



An Ancient Briton.

who were the guardians of it, possessed great authority among them. No species of superstition was ever more terrible than theirs: besides the severe penalties which they were permitted to inflict in this world, they inculcated the eternal transmigration of souls, and thus extended their authority as far as the fears of their votaries.* 9. They

class, which was by far the most numerous, and who performed all the other offices of religion, were called by the general name of Druids, which appellation was commonly given to the whole fraternity. Their supreme chief was styled the Arch-druid. To the priesthood were also attached a number of females called Druidesses, who were likewise divided into three classes. Those of the first vowed perpetual virginity, and lived together sequestered from the rest of world: these were great pretenders to divination prophecy, and miracles, and were highly venerated by the people. The second class consisted of certain devotees, who, though married, spent the greater part of their time with the Druids in assisting in the offices of religion, occasionally returning to their husbands. The third and lowest class waited on the Druids, and performed the most servile offices about the temples, &c. The priesthood, in the most ancient times, was hereditary in all countries, and was particularly so in the Celtic nations; where the order of Druids did not only descend to their posterity, but the office of priest was likewise hereditary in families.

* Among a people so credulous as the ancient Britons, it is no wonder that those who possessed such high authority among them as the Druids, practised the greatest impositions: accordingly we read, that the Druids were in the habit of borrowing large sums of the people, which they promised to repay in the other world.—*Druidæ pecuniam mutuo accipiebant in posteriore vita reddituri.—Patricius.*