

Pagan Ireland.

THE early history of Ireland is shrouded in obscurity; our knowledge of Ireland during pagan times has come down to us through the haze of tradition, embodied in the Sagas, the Annals of the Four Masters, and those touching folk-songs which Irish writers assert, may still be heard among the people in isolated portions of the island.

The first known inhabitants of Ireland were the Milesians; tradition has it that, after the confusion of tongues at the tower of Babel, the early Milesians wended their way westward and settled on the coast of Spain; as their number increased so also did their desire for adventure. On one of their sea-faring expeditions, they caught sight of Ireland, and being favorably impressed with the green-clad hills, and rugged coast of the new land, they landed and founded a settlement there, calling the island the "land of Éire."

Like the Aztecs of Mexico, and the early peoples of South America, a shroud of mystery surrounds the first-mentioned inhabitants of Ireland. The Milesians neglect to inform us of them to any extent. The question remains unsolved. Who these early people were, where did they come from, were they extremely barbarous? and many such questions are of little avail, serving as stumbling blocks to the eager students and proving a bone of contention among learned antiquarians and Gaelic historians.

Concerning the Milesians themselves, our knowledge is derived from mythical sources; mythical or not, the "adventures of Cuchulain and the Red Cross knights," "the misfortunes of Queen Maeve," and other legends are full of fruitful reading, containing as they do that spirit of chivalry and "derring-do" which modern writers wish to picture existing so universally during the early and middle ages.

Tradition again tells us that, six hundred years before Christ, a parliament was assembled at Tara, presided over by the "Ard-ri" or high-king, and composed of the chiefs or princes of the more powerful class. Another spice of tradition tells us of an Irish Prince and a few followers who were present at Christ's crucifixion, returning home and devoting themselves to the most rigorous austerities for the remainder of their lives, they were so affected by the sight of the Saviour on the Cross.