

HISTORY OF IRELAND FOR SCHOOLS

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History of Ireland for schools by William Francis Collier

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WILLIAM FRANCIS COLLIER

**HISTORY OF
IRELAND
FOR SCHOOLS**

HISTORY OF IRELAND

FOR SCHOOLS

BY

WILLIAM FRANCIS COLLIER, LL.D.

TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN

AUTHOR OF "BRITISH HISTORY," "HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE," &c.



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NOTES ON THE CHIEF SOURCES OF IRISH HISTORY.

IRISH HISTORY, in its earliest form, consisted of unwritten *Lays*, composed and chanted by the bards, whose office—a combination of poet and historian—was hereditary. These bardic lays were followed by *Annals*, or *Chronicles*, which were compiled in the monasteries, the later annalists often copying from earlier works, or from the compositions of contemporary bards.

LOST COLLECTIONS OF BARDIC POETRY.

- (1) The Cattle Quest of Quilgny (τάν bó Cuailgne) has been called "the Iliad of Ireland." It narrated the events of an expedition against Louth, undertaken by Maev, Queen of Connaught, and Fergus MacRoy, in quest of a celebrated dun bull. Connor of Ulster, aided by Oohoolin and the *Red Branch* warriors, opposed the invaders, who, however, triumphed. Fragments of the *Tavin-Bo*, orally preserved, were embodied in writing in the *Leour-na-heery* (11th century).
- (2) Psalter of Tara, ascribed to Cormac MacArt, was lost early. It was partially copied—some say—into the following work (No. 3).
- (3) Psalter of Cashel, said to have been compiled, about 900 A.D., by Cormac MacCulyenan, King of Munster and Archbishop of Cashel. Copies of this work, existing in the 17th century, were used by Keating, the historian.

It narrated especially the affairs of Munster. The word Psalter (in Irish, *Saltair*) meant simply a book of poems, not necessarily of a religious kind.

- (4) The Book of Munster was little more than a copy of the "Psalter of Cashel" (No. 3).

EXISTING MANUSCRIPTS.

- (1) *Shanghus More* (Great Law). Published in 3 vols. by the Breton Law Commissioners. Dublin, 1865-1873.
- (2) *Wars of Gael and Gail*. Edited by Dr. J. H. Todd for the "Rolls Series." Dublin, 1867.
- (3) *Book of Armagh*, written about 807 A.D., contained the *Latin Testament* and the celebrated Confession of St. Patrick. (In course of publication by Dean Reeves.)
- (4) *Leour-na-heery* (*Lesbap na h-uirépe*), probably composed in the 5th or 6th century. It contains the oldest existing manuscript of the bardic tales relating to the Ultonian heroes. The *Taxin-Do-Quilgny* was transcribed into this work in prose form—that in metrical form having been lost. Preserved in the Royal Irish Academy in a MS. of 11th century. (Published in *fac-simile* by the Royal Irish Academy in 1870.)
- (5) *Book of Leinster*—MS. of about 1150 A.D.—preserved in the library of Trinity College, Dublin. (Published in *fac-simile*.)
- (6) *Book of Leacan* (barony of Tíreragh, in Sligo) narrates events from the earliest time to the 15th century. Transcribed circa 1416, by the MacFírbíses, hereditary poets and historians.
- (7) *Book of Ballymote*, composed in that monastery during the 14th century, described the affairs of Connaught—was sold in 1522 by the MacDonoughs to O'Donnell of Donegall for 140 cows.

Numbers 2 and 3, which are preserved in the Royal Irish Academy, contain copies of the Books of Cashel, Leinster, Ulster, and Orgial. The library of the Royal Irish Academy also contains the "Annals of Connaught" (from 13th to 16th century).

IRISH ANNALS.

- (1) Teernah (Τεργερμας), Abbot of Clonmacnoise and Roscommon, was the chief of Irish annalists. He wrote partly in Latin and partly in Irish. Eight copies of his "Annals" (but all imperfect) exist—two in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, two in the British Museum, two in the Royal Irish Academy, one at Trinity College, Dublin, and one in the Ashburnham collection. The "Annals of Teernah" begin with Cimbay, B.C. 299. Teernah died in 1088.
- (2) Annals of Innisfallen, compiled about 1215 and continued by another pen to 1320, contain a detailed account of the Battle of Clontarf. Like No. 1, it is written both in Latin and in Irish. The original is in the Bodleian Library.
- (3) Annals of Boyle, in Roscommon—date 1246—written in both Latin and Irish.
- (4) Annals of Ulster, by a Maguire of Fermanagh (434–1500)—continued to 1541.
- (5) Book of Fermoy. In the library of the Royal Irish Academy.
- (6) Annals of the Four Masters, compiled in the Franciscan Monastery of Donegall (1632–1636) by
 - (1) Michael O'Clery.
 - (2) Conary O'Clery (his brother), the copyist.
 - (3) Peregrin O'Clery (his cousin), head of the sept.
 - (4) O'Mulconry (of Roscommon).

Michael O'Clery, born about 1575, at Kilbarron Castle, by Donegall Bay, became a Franciscan friar at Louvain, in France, and died at Donegall in 1643. The O'Clerys were hereditary bards and historians of the O'Donnells of Tirconell. This work, extending in two parts from 2242 A.M. to 1616 A.D., gives chiefly the Annals of Ulster and Connaught.
- (7) *Chronicum Scotorum*. Copy in the Royal Irish Academy in the handwriting of Duaid MacFirbis, born at Lecan, in Co. Sligo. He was the last of a long line of hereditary poets and chroniclers. His services were engaged by Sir James Ware. MacFirbis was killed at an inn in 1670. His work extends to 1150 A.D. Edited for the "Rolls Series" by W. M. Hennessy. Dublin. 1866.