

**THE WONDERS OF
IRELAND AND
OTHER PAPERS ON
IRISH SUBJECTS**

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The wonders of Ireland and other papers on Irish subjects by P. W. Joyce

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P. W. JOYCE

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Yours faithfully
P. W. Joyce

THE WONDERS OF IRELAND

AND OTHER

PAPERS ON IRISH SUBJECTS

BY

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THE WONDERS OF IRELAND.

IN treatises on Geography it was customary in days of old to devote a chapter to the curious and remarkable things—or “Wonders” as they were commonly called—whether artificial or natural or supernatural, of each particular country; and in those credulous and superstitious old times the fabulous and the supernatural were sure to loom largely. We too here at home had our Wonders, the fame of which travelled far beyond our shores; and when the reader has perused the relation of them given here, he will perhaps come to the conclusion I have arrived at, namely, that for Wonders—or *Mirabilia* as they are called in Latin—no other country in Europe was fit to hold a candle to Ireland.

There are two detailed accounts of the Wonders of Ireland in two Irish documents: one is in the “Book of Ballymote,” a large manuscript volume containing a great number of miscellaneous pieces in the Irish language, copied into that book towards the end of the fourteenth century. The Book of Ballymote is now preserved in the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin. The transcriber of the tract on Irish Wonders states that he copied it from an older volume called the “Book of Glendalough”; but this book is not now known to exist—probably lost, like many

others of our valuable old manuscript books, in times of wars and troubles. The other relation is in an ancient manuscript (H. 3. 17) in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin. These two differ considerably, both in the number and in the order of the wonders they describe; and each contains some wonders not given in the other.

In the edition of the Irish version of Nennius issued by the Irish Archæological Society in the year 1848, Dr. James Henthorn Todd has published the text and translation of the tract in the Book of Ballymote; and he has also given in footnotes the most important portions of the Trinity College tract.

Besides the above two main accounts there are several shorter notices of our Wonders given by other writers. The most important of these are the following:—

Roderick O'Flaherty translated into Latin verse in the third part of his "Ogygia," a short account of the Wonders of Ireland: but I do not know from what Irish original he took his version.

Giraldus Cambrensis, who visited Ireland with Prince John in the year 1185, and who some time afterwards wrote in Latin his "Topography of Ireland" from materials collected during his visit, has a long chapter headed "Of the Wonders and Miracles of Ireland." He drew his information from native sources; partly from oral tradition, and partly from Irish writings translated for him by native scholars. Some of our modern Irish writers strongly condemn Giraldus for recording these "nonsensical stories"; but here they do him some injustice; for he merely, and very properly, records the legends as he found

them, though he occasionally somewhat alters or adds to them in the supposed interest of the Anglo-Norman invaders.*

Sir James Ware, in his "Antiquities of Ireland," has a short chapter (xxxiv.) on the same subject, the greater part of which is devoted to a description of the Giant's Causeway, which he regards, justly enough, as among the Irish wonders, though I have not found it included as a wonder in the ancient Irish accounts.

As there was constant intercourse during the ninth, tenth, and early eleventh centuries, between Ireland and the Scandinavian countries, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, the fame of our Wonders—as might be expected—reached the far north. There is still extant a book called "Kongs Skuggio,"—*Speculum Regale*—"The Royal Mirror," written about A.D. 1250, in the Norse language, by some Scandinavian author, in which among many other pieces is an account of the Wonders of Ireland. This section relating to Ireland has been translated and edited by Dr. Kuno Meyer in "Folklore" (vol. v.) and in "Eriu" (vol. iv.) with valuable annotations. He has shown that the Norseman did not derive his information from any of the books mentioned above, but took it down from a narrative given orally by an Irishman. Most of his Wonders are found, with some differences in details, in the Irish authorities, but he has some not recorded in our books.

Our Wonders are noticed by some other writers ;

* The extracts from Giraldus given in the following pages are taken from Bohn's translation.