

GREEN ALICE STOPFORD

IRISH NATIONALITY

Alice Green

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CHAPTER I

THE GAELS IN IRELAND

Ireland lies the last outpost of Europe against the vast flood of the Atlantic Ocean; unlike all other islands it is circled round with mountains, whose precipitous cliffs rising sheer above the water stand as bulwarks thrown up against the immeasurable sea.

It is commonly supposed that the fortunes of the island and its civilisation must by nature hang on those of England. Neither history nor geography allows this theory. The life of the two countries was widely separated. Great Britain lay turned to the east; her harbours opened to the sunrising, and her first traffic was across the narrow waters of the Channel and the German Sea. But Ireland had another aspect; her natural harbours swelled with the waves of the Atlantic, her outlook was over the ocean, and long before history begins her sailors braved the perils of the Gaulish sea. The peoples of Britain, Celts and English, came to her from the opposite lowland coasts; the people of Ireland crossed a wider ocean-track, from northern France to the shores of the Bay of Biscay. The two islands had a different history; their trade-routes were not the same; they lived apart, and developed apart their civilisations.

We do not know when the Gaels first entered Ireland, coming according to ancient Irish legends across the Gaulish sea. One invasion followed another, and an old Irish tract gives the definite Gaelic monarchy as beginning in the fourth century B.C. They drove the earlier peoples, the Iberians, from the stupendous stone forts and earthen entrenchments that guarded cliffs and mountain passes. The name of Erin recalls the ancient inhabitants, who lived on under the new rulers, more in number than their conquerors. The Gaels gave their language and their organisation to the country, while many customs and traditions of the older race lingered on and penetrated the new people.

Over a thousand years of undisturbed life lay before the Gaels, from about 300 B.C. to 800 A.D. The Roman Empire which overran Great Britain left Ireland outside it. The barbarians who swept over the provinces of the empire and reached to the great Roman Wall never crossed the Irish Sea.

Out of the grouping of the tribes there emerged a division of the island into districts made up of many peoples. Each of the provinces later known as Ulster, Leinster, Munster and Connacht had its stretch of seaboard and harbours, its lakes and rivers for fishing, its mountain strongholds, its hill pastures, and its share of the rich central plain, where the cattle from the mountains "used to go in their running crowds to the smooth plains of the province, towards their sheds and their full cattle-fields." All met in the middle of the island, at the Hill of Usnech, where the Stone of Division still stands. There the high-king held his court, as the chief lord in the confederation of the many states. The rich lands of Meath were the high-king's domain.

Heroic tales celebrate the prehistoric conflicts as of giants by which the peoples fixed the boundaries of their power. They tell of Conor Mac Nessa who began to reign in the year that Mark Antony and Cleopatra died, and of his sister's son Cuchulain, the champion of the north, who went out to battle from the vast entrenchments still seen in Emain Macha near Armagh. Against him Queen Maeve gathered at her majestic fort of Rathcroghan in Roscommon fifteen hundred royal mercenaries and Gaulish soldiers – a woman comely and white-faced, with gold yellow hair, her crimson cloak fastened at the breast with a gold pin, and a spear flaming in her hand, as she led her troops across the Boyne. The battles of the heroes on the Boyne and the fields of Louth, the thronged entrenchments that thicken round the Gap of the North and the mountain pass from Dundalk and Newry into the

plains of Armagh and Tyrone, show how the soldiers' line of march was the same from the days of Cuchulain to those of William of Orange. The story tells how the whole island shared in the great conflict, to the extreme point of Munster, where a rival of Cuchulain, Curoi son of Dare, had sent his knights and warriors through all Ireland to seek out the greatest stones for his fortress, on a shelf of rock over two thousand feet above the sea near Tralee. The Dublin Museum preserves relics of that heroic time, the trappings of war-chariots and horses, arms and ornaments.

Amid such conflicts the Connacht kings pressed eastward from Usnech to Tara, and fixed there the centre of Irish life.

The Gaelic conquerors had entered on a wealthy land. Irish chroniclers told of a vast antiquity, with a shadowy line of monarchs reaching back, as they boasted, for some two thousand years before Christ: they had legends of lakes springing forth in due order; of lowlands cleared of wood, the appearance of rivers, the making of roads and causeways, the first digging of wells: of the making of forts; of invasions and battles and plagues. They told of the smelting of gold near the Liffey about 1500 B.C. and of the Wicklow artificer who made cups and brooches of gold and silver, and silver shields, and golden chains for the necks of kings; and of the discovery of dyes, purple and blue and green, and how the ranks of men were distinguished henceforth by the colour of their raiment. They had traditions of foreign trade – of an artificer drowned while bringing golden ore from Spain, and of torques of gold from oversea, and of a lady's hair all ablaze with Alpine gold. Later researches have in fact shown that Irish commerce went back some fifteen hundred years before our era, that it was the most famous gold-producing country of the west, that mines of copper and silver were worked, and that a race of goldsmiths probably carried on the manufacture of bronze and gold on what is now the bog of Cullen. Some five hundred golden ornaments of old times have been gathered together in the Dublin Museum in the last eighty years, a scanty remnant of what have been lost or melted down; their weight is five hundred and seventy ounces against a weight of twenty ounces in the British Museum from England, Scotland, and Wales.

The earth too was fruitful. The new settlers, who used iron tools instead of bronze, could clear forests and open plains for tillage. Agriculture was their pride, and their legends told of stretches of corn so great that deer could shelter in them from the hounds, and nobles and queens drove chariots along their far-reaching lines, while multitudes of reapers were at work cutting the heads of the grain with the little sickles which we may still see in the Dublin Museum.

But to the Irish the main interest of the Gaels lies in their conception of how to create an enduring state or nation.

The tribal system has been much derided as the mark of a savage people, or at least of a race unable to advance beyond political infancy into a real national existence. This was not true of the Gaels. Their essential idea of a state, and the mode of its government and preservation, was different from that of mediæval Europe, but it was not uncivilised.

The Roman Empire stamped on the minds of its subject peoples, and on the Teutonic barbarians who became its heirs, the notion of a state as an organisation held together, defended, governed and policed, by a central ruler; while the sovereign was supreme in the domain of force and maintenance of order, whatever lay outside that domain – art, learning, history and the like – were secondary matters which might be left to the people. The essential life of the nation came to be expressed in the will and power of its master.

The Gaelic idea was a wholly different one. The law with them was the law of the people. They never lost their trust in it. Hence they never exalted a central authority, for their law needed no such sanction. While the code was one for the whole race, the administration on the other hand was divided into the widest possible range of self-governing communities, which were bound together in a willing federation. The forces of union were not material but spiritual, and the life of the people consisted not in its military cohesion but in its joint spiritual inheritance – in the union of those who shared the same tradition, the same glorious memory of heroes, the same unquestioned law, and the

same pride of literature. Such an instinct of national life was neither rude nor contemptible, nor need we despise it because it was opposed to the theory of the middle ages in Europe. At the least the Irish tribal scheme of government contained as much promise of human virtue and happiness as the feudal scheme which became later the political creed of England, but which was never accepted in Ireland. Irish history can only be understood by realising this intense national life with its sure basis on the broad self-government of the people.

Each tribe was supreme within its own borders; it elected its own chief, and could depose him if he acted against law. The land belonged to the whole community, which kept exact pedigrees of the families who had a right to share in the ground for tillage or in the mountain pasturage; and the chief had no power over the soil save as the elected trustee of the people. The privileges of the various chiefs, judges, captains, historians, poets, and so on, were handed down from generation to generation. In all these matters no external power could interfere. The tribe owed to the greater tribe above it nothing but certain fixed dues, such as aid in road-making, in war, in ransom of prisoners and the like.

The same right of self-government extended through the whole hierarchy of states up to the Ardri or high-king at the head. The "hearth of Tara" was the centre of all the Gaelic states, and the demesne of the Ardri. "This then is my fostermother," said the ancient sage, "the island in which ye are, even Ireland, and the familiar knee of this island is the hill on which ye are, namely, Tara." There the Ardri was crowned at the pillar-post. At Tara, "the fort of poets and learned men," the people of all Ireland gathered at the beginning of each high-king's reign, and were entertained for seven days and nights – kings and ollaves together round the high-king, warriors and reavers, together, the youths and maidens and the proud foolish folk in the chambers round the doors, while outside was for young men and maidens because their mirth used to entertain them. Huge earthen banks still mark the site of the great Hall, seven hundred and sixty feet long and ninety feet wide, with seven doors to east and as many more to west; where kings and chiefs sat each under his own shield, in crimson cloaks with gold brooches, with girdles and shoes of gold, and spears with golden sockets and rivets of red bronze. The Ardri, supreme lord and arbitrator among them, was surrounded by his councillors – the lawmen or brehons, the bards and chroniclers, and the druids, teachers and men of science. He was the representative of the whole national life. But his power rested on the tradition of the people and on the consent of the tribes. He could impose no new law; he could demand no service outside the law.

The political bond of union, which seemed so loose, drew all its strength from a body of national tradition, and a universal code of law, which represented as it were the common mind of the people, the spontaneous creation of the race. Separate and independent as the tribes were, all accepted the one code which had been fashioned in the course of ages by the genius of the people. The same law was recited in every tribal assembly. The same traditions and genealogies bound the tribes together as having a single heritage of heroic descent and fame. The preservation of their common history was the concern of the whole people. One of the tales pictures their gathering at Tara, when before the men of Ireland the ancients related their history, and Ireland's chief scholars heard and corrected them by the best tradition. "Victory and blessings attend you, noble sirs," the men of Erin said; "for such instruction it was meet that we should gather ourselves together." And at the reciting of the historic glories of their past, the whole congregation arose up together "for in their eyes it was an augmenting of the spirit and an enlargement of the mind."

To preserve this national tradition a learned class was carefully trained. There were schools of lawyers to expound the law; schools of historians to preserve the genealogies, the boundaries of lands, and the rights of classes and families; and schools of poets to recite the traditions of the race. The learned men were paid at first by the gifts of the people, but the chief among them were later endowed with a settled share of the tribe land in perpetuity. So long as the family held the land, they were bound to train up in each generation that one of the household who was most fit to carry on learning, and thus for centuries long lines of distinguished men added fame to their country and drew

to its schools students from far and wide. Through their work the spirit of the Irish found national expression in a code of law which showed not only extraordinarily acute and trained intelligence but a true sense of equity, in a literary language of great richness and of the utmost musical beauty, and in a system of metrical rules for poets shaped with infinite skill. The Irish nation had a pride in its language beyond any people in Europe outside of the Greeks and Romans.

While each tribe had its schools, these were linked together in a national system. Professors of every school were free of the island; it was the warrior's duty to protect them as they moved from court to court. An ancient tale tells how the chiefs of Emain near Armagh placed sentinels along the Gap of the North to turn back every poet who sought to leave the country and to bring on their way with honour every one who sought to enter in. There was no stagnation where competition extended over the whole island. The greatest of the teachers were given the dignity of "Professors of all the Gaels." Learned men in their degrees ranked with kings and chiefs, and high-professors sat by the high-king and shared his honours. The king, said the laws, "could by his mere word decide against every class of persons except those of the two orders of religion and learning, who are of equal value with himself."

It is in this exaltation of learning in the national life that we must look for the real significance of Irish history – the idea of a society loosely held in a political sense, but bound together in a spiritual union. The assemblies which took place in every province and every petty state were the guarantees of the national civilization. They were periodical exhibitions of everything the people esteemed – democracy, aristocracy, king-craft, literature, tradition, art, commerce, law, sport, religion, display, even rustic buffoonery. The years between one festival and another were spent in serious preparation for the next; a multitude of maxims were drawn up to direct the conduct of the people. So deeply was their importance felt that the Irish kept the tradition diligently, and even in the darkest times of their history, down to the seventeenth century, still gathered to "meetings on hills" to exercise their law and hear their learned men.

In the time of the Roman Empire, therefore, the Irish looked on themselves as one race, obedient to one law, united in one culture and belonging to one country. Their unity is symbolised by the great genealogical compilations in which all the Gaels are traced to one ancestry, and in the collections of topographical legends dealing with hundreds of places, where every nook and corner of the island is supposed to be of interest to the whole of Ireland. The tribal boundaries were limits to the material power of a chief and to that only: they were no barriers to the national thought or union. The learned man of the clan was the learned man of the Gaelic race. By all the higher matters of language and learning, of equity and history, the people of Ireland were one. A noble figure told the unity of their land within the circuit of the ocean. The Three Waves of Erin, they said, smote upon the shore with a foreboding roar when danger threatened the island; Cleena's wave called to Munster at an inlet near Cork, while Tonn Rury at Dundrum and Tonn Tuaithe at the mouth of the Bann sounded to the men of Ulster.

The weaknesses of the Irish system are apparent. The numerous small territories were tempted, like larger European states, to raid borders, to snatch land or booty, and to suffer some expense of trained soldiers. Candidates for the chieftom had to show their fitness, and "a young lord's first spoil" was a necessary exploit. There were wild plundering raids in the summer nights; disorders were multiplied. A country divided in government was weakened for purposes of offence, or for joint action in military matters. These evils were genuine, but they have been exaggerated. Common action was hindered, not mainly by human contentions, but by the forests and marshes, lakes and rivers in flood that lay over a country heavy with Atlantic clouds. Riots and forays there were, among a martial race and strong men of hot passions, but Ireland was in fact no prominent example of mediæval anarchy or disorder. Local feuds were no greater than those which afflicted England down to the Norman Conquest and long after it; and which marked the life of European states and cities through the middle ages. The professional war bands of Fiana that hired themselves out from time to

time were controlled and recognised by law, and had their special organisation and rites and rules of war. It has been supposed that in the passion of tribal disputes men mostly perished by murder and battle-slaughter, and the life of every generation was by violence shortened to less than the common average of thirty years. Irish genealogies prove on the contrary that the generations must be counted at from thirty-three to thirty-six years: the tale of kings, judges, poets, and householders who died peacefully in an honoured old age, or from some natural accident, outruns the list of sudden murders or deaths in battle. Historical evidence moreover shows us a country of widening cornfields, or growing commerce, where wealth was gathered, where art and learning swept like a passion over the people, and schools covered the land. Such industries and virtues do not flourish in regions given over to savage strife. And it is significant that Irish chiefs who made great wars hired professional soldiers from oversea.

If the disorders of the Irish system have been magnified its benefits have been forgotten. All Irish history proved that the division of the land into separate military districts, where the fighting men knew every foot of ground, and had an intense local patriotism, gave them a power of defence which made conquest by the foreigner impossible; he had first to exterminate the entire people. The same division into administrative districts gave also a singular authority to law. In mediæval states, however excellent were the central codes, they were only put in force just so far as the king had power to compel men to obey, and that power often fell very far short of the nominal boundaries of his kingdom. But in Ireland every community and every individual was interested in maintaining the law of the people, the protection of the common folk; nor were its landmarks ever submerged or destroyed. Irish land laws, for example, in spite of the changes that gradually covered the land with fenced estates, did actually preserve through all the centuries popular rights – fixity of rates for the land, fixity of tenure, security of improvement, refusal to allow great men to seize forests for their chase: under this people's law no Peasant Revolt ever arose, nor any rising of the poor against their lords. Rights of inheritance, due solemnities of election, were accurately preserved. The authority and continuity of Irish law was recognised by wondering Englishmen – "They observe and keep such laws and statutes which they make upon hills in their country firm and stable, without breaking them for any favour or reward," said an English judge. "The Irish are more fearful to offend the law than the English or any other nation whatsoever."

The tribal system had another benefit for Irishmen – the diffusion of a high intelligence among the whole people. A varied education, spread over many centres, fertilized the general life. Every countryside that administered its own affairs must of needs possess a society rich in all the activities that go to make up a full community – chiefs, doctors, soldiers, judges, historians, poets, artists and craftsmen, skilled herds, tillers of the ground, raisers and trainers of horses, innkeepers, huntsmen, merchants, dyers and weavers and tanners. In some sequestered places in Ireland we can still trace the settlements made by Irish communities. They built no towns nor needed any in the modern sense. But entrenchments of earth, or "raths," thickly gathered together, mark a site where men lived in close association. Roads and paths great and small were maintained according to law, and boats carried travellers along rivers and lakes. So frequent were the journeys of scholars, traders, messengers from tribe to tribe, men gathering to public assemblies, craftsmen, dealers in hides and wool, poets, men and women making their circuit, that there was made in early time a "road-book" or itinerary, perhaps some early form of map, of Ireland.

This life of opportunity in thickly congregated country societies gave to Ireland its wide culture, and the incredible number of scholars and artificers that it poured out over Europe with generous ardour. The multitudinous centres of discussion scattered over the island, and the rapid intercourse of all these centres one with another, explain how learning broadened, and how Christianity spread over the land like a flood. It was to these country settlements that the Irish owed the richness of their civilisation, the generosity of their learning, and the passion of their patriotism.

Ireland was a land then as now of intense contrasts, where equilibrium was maintained by opposites, not by a perpetual tending towards the middle course. In things political and social the Irish showed a conservatism that no intercourse could shake, side by side with eager readiness and great success in grasping the latest progress in arts or commerce. In their literature strikingly modern thoughts jostle against the most primitive crudeness; "Vested interests are shameless" was one of their old observations. In Ireland the old survived beside the new, and as the new came by free assimilation old and new did not conflict. The balance of opposites gave colour and force to their civilisation, and Ireland until the thirteenth century and very largely until the seventeenth century, escaped or survived the successive steam rollings that reduced Europe to nearly one common level.

In the Irish system we may see the shaping of a true democracy – a society in which ever-broadening masses of the people are made intelligent sharers in the national life, and conscious guardians of its tradition. Their history is throughout a record of the nobility of that experiment. It would be a mechanical theory of human life which denied to the people of Ireland the praise of a true patriotism or the essential spirit of a nation.

CHAPTER II

IRELAND AND EUROPE

c. 100 —c. 600

The Roman Agricola had proposed the conquest of Ireland on the ground that it would have a good effect on Britain by removing the spectacle of liberty. But there was no Roman conquest. The Irish remained outside the Empire, as free as the men of Norway and Sweden. They showed that to share in the trade, the culture, and the civilisation of an empire, it is not necessary to be subject to its armies or lie under its police control. While the neighbouring peoples received a civilisation imposed by violence and maintained by compulsion, the Irish were free themselves to choose those things which were suited to their circumstances and character, and thus to shape for their people a liberal culture, democratic and national.

It is important to observe what it was that tribal Ireland chose, and what it rejected.

There was frequent trade, for from the first century Irish ports were well known to merchants of the Empire, sailing across the Gaulish sea in wooden ships built to confront Atlantic gales, with high poops standing from the water like castles, and great leathern sails – stout hulls steered by the born sailors of the Breton coasts or the lands of the Loire and Garonne. The Irish themselves served as sailors and pilots in the ocean traffic, and travelled as merchants, tourists, scholars and pilgrims. Trading-ships carried the wine of Italy and later of Provence, in great tuns in which three men could stand upright, to the eastern and the western coasts, to the Shannon and the harbours of Down; and probably brought tin to mix with Irish copper. Ireland sent out great dogs trained for war, wool, hides, all kinds of skins and furs, and perhaps gold and copper. But this material trade was mainly important to the Irish for the other wealth that Gaul had to give – art, learning, and religion.

Of art the Irish craftsmen took all that Gaul possessed – the great decorated trumpets of bronze used in the Loire country, the fine enamelling in colours, the late-Celtic designs for ornaments of bronze and gold. Goldsmiths travelled oversea to bring back bracelets, rings, draughtboards – "one half of its figures are yellow gold, the others are white bronze; its woof is of pearl; it is the wonder of smiths how it was wrought." They borrowed afterwards interlaced ornament for metal work and illuminated manuscripts. In such arts they outdid their teachers; their gold and enamel work has never been surpassed, and in writing and illumination they went beyond the imperial artists of Constantinople. Their schools throughout the country handed on a great traditional art, not transitory or local, but permanent and national.

Learning was as freely imported. The Latin alphabet came over at a very early time, and knowledge of Greek as a living tongue from Marseilles and the schools of Narbonne. By the same road from Marseilles Christianity must have come a hundred years or so before the mission of St. Patrick – a Christianity carrying the traditions and rites and apocalypses of the East. It was from Gaul that St. Patrick afterwards sailed for his mission to Ireland. He came to a land where there were already men of erudition and "rhetoricians" who scoffed at his lack of education. The tribes of Ireland, free from barbarian invasions as they had been free from Roman armies, developed a culture which was not surpassed in the West or even in Italy. And this culture, like the art, was national, spread over the whole land.

But while the Irish drew to themselves from the Empire art, learning, religion, they never adopted anything of Roman methods of government in church or state. The Roman centralized authority was opposed to their whole habit of thought and genius. They made, therefore, no change in their tribal administration. As early as the second century Irishmen had learned from Gaulish

landowners to divide land into estates marked out with pillar-stones which could be bought and sold, and by 700 A.D. the country was scored with fences, and farms were freely bequeathed by will. But these estates seem still to have been administered according to the common law of the tribe, and not to have followed the methods of Roman proprietors throughout the Empire. In the same way the foreign learning brought into Ireland was taught through the tribal system of schools. Lay schools formed by the Druids in old time went on as before, where students of law and history and poetry grouped their huts round the dwelling of a famous teacher, and the poor among them begged their bread in the neighbourhood. The monasteries in like manner gathered their scholars within the "rath" or earthen entrenchment, and taught them Latin, canon law, and divinity. Monastic and lay schools went on side by side, as heirs together of the national tradition and language. The most venerable saints, the highest ecclesiastics, were revered also as guardians of Irish history and law, who wrote in Irish the national tales as competent scribes and not mere copyists – men who knew all the traditions, used various sources, and shaped their story with the independence of learning. No parallel can be found in any other country to the writing down of national epics in their pagan form many centuries after the country had become Christian. In the same way European culture was not allowed to suppress the national language; clerics as well as laymen preserved the native tongue in worship and in hymns, as at Clonmacnois where the praises of St. Columcille were sung, "some in Latin, which was beguiling, some in Irish, fair the tale"; and in its famous cemetery, where kings and scholars and pilgrims of all Ireland came to lie, there is but one Latin inscription among over two hundred inscribed grave slabs that have been saved from the many lost.

Like the learning and the art, the new worship was adapted to tribal custom. Round the little monastic church gathered a group of huts with a common refectory, the whole protected by a great rampart of earth. The plan was familiar to all the Irish; every chief's house had such a fence, and every bardic school had its circle of thatched cells where the scholars spent years in study and meditation. Monastic "families" which branched off from the first house were grouped under the name of the original founder, in free federal union like that of the clans. As no land could be wholly alienated from the tribe, territory given to the monastery was not exempted from the common law; it was ruled by abbots elected, like kings and judges of the tribe, out of the house which under tribal law had the right of succession; and the monks in some cases had to pay the tribal dues for the land and send out fighting men for the hosting.

Never was a church so truly national. The words used by the common people were steeped in its imagery. In their dedications the Irish took no names of foreign saints, but of their own holy men. St. Bridgit became the "Mary of the Gael." There was scarcely a boundary felt between the divine country and the earthly, so entirely was the spiritual life commingled with the national. A legend told that St. Colman one day saw his monks reaping the wheat sorrowfully; it was the day of the celebration of Telltown fair, the yearly assembly of all Ireland before the high-king: he prayed, and angels came to him at once from heaven and performed three races for the toiling monks after the manner of the national feast.

The religion which thus sprang out of the heart of a people and penetrated every part of their national life, shone with a radiant spiritual fervour. The prayers and hymns that survive from the early church are inspired by an exalted devotion, a profound and original piety, which won the veneration of every people who came into touch with the people of Ireland. On mountain cliffs, in valleys, by the water-side, on secluded islands, lie ruins of their churches and oratories, small in size though made by masons who could fit and dovetail into one another great stones from ten to seventeen feet in length; the little buildings preserved for centuries some ancient tradition of apostolic measurements, and in their narrow and austere dimensions, and their intimate solemnity, were fitted to the tribal communities and to their unworldly and spiritual worship. An old song tells of a saint building, with a wet cloak about him —

"Hand on a stone, hand lifted up,
Knee bent to set a rock,
Eyes shedding tears, other lamentation,
And mouth praying."

Piety did not always vanquish the passions of a turbulent age. There were local quarrels and battles. In some hot temporal controversy, in some passionate religious rivalry, a monastic "rath" may have fallen back to its original use as a fort. Plunderers fell on a trading centre like Clonmacnois, where goods landed from the Shannon for transport across country offered a prize. Such things have been known in other lands. But it is evident that disturbances were not universal or continuous. The extraordinary work of learning carried out in the monastic lands, the sanctuary given in them for hundreds of years to innumerable scholars not of Ireland alone, shows the large peace that must have prevailed on their territories.

The national tradition of monastic and lay schools preserved to Erin what was lost in the rest of Europe, a learned class of laymen. Culture was as frequent and honourable in the Irish chief or warrior as in the cleric. Gaiety and wit were prized. Oral tradition told for many centuries of a certain merryman long ago, and yet he was a Christian, who could make all men he ever saw laugh however sad they were, so that even his skull on a high stone in the churchyard brought mirth to sorrowful souls.

We must remember, too, that by the Irish system certain forms of hostility were absolutely shut out. There is not a single instance in Irish history of the conflicts between a monastery and its lay dependents which were so frequent on the continent and in England – as, for example, at St. Albans, where the monks paved their church with the querns of the townsfolk to compel them to bring their corn to the abbey mill. Again, the broad tolerance of the church in Ireland never allowed any persecution for religion's sake, and thus shut the door on the worst form of human cruelty. At the invasion of the Normans a Norman bishop mocked to the archbishop of Cashel at the imperfection of a church like the Irish which could boast of no martyr. "The Irish," answered the archbishop, "have never been accustomed to stretch forth their hands against the saints of God, but now a people is come into this country that is accustomed and knows how to make martyrs. Now Ireland too will have martyrs." Finally, the Irish church never became, as in other lands, the servant, the ally, or the master of the state. It was the companion of the people, the heart of the nation. To its honour it never served as the instrument of political dominion, and it never was degraded from first to last by a war of religion.

The free tribes of Ireland had therefore by some native instinct of democratic life rejected for their country the organisation of the Roman state, and had only taken the highest forms of its art, learning, and religion, to enrich their ancient law and tradition: and through their own forms of social life they had made this culture universal among the people, and national. Such was the spectacle of liberty which the imperial Agricola had feared.

CHAPTER III

THE IRISH MISSION

c. 560 —c. 1000

The fall of the Roman Empire brought to the Irish people new dangers and new opportunities. Goths and Vandals, Burgundians and Franks, poured west over Europe to the Atlantic shore, and south across the Mediterranean to Africa; while the English were pressing northward over Great Britain, driving back the Celts and creating a pagan and Teutonic England. Once more Ireland lay the last unconquered land of the West.

The peoples that lay in a circle round the shores of the German Ocean were in the thick of human affairs, nations to right and left of them, all Europe to expand in. From the time when their warriors fell on the Roman Empire they rejoiced in a thousand years of uninterrupted war and conquest; and for the thousand years that followed traders, now from this shore of the German sea and now from that, have fought and trafficked over the whole earth.

In Ireland, on the other hand, we see a race of the bravest warriors that ever fought, who had pushed on over the Gaulish sea to the very marge and limit of the world. Close at their back now lay the German invaders of Britain – a new wave of the human tide always flowing westward. Before them stretched the Atlantic, darkness and chaos; no boundary known to that sea. Even now as we stand to the far westward on the gloomy heights of Donegal, where the very grass and trees have a blacker hue, we seem to have entered into a vast antiquity, where it would be little wonder to see in the sombre solitude some strange shape of the primeval world, some huge form of primitive man's imagination. So closely did Infinity compass these people round that when the Irish sailor – St. Brendan or another – launched his coracle on the illimitable waves, in face of the everlasting storm, he might seem to pass over the edge of the earth into the vast Eternity where space and time were not. We see the awful fascination of the immeasurable flood in the story of the three Irishmen that were washed on the shores of Cornwall and carried to King Ælfred. "They came," Ælfred tells us in his chronicle, "in a boat without oars from Hibernia, whence they had stolen away because for the love of God they would be on pilgrimage – they recked not where. The boat in which they fared was wrought of three hides and a half, and they took with them enough meat for seven nights."

Ultimately withdrawn from the material business of the continent nothing again drew back the Irish to any share in the affairs of Europe save a spiritual call – a call of religion, of learning, or of liberty. The story of the Irish mission shows how they answered to such a call.

The Teutonic invaders stopped at the Irish Sea. At the fall of the Empire, therefore, Ireland did not share in the ruin of its civilisation. And while all continental roads were interrupted, traffic from Irish ports still passed safely to Gaul over the ocean routes. Ireland therefore not only preserved her culture unharmed, but the way lay open for her missionaries to carry back to Europe the knowledge which she had received from it. In that mission we may see the strength and the spirit of the tribal civilisation.

Two great leaders of the Irish mission were Columcille in Great Britain and Columbanus in Europe. In all Irish history there is no greater figure than St. Columcille – statesman and patriot, poet, scholar, and saint. After founding thirty-seven monasteries in Ireland, from Derry on the northern coast to Durrow near the Munster border, he crossed the sea in 563 to set up on the bare island of Hii or Iona a group of reed-thatched huts peopled with Irish monks. In that wild debatable land, swept by heathen raids, amid the ruins of Christian settlements, began a work equally astonishing from the religious and the political point of view. The heathen Picts had marched westward to the

sea, destroying the Celtic churches. The pagan English had set up in 547 a monarchy in Northumbria and the Lowlands, threatening alike the Picts, the Irish or "Scot" settlements along the coast, and the Celts of Strathclyde. Against this world of war Columcille opposed the idea of a peaceful federation of peoples in the bond of Christian piety. He converted the king of the Picts at Inverness in 565, and spread Irish monasteries from Strathspey to the Dee, and from the Dee to the Tay. On the western shores about Cantyre he restored the Scot settlement from Ireland which was later to give its name to Scotland, and consecrated as king the Irish Aidan, ancestor of the kings of Scotland and England. He established friendship with the Britons of Strathclyde. From his cell at Iona he dominated the new federation of Picts and Britons and Irish on both sides of the sea – the greatest missionary that Ireland ever sent out to proclaim the gathering of peoples in free association through the power of human brotherhood, learning, and religion.

For thirty-four years Columcille ruled as abbot in Iona, the high leader of the Celtic world. He watched the wooden ships with great sails that crossed from shore to shore; he talked with mariners sailing south from the Orkneys, and others coming north from the Loire with their tuns of wine, who told him European tidings, and how a town in Istria had been wrecked by earthquake. His large statesmanship, his lofty genius, the passionate and poetic temperament that filled men with awe and reverence, the splendid voice and stately figure that seemed almost miraculous gifts, the power of inspiring love that brought dying men to see his face once more before they fell at his feet in death, give a surpassing dignity and beauty to his life. "He could never spend the space of even one hour without study or prayer or writing, or some other holy occupation ... and still in all these he was beloved by all." "Seasons and storms he perceived, he harmonised the moon's race with the branching sun, he was skilful in the course of the sea, he would count the stars of heaven." He desired, one of his poems tells us, "to search all the books that would be good for any soul"; and with his own hand he copied, it is said, three hundred books, sitting with open cell door, where the brethren, one with his butcher's knife, one with his milk pail, stopped to ask a blessing as they passed.

After his death the Irish monks carried his work over the whole of England. A heathen land lay before them, for the Roman missionaries established in 597 by Augustine in Canterbury, speaking no English and hating "barbarism," made little progress, and after some reverses were practically confined to Kent. The first cross of the English borderland was set up in 635 by men from Iona on a heather moorland called the Heaven-field, by the ramparts of the Roman Wall. Columban monks made a second Iona at Lindisfarne, with its church of hewn oak thatched with reeds after Irish tradition in sign of poverty and lowliness, and with its famous school of art and learning. They taught the English writing, and gave them the letters which were used among them till the Norman Conquest. Labour and learning went hand in hand. From the king's court nobles came, rejoicing to change the brutalities of war for the plough, the forge-hammer, the winnowing fan: waste places were reclaimed, the ports were crowded with boats, and monasteries gave shelter to travellers. For a hundred years wherever the monks of Iona passed men ran to be signed by their hand and blessed by their voice. Their missionaries wandered on foot over middle England and along the eastern coast and even touched the Channel in Sussex. In 662 there was only one bishop in the whole of England who was not of Irish consecration, and this bishop, Agilberct of Wessex, was a Frenchman who had been trained for years in Ireland. The great school of Malmesbury in Wessex was founded by an Irishman, as that of Lindisfarne had been in the north.

For the first time also Ireland became known to Englishmen. Fleets of ships bore students and pilgrims, who forsook their native land for the sake of divine studies. The Irish most willingly received them all, supplying to them without charge food and books and teaching, welcoming them in every school from Derry to Lismore, making for them a "Saxon Quarter" in the old university of Armagh. Under the influence of the Irish teachers the spirit of racial bitterness was checked, and a new intercourse sprang up between English, Picts, Britons, and Irish. For a moment it seemed as though the British islands were to be drawn into one peaceful confederation and communion and a

common worship bounded only by the ocean. The peace of Columcille, the fellowship of learning and of piety, rested on the peoples.

Columcille had been some dozen years in Iona when Columbanus (c. 575) left Bangor on the Belfast Lough, leading twelve Irish monks clad in white homespun, with long hair falling on their shoulders, and books hanging from their waists in leathern satchels. They probably sailed in one of the merchant ships trading from the Loire. Crossing Gaul to the Vosges Columbanus founded his monastery of Luxeuil among the ruined heaps of a Roman city, once the meeting-place of great highways from Italy and France, now left by the barbarians a wilderness for wild beasts. Other houses branched out into France and Switzerland. Finally he founded his monastery of Bobio in the Apennines, where he died in 615.

A stern ascetic, aflame with religious passion, a finished scholar bringing from Ireland a knowledge of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, of rhetoric, geometry, and poetry, and a fine taste, Columbanus battled for twenty years with the vice and ignorance of a half-pagan Burgundy. Scornful of ease, indifferent to danger, astonished at the apathy of Italy as compared with the zeal of Ireland in teaching, he argued and denounced with "the freedom of speech which accords with the custom of my country." The passion of his piety so awed the peoples, that for a time it seemed as if the rule of Columbanus might outdo that of St. Benedict. It was told that in Rome Gregory the Great received him, and as Columbanus lay prostrate in the church the Pope praised God in his heart for having given such great power to so small a man. Instantly the fiery saint, detecting the secret thought, rose from his prayer to repudiate the slight: "Brother, he who depreciates the work depreciates the Author."

For a hundred years before Columbanus there had been Irish pilgrims and bishops in Gaul and Italy. But it was his mission that first brought the national patriotism of Ireland into conflict with the organisation of Rome in Europe. Christianity had come to Ireland from the East – tradition said from St. John, who was then, and is still, held in special veneration by the Irish; his flower, St. John's wort, had for them peculiar virtues, and from it came, it was said, the saffron hue as the national colour for their dress. It was a national pride that their date for celebrating Easter, and their Eastern tonsure from ear to ear, had come to them from St. John. Peter loved Jesus, they said, but it was John that Jesus loved – "the youth John, the foster-son of his own bosom" – "John of the Breast." It was with a very passion of loyalty that they clung to a national church which linked them to the beloved apostle, and which was the close bond of their whole race, dear to them as the supreme expression of their temporal and spiritual freedom, now illustrious beyond all others in Europe for the roll of its saints and of its scholars, and ennobled by the company of its patriots and the glory of Columcille. The tonsure and the Easter of Columbanus, however, shocked foreign ecclesiastics as contrary to the discipline of Rome, and he was required to renounce them. He vehemently protested his loyalty to St. John, to St. Columcille, and to the church of his fathers. It was an unequal argument. Ireland, he was answered, was a small island in a far corner of the earth: what was its people that they should fight against the whole world. The Europe of imperial tradition had lost comprehension of the passion of national loyalty: all that lay outside that tradition was "barbarous," the Irish like the Saxons or the Huns.

The battle that was thus opened was the beginning of a new epoch in Irish history. St. Augustine, first archbishop of Canterbury (597), was ordered (603) to demand obedience to himself from the Celtic churches and the setting aside of their customs. The Welsh and the Irish refused to submit. Augustine had come to them from among the English, who were still pagan, and still fighting for the extermination of the Celts, and on his lips were threats of slaughter by their armies to the disobedient. The demand was renewed sixty years later, in a synod at Whitby in 664. By that time Christianity had been carried over England by the Irish mission; on the other hand, the English were filled with imperial dreams of conquest and supremacy. English kings settled on the Roman province began to imitate the glories of Rome, to have the Roman banner of purple and gold carried before them, to hear the name of "Emperor of the whole of Britain," and to project the final subjugation to that "empire" of the Celt and Pictish peoples. The Roman organisation fell in with their habits of government and their

ambitions. In the synod the tone of imperial contempt made itself heard against those marked out for conquest – Celts "rude and barbarous" – "Picts and Britons, accomplices in obstinacy in those two remote islands of the world." "Your father Columba," "of rustic simplicity" said the English leader, had "that Columba of yours," like Peter, the keeping of the keys of heaven? With these first bitter words, with the condemnation of the Irish customs, and the sailing away of the Irish monks from Lindisfarne, discord began to enter in. Slowly and with sorrow the Irish in the course of sixty years abandoned their traditional customs and adopted the Roman Easter. But the work of Columcille was undone, and the spiritual bond by which the peoples had been united was for ever loosened. English armies marched ravaging over the north, one of them into Ireland (684), "wasting that harmless nation which had always been most friendly to the English, not sparing even churches or monasteries." The gracious peace which had bound the races for a hundred and twenty years was broken, and constant wars again divided Picts, Scots, Britons, and Angles.

Ireland, however, for four hundred years to come still poured out missionaries to Europe. They passed through England to northern France and the Netherlands; across the Gaulish sea and by the Loire to middle France; by the Rhine and the way of Luxeuil they entered Switzerland; and westward they reached out to the Elbe and the Danube, sending missionaries to Old Saxony, Thuringia, Bavaria, Salzburg and Carinthia; southwards they crossed the Alps into Italy, to Lucca, Fiesole, Rome, the hills of Naples, and Tarentum. Their monasteries formed rest-houses for travellers through France and Germany. Europe itself was too narrow for their ardour, and they journeyed to Jerusalem, settled in Carthage, and sailed to the discovery of Iceland. No church of any land has so noble a record in the astonishing work of its teachers, as they wandered over the ruined provinces of the empire among the pagan tribes of the invaders. In the Highlands they taught the Picts to compose hymns in their own tongue; in a monastery founded by them in Yorkshire was trained the first English poet in the new England; at St. Gall they drew up a Latin-German dictionary for the Germans of the Upper Rhine and Switzerland, and even devised new German words to express the new ideas of Christian civilisation; near Florence one of their saints taught the natives how to turn the course of a river. Probably in the seventh and eighth centuries no one in western Europe spoke Greek who was not Irish or taught by an Irishman. No land ever sent out such impassioned teachers of learning, and Charles the Great and his successors set them at the head of the chief schools throughout Europe.

We can only measure the originality of the Irish mission by comparing with it the work of other races. Roman civilisation had not inured its people to hardship, nor given them any interest in barbarians. When Augustine in 595 was sent on the English mission he turned back with loathing, and finally took a year for his journey. In 664 no one could be found in Rome to send to Canterbury, till in 668 Theodore was fetched from Syria; he also took a year on his way. But the Irish missionaries feared nothing, neither hunger nor weariness nor the outlaws of the woods. Their succession never ceased. The death of one apostle was but the coming of another. The English missions again could not compare with the Irish. Every English missionary from the seventh to the ninth century had been trained under Irish teachers or had been for years in Ireland, enveloped by the ardour of their fiery enthusiasm; when this powerful influence was set aside English mission work died down for a thousand years or so. The Irish missionaries continued without a break for over six hundred years. Instead of the Irish zeal for the welfare of all peoples whatsoever, the English felt a special call to preach among those "from whom the English race had its origin," and their chief mission was to their own stock in Frisia. Finally, among Teutonic peoples politics went hand in hand with Christianity. The Teutons were out to conquer, and in the lust of dominion a conqueror might make religion the sign of obedience, and enforce it by fire and water, viper and sword. But the Irish had no theory of dominion to push. A score of generations of missionaries were bred up in the tribal communities of Ireland, where men believed in voluntary union of men in a high tradition. Their method was one of persuasion for spiritual ends alone. The conception of human life that lay behind the tribal government and the tribal church of Ireland gave to the Irish mission in Europe a singular and lofty

character. In the broad humanity that was the great distinction of their people persecution had no part. No war of religion stained their faith, and no barbarities to man.

CHAPTER IV

SCANDINAVIANS IN IRELAND

800-1014

For a thousand years no foreign host had settled in Erin. But the times of peace were ended. About 800 A.D. the Irish suffered their first invasion.

The Teutonic peoples, triumphant conquerors of the land, had carried their victories over the Roman Empire to the edge of the seas that guarded Ireland. But fresh hordes of warriors were gathering in the north, conquerors of the ocean. The Scandinavians had sailed out on "the gulf's enormous abyss, where before their eyes the vanishing bounds of the earth were hidden in gloom." An old English riddle likened the shattering iceberg swinging down from Arctic waters to the terror of the pirate's war-ship – the leader on the prow as it plunged through the sea, calling to the land, shouting as he goes, with laughter terrible to the earth, swinging his sharp-edged sword, grim in hate, eager for slaughter, bitter in the battle-work. They came, "great scourers of the seas – a nation desperate in attempting the conquest of other realms."

The Scandinavian campaigns of the ocean affected Ireland as no continental wars for the creation or the destruction of the Roman Empire had done. During two hundred years their national life, their learning, their civilisation, were threatened by strangers. The social order they had built up was confronted with two new tests – violence from without, and an alien population within the island. We may ask how Irish civilisation met the trial.

The Danes fell on all the shores of England from the Forth to the Channel, the land of the Picts northward, Iona and the country of the Scots to the west, and Bretland of the Britons from the Clyde to the Land's End: in Ireland they sailed up every creek, and shouldering their boats marched from river to river and lake to lake into every tribeland, covering the country with their forts, plundering the rich men's raths of their cups and vessels and ornaments of gold, sacking the schools and monasteries and churches, and entering every great king's grave for buried treasure. Their heavy iron swords, their armour, their discipline of war, gave them an overwhelming advantage against the Irish with, as they said, bodies and necks and gentle heads defended only by fine linen. Monks and scholars gathered up their manuscripts and holy ornaments, and fled away for refuge to Europe.

These wars brought a very different fate to the English and the Irish. In England, when the Danes had planted a colony on every inlet of the sea (*c.* 800), they took horse and rode conquering over the inland plains. They slew every English king and wiped out every English royal house save that of Wessex; and in their place set up their own kings in Northumbria and East Anglia, and made of all middle England a vast "Danelaw" a land ruled by Danish law, and by confederations of Danish towns. At the last Wessex itself was conquered, and a Danish king ruled over all England (1013). In Ireland, on the other hand, the invincible power of the tribal system for defence barred the way of invaders. Every foot of land was defended; every tribe fought for its own soil. There could be no subjection of the Irish clans except by their extermination. A Norwegian leader, Thorgils, made one supreme effort at conquest. He fixed his capital at Armagh and set up at its shrine the worship of Thor, while his wife gave her oracles from the high altar of Clonmacnois on the Shannon, in the prophetess's cloak set with stones to the hem, the necklace of glass beads, the staff, and the great skin pouch of charms. But in the end Thorgils was taken by the king of Meath and executed, being cast into Loch Nair. The Danes, who held long and secure possession of England, great part of Scotland, and Normandy, were never able to occupy permanently any part of Ireland more than a day's march from the chief stations

of their fleets. Through two hundred years of war no Irish royal house was destroyed, no kingdom was extinguished, and no national supremacy of the Danes replaced the national supremacy of the Irish.

The long war was one of "confused noise and garments rolled in blood." Ireland, whether they could conquer it or not, was of vast importance to the Scandinavians as a land of refuge for their fleets. Voyagers guided their way by the flights of birds from her shores; the harbours of "the great island" sheltered them; her fields of corn, her cattle driven to the shore for the "strand-hewing," provisioned their crews; her woods gave timber for shipbuilding. Norwegians and Danes fought furiously for possession of the sea-ports, now against the Irish, now against each other. No victory or defeat counted beyond the day among the shifting and multiplying fleets of new marauders that for ever swarmed round the coasts – emigrants who had flung themselves on the sea for freedom's sake to save their old laws and liberties, buccaneers seeking "the spoils of the sea," sea-kings roaming the ocean or gathering for a raid on Scotland or on France, stray companies out of work or putting in for a winter's shelter, boats of whale-fishers and walrus-killers, Danish hosts driven out of England or of Normandy. As "the sea vomited up floods of foreigners into Erin so that there was not a point without a fleet," battle swung backwards and forwards between old settlers and new pirates, between Norsemen and Danes, between both and the Irish.

But the Scandinavians were not only sea-rovers, they were the greatest merchants that northern Europe had yet seen. From the time of Charles the Great to William the Conqueror, the whole commerce of the seas was in their hands. Eastward they pushed across Russia to the Black Sea, and carried back the wares of Asia to the Baltic; westward they poured along the coasts of Gaul by the narrow seas, or sailed the Atlantic from the Orkneys and Hebrides round the Irish coast to the Bay of Biscay. The new-made empire of Charles the Great was opening Europe once more to a settled life and the possibilities of traffic, and the Danish merchants seized the beginnings of the new trade. Ireland lay in the very centre of their seaways, with its harbours, its wealth, and its traditional commerce with France. Merchants made settlements along the coasts, and planted colonies over the inland country to supply the trade of the ports. They had come to Ireland for business, and they wanted peace and not war. They intermarried with the Irish, fostered their children, brought their goods, welcomed Irish poets into their forts, listening to Irish stories and taking new models for their own literature, and in war they joined with their Irish neighbours. A race of "Gall-Gaels," or "foreign Irish," grew up, accepted by the Irish as of their community. Between the two peoples there was respect and good-will.

The enterprise of the sea-rovers and the merchant settlers created on Irish shores two Scandinavian "kingdoms" – kingdoms rather of the sea than of the land. The Norsemen set up their moot on the Mound over the river Liffey (near where the Irish Parliament House rose in later days), and there created a naval power which reached along the coast from Waterford to Dundalk. The Dublin kingdom was closely connected with the Danish kingdom of Northumbria, which had its capital at York, and formed the common meeting-ground, the link which united the Northmen of Scandinavia and the Northmen of Ireland. A mighty confederation grew up. Members of the same house were kings in Dublin, in Man, and in York. The Irish Channel swarmed with their fleets. The sea was the common highway which linked the powers together, and the sea was held by fleets of swift long-ships with from ninety to a hundred and fifty rowers or fighting men on board. Dublin, the rallying-point of roving marauders, became the centre of a wide-flung war. Its harbour, looking east, was the mart of the merchant princes of the Baltic trade: there men of Iceland and of Norway landed with their merchandise or their plunder.

"Limerick of the swift ships," "Limerick of the riveted stones," the kingdom lying on the Atlantic was a rival even to Dublin; kings of the same house ruled in Limerick and the Hebrides, and their fleets took the way of the wide ocean; while Norse settlements scattered over Limerick, Kerry and Tipperary, organised as Irish clans and giving an Irish form to their names, maintained the inland trade. Other Munster harbours were held, some by the Danes, some by the Irish.

The Irish were on good terms with the traders. They learned to build the new ships invented by the Scandinavians where both oars and sails were used, and traded in their own ports for treasures from oversea, silken raiment and abundance of wine. We read in 900 of Irishmen along the Cork shores "high in beauty, whose resolve is quiet prosperity," and in 950 of "Munster of the great riches," "Munster of the swift ships."

On the other hand, the Irish never ceased from war with the sea-kings. From the time of Thorgils, high-kings of Tara one after another led the perpetual contest to hold Ireland and to possess Dublin. They summoned assemblies in north and south of the confederated chiefs. The Irish copied not only the Scandinavian building of war-ships, but their method of raising a navy by dividing the coast into districts, each of which had to equip and man ten ships, to assemble at the summons for the united war-fleet. Every province seems to have had its fleet. The Irish, in fact, learned their lesson so well that they were able to undertake the re-conquest of their country, and become leaders of Danish and Norse troops in war. The spirit of the people rose high. From 900 their victories increased even amid disaster. Strong kings arose among them, good organisers and good fighters, and for a hundred years one leader followed hard on another. In 916, Niall, king of Tara, celebrated once more the assembly of Telltown, and led southern and northern O'Neills to the aid of Munster against the Gentiles, directing the men of Leinster in the campaign – a gallant war. Murtagh, king of Ailech or Tirconnell, smote the Danes at Carlingford and Louth in 926, a year of great danger, and so came victorious to the assembly at Telltown. Again, in 933, he defeated the "foreigners" in the north, and they left two hundred and forty heads, and all their wealth of spoils. In 941 he won his famous name, "Murtagh of the Leather Cloaks," from the first midwinter campaign ever known in Ireland, "the hosting of the frost," when he led his army from Donegal, under shelter of leather cloaks, over lakes and rivers frozen by the mighty frost, round the entire circuit of Ireland. Some ten years later, Cellachan, king of Cashel, took up the fight; with his linen-coated soldiers against the mail-clad foreigners, he swept the whole of Munster, capturing Limerick, Cork, Cashel and Waterford, and joining their Danish armies to his own troops; till he closed his campaign by calling out the Munster fleet from Kinsale to Galway bay, six or seven score of them, to meet the Danish ships at Dundalk. The Norsemen used armour, and rough chains of blue iron to grapple the enemies' ships, but the Irish sailors, with their "strong enclosures of linen cloth," and tough ropes of hemp to fling over the enemies' prows, came off victorious. According to the saga of his triumph, Cellachan called the whole of Ireland to share in the struggle for Irish freedom, and a fleet from Ailech carried off plunder and booty from the Hebrides. He was followed by Brian Boru. "Ill luck was it for the Danes when Brian was born," says the old saga, "when he inflicted not evil on the foreigners in the day time he did it in the next night." From beyond the Shannon he led a fierce guerrilla war. Left with but fifteen followers alive, sleeping on "hard knotty wet roots," he still refused to yield. "It is not hereditary to us," he said, "to submit." He became king of Munster in 974, drove out the Danish king from Dublin in 998, and ruled at last in 1000 as Ardri of Ireland, an old man of sixty or seventy years. In 1005 he called out all the fleets of the Norsemen of Dublin, Waterford, Wexford, and of the men of Munster, and of almost all of the men of Erin, such of them as were fit to go to sea, and they levied tribute from Saxons and Britons as far as the Clyde and Argyle.

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