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## P R E F A C E .

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To write history is at all times a difficult task, but to write a history of the Irish nation is more than commonly difficult. This arises, to an important degree, from the prejudices engendered by a diversity in race and in religion amongst those to whom, it might be presumed, that such a performance would be chiefly interesting. But the difficulty is greatly enhanced by the paucity of ancient and authentic records, which, in a work like the present, should not only serve for reference and authority, but be, in fact, the basis of a reliable historical narrative. It is unfortunate, in the case of Ireland, that the confusion and devastation which attended the Danish invasion produced, amongst other results, the almost total destruction of those manuscript records of preceding ages, which, whether they referred to the times preceding the introduction of Christianity into the island or those succeeding that event, were preserved in the monastic seats of learning, and, therefore, in the destruction of the latter, fell a prey to the ferocity of ignorant and pagan invaders. The belief is, in some quarters, entertained that the Norman conquerors imitated, in this respect, the conduct of the Danes, destroying, as far as possible, what had escaped the notice or the violence of these ruthless pirates : but, whatever were the faults of the Normans, and how atrocious soever was their conduct towards Ireland, the charge in question can hardly be substantiated. It is, indeed, to be regretted that for an account of the events succeeding their invasion we are so dependent on one of their own historians, Giraldus Cambrensis, whose transparent hatred of the Irish people make his statements, in relation to their character and habits at that era, not always reliable.