

source of national poetry, and refuses to guide its future by the lessons which its history imparts. Ireland being the only country of Celtic speech over which the Roman had not ruled, our early institutions, laws, and habits afford precious aid in determining those of Britain, Gaul, and Northern Italy before the Latin conquest. They also furnished materials towards the early history of European institutions, and gave the key to much that was obscure in origin of the feudal system—nay, they even threw an unexpected light on the early institutions out of which the British Constitution was evolved. Again, when the culture of the ancient world seemed about to entirely perish beneath the flood of Northern barbarism, a spark from it was caught up and carefully nourished in Ireland, and from it our countrymen rekindled many a fire of knowledge in Europe. Furthermore, the Celtic Mythology, the key of which would be found in our manuscripts, was directly or indirectly interwoven with much of the early poetry and romantic literature of Europe, and even one of the greatest of living English poets had taken the subjects of some of the most charming poems from that abundant source. The early history of every old people was a tissue of fables. That of Ireland could not be an exception. The stories of Formorians, Firbolgs, Tuatha De Danaans, and Milesians from Spain were demolished by modern science. All the great Kings and personages of our stories must go back to the Land of Promise whence they came and whether tradition had already sent the Tuatha De Danaan. Real history began for us in the end of the fourth century, in the time of Nial of the Nine Hostages, who however, only emerged from the mythic clouds. The period with which I am concerned is from the sixth to the ninth century. The story will perhaps, disappoint those who have been in the habit of transfiguring ancient Ireland, and then viewing every personage and event belonging to it through the halo which their imaginations had created. Nor will I satisfy those who, either through ignorance, or passion, believed the ancient Irish to be no better than savages. Thirteen hundred years ago

the aspect of Ireland was very different from what it is to-day. The country, now so bare of trees, was then covered with forests of considerable extent, encompassing broad expanses of upland pastures and marsh meadows, unbroken by ditch or dyke. There were no cities or large towns at the mouth of our rivers; no stone bridge spanned them. Stepping stones, or at best hurdle bridges at the fords or shallows offered the only mode of crossing the broadest of them, and connecting the unpaved tracks or bridle paths which formed the main roads. The heights were not crowned by stone castles; the very churches at this period, were of wood, or perhaps of wicker work or clay. The red deer and wild boar abounded in the forest, and wolves prowled about and ravaged the flocks, for the most part unprotected by fences. Scattered over the country were numerous small hamlets, composed mainly of small cabins, but having some more pretentious houses; while other hamlets were composed only of huts of the rudest kind. Here and there were large hamlets or villages that had grown up about groups of houses surrounded by an earthen mound or rampart. Sometimes the rampart was double, and had a deep ditch between them. The single rampart enclosed a *lis*, or cattle yard, and was sometimes called a *rath*; the occupier was a *flaith*, or landlord. The double rampart and ditch was a *dun*, and contained the residence of a *righ*, or king. The words *rath*, *lis* and *dun* are common in our topographical nomenclature. One name, *shean dun*, or the Old Dun, which commanded the ford of the Lee, where is now Northgate Bridge, has been wafted far and wide by the fame of the modern bells there. Here and there in the neighborhood of the hamlets were patches of corn grown upon the allotments that were annually exchangeable among the inhabitants. Around the *dun* and the *rath* the cultivation was better, for the corn land was the fixed property of the lord, and the symptoms of fencing the crops were visible: The tillage was rude, the spade and fork being made of wood, though the wealthier classes then, or at all events soon after, shod them with iron. We have no absolute