

IRISH NATIONALITY

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Irish Nationality by Alice Stopford Green

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IRISH NATIONALITY

BY

ALICE STOPFORD GREEN

AUTHOR OF "TOWN LIFE IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY"
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IN MEMORY
OF
THE IRISH DEAD

IRISH NATIONALITY

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