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The Pre-Christian History of Ireland

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The Pre-Christian History of Ireland.*

HE researches and discoveries made by Professors Macalister and MacNeill during the course of the past few years will probably work a revolution in Irish historical studies similar to that which the discovery of the uses of bronze brought about in the history of civilisation. It seems probable that, by the year 1930, all our present historical text-books, including several written during the past few years, will have been consigned to the limbo of oblivion in which the works of Vallancey and Ledwich lie buried.

Many previous attempts had been made at compiling a synthetic account of pre-Christian Irish antiquities and history. O'Curry, O'Donovan, Joyce, Wood-Martin, Wakeman, O'Grady, Petrie, O'Sullivan and Jubainville all laboured in one or other of these fields, but some fundamental defect marred the success of all. In the field of antiquarian studies, it was usually a neglect of the scientific and chronological treatment of the subject, combined with an ignorance of the comparative method of dealing with antiquities. In addition, most of the writers did not possess the requisite knowledge of geology, ethnology, philology, architecture and other kindred sciences. In the field of Pre-Christian History, a universal fault was the absence of any criterion for dealing with the bewildering mass of available material. To the two chief classes of historians, the "all fact"-ers and the "all fable"-rs, might be added a third smaller class who rejected or selected, not according to any criterion, but as a result of some preconceived prejudice, whether religious, political, racial, or social. Thanks to Professor Macalister's researches archæologists can now work on terra firma, while, if Dr. MacNeill has not led us out of the wood, he has at least brought us back to the right path, and he has cleared away so many obstacles that success seems within reasonable distance.

I.—PRE-CELTIC IRELAND.

Dr. Macalister's book contains the substance of a course of public lectures delivered at University College, Dublin, during the session 1915-1916, but re-written, re-arranged, and expanded for publication in permanent form. The whole scheme of the book is based on chronology. Antiquities, races and institutions are dealt with according as they belong to the Early, Middle, or Late Neolithic Age (roughly from 10,000 B.C. to 2,500 B.C.), or to one of the divisions of the Bronze Age (2,500—400 B.C.).

* Pre-Celtic Ireland by R. A. S. Macalister, Professor of Archæology, National University, Ireland: Celtic Ireland, by Eoin MacNeill, Professor of Early Irish History, National University—

The chapter on the Stone Age has been worked out with great care and a wealth of detail. There is no evidence for the human occupation of Ireland during the Palæolithic Period (previous to 10,000 B.C.). The first colonists, who were in the Campignian stage of development, (a transitional phase between the Palæolithic and Neolithic stages), came from Scotland in the early Neolithic period, and settled on the North-east coast of Ireland. From a detailed examination of the rich deposits in the gravels of the raised beaches at Latharna, Dr. Macalister has painted a vivid picture of their civilisation and methods of existence. These early settlers remained, probably for decades of centuries, unprogressive and confined to the sites in the North-east corner. In the meantime, material civilisation had made great progress among their kinsfolk on the Continent, and the later colonists brought with them the more developed arts of the Late Stone Age. Their methods of life may be studied in the Shore-dwellers' or Sandhill sites at the Giant's Causeway, the Factory sites at Glenarm, and in the Shell-heaps which are numerous along the coast line. By the end of the Stone Age (about 2500 B.C.), man had found his way over the whole of Ireland. Of his routes of internal progress, as yet only imperfectly known—the best remaining evidences are the dolmens and the cave sites. Dr. Macalister's analysis of the results of an exploration, made in 1879, in a cave-site in Baile na mBaintrebhach, Co. Waterford, is probably the most instructive piece of work in the whole book, and, as an example of how careful excavation can teach the whole history of a site, it is invaluable for archæological workers. Over thirty pages of this chapter are devoted to an examination of the tools and implements, mostly in flint, left behind by the Stone Age inhabitants. They include cores, flakes, axes, awls, borers, scrapers, knives, saws, daggers, arrow-heads, javelin-heads, hammers, anvil choppers, celts, mallets, mauls, querns, rubbing-stones, and grind-stones.

The most epoch-making discoveries in the history of civilisation were those of the nature and properties of metals, and, in particular, the discovery of the important fact that tin mixed with copper, in certain proportions, hardened it and produced an alloy known as bronze. Not only did this discovery put serviceable tools at the disposal of the artisan, the farmer and the warrior, but it laid the foundations of the development of trade and commerce. Inhabitants of the countries where these metals were not found had to trade with the favoured regions that possessed them. Horses and caravans came into general use, merchants with their attendants travelled back and forth along newly established trade-routes, and, as a result, there was developed a give-and-take of knowledge, art, folklore and new discoveries, without which the world's civilisation would have been retarded for centuries.

Dr. Macalister is of the opinion that Ireland was not behind the rest of Europe in the adoption of the new metal and its technique. Copper was evidently mined in Ireland itself, while the shrewd mine-owners of Cornwall, anxious though they were to keep the alloying trade in their own hands, were willing to barter tin for the more valuable gold of which Ireland had a plentiful supply.

Among the bronze and copper implements described in the book, we find celts, moulds, axe-heads, palstaves, spear-heads, rapiers, swords, scabbards, sickles, knives, gongs and razors. There is scarcely the same wealth of detail as in Mr. Coffey's book, but the subject is treated chronologically; and the Bronze Age in Ireland is divided into five periods, showing distinct stages of development, with their tentative dates:—

- I.—Period of flat copper axes without flanges. A transition period, probably from 2500 to 1900 B.C.

II.—Period of flat-flanged axes (1900-1400 B.C.).

III.—Palstave period (1400-1000 B.C.).

IV.—Period of winged celts (1000-800 B.C.).

V.—Period of socketed celts (800-400 B.C.).

The first colonists of the Latharna gravel period are assigned to about 10,000 B.C., leaving 7,500 years as the portion of the Stone Age, at the end of which, Ireland was wholly inhabited. The transition period referred to above (2500-1900), really belongs to the Copper Age. In the fourth century B.C. the Iron Age was introduced by a new race of colonists, the so-called Celts, who, though comparatively few in number, seem to have established a partial domination over the primitive races in a large portion of the island.

For many readers, the most interesting chapter will be that on the application of the Criteria of Race to the early people of Ireland. Ethnologists divide the people of Europe into three chief racial divisions: 1. the Mediterranean—dark, long-headed (dolichocephalic), and of medium stature; 2. the Central European—dark, shortheaded (brachycephalic), and of medium stature; and 3. the Nord, Scandinavian or Teuton—fair, longheaded and tall. The three criteria by which we judge European peoples are headshape, colour of hair and eyes, and stature. To which of these three divisions did the Pre-Christian inhabitants belong? (a) From the data at his disposal, Dr. Macalister shows, conclusively we think, that the ancient Irish race were decidedly dolichocephalic (longheads); (b) From numerous references in the ancient records, he infers, but much less conclusively, that the ruling class, a tribe of imported conquerors, were fair, red-headed or golden-haired, while the aboriginies, belonging to the so-called "Pictish" races, were dark and heavily-built; (c) The data as to stature is practically negligible. The conclusion is that the aboriginies, the people of the Stone and Bronze Ages, belonged to the Mediterranean Race, while the Iron Age invaders, those 'Celts' who came in the fourth century B.C., were of the Nordic stock. There are, however, a few weak links in the chain of argument.

Dr. Macalister's oft-repeated statement that the original inhabitants were reduced to a state of subordination, if not of serfdom, is not borne out by history. The Ernai, undoubtedly a pre-Celtic race, remained the dominant people of Munster. The Fir Domnann, another pre-Celtic race, ruled Connacht down to Patrician times. The Cruthni or Picts maintained their sway in Antrim, Down and Louth until the Norman invasion. The Fir-Bolg appear to have been the ruling race in Tir-Conaill until they were conquered in the fifth century by the sons of Niall. The Gailion and Luaigni maintained themselves fairly well in modern Leinster, although, in later times they became subject to the Uí Neill. Most of the prominent heroes of the Tain, such as Cuchulaind, Conal Cearnach, and Ferdiad, were not of Celtic origin. The original composers of the Ulster epic were probably partly Celtic (of the Dal Fiatach) and partly 'Pictish' (of the Conailli). The "synthetic historians," to use Dr. MacNeill's phrase, were all Celts, and as they determined the lines of Irish historical studies for over twelve centuries, the Celtic myth may be traced to their influence.

Dr. Macalister attempts to reconcile his conclusions with the native accounts of the Invasions. The three stories of the Parthalonians, Nemedians and Fir Bolg are merely versions of one story—namely, that which the aboriginies told of their own 'origines.' The story of the Milesians is the story which the 'Celtic' invaders told of themselves. The hideous Fomorian story, on the other hand, is the tale which the subdued aboriginies told of their conquerors. The Tuatha De Danaan

are the semi-humanised pantheon of Celtic gods. The solution is as good a "working theory" as any that have preceded it, and has about the same foundation. We feel, however, that it could be improved upon. Dr. Macalister shows evidence that all the pre-Celtic inhabitants belonged to the Mediterranean race. Even if we grant this,—and it is very probable,—was there not still room for different invasions by distinct peoples belonging to that race? Their history covers a period of almost a hundred centuries, and we think that Dr. Macalister has neglected one valuable criterion for distinguishing these different invasions—changes in sepulchral rites. A radical change in sepulchral rites presupposes a change in a religious system, which in turn, implies the coming of a foreign race. This seems to be particularly true of the Dolmen-builders of the very late Stone Age. We can trace their course from Africa, across Gibraltar, across Spain and France, through the the British Isles, and into Ireland. The variety of types of burial rites in the Bronze Age evidently connotes a multiplicity of peoples. In the early Bronze Age there is a very sharp struggle between 'burial' and 'cremation'; after some time, the latter custom prevailed, but we have evidence of the appearance, from time to time, of new rites, culminating in the methods adopted in the great cemeteries of New Grange and Dowth. I notice that Dr. Macalister regards these changes in religious rites as indicating, not the migrations of peoples, but the spread of new religious and cultural ideas among groups of peoples. He probably has solid ground for his opinion in this matter, but to us, it appears that the changes were too radical and deep-rooted, as well as too numerous, to admit that the learned author's explanation will hold in every case. Were it admitted that, in some cases at least, a change in religious rites connotes the entrance of a foreign people, a more satisfactory explanation of the early Invasions is offered.

In the chapter on Social Organisation, Dr. Macalister invades the province of the book-antiquarian, and his touch is not as sure as in the other sections. It is an almost impossible task to try to reconstruct the methods of thought of a long-vanished race from whom not a document nor a scrap of tradition has been handed down, and Dr. Macalister's treatment of the subject only emphasises the hopelessness of the attempt. Two things he attempts to prove—that the pre-Celtic settlers were organised on a matriarchal basis, and that they developed a religious system of totemism. For the matriarchal, or rather matrilinear theory, the only direct evidence advanced, as far as Ireland is concerned, is the tradition that many of the ancient places and sanctuaries were founded by women, e.g., Tara and Emain Macha. It seems fairly certain that the institution of totemism, almost universal among primitive peoples, existed in pre-Celtic Ireland, but the examples given by Dr. Macalister are all taken from literature of the Celtic period.

The discussion of pre-Celtic Religions, while it does not completely satisfy our curiosity, is more fruitful of results. The objects of religious worship were threefold:—the dead, animals, and the powers of nature. The ancient gods, such as Lugh and Aenghus were real historical personages, prominent in their lifetime, and deified after their departure from this world. The reverence paid to animals merged into the conception of an animal god who afterwards became identified with an anthropomorphic deity. Thus the Bull of Cooley became the swineherd of Bodhbh, and afterwards King of the Sidhe of Mumhan. Even to-day the *Ri na gcac* is one of the malicious spirits that trouble Omeath and Farney. The worship of the powers of nature, and of agricultural and pastoral deities, is written all over the ancient literature. Beltaine was the beginning of summer, Lughnasa of autumn and Samhain of winter. Probably St. Brigid's day supplanted the feast of the rebirth of the corn-spirit. The reverence still paid to wells, springs, streams, winds,

etc., may be a remnant of the religion of our pre-Celtic ancestors. The rites with which all these deities were revered were partly magical and partly propitiatory. Idols erected in their honour, such as standing-stones, stone circles, stone alignments, etc., were worshipped with sacrifices, dances, and mechanical appliances.

From Religion the author naturally passes on to the Disposal of the Dead. The belief that death is only the door to another life is found among all peoples, ancient and modern, primitive and civilised—the evidence for it appears as early as the Mammoth epoch of the early Stone Age. Burial rites were used for assuaging the ghosts of the dead persons, while grave deposits, or “grave goods,” such as food, weapons, etc., were intended for their use in their new existence. Only a few of the graves of the Middle Neolithic period have been properly examined. The bodies are stretched or crouched in a chamber of slabs, and covered with an earth-mound of moderate dimensions. The grave goods are scanty—usually amulets and necklaces, sometimes knives or arrow-heads. Towards the end of the Stone Age we find the Dolmen or Cromlech,—a structure of considerable size, consisting of a number of gigantic upright stones, supporting a horizontal slab. They were evidently built over the actual place of interment, and represented a dwelling-place more permanent than the dead person's earthly habitation. We think that the study of dolmen burials merited more space than Dr. Macalister devoted to the subject. The Bronze Age introduced the practice of cremation, which, after a long struggle with the old rite, became, for centuries, the normal method of disposing of the dead. During this age, there was a great lack of uniformity in the methods of interment. There are two main divisions—Earth Burials and Cave Burials, with five or six sub-divisions of each. As this section treats of the history of a large number of antiquarian field-objects, including caves, cists, carns, urns, incense-cups, cup-marks, standing-stones, cemeteries, pottery, and various articles of “grave-goods,” any one who wishes to be considered an authority on pre-Celtic archæology cannot afford to neglect a careful study of it.

The same remark applies to the chapter on Dwellings and Fortifications, where the following objects are minutely described and classified as to chronology and use—crannogs, stone-age hearths, shore hut-sites, bee-hive huts, ‘jam-pot’ enclosures, stone fortresses, promontory forts, and earthen ring-forts. There are also two fascinating and suggestive chapters on “Pottery” and “Ornament and Symbolism.”

The book is written in an easy popular style, and no fault can be found with the number and quality of the illustrations. Evidently, neither expense nor trouble has been spared on this attempt to popularise a sadly-neglected study. Many shrewd remarks and musings, flavoured, as a rule, with a touch of humour, on archæology and archæologists in general, are interspersed through the pages of the book. A few of them will bear repetition here. The first quotation ought to be of benefit to us all:—

“There are two kinds of meddlers in Irish archæology, and it is hard to tell which of them is the more mischievous. The first kind are full of the glories of Brian the Brave, and of that dream-land time when Ireland was peopled by a race ‘taller than Roman spears’—a condition of things that could not be brought about save by an epidemic of acromelagy. The other kind are for ever chortling over the savagery of the country down to the time of Queen Elizabeth, the evidences for human sacrifices, people going about without clothes on, and so forth . . . The exaggerations on both sides are so great, that the truth is completely hidden.”

As instalments of the Louth Letters appear in this *Journal* from time to time, we might bring the following quotation to the editor's attention:—

“The suspension of the work (i.e., the Ordnance Survey) was, in a sense, a blessing in disguise. The principles of archæological observation have to be acquired, like any

"other science; and they had scarcely been formulated at the time in question. Perusal of the letters written, chiefly by John O'Donovan, shews how imperfect the work would have been . . . One of the most surprising things about these letters is the enormous quantity of important material which is passed over in silence, and the helpless amateurishness of the descriptive matter. The publication of O'Donovan's Ordnance Survey Letters has often been urged; but to publish them without a complete re-collation of the letters with the remains actually to be seen would be a fatal error."

Even in the pages of our own *Journal*, statements from the *Vita Tripartita* or the *Book of Rights* are sometimes triumphantly refuted by means of some chance quotation from O'Donovan, or Hennessey or Colgan. The following passage deals with another type, the 'museum-clerk' antiquarian:—

"The rank and file of collectors are an unmitigated curse to archæology. They import an element of commercialism, wholly detrimental. Their interests are limited to making their cabinets fuller and richer than those of their rivals . . . And when death claims the collector, his cabinet is auctioned and dispersed to the four winds. Over and over again have I read in antiquarian papers:—'I am happy to say this object is in my possession.' But the writer is now dead, and where are his treasures? A public museum is the ONLY legitimate place for important antiquities."

But the above is mild compared with the castigation that that despicable class, the antiquarian dealers and "hoggers," receive at the author's hands.

The worst lapse that we have observed in the whole book, and one that a Louth antiquarian might be inclined to resent, is the author's treatment of Cuchulaind.

"The historical character, who is at the basis of the Cu Chulaind myth, was not a native Irishman at all. His other name, Setanta Becc, sufficiently identifies him as a member of the otherwise obscure Brythonic tribe of the Setantii, whose seat was somewhere about the mouth of the Mersey . . . It is not surprising that the King of the Ulaidh should have imported from abroad a fire-eating bravo whose prowess was notorious, notwithstanding his diminutive stature . . ."

For this grotesque description of Cuchulaind as a Liverpool bully imported by the Ulster king, for the purpose, we presume, of overawing the men of Cooley and Muirtheimhne, the only reasons advanced are, (a) the statement in the Harleian MS. that Cuchulaind was exempt from the 'cess noinden,' because he was not of the Ulaidh, and (b) the name Setanta. The statement in the Harleian MS. simply means that Cuchulaind, like the rest of the men of Muirtheimhne, was a Pict, although it is elsewhere explained in the *Tain* by the fact that the god Lugh was his father. Other Pictish leaders were also exempt from the Ulster sickness. Similarity of names, unsupported by any other evidence, is a peculiar historical criterion. To record the score of positive arguments which might be adduced on the other side would give the statement an importance which it does not deserve.

A few years back the following note would probably have engaged the attention of the Censor:—

"A visitor from Mars would naturally suppose that the Empire, which rules over the greatest and most varied assortment of native races, has encouraged, by special endowments, the sciences of ethnology and anthropology in all their branches: without a thorough understanding of which it is impossible to rule native races aright. He would probably make many mistakes in his progress through our Gilbert and Sullivan world, but that would be one of his worst."

CELTIC IRELAND.

We do not intend to detract from the merits of Dr. MacNeill's work when we say that, from the point of view of the man in the street, it is not as satisfactory as Dr. Macalister's book. The greater part of the criticism is destructive, and even the constructive portion lacks the element of finality. The book is written after the manner of a man who is musing and balancing his arguments. Sometimes,

for a page or two, we watch a structure being built up by a cumulation of arguments, only to find that the author, by pushing away the foundation-stone, suddenly brings down the whole building. Criticism of the piece-meal character of the book must be restrained by a knowledge of the fact that, during the year preceding publication, the author spent seven months in prison, and three more at hard work in Omeath. The outstanding merits are that it sets up certain criteria for dealing with early Irish historical problems, and definitely establishes many important facts that had been overlooked by previous writers. Such hoary old myths as the 'clan system,' the 'Milesian legend,' the 'early Gaelic invasion,' the 'pre-Christian hegemony of Tara,' the 'law of Tanistry,' and the 'communal ownership of land' can no longer take the place of real history.

Previous to the time of St. Patrick there was no detailed systematic written history of Ireland. All literature and writing belong to the Christian period. As a result, the accepted historical system is not credible beyond the year 300 A.D. At the same time, there was, in the traditional deposit of the nation, the Ulidian epic and its co-related tales, together with a large mass of pedigrees, mythologies, historical traditions, etc. Dr. MacNeill rightly accepts the ethnographical scheme of the Tain as historical.

The Christian missionaries from the Continent introduced not only the Bible with its Old Testament chronology, but also St. Jerome's version of the (lost) Chronicle of Eusebius—"a world history in parallel columns"—which consisted of a summary of the reigns and chief events in Rome, Greece, Judea, Egypt, etc., all set side by side in the order of their occurrence. Naturally enough, the Irish literati, dazzled by the light of the vision suddenly unfolded, felt urged to adjust traditional history to the universally accepted chronological system, and began to weave an Irish thread into the international chronicle. Dr. MacNeill is of opinion that the first writer of an Irish history on this model was Sinlan, abbot of Bangor. Probably a certain amount of history building, in a random way, went on before and after his time. The subject soon attracted the attention of the schools, and was done thoroughly and systematically. Not only the traditional stories, but the genealogies were synchronised. The greater part of the work was accomplished during the ninth and tenth centuries, chief among the late synchronisers being Flann of Monasterboice. In this manner did Irish history originate. From 432 A.D. onwards it rests on a sure foundation, and even for a century earlier the framework is sufficiently authentic; but in the pre-Christian scheme of history there are four strata,—Biblical, mythological, fictitious, and Ulster epic. (a) Biblical. National pride, combined with a desire to flatter the dominant dynasties, dictated that Irish tradition should be linked up to the Book of Genesis both in chronology and descent; (b) Mythological. The Christian historians could not accept the tradition of the Celtic gods, and, accordingly, they humanised the Tuatha De Danaan, made a number of them kings of Ireland, and gave them a chronology. The most famous of the ancient Celtic gods, Lugh Long-arm, after whom Louth is named, was worked into all royal genealogies. (c) Fictitious. Names were invented to fill in blank spaces for which tradition was unable to account, and to link up the native lines to Mil of Spain, and, through him, to Adam; (d) Ulster epic. This is the most authentic part of the work. The Ulster epic had impressed itself on the popular mind to the extent that it could not be disregarded. All of it that was consistent with the Gospel, and a great deal that was not, was incorporated in the new scheme of history.

It seems remarkable that these synthetic historians were able to impose, not only on the critical minds of their own time, but on all the later generations. Dr.

MacNeill gives four satisfactory reasons for the general acceptance of the scheme : (1) The new theory of antiquity was flattering to the ruling dynasties ; (2) It filled a vacuum in the traditions of the race ; (3) There was no rival theory ; (4) Its acceptance of the truth of the Ulster epic and other popular and mythological tales commended it to the common people. To these might be added a fifth—the blessing and ‘imprimatur’ of the Church, for the harmonising of Christian and native tradition destroyed whatever tendency to pagan belief may still have remained in the land.

It will easily be seen that the task of the modern historical critic is not an easy one. The Biblical accretions can easily be recognised and discarded. The same is very often true of the fictitious portion, for the fiction is frequently hid under such a thin disguise as Findtan (Blank Time), Cimbaeth (Captive Fire), Ollathair (Great or Universal Father), or Breogan (Flame-born). But, as Dr. MacNeill remarks, there is no such thing as random originality, and even an analysis of anything invented may succeed in disclosing the motive, or the purpose, or the methods of the inventor, and every such disclosure may open up a new line of inquiry and discovery. Even when the accretions are cleared away, the main difficulty still remains of analysing and interpreting the remainder. The originals on which ancient documents are based must be fixed chronologically ; conflicting testimonies must be examined as to credits ; and historical criteria for the different periods must be set up. One such criterion has been used, with remarkable results, by Professor MacNeill. The history of the unknown centuries of the pre-Christian period must be such as to explain, or, at least, not to conflict with the known conditions, sub-divisions, sub-ordinations and co-ordinations of the known period which follows. The chapter on the Revolt of the Vassals is a fine example of the author's methods of separating the grain from the chaff—although in this case, there is little left but chaff. To read one of these chapters, is, in a way, an exciting performance, for the argument swings back and forth, and, until the final decisive blow is given, one never knows which side is going to win.

We notice that Professor MacNeill adopts, in its entirety, the story of the Patrician foundation of the ecclesiastical metropolis at Armagh. That St. Patrick founded a church at Armagh cannot be seriously doubted, but is it not, at least, possible that the foundation of a metropolis may have been another invention of the synthetic historians ? If we apply the author's favourite criterion, we find that the theory not only does not explain, but is in serious conflict with what we know of Irish ecclesiastical organisation in the sixth and early seventh centuries.

The last four chapters in the book are of a more constructive nature than the preceding six, and many of the conclusions, which are here enunciated for the first time, must have an important bearing on the work of future historians. Especially is this true of the articles on the Irish Law of Dynastic Succession, and the Family Commune. Those enterprising idealists who took possession of ancient Ireland in the name of the Irish Commune will get a rude shock when they read the author's well-reasoned conclusion that, while there were classes of land such as bog, forest and mountain pasture which were in common occupation, no evidence of communal ownership on a large scale can be found.

Readers of the *Louth Archæological Journal* will find much that is of particular interest to themselves. The epic of the Bull of Cooley gets a whole chapter to itself. The genealogies of the Conaille (North Louth) and of the Ciannachta (Barony of Ferrard) are given, and there are numerous references to the Cruthni or Picts, the Airghialla, the Ulaid, the Fir Roiss, and the Corainn of the Boyne Valley. The name of the last-mentioned people, who are to be identified

with the Coriondi of Ptolemy, is still, we think, preserved in the Chord Road. The boundaries of the territories of the Ulaid, the Airghialla and the Conailli are discussed at length in the chapter on the Book of Rights, and the author's conclusions agree in substance with those enunciated in an article in this *Journal* seven or eight years ago. But even if there were no special references to our own territory, no apology would be needed for this lengthy review of the two books under discussion. Pre-Christian Louth affords a wide field for historical research, yet our *Journal* is almost the only Irish Archæological publication that is never quoted by either of the two distinguished writers. Articles in the Proceedings and Journals of the Royal Irish Academy, Ulster Journal of Archæology, Journal of Belfast Naturalist Field Club, Journal of Royal Antiquarian Society supplied Professor Macalister with a large portion of the material for his study. Whatever claim to merit we may have in regard to the treatment of historical problems of the Christian and Norman periods, it is clear that in the fields of pre-Christian and pre-Celtic history, our *Journal* does not rank high among antiquarian periodicals. The reasons are plain. Unscientific enthusiasts are out of date in archæology. Scarcely one of our contributors or members has taken the trouble to learn anything about the first principles of archæological observation. Scarcely one amongst us could tell the difference between a stone celt and a street paving stone. Earnest painstaking research in field-work is absolutely unknown, although of excursion pleasure-parties we had plenty. No complete lists of our cairns, dolmens, stone-circles, standing-stones, earthen forts, etc., has ever been attempted. Contributors to the *Journal* often throw chronology and historical criteria to the four winds. A footnote from Colgan or an excerpt from the Louth Letters furnishes stronger authority concerning some Louth place-name than a poem from the Dind-seanchus. O'Donovan's opinion about the boundaries of the ancient territories displaces the authority of the Book of Rights. We are too fond of trying to say the last word on a subject about which the first word has yet to be said. And finally, Dr. MacNeill lays down a knowledge of the Irish language in all its stages of development as the greatest need of historical studies in Irish antiquity.

Speaking of the necessity for an archæological survey of Ireland, Dr. Macalister writes :—" Now is the time for such a survey ; in fact, if it be delayed much longer, it will be too late. Increased tillage, changing ideas, and many other causes are proving fatal to the ancient monuments of Ireland ; and if a record is to be kept of them for future generations of scholars, it must be begun at once." Is it not still possible to make our *Journal* a reflex, on a small scale, of the two works under review, and to treat of Louth history and antiquities in accordance with the principles which they have formulated ?

LAURENCE P. MURRAY.