

IRELAND'S GRANDEUR IN THE PAST.

It has been doubted, not alone in England, where what is called Society has always delighted in sneering at and disparaging the past and the present of Ireland, but also among a miserable "Know-Nothing" class in the United States, whether Ireland ever was under regal rule, previous to the invasion, by the Anglo-Normans, in the reign of Henry II., of England, over seven hundred years ago.

Kenting and other historians, down to our friend Thomas Mooney (whose two volumes I have frequent occasion to refer to), have mentioned the undeniable fact that, in far remote times, Ireland consisted of kingdoms, governed by princes exercising kingly sway. "Ah," it may be remarked, "but these were mere provinces?" At any rate this doubt or sneer comes with a bad grace from a country which, until the middle of the eleventh century, when William of Normandy invaded and conquered it, was cut up into seven kingdoms—known as the Saxon Heptarchy, the largest of which was not equal in extent and population to the present County of Cork, in Ireland.

I desire, here to show that Ireland had various lines of native sovereigns before fraud, force, and treachery combined to invade the island and reduce it to a province owing fealty to England.

Heremon, head of the Milesian race, who became sole ruler of Ireland, only three centuries after the death of Moses, the Jewish leader and law giver, built that royal residence, in Meath, the site of which is known as Tara, even to the present day. From the death of Heremon, to the accession of Ollamh Fodhla (about 920 years before the beginning of the Christian era), there were nineteen Irish kings, which shows an average reign of twenty-one years for each. This was nearly two centuries before Romulus and Remus laid the first stone of Rome. Then what probably was the first Parliament any where, was assembled at Tara, and that system of jurisprudence was established, there and then,—a great system of equity and common law—which Alfred, educated

in Ireland, transferred to England, when he was there acknowledged as monarch.

There was, in fact, from a very remote period a succession of kings in Ireland. Chiefs sometimes bore the royal title, but the rule was to have one supreme ruler, of whom all other chiefs were the vassals. Their names and exploits are recorded (sometimes, it may be, with more or less exaggeration) by various historians. But there is nothing overcharged or exaggerated in what has been written of the life and death of Brian Boru, who rose from the sovereignty of Munster to that of the whole island, and retained his high position for many years, not alone by the sagacity and success of his government, but by the pertinacity with which he repelled an invasion of the Northmen or Danes—a belligerent and piratical race. They were finally defeated, at Clontarf, near Dublin, on Friday, April 23, 1014, in a battle which was waged from sunrise to dusk, but the victory was dearly won, for Brian lost his life, by the base hand of an assassin, who slew the old man in his tent.

Brian, who was directly descended from Milesius, the Spanish conquerer and colonizer, whose very existence is somewhat angrily ignored by Thomas Moore, overcame the Northmen, led by their Vi-Kings, in forty-nine battles also did a great deal to strengthen Ireland by cultivating the gentle arts of peace. He built Cathedrals, restored bishops to their sees, revived decayed schools and colleges, laid good roads through the island, and built bridges over deep waters and rivers that had previously been impassable.

He gave surnames of distinction to all the leading families of his time; it is recorded that a maiden in the flush of youth and "beautiful exceedingly" had traveled alone on foot, throughout the realm, without either her honor or her treasure being assailed. Moore has made that tradition the basis of his well-known lyric, "Rich and rare were the gems she wore."

Murrough and Turlough, respective son and grandson of King Brian were slain in the battle of Clontarf, but Donagh, who was Brian's third son, taking command of the Irish troops gave battle to the Danes, and completely routed