

**IRISH TEXT SOCIETY, VOL. XX.
THE CONTENTION OF THE BARDS,
EDITED WITH TRANSLATION,
NOTES, GLOSSARIES, PART I**

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Irish Text Society, Vol. XX. The contention of the Bards, edited with translation, notes, glossaries, Part I by L. MacKenna

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L. MACKENNA

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IRISH TEXTS SOCIETY

CUMANN NA SCRÍBEANN GAELIGE



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IO MARBÁŠ NA ÚFILEADÓ

THE CONTENTION OF THE BARDS

EDITED

WITH TRANSLATION, NOTES, GLOSSARIES, Etc.

BY

REV. L. MCKENNA, S.J., M.A.

PART I.

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FOREWORD.

IRISH Scholars and Irish Historians have been long wishing for a critical edition of the *Contention of the Bards*. They felt it a shame and a loss that no considerable body of Bardic poetry should exist in print, and they thought it especially desirable that the *Contention*, which caused such a stir in the Ireland of the early 17th century, should be rescued from the precarious keeping of manuscripts.

In 1911 Mr. Thomas O'Nolan, M.A., undertook the task of publishing the *Contention*, but his early death prevented him from carrying out this, one of the many noble purposes of his life. His widow, Mrs. O'Nolan (Maire de Buitléir), very kindly put the notes of her husband at my disposal, as I was one of his closest friends. Very gladly—though perhaps rashly—I availed myself of the opportunity of testifying my affection and esteem for my dear friend, and of completing, as far as my powers would permit, the work he had begun.

Mr. O'Nolan had already done much of the tedious spade-work, having collated many MSS. of i.-ix., xiii.-xvi., xx., xxi., xxiii., xxiv., xxvii.-xxix., and having written a tentative translation of i.-v. 98.

I owe a very special debt of gratitude to Miss Eleanor Knott, who not merely read very carefully all the proof-sheets, but in numerous instances—more numerous even than those where “(K)” indicates her suggestions—gave me the benefit of her wide and accurate scholarship. To her is due practically the whole Appendix (page 255), which, except for considerations of printing expenses, would have been incorporated in the body of the book.

To the Celtic Faculty of the National University, and in particular to Dr. Douglas Hyde and Dr. O. J. Bergin, I am indebted for their kind permission and even encouragement to publish the book, which was presented in the first instance as a Thesis. Also I am indebted to Father J. McErlean, S.J., for many helpful suggestions.

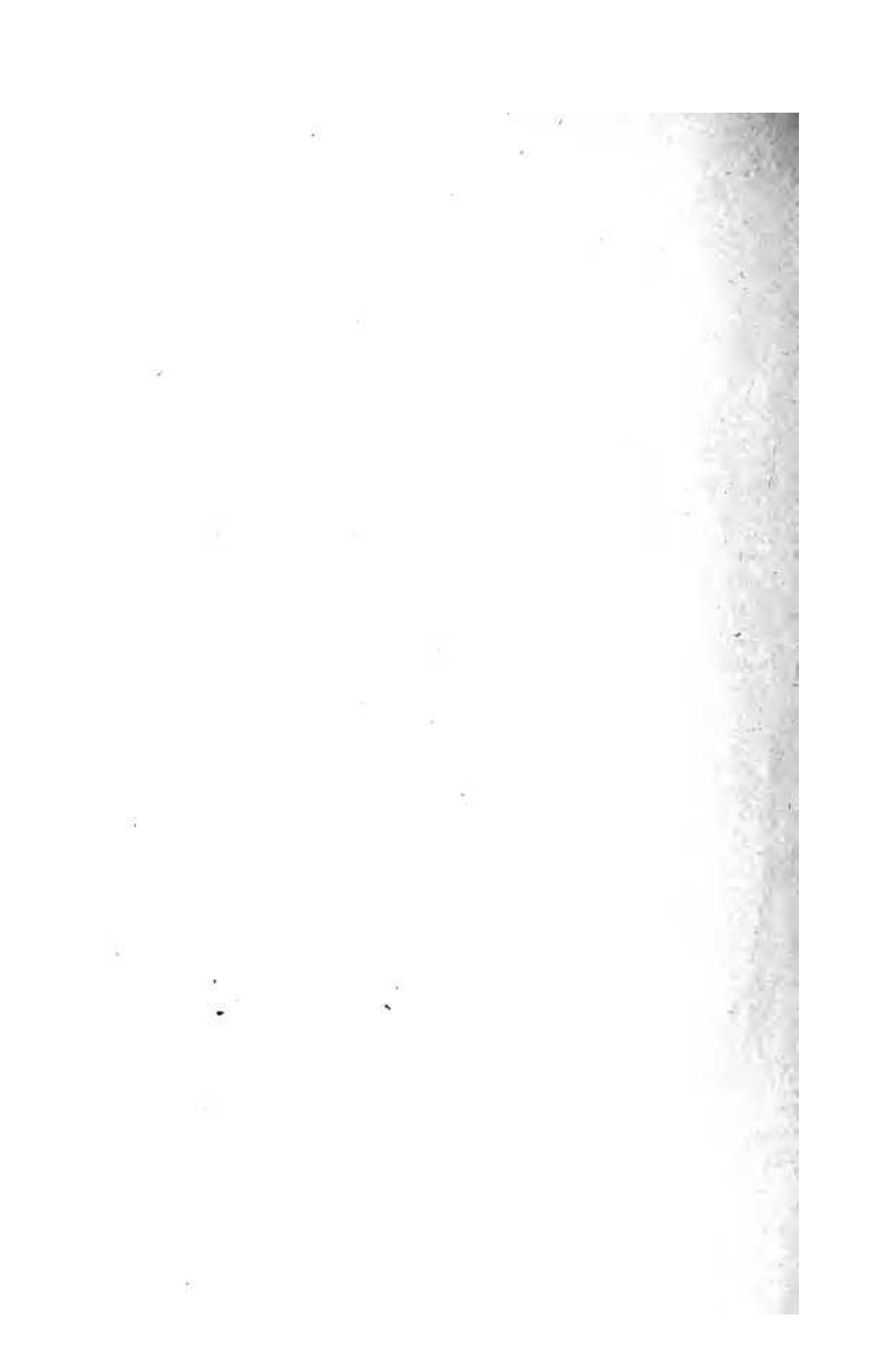


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ABBREVIATIONS.

Acall.	= Acallam na Scénórach (Ir. Texte, Ser. iv., Heft. i.).
Contrib.	= Contributions to Irish Lexicography by K. Meyer
O'R.	= O'Reilly's Irish Writers.
K.	= Keating's History (Ir. Texts Soc.).
Z.C.	= Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie.
K.Z.	= Kühn's Zeitschrift.
M.C.	= O'Curry's Manners and Customs.
4 M.	= Four Masters (O'Donovan).
P.H.	= Passions and Homilies (Atkinson).
B.R.	= Book of Rights (ed. O'Donovan).
Magh Rath	= Battle of Magh Rath (O'Curry).
C.C.C.	= Caithreim Ceallachain Caisil (Bugge, 1905).
C.A.	= Cóir Anmann, Ir. Texte, iii. Ser., ii. Heft.
O'Dav. Gloss.	= In "Three Irish Glossaries" (Stokes).
Fled Bric.	= Fled Bricrend (Ir. Texts Soc., 1899).
A. Clonmac.	= Kilk. Arch. Soc. Jour., N.S.I., 444-460.
Serg. Cuch.	= Serglige Conculaind (Windisch. Ir. Texte).
Mesc. Ul.	= Mesca Ulad (Hennessy, Todd Lect., 1889).
Tec. Corm.	= Tecosca Chormaic (K. Meyer, Todd Lect., 1909).
Toch. Em.	= Tochmarc Emire (K. Meyer, Rev. Celt. xi., 434).

The other abbreviations will be easily understood.

INTRODUCTION.

PART I.

ORIGIN OF "THE CONTENTION."

IN the beginning of the 17th century Tadhg McBrody, chief poet of Thomond, published a poem "Olc do thagrais a Thorna," in which, by way of a criticism of two poems of Torna (fl. 5th century), he challenged the pretensions of the Eremonian clans, especially those of the North, and extolled the Eberian dynasties. A controversy arose between the Court poets of the North and those of the South. This controversy, generally known as "Iomarbhaidh (or "Coinntinn") na bhfileadh" caused, to judge from the multiplicity and variety of the MSS., a lively interest everywhere in Ireland.

It is not easy to explain why so many poets joined in the controversy, nor why the dispute caused such a stir through the land. Tadhg's poem cannot have been its cause, but at most its occasion. We know of many earlier poems equally capable in themselves of exciting such a contention. We know of other such controversies which apparently excited little or no stir. (Cf. "Reliquiae Celticae," II., pp. 291-297.)

O'Curry (M.M. 141) says that the contention arose "apparently in consequence of a preconcerted arrangement," and that "its object was to rouse and keep alive the national feeling and family pride of the native nobility." Dr. Hyde ("Lit. Hist." 517) and Miss Hull ("Text Book of I. Lit.," 168) are of the same opinion. It seems hard, however, to read this exalted motive into the poems. The poems of McBrody, notably his Elegy on the 4th Earl of Thomond, would suggest that he had no conception of a national policy of resistance to the foreigner. He mentions approvingly the Earl's exploits at Kinsale! Even supposing that he did perceive the necessity of uniting the Irish chiefs it seems unlikely that one, who in his professional eulogies went out of his way to deny his political convictions, would have been the leading preacher in a poetical crusade for the defence of the old Irish polity. Again, the general tone of the poems does not suggest that the uniting of the country was the motive of their composition. It is true that the poets (for instance, Tadhg, xviii. 5) protest that they do not wish to set tribe against tribe; it is true, too, that a feeling of the essential