, and to comment on the individual papers which, as has been seen, were concerned with specific aspects of the period. Although he admits the paucity of evidence to really prove the existence of an Irish Sea province in the pre-Roman Iron Age, in looking backward to the end of the Bronze Age and forward to the Early Christian Period, he argues that at these periods the concept of a cultural zone is valid. In using what archaeological evidence there is relevant to the Iron Age, he draws a similar conclusion. But much research and excavation are necessary before this hypothesis can be substantiated.

All in all, this is a valuable corpus of papers, well presented and illustrated. The CBA is to be congratulated on its fine series of Research Reports.

J.X.W.P. Corcoran


This book is the work of two historians, one, the late Patrick Canon Cahalane who for many years devoted himself to the laborious task of collecting the basic materials, and the other, Dr. Evelyn Bolster (Sister Mary Angela) who brought the work to its final state of publication. Before passing on to the task of assessing its merits, one feels obliged to note, with a certain amount of disapproval, the omission of any reference to the late Canon Cahalane in the title. If a definitive study such as we have here is the work of two people and the burden of labour is shared by them, it is only right that the honours be likewise divided.

As to the book itself, we are given, within its 548 pages, a full and detailed account of the history of the Cork diocese from the time when the first Christian communities were formed in the valley of the Lee down to the middle of the sixteenth century when the Protestant Reformation changed the entire course of Church history. The early chapters on 'St. Finbarr' and 'A Church in Transition' are, to some extent, unsatisfactory in that one might be led to accept as historical facts, if not elsewhere forewarned, what is in most instances mere pseudo-history or, at best, medieval propaganda. What reliable evidence, in fact, do we possess for the Christian Church of the fifth and sixth centuries in Ireland and for saints such as Finbarr? Most modern scholars of early Irish history are reluctant to extend the contemporaneity, and hence the reliability, of our annalistic records back beyond the middle of the eighth century, or at best to the late seventh century. It would appear that, in places, Dr. Bolster is too lenient and uncritical of her medieval sources when she attempts to project this evidence back in time.

In pages xxxv and xxxvi of the Introduction the question of pre-Patrician Christianity is touched upon, and in listing the evidence for this the commercial relations between Ireland and
western Gaul are cited. Proof of this fourth and fifth century commerce has been found by the late Professor Seán P. Ó Ríordáin at Garranes ringfort — in the shape of late Roman wheel-made pottery, some of which may have had a direct link with the introduction of Christianity into the Cork area. It is a pity that no mention is made of this important evidence, although a number of references are made to Ó Ríordáin's report on the excavations at the site and the historical evidence for associating Garranes with the Eoghanacht of Raithland.

In contrast to the early chapters, the chapters dealing with the early medieval church are of a much higher standard. We are given a very full account of the change-over from the early monastic church to the episcopal diocese during the reform movement of the twelfth century. The Synods of Cashel, Rathbreasail and Kells, and the parts played by the leading ecclesiastical figures of the day, such as Ceallach, Gilbert and Malachy, are, in turn, treated of as the story of the diocese unfolds. The Norman Irish Church and the feudal hierarchy of Cork receive full attention and one feels that here in the medieval period Dr. Bolster is on her home ground, so to speak, and the text reflects this confident grasp of and familiarity with the sources and evidence. We are provided with a wealth of detail — in two separate chapters the careers of the medieval bishops are outlined and another chapter gives a fine account of the life of Blessed Thaddeus McCarthy, while one of the many appendices lists the known prelates of the diocese from 1186 to 1531. A rather unusual order is adopted in the placement of the appendices: they are inserted at the end of each chapter and, while this may have its advantages, it does tend to disrupt the sense of continuity and narrative which a history of this kind should possess.

The Monastic Orders contributed in no small measure to the development of the medieval church of Cork, and the part played by the Augustinians, Franciscans and Dominicans, to mention but a few, is here for all to read and reflect upon. Little, if anything, is overlooked, though at least one reader would have welcomed a map showing the locations — as far as could be determined — of the various houses of the religious orders referred to. Despite its wealth of statistical data, this lack of attention to topographical detail is obvious when comparisons are drawn with other well-known diocesan histories.

Full indexes and a bibliography of sources, primary and secondary, are provided, the latter, however containing at least one very enormous reference on page 521 to a 'book' by H. G. Leask entitled Christian Art in Ireland, 2 vols. Dublin 1941 — no such work was produced by that eminent scholar of Irish medieval architecture. The context of the reference (see p. 57) suggests that the correct title and author should be Christian Art in Ancient Ireland, Vol. II, Dublin 1941, edited by J. Raftery.

THOMAS FANNING


Part I of the first volume of the History of Irish Catholicism, published in 1967, was by Dr. Ludwig Bieler and dealt with the mission of St. Patrick [reviewed in this Journal, 10 (1986-87), 230-231]. Part II in some slight degree overlaps this, since Fr. Ryan discusses briefly the alleged 'pre-Patrickian' saints, Clárán of Saighir, Declán, Tobar and Ailbe, and finds himself unable to support the claims made for them. The matter cannot however be regarded as closed, since the evidence for their dates is even less satisfactory than that for Patrick, and the question must probably be left permanently open. Much of the opening section of Fr. Ryan's essay is in fact devoted to thumbnail sketches of the early monastic founders, and I confess to finding it unsatisfactory. This is no criticism of Fr. Ryan. Had a title of the energy expended over the last thirty years on the Patrickian question been devoted to the Lives of the other Irish saints, in an attempt to sift fact from fiction in them, to assess their probable sources and the date of their probable archetype, Fr. Ryan's task would have been vastly easier. Only the Lives of Clárán of Clonmacnois have been submitted to detailed examination to determine the date of their archetype, by Fredric Mac Donncha, O.F.M.

When Fr. Ryan passes to early Irish monastic life, with which he has been occupied since his work on Irish Monasticism, published over forty years ago, he provides an admirably clear summary of what the sources tell us of perhaps the most attractive aspect of early Irish history.
Significantly, he draws hardly at all on the saints' Lives, but makes excellent use of the monastic 'rules' in Latin and Old Irish, and of the tract on the usages of Tallaght. On a few minor points one may differ from him: that Colum Cille was descended on his mother's side 'from Cathaor Mór, the most famous of the Leinster kings' (p. 3) is not certain: an unpublished tract on the mothers of Irish saints claims her for the Corpaige of Panad, which seems more likely. It is not, I hope, pedantry to withhold recognition from Muirchertiach son of Erc as 'high-king' (ibid.), and limit him to being king of Tara. I do not know why Fr. Ryan claims 556 as the most probable date for the death of Ciarán of Clonmacnois (p. 15), nor am I inclined to see Mo-Sinn moecc Min of Bangor as 'in all probability' the compiler of 'the earliest of the great series of native Irish Annals' (p. 26). That the Stowe Missal was written 'probably at Lorrha' (p. 59) seems to me none too probable; and the doubts that have been expressed of the extent of Columban's acquaintance with 'Virgil, Horace, Sallust, Ovid, Juvenal and other pagan writers' (p. 63) have recently received formidable support from a Nijmegen doctoral thesis by Johannes Wilhelmus Smit, of which an English translation appeared in 1971. Smit's view is that all the classical reminiscences to be found in Columban's authentic works are second-hand through Jerome, Augustine and other Christian writers who, like Jerome, were soaked in the classics; and he has drastically reduced the roster of authentic texts.

These points notwithstanding, this essay is to be commended to all who are interested not only in the early Irish church but also in early Irish society, both for the knowledge skillfully deployed, and for the fellowship with, and indeed affection for, these 'warriors of Christ' that shines through Fr. Ryan's pages.

Part III, by Mgr. P. J. Corish, is a tour de force. In less than a hundred lucid pages he expounds the problems facing the church in Ireland from the fifth to the twelfth century, and the solutions attempted for them. He has of course drawn heavily on the work of such scholars as Dr. Kathleen Hughes — as what sane man would not — but he has also ranged into early Irish literature both, in Irish and Latin to flesh out the bare bones of analysis with the eipsisima verba of some of those who had to wrestle with the conversion of Christian theory into practice. I think that perhaps he overestimates the influence and importance of the céna (pp. 20-21), but on the other hand I am happy to see Mac Conglinne called in as witness for the twelfth century. In short, an admirable piece of work.

GARÚID MAC NIÓCAIL

Michael Dolley, MEDIEVAL ANGLO IRISH COINS, B. A. Seaby Ltd. (in conjunction with The Institute for Irish Studies, Queen's University, Belfast), London 1972. Price £3.00.

W. A. Seaby, formerly Director of the Ulster Museum, Belfast, and himself a leading worker in the field of Irish coins, states in the Preface to this book that Michael Dolley's special interest is in 'the integration of Numismatics and History'. For years Mr. Dolley, a long-time member of our Society, has shown us in the numerous articles published in virtually every learned journal in these islands how he can link a superficially unimpressive coin hoard with an historical event. But this time he has surpassed himself, in using the evidence of Ireland's coins to illuminate and enlarge upon the story of Ireland from the coming of the Anglo Normans in 1169 to the Flight of the Earls in 1607. With the publication of this book it is more forcefully than ever brought home to us that one can no longer regard numismatics as merely a collector's method of classifying the coins in his cabinet, but that it is truly a major aspect of historical research.

The whole history of Medieval Ireland cannot, of course, be traced through its coinage, as it was not until the reign of Henry VIII (1509-1547) that 'the extensive use of coin seems to have begun to infiltrate Gaelic society' (p. 79) — Henry was, incidentally, the first to include a harp on Irish coins. However, the history of the Anglo-Irish colonists can be followed, numismatic study, for example, illustrating their loyalties to the various English kings — indeed, the Yorkist tendencies of the Anglo-Irish during the late 15th century is clearly proven by their coins, not least by the issue of Irish coins for the ten-year-old pretender Lambert Simnel who was crowned 'King Edward VI of England' in Dublin on the 24th of May, 1487.

The first Anglo-Irish coins date from c. 1165, the chronology of which coinage was first studied in detail by Dolley and O'Sullivan in the Society's North Munster Studies, an important paper which receives due prominence in this book — as do many of the numismatic papers published in our Journal.
Shortly after these earliest coins, from 1294 to 1426, decisions were taken which stipulated that Irish coins were to be of the same weight and fineness as their English counterparts. The advantages of this were that Anglo-Irish coinage was legal tender in England and wherever English coins were used, and the facilitating of trade, but its main disadvantage was that it also meant 'that there was little or nothing to prevent the wealth of the island being siphoned out of the country — and often directly into the English King's coffers' (p. 20). This was disastrous for the Anglo-Irish colonists and, as Dolley remarks, they "were having to learn the hard way that the best interests of loyalists and of the English Crown do not necessarily coincide" (p. 20), a comment perhaps equally fitting today!

The drain of silver out of Ireland was halted in 1461 with the striking of a new Irish coinage which had not only designs very different from those of England but also weighed only three-quarters as much as the English pieces while still having nominally the same value — "a very carefully contrived devaluation of the Irish pound" (p. 21). This expedience encouraged the flow of English currency into Ireland as it was also laid down that English money would be worth more than its face value when used in Ireland. Added interest is present in that these new coins were anonymous, not bearing the name of any king — an indicator of the ambiguous support of the Anglo-Irish for either the House of York or that of Lancaster! This intriguing situation did not last long, however, as in 1465 the Anglo-Irish currency suddenly reverted to purely English types.

A minor feature of 15th century Anglo-Irish currency, namely the abundance of crude forgeries in use, is also dealt with in this book. These forgeries were made by pressing silver foil against genuine coins and soldering the two impressions together with lead-solder to bring them up to the required weight. Indeed, a forger’s kit for this very purpose was discovered in 1602, near Pettingo, Co. Donegal, and 'O’Rally’s Money', publically denounced in 1447 and 1456, probably was of this base type.

Mr. Dolley traces the financial and political history of Ireland down to 1607 when James I, the Stuart successor to Tudor Elizabeth, abandoned the idea of a separate silver coinage for Ireland. This opened the way for the eventual integration of the English and Irish currencies, an event which was further helped on its way in 1637 when it was ordained that all official payments, etc., were to be quoted and rendered in sterling — English coinage became the legal tender though Irish coinage continued in use. The final integration took place during the reign of George IV (1820-1830).

Not only is this book almost a history book and not a coin catalogue, but it is the type of book which will appeal to the non-specialist. It contains many interesting details, all relevant in one way or another, and it is rarely difficult to read — a sort of nodding acquaintance with England’s kings and queens, and an outline knowledge of the history of Medieval England and Ireland, will help, however.

The book is beautifully printed on good quality art paper, and among the numerous illustrations it includes four colour plates and seven distribution maps. There are also Appendices on the use of foreign coins in Ireland during the period under review, on Medieval Irish coin-hoarders (provisional lists and five of the maps), and one providing what is probably the most useful account available to date on Treasure Trove in Ireland. What one misses most in this book are footnotes and a complete bibliography, though both omissions are somewhat rectified by an excellent annotated list of "Suggestions for Further Reading". The book is also provided with Indices.

Despite the rather 19th century antiquarian style of its dust jacket, and of the multi-coloured title page, there is nothing old-fashioned about this book. As the author says (on p. 75), about an 18th century precursor of this book, it "is one that may ... be read with enjoyment as well as profit". It is, furthermore, extremely good value at the price.

Étienne Rynne


First impressions suggest that this book is *haute vulgarisation* of the type to appeal to the general reader while still having something of value for the specialist. It certainly had the makings of such a work, but as it stands it will satisfy few — not least, I rather suspect, its author, a former President of our Society. The general impression gained from reading through this book is of a rushed job, containing rather loosely linked jottings fleshed out with interesting comments and
anecdotes. While one might excuse the occasional misprint which occurs, there can be little excuse for the poor editorial work — seldom has a book with the illustrations (and references to them) so eccentrically laid out come to the reviewer’s notice: it is unusual, to say the least, to find the text beginning on page 19 with an ‘Introduction’ following on several pages of illustrations. While on the subject of the illustrations, one might be permitted to point out that no. 5 (the Tara Brooch) is printed on its side, and that its caption describes it as “of decorated gilded bronze” while in the text on page 22 it is more correctly described as “of heavy silver gilt”. Furthermore, illustration no. 83 should have followed no. 81 and have been similarly captioned. Finally, the captions to nos. 71 and 72 make acknowledgement to the non-existent Journal of the Thomand [sic] Archaeological Society, a minor but annoying mistake.

In his ‘Introduction’ Dr. Wyse Jackson divides the history of Irish silver into three main phases: (i) the pre-Norman period; (ii) the Gothic period; and (iii) the post-1337 period.

The pre-Norman period is covered very briefly, but there are, regrettably, at least four rather serious errors which jumped to the reviewer’s notice. These include the dates given for the Broighter Collar (p. 21) and for the Book of Kells (p. 22), both of which are dated a century, perhaps a hundred and fifty years, too late. The ‘second century Alexandrine piece’ (p. 25) in the Balline Hoard is now recognised as belonging to the early fourth century, as does the rest of the hoard (see J. M. C. Toynbee, Art in Britain under the Romans: Oxford 1964, p. 313) and in the inscription on the Ardagh Chalice St. Paul replaces Judas, not Matthias (p. 23).

The Gothic period is dealt with equally briefly but with greater assurance. Just as Limerick figured importantly in the earlier phase with the Ardagh Chalice and the Balline Hoard, it now figures with the O’Dea Crozer, dated 1418, which has not only been expertly described by John Harty (The O’Dea Mitre and Crozer, a few copies of which are still available through the Society), but which has recently been repaired and restored through his good offices.

The third phase of Irish silverworking is treated in greater depth, not only in general but with some aspects in greater detail. The development of the ubiquitous spoon, for instance, is outlined, though without an illustration showing the chronological sequence of bowl-shapes the different varieties are rather difficult to follow. The earliest surviving Irish silver spoon (illustration no. 11) is by George Gallant, of Dublin, and dates to 1839–40.

The tea-pot is likewise discussed, and we are told that the first tea drunk in these islands, during the mid-17th century, was “a china drink” (Samuel Pepys, 1660), and it is interesting to learn that as early as 1688 Londoners may have been referring to “cups of cha”, for in that year an advertisement in the London press informed prospective buyers that it was an approved China Drink called by the Chinese Tcha” — my Concise Oxford Dictionary further informs me that Ch’a is Mandarin (i.e. upper class) dialect while thee is Amoy dialect.

The Irish dish-ring, first made about 1740, is also examined in some detail. The author points out that its purpose was to support bowls, “dish” meaning “bowl” in Georgian times, and that it was the Victorians who mised it “potato-ring” and misused it accordingly. . . . as did the reviewer’s Limerick-born Victorian grandmother.

Some fascinating accounts of the manner in which Irish Church Plate (chalices, patens, etc.) and Irish Civic Silver survived or, more frequently, were lost, stolen, sold or destroyed, are given, though the interesting and varied history of the Galway Sword (1610) and Mace (Dublin-made, 1710) is strangely ignored. Provincial Irish silver also obtains coverage, with special reference to Cork, Youghal, Kinsale, Limerick, Killkenny and Galway. In the ‘Bibliography’ which follows, every collector is advised “to have a book of tables of marks from which all silver made in Great Britain and Ireland can be dated and assigned to its town of origin” — but such tables would have to be more complete than illustration no. 83 which shows five sets of provincial Irish marks but only identifies four of them.

All in all this is a rather disappointing book, to be perhaps best treated as an appetizer rather than as fulfilling a need.


It is a pleasure to notice this volume by Dr. Peate, known and liked for many years now through both the British Association for the Advancement of Science and the Society for Folk Life Studies. As an example of book making it is a pleasing, clean, neat piece of work, with excellent type face
and well placed illustrations, so much better than piling them in a great chunk at the end of the book, necessitating a separate index.

Dr. Peate is being too modest in subtitling his book “A Welsh View”. It may be true that his details and instances are Welsh, but in its larger framework it could well be called Celtic (or Keltic, as he writes it), and the Irish student is immediately at home with it. Moreover, the style is so simple and easy, so well illuminated with the apposite story, that, whatever his origins, the reader can bowl merrily along with it.

The down-to-earth simplicity of the writing is highly effective. In the first main chapter for example, on The House, after discussing the types of circular and rectangular houses and showing that there could be no ridge tree in a circular house, because it has no ‘ridge’, Dr. Peate says, quite plainly “It may thus be seen how impossible it was to extend a circular house: the only ‘extension was to build another.” One tends not to think of such simple precepts until laid down in words of one syllable!

Especially interesting is the definition and discussion of the ‘long house’, a type which in Ireland, at least, has been preserved right on to the present day, save that the uses of the elements have changed. The great majority of small bungalow-type houses being built today are of the ‘byre-entrance-kitchen with fire-’The Room’” type, stemming directly from Dr. Peate’s long house type.

The details revealed in the chapter on The Hearth make the reader hungry, with information on the use of the baking pot, and a description of cooking outside. Mention of outside cooking prompts the speculation of whether in Wales there are many remains of the hunting cooking-places found in Ireland, known as fidhocha fiaidh, and consisting essentially of a horseshoe-shaped enclosure with a fireplace and stone trough to hold meat, water, and hot stones for boiling the water. The perpetual fire also rings a still sounding bell here; your reviewer still ‘smoors’ the fire in the evening and rekindles it in the morning with a bit of a blow.

Dr. Peate’s thesis that the hooks used for suspending pots over the fire can be paralleled back to the Early Iron Age, and in Roman Britain, underlines a continuity of tradition characteristic of many elements of our culture, which is reinforced by experience in the West of Ireland where such hooks and much similar equipment are still in common use. It was a thrill to be presented only recently with a pair of the flesh-hooks referred to by Dr. Peate.

In an important chapter on The Home, the development of those furnishings which transformed a house into a home is dealt with in some detail, and Dr. Peate’s suggestion that the bed outshot, and its later development the cupboard bed, may be descended from the platform beds of the prehistoric roundhouses is of considerable interest. Dr. A. T. Lucas, in the course of a detailed and fascinating paper on this subject delivered to the Society for Folk Life Studies, suggests that the annexe of the ancient Irish house used as a larder or store room could well have been the ancestor of the outshot, and resorts to literature and linguistics in support of his claim.

In this chapter, too, the references to churns raises some interesting questions. One wonders if there are any remains of dog-driven box churns in Wales or in Ireland. These must have needed a great deal of room, more surely than in the average house of their period. It is understandable that in so short a book no details can be given of churn designs or butter-making customs. It would be interesting to know whether Wales has the churn design variations known in Ireland, as illustrated in Irish Folk Ways, by Professor Estyn Evans; and the customs such as tying red wool to the cow’s tail to make sure that the milk comes to make the butter.

We who switch on electricity for light and heat would do well to sample a rush-lit kitchen — we might then appreciate even the reduced voltage we mean about today. Dr. Peate’s graphic description of the making of light in the pathetically small quantities which were the rule up to the First World War, should make us realise how far we have moved in two generations. His references to mangle-boards, box-irons, goffering and crimping, evoke visions of the less pleasant forms of ‘service’, and sympathy for the little girls who were put into ‘a place’ not much longer ago than yesterday. Box-irons were used in south County Mayo up to the coming of electricity thirty years ago.

With penetrating glances at Costume, Aspects of Social Life — including some hair-raising details of the ‘gentle’ punishments of long ago — Music and Dance, Play, and Folklore, Dr. Peate provides in an eminently acceptable form a sort of introductory cocktail of subjects demanding a much deeper and more leisurely study of this fascinating section of anthropology. His chapters are a good to further study and a challenge to the memory of things past.

Especially forthright and justified is his disposal of some of the myths attaching to folk music, which is admirably summed up in his sentence “It is no exaggeration to say, therefore, that folk
song continues to be created amongst bus drivers as well as in the countryside, in school and university as well as in the stable-loft”. His definition of folk song, also, as “fundamentally unlearned artistry . . . originating in the mind of a single man or woman, but eliminating the individual by constant handing on from one singer to another”, is a concept almost exactly echoed by Brendan Breathnach in his Folk Music and Dances of Ireland. Indeed, the similarity between the two contributions on both song and musical instruments is astonishing, and seems to add weight to the idea of the “Irish Sea Province” recently promoted.

Dr. Peate closes with an important note on language, and tops up the cocktail with a most useful bibliography, and, for this reader, a somewhat inadequate index. His warmth and enthusiasm and wide knowledge all come through very clearly, and should lead you inevitably into the pleasant highways and byways of the study of our present and previous selves.

L. B. MAYER-JONES


Irish Popular Superstitions was originally published in 1852 and has been now re-issued in a beautifully reproduced photolithographic facsimile by the Irish University Press. It is one of the reprints in the 'Irish Folklore Series' under the general editorship of Professor Séamus Ó Dúibhghaill.

“A wild and daring spirit of adventure — a love of legendary romance — a deep rooted belief in the supernatural — an unconquerable reverence for ancient customs and an extensive superstition creed; has, from the earliest times belonged to the Celtic race.” So Sir William Wilde (the father of Oscar and the husband of ‘Speranza’, to whom the book was dedicated) tells us in the preface to his book in which he published legendary tales and local superstitions collected mainly in the west of Ireland. Even in his day many of the superstitions described by him were already disappearing, due, he claims, to the drastic depopulation of the countryside after the Great Famine, and to the spirit of the “new education” (a reference to Lord Stanley’s Education Bill setting up the national school system which was passed in 1831). To these he added Father Theobald Mathew’s plea for temperance, with the comment that “the spirits of the people isn’t [sic] what they were when a man could get drunk for three half-pence and find a sod or kipseen over the door of every second cabin in the parish” (the sod over the door was a method of indicating that there was “good liquor within”).

Fearing obliteration for many of these customs, Wilde recorded them for posterity, just as his wife did over thirty-five years later — see this Journal, 14 (1971), 78. The main group of superstitions examined by Sir William are those associated with the Festival of May or Bealtaine (which he breaks down as Beal-tine and understands as meaning the “fire of the Celtic God, Bal”)

Maytime revels in Finglas, Co. Dublin, are minutely described, as are the not distinctively Irish maypoles at Harold’s Cross, also in Dublin. However, it was in the Irish countryside, particularly in his own area near Castletown, Co. Roscommon, that he witnessed darker and more ancient matters: the fires of Bal; the passing of the burning coal around the cow’s belly; the driving of cattle through the gissach; the ritual bleeding of cattle, partly remedial, partly expiratory — he goes on to inform us that he had “more than once when a boy seen the entrance of the great fort of Rathcroghan, the centre of one of the most extensive and fertile grazing districts in Connaught, redenied with the blood thus drawn upon a May morning.” There, in Rathnadargh, the status of cattle does not seem to have diminished since the days of Queen Maeve and the Táin. All the superstitions associated with Bealtaine listed by Wilde are connected with fear of spirits, e.g. the putting of an ass’s shoe on the bottom of the churn dash in the hope of keeping the cow from “going dry” during the coming year. Indeed, the first day of May was important because any one event of that day might well bring bad luck for the rest of the year. The Mayday dew, the Mayday milk, the Mayday bread, all had their associated superstitions beliefs and practices. The Mayday boys travelling around the locality kept the tradition of the Maybush and many of the May verses alive, and gave an air of festivity to this day of strange superstitions and customs.

In a later chapter Wilde relates in detail the power of the “little people” mentioned in connection with Mayday. He tells us of the “gentry” or “good people” riding by night up and down the moonbeams; changing their residences or locations with the whirlwind; creeping into russet acorn shells; sleeping in summer in the purple pendant bells of the foxglove and the wild campanula; quaffing the Maydew from the gossamer threads of the early morning, and living a merry social life, dancing and playing, with wild Aeolian music, by the streamlet’s bank, upon the green hillside, or round the grassy fort.” These “little people” were looked upon as prime movers in all
accidents, diseases, and death "in man or baste". They were believed to have been fallen angels and to have the power to take a person's spirit while leaving an apparent corpse. According to Sir William Wilde this was a regular occurrence with women after confinement who would be brought to the fairy court to nurse the fairy queen's child — such was the story told of Mary O'Rourke of Inishark. Various meal and herbal concoctions were used to dispel such fairy spirits.

It is in the second chapter, however, that Wilde gives us his view of the Ireland of the calamitous 1840s - what life was like in the Roscommon of his childhood. There was agrarian strife, and secret societies abounded; life was cheap. Wilde describes one incident which shows the callous inhumanity of the times. A family called Welsh lived near Ballintober. The father, Paddy, an etching of whom forms the frontispiece to the book, was a great friend of the author's and a great man for 'the tradition'. Wilde relates, through this Pandean Brannach's discourse, traditions about the holy well at Oran, the 'Big House' of Dunnaman at Ballymoe, the ruined castle of the O'Connors at Ballintober — relics which still survive today in the Roscommon countryside. The cruel death of this man's son, Michael, who reluctantly found himself "tied up" with the Ribbonmen, a secret society of the time, gives a realistic picture of 1849 in Roscommon. However, it was the effort of the Crown to put an end to Ribbonism in the area which brings us to the old gaol in Roscommon town. It was here that the only hangwoman of Ireland — a Munsterwoman known as Lady Betty — presided over the scaffold. Sir William probably witnessed what happened as his gruesome account has a very realistic stamp.

Reading this book makes one realize the genius of Wilde, so steeped in the lore legends, superstitions and mystic charms of Farmane period Ireland. One cannot escape a catching a glimpse of the Ireland of the 1840s, a depressing period but, as Wilde himself says, "if we cannot hope much for the future, let us for the present at least, live in the memory of the past".

The Irish University Press are to be thanked for allowing us the opportunity to have ready access to such valuable material, and the re-issue of the book should stimulate the collection of further material wherever it is read, which was, indeed, the original intention of its author.

ANN GANNON


"They bear the stamp of genius of more than one race", by which William Larminie inferred that "the so-called Gaelic race is really a compound one, containing in addition to the true Celtic (Aryan) element probably two that are not Aryan — a Mongolian or Finnish element, and an Iberian element" (pp. xix and x), an inference which is perhaps more true of the folk-tales he recorded than of the people themselves. Larminie's own work collecting these eighteen folk-tales in the West of Ireland between 1884 and 1889 likewise bears the stamp of genius. Their publication in 1893 in many ways marked an important step forward in Irish folklore studies, not least because of the scientific attitude adopted by Larminie. Having collected the tales in their original Irish form he not only translated them but also supplied a phonetic rendering of the Irish of many of them as recounted to him, a chapter on the phonetic system used, and a useful collection of notes. His well-written and perceptive introduction clearly shows his understanding and appreciation of the real value of such tales.

The tales recorded by Larminie were narrated by the following: Michael Faherty, of Renvyle, Co. Galway, who contributed "The Ghost and His Wives" and "Simon and Margaret"; Terence Davis, also of Renvyle, who told "The Story of Bioutach"; John McGinty, a man of Donegal descent and name but from Valley, Achill Island, Co. Mayo, who contributed "The Gloss Gavlen" and "The King who had Twelve Sons"; Pat McGraile, from Dugort, Achill Island, who provided Larminie with "Morraha", "King Mananaun", "The Son of the King of Prussia", "The Little Girl who got the better of the Gentleman" and "Gilla of the Enchantments"; Jack Gillespie, known as Jack-Anne to distinguish him from other Jack Gillespies, from Glen, Glencolumbkille, Co. Donegal, who contributed one story called "Grg"; and Pat Minahan, an eighty year old bachelor from Malinmore, Glencolumbkille, from whom seven tales were obtained, namely "The Champion of the Red Belt", "Jack", "The Servant of Poverty", "The Son of the King of Prussia", "Beauty of the World", "The Woman who went to Hell", "The Red Pony" and "The Nine-legged Steed". All of these eighteen tales make fascinating reading, even in this day and age of cynical disbelief.... their republishers are to be thanked.

EDWARD FOX