

Celtic land of Ireland where Hugh O'Neill and Gerald, the great Earl of Desmond, champions of faith and freedom during the Elizabethan wars, were supposed to lie enchanted in underground fastnesses, with their knights around them, ready to do battle for the freedom of Innisfail—a belief that finds its true fulfilment in the success of the Celtic Revival.

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Poetry in Ireland.

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In treating of this topic, the development of poetic literature in Ireland, we are treating of the only European country outside of Greece in which we can trace with perspicuity and grace the development of a nation's poetry. In the history of the literature of any country, verse is the very earliest development, in its beginnings. When I say literature I mean not only that literature which is put on paper, but also that which is stereotyped in the mind, no matter whether read from parchments or from tablets of memory. It is the vulgarest idea possible that pen and ink are necessary concomitants to the development of literature, designed to further the perpetration of literature. In all countries, then, the first verse that appears is perfectly rude, shapeless. Certainly the earliest poems in Ireland were thus rude and shapeless, devoid of all rhyme and alliteration. There is nothing in them to distinguish the verse from prose except in the use of dis-syllabic words. The first poem was written by a son of Milesian to Ireland 1000 B. C. Of course, that is not true. We have no poem as old as that, but it is still the oldest poem in the Celtic language. No word of it is intelligible, except under the heaviest glass. So also with the first satires written in Ireland. All verses, too, quoted in corroboration of satires, up to 500 years A. D., are unrhymed verses, differing from prose only in accentuation. St. Patrick wrote poetry that is acknowledged to be genuine. It has no rhyme nor alliteration.

There have been preserved from the cataclysm that followed the Danish invasion four ancient parchment volumes, containing the course of study prescribed for the old Irish poets before that invasion, at about 800 or 900 A. D. By perusing these parchments we see that with no race or country on the globe, now or at any time in history, was the art of poetry so cultivated so venerated or so remunerated as in Ireland at that time. The elaborate complexity of the rules, the subtleties and intricacies of the poetical code, are all calculated to astound us when we look at them.

Ireland, it is alleged, taught Europe the art of rhyming. If that is so—and I do not claim it as an Irishman, but quote those eminent German and Italian scholars—all that Ireland has done in literature pales before that achievement. That achievement revolutionized the poetical systems of Europe by spreading the art of rhyming.

The earliest recorded rhymes in Europe are those in Laun, written by Augustine. He composed them while surrounded by a Celtic-speaking people, in the South of Gaul. In the year 750 A. D., we find the Irish people making