## THE TRUE WITNESS AND CATHOLIC CHRONICLE

## SOME MYTHS OF ANCIENT IRELAND.

(Michael Corbett, in the Catholic

That the mythologists of the lri Kelt are as old as those of the most European countries there is doubt. In practical conception no ble ends they were of a more nable nature, a fact of which we can find ample evidence by com on. The few that have com down to us are preserved by tradi-tion rather than by history; there fore, in the treatment of this sub ct we can only justly mention thos that have been most familiar to us that have left a distinct im ion on the character of our peo

We have no desire to resurrect th myths of our fathers, which long ago faded and vanished before the march of Christianity. Our pur our antiqui pose is merely to show and incidentally to complimen the days of his paganism the Kelt Croghan and buried beneath the shahad a vision of a future glorious existence surpassed only by the heaven of the Gospel. In haling, therefore, from their catacombs those superstitions which reason and the Catholic Church have consigned to oblivion we are only actuated by the pride that attaches to ancient lineage and regard them as some antiquary does a relic of the far past.

And why should we recoil from reflecting upon our antiquated myths? If we find them absurd at the present time, they at least serve te connect us with a pagan civilization once more exalted than any of its age. Equally with tradition, it is the chain which leads us to the misty past. Eradicate tradition from our history, and the history of Ireland were left unwritten; ne ther should we have its songs, its music, its epics and romances. The incessant wars of Ireland destroyed nearly all the evidences of its early civilization; tradition lived on and preserved them.

The most poetical and familiar mith in our folklore is "Tir-na-noge," or the land of youth. Perhaps no finer conception of a hereafter existed in the pagan world. When the gods deprived Eos of the beau tiful Orion for a husband, her sorrow was great, but taking pity or her grief and loneliness, they found her a substitute in Tithonus. But Tithonus was lacking many of th fine attributes of the other, and in recompense for the defects she begged Zeus, the chief god, to bestow him immortality. As the years went by Tithonus showed the effects of time. He finally shriveled up, and Eos became disaffected and disregarded him. She then discovered her mistake in not asking for eternal youth instead.

All this happened thousands vears ago in Greece. Perhaps ou ancestors heard the tale and profited by its moral; or perhaps Eos got glimpse of Tir-na-n-oge, and behold ing the superiority of the Elect to that of her own ungainly but spe cially endowed husband, became cha grined for not choosing an Irishman In tracing this myth, Tir-na-n-oge to its source, we are guided by the knowledge that hero-worship was practiced by many of the pagan na-Every great personality wa care so much for that worship, which might be his in the next life, as for this. Grant him the qualities was bound to succeed in the here and hereafter. And as youth and its

die and be buried in Ireland. If he died abroad his family brought home adjacent glens and groves. We often die and be buried in Ireland. If he

tive earth. that peculiar love of motherland in the hearts of Irishmen. In life and in death they longed to be with her; With the passing of the last gene-

as the next alternative. The corpse of Dathi the Fearless, of the "banshee." I refer to the as the next alternative. the last of the Irish pagan kings,

interment to the ancestral cemetery. The difficulty in transportation in harmonical tones. those days was as nothing compared the good qualities of the decease to the propriety of having his ashes his worth in life and his loss mingle with the soil of his birth. death. It was the final tribute So his remains were brought back to the dead; the outpouring of pent-up dow of the palace of Queen Maive, where the winds from Tir-Connaill about to be closed to sight and touch sing a nightly caoine, and the waves forever. No more sublime or pathe of Lough Erne play a mournful dirge to his memory. There is no doubt but such would be the tribute paid rites of a requiem. But this beauti to his position under any circumstances, but in the old days the future destiny was conditioned by the last resting place of the body.

'He fell pale in a land unknown His soul came forth to his fathers in their stormy isle," sang the melting Ossian of a similar event. And have we all not read the soulful yearnings of St. Columcille for the land of his birth? "Death." said he. "in any shape in Ireland is better than life without end in Albion." We do not mean to imply that the saint had the same views of the hereafter as the pagan, or that it made any spiritual difference to him where the body was entombed prised if we have our superstitions when the soul had departed, but we cannot help reflecting that the pining Dove of Iona thought the delights of his heaven would be augmented through the transit of ar

Irish grave. Let us come down the centuries, to near our own times, and pause over the mortuary verses of Thomas Davis. Hearken to the request of this tender soul for a grave "in an Greece, or that of Egypt, or that Irish hillside, in an open lawn, but of Babylon. They have been pre not too wide, for I love the drip of the wetted trees. I like not the gale, but the gentle breeze, to mel- of the world, yet to-day they may. low the turf. Put no tombstone perhaps, serve but to amuse us with there, but green sods decked with daisies fair. Be my epitaph writ in durance of some is probably due my country's mind, 'He loved his a combination of tradition and to-country and served his kind.' O, pography. Few there are those who merry 'twere unto the grave to go if one were sure of being buried so!" So much for Tir-na-n-oge and its

an outline of the myth as in boybood we heard it in the folklore that moment through Clare, for instance circulates around Irish turf fires. There is another myth familiar to tioned. It is the hour of sunset, the our people, and frequently alluded fog is settling on the lowiands, the to in Irish legend, the Banshee. This woods and hills are silent above. is a spirit or shade of some depart-ed relative assigned to watch over, the destinies of her kindred in this life. As the name implies, she im-personates a woman. Practically all the great families had a "banshee," we'rd sentinel over the lost heritage whether of Norman or Celtic ex-traction. Even the English who he-calls her monologue in the . mentions. Every great personality was came Hibernianized coveted the ho-adored after death. But the Kelt nor and yielded to the superstition. of the pre-Christian period did not The most important of this singular geni that the writer has heard of was the "banshee" of the O'Briens, the lustre which heroism reflects in Kings of Thomond, now the County, of Clare. She was styled the "Beauwhich greatness is achieved, and he tiful Eawen of Cragles, from her place of abode. Cragles, a rock that overhung the river Shannon, a short

she has remained with the fa-since the days of Brian Boru, when any member of this r

he remains, his passports were with-he remains, his passports were with-kild until his body touched his na-wallings of the "banshee." Th If the latter could not tones are said to be clear, deep and be accomplished, then his chances of exquisitely modulated. They might ever entering the "delectable land" be called entrancing were it not not were doubtful. It was this clause for the sad events they predict. There or condition in attaining the "land is scarcely a lonely glen, a dismantl-of youth" that perhaps first created ed castle or old mansion that has

if not through life then in death ration in Ireland also passed a cu "caoiners" at the house of a corps who was killed by lightning at the Three or four persons gathered foot of the Alps, was brought for around the casket before the lid was sealed and cried aloud in measur They recounter grief, of the suppressed fear, of lov and blessing on a dear one, who tic ceremony was ever performe over a corpose, outside ful observance has been abandone and practically forgotten. No mo will you hear the lament of the cadiners in the house of the dead than you will hear the wail

Eaven in the glens of Thomond. Those who understand the signifi cance of our ancient customs will not shudder when we recount them; those who comprehend the beauties of ou language will not deride us when w speak it; those who have seen the picturesque beauty of our country will not wonder when we yearn fo it, and those who have roamed in the twilight amid our ruins and over our hillsides will not be sur There are unseen and undefinab agents in nature that arouse in the imagination conceptions of the mystical. This is especially true applied to simple and unlettered minds, though the most enlightened and material will sometimes yie to this influence. Our custo have come down to us from a faraway past, a past old as that served in song and story; they are fading with all the old institutions their beauty and antiquity. The en cannot look on an imposing land scape, filled with reminiscences of old days without their minds gateway, the grave. We have given tering into the spirit of the Let us take you in thought for the region we have heretofore men. woods and hills are silent above. An old Abbey with the rays of the setting sun gleaming through its Gothic windows, mourns its fate in dows, and the rippling waters of the Shannon are the voices of Eeven bewailing her lost kindred amid the ruins of palace and temple. Can you not pardon the superstition of the native, if amid scenes such as these he hears the voices of the night

nal. Butter-Choicest creamery, 221c to and connects them with a mythical personage? If, on his way to the cemetery up on the mountain, he



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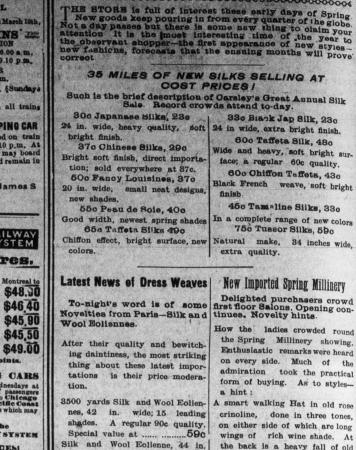
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TURSDAY, MARCH 15, 1906.

THURSDAY, MARCH 15, 1906.

Vol. LV., No. 27

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