

FINN AND HIS COMPANIONS

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Finn and his companions by Standish O'Grady

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STANDISH O'GRADY

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COMPANIONS**



ST. PATRICK WELCOMES HIS GUESTS.

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LOS ANGELES

FINN AND HIS COMPANIONS

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"THE COMING OF CUCLAIN"
"THE TRIUMPH AND PASSING OF CUCLAIN"
"IN THE GATES OF THE NORTH"
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PREFACE

You have, I am sure, often heard how the Roman Empire was broken up and destroyed by the barbarians of Northern Europe, the Goths, the Vandals, the Huns, the Piets, and Scots, etc., etc. You know too, why God permitted this to be done. It was because the civilised Romans, and the nations whom they made like themselves, lost the great simple virtues of truth, courage, generosity, and the readiness to sacrifice their lives and possessions for the sake of noble objects. We read that Romans at this time would even cut off their thumbs in order to avoid becoming soldiers; for, of course, a young man who had no thumb to his hand could not be expected to hold a spear strongly, or wield a sword well. In those days the rich Roman became not only very rich, but also selfish and ease-loving, and the poor Roman very poor, so that he cared about nothing but how he might get food in order that he might live; and generally the Roman character changed greatly from what it was in ancient times, for wealth, commerce, civilisation, and peace, however good in themselves, have this tendency, viz. they enfeeble and corrupt men's minds, and make them selfish, lazy, and hard-hearted. Then, as God long ago sent the flood to drown a world which had grown too wicked, so

he sent the brave though rude barbarians of northern Europe to destroy the Romans and break their great Empire to pieces.

Woe to the lands, the minstrel sang,
That hear the northern warriors' clang.

You have also read in the English histories how at this time the Romanised Britons were perpetually invaded and plundered by the Picts and Scots, and then by the Saxons, until they were quite ruined. The Picts and Scots and the Saxons could not have done this in the time of Caractacus and Boadicea.

Now it becomes an interesting question what kind of men these northern barbarians were who did such a great work, and one would like to know how they lived, what they loved and honoured, and what they hated and despised. Of the other northern nations other writers will tell you something. I am going to tell you something about the nation which in histories of England are called the Scots. Now the Scots, who, in alliance with the Picts made such havoc among the degenerate Britons, were in fact the Irish, who at some very early period, overflowing out of Ireland, occupied the western counties of Scotland. The Highlanders and the Irish of Ireland were one race of people whom the old historians called *Scoti* or Scots. They spoke the same language, and had the same manners and customs, and the same traditions, the same music and the same songs. A great many of their songs and stories lingered a long time in the Highlands, and

were believed to have been made by a poet called Ossian. In Ireland a still greater number remained in the minds of the people. These songs and stories, too, were attributed to Ossian or to friends of Ossian, and have been from time to time written down on paper or on parchment. In these stories we learn a great deal about Ossian, his friends and acquaintances, what sort of men they were, and how they lived. I do not say that everything related about them is true, but when we compare these stories with what is known historically about the conquerors of the Roman Empire, we can see that the people amongst whom Ossian lived must have been very like the people of the Ossianic stories, and that Finn, who was the father of Ossian, Oscar his son, Diarmid his chivalrous cousin, Caelta, Mac-Lewy, and the rest were very brave, upright, true-hearted, and affectionate men, who in their forests and their rude simple homes preserved certain virtues which the Romans and the Romanised Britons had lost in spite of all their wealth. These stories will, I hope, amuse and entertain you, and will also enable you to read some meaning in a word which you have often seen in your histories, but which has had hitherto for you no meaning at all, or perhaps a bad one. The Scots, who with the Picts gave the poor degenerate Britons so many beatings in battle and plundered them far and wide, were essentially somewhat like the men whose characters and manner of living you will find described in these stories. Most of our stories

relating to this period are supposed to have been told by Ossian to St. Patrick. Those which I relate are, for the most part, stories told to St. Patrick by Caelta, a cousin of Ossian, and are not so well known. Most of them are, I think, quite new. If all our Irish Ossianic stories and poems were published, I daresay they would fill a hundred volumes like the present. I have, however, tried to tell these few stories in such a way as to give you a good general idea of the literature as a whole.

Finn and his friends are believed to have flourished in the second and third centuries, that is about two hundred years before the Irish began to break out and attack the Roman Empire in this part of Europe.

The great influence exercised by Finn over the Irish mind was not destroyed, but rather purified and elevated, by the introduction of Christianity. It is distinctly traceable down to the seventeenth century, and though now unrecognised, perhaps still survives, warring strongly, if silently, against the vices which are always connected with civilisation.