

**WEST IRISH
FOLK-TALES
AND ROMANCES**

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West Irish folk-tales and romances by William Larminie

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WILLIAM LARMINIE

**WEST IRISH
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WEST IRISH FOLK-TALES
AND
ROMANCES

Collected and Translated
BY
WILLIAM LARMINIE.

*WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES, AND APPENDIX
CONTAINING SPECIMENS OF THE GAELIC
ORIGINALS PHONETICALLY SPELT.*

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INTRODUCTION.

WHATEVER profit might, from the scientific point of view, be considered likely to spring from a study of Gaelic folk-lore, it would probably be considered beforehand that it would come from the study of the material as a single body, uniform throughout, and, as such, to be brought into comparison with the folk-lore of other countries. When, however, we come to an actual survey of the material, certain appearances present themselves which lead us to expect that, possibly, a large part of our gain will accrue from the observation of the differences which characterise different parts of the material within itself. Ireland, though an island of moderate extent, is yet sufficiently large to contain districts far enough apart to isolate in some degree their respective peasant populations; while it is also admitted that the homogeneity of the Gaelic tongue does not indicate a corresponding homogeneity of race. It may turn out, in fact,

ultimately, that we have in Ireland, not one, but several bodies of folk-lore placed in relations most favourable for aiding in the solution of certain problems; while, finally, we shall, by a comparison with the Gaelic folk-lore of Scotland, obtain a still wider field for similar observations and inferences.

It is true, unfortunately, that our Irish material is not by any means what it might have been, either in quantity or quality; its defects being such that any conclusions arrived at through the line of investigation here to be suggested must at present be considered of a very provisional nature. Of the folk-lore of the large province of Munster we know next to nothing. I have myself hitherto been able to make no attempt at collection in the southern counties. Some of Mr. Curtin's stories were probably obtained in Kerry; but he has not told us which. We have, therefore, nothing to fall back upon but the somewhat sophisticated little fairy tales of Crofton Croker. For Leinster, we are better off, as we have the Wexford tales of Kennedy. For the inland parts of Connaught we have Dr. Hyde's volume; for the coast of Connaught and Donegal, the tales included in this book, and many others in my possession not yet published.

With regard to Crofton Croker's tales, it needs but a small acquaintance with Ireland to be assured that they are not peculiar to Munster.

The cluricaun still pursues his trade of boot-making by the shores of Achill Sound in Mayo. Donegal knows all that the south ever knew on the subject, and has perhaps even a greater wealth of information. It is admitted that in the city of Dublin the tribe does not now exist; but such is not the case even in this highly-civilised watering-place of Bray, only twelve miles distant from the metropolis. In a word, this minor mythology was, may we not say still is, common to the whole island.

The fairies, however, do not very often form the subjects of the longer detailed narratives. Let me now turn to these. Among the Connaught stories I have found a good many parallels on the coast to those of the inland districts, though I have not included any in this volume. In Donegal, on the other hand, while I have obtained only two partial variants of the inland Connaught tales, I have found several close parallels to the Connaught coast tales—a fact, however, which may be accounted for by the partially Donegalese descent of the Achill people. If we now bring the Wexford tales into comparison, it will be found that they do not contain many parallels to those of the other districts. I know of only five from Connaught, and two from the more distant Donegal, both variants of two of the Connaught tales, one of them, perhaps

the best known of all such stories—no other, indeed, than Mr. Lang's "far-travelled tale"—that of "The Three Tasks"; the other, of which I obtained complete versions in Galway and in Mayo, and which I know to exist in Donegal, is represented in this volume by "Morraha Brian More," and in Kennedy by the "Fis fá an aon Sgeul." Now this latter does not appear to be much known except in Ireland; but it will hardly be contended that it was independently invented in the four Irish counties in which it has been discovered. Still less would this be maintained regarding the other. The tale, which has proved its popularity by flourishing in three quarters of the globe, shows the same quality on a smaller scale by flourishing in at least three provinces of Ireland.

And perhaps this is the best place to note that the theory of independent origin is contrary to one of the closest analogies to be observed in nature. When animals and plants of the same species are found in widely-distant regions, no naturalist assumes for a moment that they originated separately. However puzzling the problem may be, the student of nature seeks to solve it by explanations of a very different kind; and already many of the most difficult cases have yielded their secret to patient investigation. It will assuredly turn out to be the same with folk-tales. As