

## OLD PUBLICATIONS.

(By a Regular Contributor.)

We are now into the old books that bring us back to the dim and distant days of Ossian. It is my intention to reproduce this week what is to me an admirable essay, a sketch of the earlier history of the Celts, and the early history of the Celts, and then in store a surprise for many readers of the "True Witness." It will be an agreeable one to them, an astounding one for those who are prone to vaunt the masterpieces of English literature, while looking with contempt upon the productions of Celtic genius. In a word, I am going to place, text by text, some of the sublimest passages of Milton, Pope, Dryden, and others, side by side with passages from Ossian's poem of "Fingall." It will then be seen from what source the masters of the English language drew their ideas, their expressions and their sentiments. But before coming to this, I turn to the following essay, which I only summarize, and which was written in 1773.

**NATIONAL ANTIQUITIES:**—Inquiries into the antiquities of nations afford more pleasure than any real advantage to mankind. The ingenious may form systems of history on probabilities and a few facts; but at a great distance of time, their accounts must be vague and uncertain. The infancy of states and kingdoms is as destitute of great events, as of the means of transmitting them to posterity. The arts of polished life, by which alone facts can be preserved with certainty, are the productions of a well formed community. It is then historians begin to write, and public transactions to be worthy of remembrance. The actions of former times are left in obscurity, or magnified by uncertain traditions. Hence it is that we find so much of the marvellous in the origin of every nation; posterity being always ready to believe anything, however fabulous that reflects honor on their ancestors. The Greeks and Romans were remarkable for this weakness. They swallowed the most absurd fables concerning the high antiquities of their respective nations. Good historians, however, rose very early amongst them, and transmitted, with justice, their great actions to posterity. It is to them that they owe that unrivalled fame they now enjoy, while the great actions of other nations are involved in fable, or lost in obscurity. The Celtic nations afford a striking instance of this kind. They, though once the masters of Europe (as Pliny says) from the mouth of the Oly river in Russia to Cape Finistere, the western point of Gallacia in Spain, are very little mentioned in history. They trusted their fame to tradition and the songs of their bards, which, by the vicissitudes of human affairs, are long since lost. Their ancient language is the only monument that remains to them: and the traces of it being found in places so widely distant of each other, serve only to show the extent of their ancient power, but throws very little light on their history.

**THE CELTS OF GAUL:**—Of all the Celtic nations, that which possessed old Gaul is the most renowned; not perhaps on account of worth superior to the rest, but for their wars with a people who had historians to transmit the fame of their enemies, as well as their own, to posterity. Britain was first peopled by them, according to the testimony of the best authors (Caesar, for example); its situation in respect to Gaul makes the opinion probable, but what puts it beyond all dispute is, that the same customs and language prevailed among the inhabitants of both in the days of Julius Caesar. The colony from Gaul possessed themselves at first of that part of Britain which was next to their own country, and spreading northward, by degrees, as they increased in numbers, peopled the whole island. Some adventurers passing over from those parts of Britain that are within sight of Ireland, were the founders of the Irish nation; which is a more probable story than the fables of Milesian and Gallician colonies. Dodona Siculus mentions it as a thing well known in his time, that the inhabitants of Ireland were originally Britons; and his testimony is unquestionable, when we consider that for many ages the customs and languages of both nations were the same. Tacitus was of opinion that the ancient Caledonians were of German extract,

but whether they were a colony of the Celtic Germans, or the same with the Gauls that first possessed themselves of Britain, is a matter of no moment at this distance of time. Whatever their origin was, we find them very numerous in the time of Julius Agricola, which is a presumption that they were long before settled in the country.

**THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT:**—The form of their government was a mixture of aristocracy and monarchy as it was in all the countries where the Druids bore the chief sway. This order of men seems to have been formed on the same system with the Dactyli, Idaci and Opretes of the ancients. Their pretended intercourse with heaven, their magic and divination were the same. The knowledge of the Druids in natural causes, and the properties of certain things, the fruit of the experiments of ages gained them a mighty reputation among the people. The esteem of the populace soon increased into a veneration for the order; which a cunning and ambitious tribe of men took care to improve, to such a degree, that they, in a manner, engrossed the management of civil as well as religious matters. The chiefs were allowed to execute the laws, but the legislative power was entirely in the hands of the Druids. It was by their authority that the tribes were united, in times of the greatest danger, under one head. This temporary King, or Vergobretus, ("the man to judge") was chosen by them, and generally laid down his office at the end of the year. These Druids enjoyed long this extraordinary privilege among the Celtic nation, who lay beyond the pale of the Roman Empire. It was in the beginning of the second century that their power among the Caledonians began to decline. The poems that celebrate Trathal and Cormac, ancestors of Fingal, are full of particulars concerning the fall of the Druids, which account for the total silence concerning their religion in the poems that are now given to the public. Had Ossian brought down gods, as often as Homer hath done, his poem had not consisted of eulogiums on his friends, but of hymns to these superior beings. To this day, those who write in the Gaelic language seldom mention religion in their profane poetry, but when they professedly write of religion; they never interlard with their compositions, the actions of their heroes. This custom alone, even though the religion of the Druids had not been previously extinguished, may, in some measure, account for Ossian's silence concerning the religion of his own times. But let Ossian's religion be what it will, it is certain he had no knowledge of Christianity, as there is not the least allusion to it, or any of its rites, in his poems; which absolutely fixes him to an era prior to the introduction of that religion. The strongest objection to the authenticity of the poems now given to the public under the name of Ossian, is the improbability of their being handed down by tradition through so many centuries.

**A TRANSPARENT VEIL:**—It will be easily seen by any one familiar with Irish history, that all I have quoted of this essay constitutes a clever exposition of Ossian's times, calculate to create the impression that he was a myth, and that Macpherson, the translator, was the real author of the poems. It is an able, but most unscrupulous attempt to secure credit that is not due. Just observe that he speaks of the Caledonians (or Scotch) Celts—not the Irish. This is to leave the impression that Ossian was a Scotch bard, and not (as he was) an Irish one. Then he gives us an absolutely false idea of the Druids. He actually casts doubt on the authenticity of Ossian's works, by claiming that he wrote, if ever he did, in a pre-Christian age, and that his poems could not have been transmitted by tradition alone. Such might stand good had Ossian been a Briton, or Caledonian; but being an Irish bard, we have scores of authentic Irish manuscripts extant that date from even before his time—the Breton laws, for example. Not only did Macpherson try to rob Ireland of the honor of possessing Ossian, but he tried to rob the bard of the honor of having written his own poems; and, as if this were not enough, we will see Milton copying Ossian, at least one hundred years before Macpherson was born. I

could not better close this week's sketch than by quoting the following from that wonderfuly sublime and historical poem of McGee—"The Celts." It will be seen that McGee—who knew more of Irish ancient history than any man who has written in the last three centuries—places Ossian at a period one or two centuries earlier than the time of Christ.

"Long, long ago, beyond the misty space,  
Of twice a thousand years,  
In Erin old there dwelt a mighty race,  
Taller than Roman spears;  
Like oaks and towers they had a giant grace,  
Were fleet as deers,  
With winds and waves they made their biding place,  
These western shepherd seers.

Their Ocean god was Man-a-nan, Mc-Liir,  
Whose angry lips,  
In their white foam, full often would inter  
Whole fleets of ships;  
Cromah their Day-god, and their Thunderer,  
Made morning and eclipse;  
Bride, was Queen of song, and unto her,  
They prayed with fire-touched lips.

Great were their deeds, their passions and their sports,  
With clay and stone  
They piled on strath and shore those mystic forts,  
Not yet o'erthrown;  
On cairn-crown'd hills they held their council courts;  
While youths alone,  
With giant dogs, explored the elk resorts,  
And brought them down.

Of these was Fin, the father of the Bard,  
Whose ancient song  
Over the clamor of all change is heard,  
Sweet voice'd and strong.  
Fin once o'ertook Granu, the golden-haired,  
The fleet and young;  
From her the lovely, and from him the fear'd,  
The primal poet sprung.

Ossian! two thousand years of mist and change  
Surround thy name—  
Thy Fenian heroes now no longer range,  
The hills of fame.  
The very name of Fin and Gaul sound strange—  
Yet thine the same—  
By miscalc'd lake and desecrated grange—  
Remains and shall remain!

The Druid's altar and the Druid's creed  
We scarce can trace:  
There is not left an undisputed deed  
Of all your race,  
Save your majestic song, which hath their speed,  
And strength of grace;  
In that sole song, they live and love, and bleed—  
It bears them on thro' space.

O, inspir'd giant! shall we e'er be hold  
In our own time,  
One fit to speak your spirit on the wold,  
Or seize your rhyme?  
One pupil of the past, as mighty-soul'd  
As in the prime,  
Were the fond, fair and beautiful, and bold—  
They, of your song sublime.

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## THE BIBLICAL COMMISSION.

Apostolic Letter of Our Holy Father Pius X., by Divine Providence Pope, on the Conferring of Degrees in Sacred Scripture by the Biblical Commission.

PIUS X., POPE.

In Perpetual Memory of This Matter. To promote more and more the study of Sacred Scripture among the clergy We feel to be especially urged upon Us by Our Apostolic office at the present time when we see that this fount of divine revelation and faith has become a main object of attack by the intemperance of human reason. Our predecessor, Leo XIII., of happy memory, realizing this, was not satisfied with publishing his encyclical letter "Providentissimus Deus," treating of the Scripture in the year 1893; for, a few months before his death, in the Apostolic letter "Vigilantiae," he established a special council in the city consisting of a number of Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church and several other learned men, which, while guided by the doctrine and tradition of the Church, was also designed to utilize the advance of erudition for the legitimate exegesis of the Bible, and at the same time furnish Catholics, with aid and direction in Scriptural studies and settle any controversies that might arise among them.

We, too, include, as is fitting, with in the scope of Our solitude and authority, that great monument of Pontifical foresight left by Our predecessor. Nay, more, We have determined in the confidence We feel in the capacity of this council of commission, to employ it in a matter which We regard as important for the advancement of Scriptural knowledge. We wish to provide a means for furnishing an abundant supply of teachers, of approved sobriety and purity of doctrine, to interpret the divine books in Catholic schools. For this end it would certainly be very useful to have, in the City of Rome, a special institute such as We know Leo wished to establish, equipped with the higher studies and every appliance of biblical erudition, to which picked young men might flock from all parts, and where they might receive a training that would render them especially proficient in the knowledge of the Divine utterances. But since the power of effecting this is denied us, as it was denied Our predecessor, (although we cherish the fond hope and feel certain that the power will some day be supplied Us by the liberality of Catholics), in the meantime We have determined to effect and carry out, by the tenor of this letter, what the times allow.

Wherefore, praying that it may be a good and wholesome measure and redound to the welfare of Catholicity, We do, by Our Apostolic authority, institute the academic degrees of Licentiate and Doctor in the faculty of Sacred Scripture to be conferred by the Biblical Commission according to the laws hereunder written:

I. Nobody shall be advanced to the academic degrees on Sacred Scripture who is not a priest, either secular or regular, and who has not, moreover, obtained the Doctorate in Sacred Theology in some university or institute approved by the Apostolic See.

II. Candidates for the degree of Doctor or Licentiate are to undergo an examination, both oral and written, and the matter for this examination is to be fixed by the Biblical Commission.

III. It will be for the Commission to appoint the judges for determining the knowledge of the candidates, and these judges are to be at least five in number and consultants of the Commission. The Commission may, however, in the case of the licentiate, delegate the verdict to other suitable men.

IV. Candidates for the degree of Licentiate in Sacred Scripture may be admitted to examination immediately they have obtained the doctorate in Sacred Theology; but candidates for the doctorate shall not be admitted until a year after obtaining the degree of Licentiate.

V. In the examination of candidates for the Doctorate in Sacred Scripture there will be this special condition, that each candidate will expound a written thesis, selected by himself, and approved by the Biblical Commission, and shall afterward read the same and defend it from the attacks of adversaries in a legitimate meeting to be held in Rome.

This We do will, decree and determine, sight to the contrary notwithstanding. It only remains now that Our venerable brothers, the Bishops and the other prelates, each for the advantage of his own diocese, may look for that fruit from these,

Our decrees, which We hope will be abundant. To this end let them end degrees in this faculty those among their clergy whom they see to be endowed with a special taste and aptitude for special biblical studies, and let them consider those who possess these degrees as specially qualified for the office of teaching Scripture in the Seminaries.

Given at Rome at St. Peter's, encouragement and aid in the attainment of the ring of the Fisherman, on the 23rd day of February, Feast of St. Peter Damian, in the year 1904, the first of Our Pontificate.

A. CARD MACCHI.

**TWO IRISH SAINTS.**—Elsewhere we have a list of leading Irish anniversaries, of historical character, that mark the month of April. The name of St. Lasarian is mentioned, and as his story may not be familiar to some of our readers, we deemed it well to give a brief sketch of it; and before so doing to briefly mention another Irish Saint, whose patronal anniversary comes in the same month. We will begin with the shorter account of the two, and the one that takes precedence in the chronological order.

St. Tigernach was baptized by Conlath, Bishop of Kildare. St. Bridgit being his god-mother. He founded the famous Abbey of Clones, in the County Monahan, where he fixed his Episcopal See, now united to Clogher. He died in 550.

St. Lasarian, Bishop of Leighlin, was the son of Cairis and Blitha, persons of high distinction in Ireland, who entrusted his education from his infancy to the Abbot St. Murin. He afterwards travelled to Rome, in the days of Pope Gregory the Great, by whom he is said to have been ordained priest. Soon after his return to Ireland, he visited Leighlin, a place situated a mile and a half west of the River Barrow, where St. Gobah was then Abbot, who resigned to him his Abbey, built a little cell for himself and a small number of monks. A synod being soon after assembled there, St. Lasarian strenuously advocated the Catholic time of celebrating Easter; but not being able to confute his opponents, he took another journey to Rome, where Pope Honorius consecrated him Bishop, without allotting to him any particular See, and made him his legate in Ireland. Nor was his commission fruitless, for after his return the time of observing Easter was reformed in the South of Ireland. St. Lasarian died on 18th April, and was buried in his own Church, which he had founded.

## An Age of Vulgarity.

The leading article by "Augustus" in the New York Observer is on "Vulgarity." The following extracts will afford a good idea of its drift:

"There is vulgarity manifested in the thought, manners and practices of the present age in our country which calls for criticism and rebuke. It is prominent in literature, conversation, and behavior, in that intercourse which is necessitated by public travel, and in a conspicuous manner by the advertising that meets us at every turn. Politeness is a vanished art in public places. Well dressed men and women crowd, push and jostle one another in vehicles and cars; at entertainments, both religious and secular; and even in private houses there is often a rudeness and selfishness which contrast sadly with the customs and behavior of ordinary people a quarter of a century ago. Unless something is soon done to reform our manners and correct the habits of life in cities and towns, the American people will become a nation of bores.

The reasons for all this vulgarity, which is sweeping over the land, is not far to seek. They are found in a lack of early and careful home training, in a cumbersome and imperfect system of education, which leads principals in business and teachers in schools to neglect those details in training and scholarship which maintain dignity and decorum, enforce respect, and furnish examples of things which are honorable, pure and good. They are found in the undue attention paid to athletic and bodily culture, which develop in man and woman the brute rather than the angel, and magnify strength of limb, dexterity of movement and keenness of vision, above vigorous intellect, mental power and nobleness of soul.

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## HIS IDEA.

"Now, Harry," said the teacher of the juvenile class, "what is the meal we eat in the morning called?"  
"Oatmeal," was the little fellow's prompt reply.

## AN IMPOSING CELEBRATION.

The celebration of the thirteenth Centenary of Pope St. Gregory the Great in Westminster Cathedral, on March 12, was a most imposing and solemn function. The procession consisted of almost all the Bishops of England, mitred Abbots, Monsignori, Provincials of Religious Orders, and about 450 clergy from different parts of England, the rear being brought up by His Grace the Archbishop, wearing the Pallium.