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P R E F A C E.

263 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
81 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,
10 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
41 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
3 the monastic seats of learning, and, therefore, in the destruc-
9 tion 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 sub-
stantiated. 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.