

**A LAND OF HEROES;  
STORIES FROM  
EARLY IRISH HISTORY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649245048

A land of heroes; stories from early Irish history by W. Lorcan O'Byrne

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**W. LORCAN O'BYRNE**

**A LAND OF HEROES;  
STORIES FROM  
EARLY IRISH HISTORY**





DERDRE'S LAMENT

1-417

# A Land of Heroes

Stories from  
Early Irish History

BY  
W. LORCAN O'BYRNE

*WITH SIX ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN H. BACON*

THE · TALBOT · PRESS

DUBLIN: (R. C. OF I. LTD.) BELFAST:  
89 TALBOT STREET 54 FOUNTAIN STREET



D.A. 1.1.1  
- 18.

## INTRODUCTION.

---

Who the authors of these Tales were is unknown. It is generally accepted that what we now possess is the growth of family or tribal histories, which, from being transmitted down, from generation to generation, give us fair accounts of actual events. The Tales that are here given are only a few out of very many hundreds embedded in the vast quantity of Old Gaelic manuscripts hidden away in the libraries of nearly all the countries of Europe, as well as those that are treasured in the Royal Irish Academy and Trinity College, Dublin. An idea of the extent of these manuscripts may be gained by the statement of one, who perhaps had the fullest knowledge of them—the late Professor O'Curry,—in which he says that the portion of them (so far as they have been examined) relating to Historical Tales would extend to upwards of 4000 pages of large size. This great mass is nearly all untranslated, but all the Tales that are given in this volume have already appeared in English, either in *The Publications of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language*; the poetical versions of *The*



*Foray of Queen Meave*, by Aubrey de Vere; *Deirdré*, by Dr. Robert Joyce; *The Lays of the Western Gael*, and *The Lays of the Red Branch*, by Sir Samuel Ferguson; or in the prose collection by Dr. P. W. Joyce, entitled *Old Celtic Romances*; and the contributions to *Atlantis*, and *The Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History*, by Professor O'Curry.

These translations or compositions, however, are, besides being lengthy, suited rather for mature minds; the present telling of the Tales is intended to reach the level of children, in the hope that a more lively interest may be taken by these readers in the historic events and places of Ireland. With this view the Tales, drawn from different sources, have been placed in something of chronological order, and an English dress has been given to the Irish names. The deterrent effect of the appearance of Irish words on purely English readers is well known, even without the strangeness of the Celtic element, which is referred to by Dr. Douglas Hyde in his *Sketch of Early Gaelic Literature*, where he says: "The moment the English reader embarks on the sea of native Irish literature he finds himself in absolutely unknown waters. Its allusions are to things and times and events and cycles and dynasties, strange and unknown to him, and he thus finds himself suddenly launched into a new world, whose existence was by him perfectly unsuspected." And,

in estimating the value of these Tales, Dr. Hyde may be again quoted: "We find in our most ancient Tales a genuine picture of Pagan life in Europe for which we look in vain elsewhere, and, through this early Irish peep-hole, we get a vivid picture of the life and manners of the (Celtic) race in one of its strongholds, from which we may conjecture, and even assume, a good deal with regard to the others".

"Foreigners", says Mr. Standish O'Grady in his *Early Bardic Literature*, "are surprised to find the Irish claim for their own country an antiquity and a history prior to that of the neighbouring countries. Here lies the explanation. There is not a conspicuous sepulchral monument in Ireland the traditional history of which is not recorded in our ancient literature, and of the heroes in whose honour they were raised. In the rest of Europe there is not a single barrow, dolmen, or cist of which the ancient traditional history is recorded; in Ireland there is hardly one of which it is not."

With reference to the amount of credence to be placed in the "Historic Tales", Professor O'Curry, in his *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History*, says that—"Under the ancient laws of Erin an obligation was imposed upon certain high officers to make and preserve regular records of the history of the country. The duty of the Ollavs was, however, a good deal more

extensive than this, for they were bound, by the same laws, to make themselves perfect masters of that history in all its details, and to teach it to the people by public recitals, as well as to be the legal referees upon all subjects in dispute concerning history and the genealogies (and you will bear in mind that the preservation of the rights of property of individuals intimately depended on the accuracy of that history and of these genealogies). The laws provided strictly for the education of the Ollav (and no one could be a Brehon or Judge that had not attained the degree of an Ollav), and they conferred on him valuable endowments and most important privileges, all which he forfeited for life if he became guilty of falsifying the history of any fact or the genealogy of any family."

"The education of the Ollav was long and minute. It extended over a space of twelve years of hard work, and it appears that he was bound (even from the very first course of his professional studies), among other duties, to have the Historic Stories; and these are classed with the genealogies and synchronisms of history, in which he was to preserve the truth of history pure and unbroken to succeeding generations. According to several of the most ancient authorities, the Ollav, or perfect Doctor, was bound to have (for recital at the public feasts and assemblies) at least seven fifties of these historic narratives. It is thus perfectly clear that the com-