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THE ORIGIN OF DRUIDISM

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SCHRADER says in his *Reallexikon der idg. Altertumskunde*: 'The Celtic Druids are quite different from the other priest-hoods of ancient Europe. Where the first beginnings of their origin started from will never be known.' I hope, however, to succeed in throwing some light into that obscurity.

In seeking to determine the origin of Druidism people came to very strange ideas. Some thought the Druids pupils of Pythagoras, others even took them for Buddhists; one thought the origin of Druidism was in Phœnicia, others thought it was in Chaldea or India. The ancients already showed great interest in that priesthood, and in the last two centuries there arose a great literature dealing with them, but it was of no importance as it lost itself in symbolic and occult trifles. Notwithstanding, there was no success in throwing light on the accounts of the Druids nor in explaining the so-called contradictions.

But when in 1906 there appeared a book by the well-known French scholar D'Arbois de Jubainville, *Les Druides et les Dieux Celtiques aux Formes des Animaux*, the scientific world hoped to receive at last some enlightenment regarding that mysterious institution. De Jubainville's book, however, is not much more than a compilation of the most important things we know about the Druids, and he only tells us what we already know from other sources.

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In the first chapter of his book De Jubainville speaks of the Gaulish priests :—

‘They have two kinds of priests, the Druids and the “Gutuatri.” When Cæsar subdued independent Gaul in the first century before our era, the Druids had already gained an important position, but he was told that Druidism originated in Britain and had been transferred from thence to Gaul.

‘Before the establishment of the Druids on the Continent the Gauls had no other priests than the “Gutuatri.” He derives their name from the Celtic “gutu,” Ir. guth (voice), and compares it with our German word “Gott,” from the Indo-Eur. “ghutom” (what is invoked), from the root “ghu.” “Gutuatri” would then mean, “the invoking ones,” from the same root as the Goth. “gudja” (priest). They were all priests of temples or of holy groves. The “Gutuatri” were still extant during the Roman occupation. We have their name preserved on four inscriptions.’

De Jubainville compares the ‘Gutuatri’ with the Homeric ‘ἱερεὺς,’ with Chryses who bears the surname ‘ἀρητήρ,’ which signifies the same thing as ‘Gutuatos’ and with the ‘Flamines’ of the Romans who, like them, formed no corporation.

‘The Druids, however, formed a corporation and had an Arch-Druid over them, not only in Gaul, but in Ireland, and probably also in England.’

In this passage I cannot agree with De Jubainville. In the Irish literature a chief of the Druids is never mentioned, and from the sentence in the *Life of St. Patrick*: *Congregata est multitudo nimis magorum ad primum magum Recradum nomine,* we are not justified in concluding that the Irish Druids had a head. The passage can also signify, that Recradus was at that time the most famous Druid. It is even very possible that we owe here to the Christian writer, who wished to enhance the glory of the holy man, a little exaggeration, for somewhat later we read how St. Patrick killed this Druid by means of a miracle. We have therefore in the Arch-Druid a special Gaulish institution.

In the art of prophecy the Druids had rivals in the

'Vatis,' who by Strabo are called 'οὐάταις,' by Diodorus 'μάγιστρίαις.' St. Patrick did not vanquish the Druids till he had associated himself with the 'Vatis,' Ir. fáthi, filid.

De Jubainville, agreeing with Thurneysen, derives the name of the Druids from the root 'dru,' and translates the name 'druis' by 'the most wise one,' the Galatic 'dru-nemeton' by 'arch-sanctuary,' and quotes as the Gaulish synonym 'ver-nemeton.' (Other derivations of the word 'druis' are possible. Cf. Cymr. derwydd; Gaul. dervum.)

The second chapter seems to me to be the most important of the whole book, and therefore I propose to give it word for word in translation :—

'It seems that the Druids were known to the Greeks since about 200 B.C. when Sotion mentions them. They existed therefore already at that time in Gaul, on the left side of the Rhine, a country which was very much visited by merchants of Massilia. This happened not long after the Gauls had conquered Britain, which had been occupied first by the Gaels. And it seems, in fact, that the conquest had probably taken place between 300 and 200 B.C. The Gauls had found the Druids in Britain and transferred the institution to the Continent. Caesar says so explicitly. ("Disciplina in Britannia reperta atque inde in Galliam translata esse existimatur, et nunc qui diligentius eam rem cognoscere volunt plerumque illo discendi causa proficiscuntur.") We conclude, therefore, that the Druids were originally a Gaelic institution peculiar to the Gaels. The Gaels are a Celtic tribe, whose language still exists in Ireland and in the Highlands of Scotland. From this tribe, which had during a long time occupied all the British Island, Druidism had been transferred into the large countries which lay spread out to the south of the Channel between the Atlantic Ocean and the Rhine; but it was unknown in Gallia Cisalpina and in the lands formerly Celtic, to the east of the Rhine, also in the basin of the Danube, and in Asia Minor, where the dru-nemeton (arch-sanctuary) is in no way connected with the Druids.'

So far D'Arbois de Jubainville. Before I proceed further I shall shortly summarise what the writers of the ancients tell us about the Druids.

According to Caesar there were two governing classes in Gaul: the warlike aristocracy and the Druids. The latter

were free from military service and from all exactions, and through these privileges many of them were drawn to their profession, the more readily as Druidism was apparently not founded upon birth, but merely upon the engagement and training of novices.¹

The Druids were philosophers and teachers of youth. They gave not only lessons in theology and mythology but also spoke much about the course of the stars, about the nature of all things, and the magnitude of the universe.

From all the ethical doctrines of the Druids nothing but a single sentence is preserved (Diogen. Laert., proem 5): 'To be pious against the gods, not to do injury to any one, and to practise bravery.' But their first doctrine was, that after death they passed into another body. So strong was this belief among the people, that bargains were even made with the promise to pay them in the future life. The novices had to learn by heart a large number of verses, and some spent twenty years in learning them. Almost nothing is preserved to us from the tradition of the Gaulish Druids, for they were not allowed to put down their teaching in writing. It was otherwise in Ireland. The author of the Yellow Book of Lecan tells us that St. Patrick burnt a hundred and eighty books of the Druids, and that after his example all Christians did the same, till all Druidical books were destroyed.

The Druids were also soothsayers and assisted at sacrifices.

Every year they met in the territory of the Carnutes, and many cases were brought to them for decision. The most severe punishment they could inflict was exclusion from the sacrifices. Those so punished were cut off from all human society and treated as outlaws. At the head of the Gaulish Druids stood an Arch-Druid, who was elected by the vote of his fellow-Druids on the death of his predecessor.

Caesar seems to include under the name 'Druides' the bards and seers (*vātis*), who were treated by later writers as separate.

¹ Schrader, *Reallexikon der idg. Altertumskunde*, ii. p. 643.

The similarity of the Druidical doctrine to that of Pythagoras led to many fables. That the Druids did not live like monks (a theory set forth by Alexander Bertrand) is already clear, as we are told that the Druid Divitiacus, Caesar's friend, had a wife and children, and that the Irish Druids were mostly married.

Criminals were sacrificed to the gods, but also innocent persons. Large figures made of wickerwork were filled with living men and then burned.

The Romans soon prohibited Druidism; but it continued secretly, and Mela tells us (45 A.D.) that the noblest youths of Gaul followed their teachers into secret forests.

Thirty-five years later Pliny the Elder gives us quite another picture of the Druids. He shows them as priests of the oak, as physicians and magicians, as nothing better than common charlatans. They compose the mystic serpent's egg out of snake venom, which assures the success of every action.

How shall we account for this seeming change? Did suppression cause them to set aside their noble teaching in order to earn their livelihood in a less worthy manner? I shall soon have to show that the Druids were already magicians in the earlier times. But how does it happen that they are occupied with mean sorcery as well as with an earnest science? In the meantime we may notice that the most prudent men are often the greatest charlatans, because they know that the great crowd is more easily led by cunning, juggling tricks than by high wisdom.

As to the Druidical belief in the immortality, and their doctrine of the transmigration of souls, D'Arbois de Jubainville quotes many examples of the belief of the Celts in a life in the other world, but he thinks the report of their doctrine of rebirth an error, which had risen owing to the Greeks having heard from the Druids tales of transformations which they misunderstood, and so thought that the Druids taught the transmigration of souls after the doctrine of Pythagoras.

Here I venture to make a conjecture. Have we not in this doctrine a survival of the belief of the pre-Celtic

aborigines? It is possible that already the men of the Stone Age believed in metempsychosis, as they often buried their dead in a cowering position. We can detect the belief in metempsychosis chiefly among peoples of a low culture. The next step is the belief in rebirth, of which we have also some examples in Irish mythology.

De Jubainville has shown that the Druids originally had been the priests of only one Celtic tribe—that which conquered Britain first. It is very strange that between brother-nations, whose customs and language differed not very widely, such a fundamental distinction should have existed. For nothing is so characteristic of a people as its religious beliefs. But, as we shall see, Druidism has many features quite alien to the character of an Indo-European religion. There is but one way to account for such a strange and almost fundamental difference as is said to have existed between Gaels and Gauls before the occupation of Gaul by Caesar.

The Gauls certainly took Druidism from their brethren in Britain, but the latter were not yet acquainted with that institution when they crossed the Channel.

For the Druids were the priests of the pre-Celtic aborigines of the British Islands, and it is from them only that the Celts received them.

As the Gaels, the one great nation of the Celts, conquered the British Isles about 1000 B.C., they had already attained a high degree of culture. They brought with them the knowledge of bronze and burnt their dead.¹

I suppose that they were ruled by priestly kings, whom we find about the same time among the Greeks, Latins, and Germans, who have, in common with the Celts, other characteristics of Indo-European origin. We have no cause whatever to assume that the Celts had differed widely in customs and religion in that early time from the neighbouring Indo-European brother-nations, which we would have to assume if the institution of Druidism had existed among them from

¹ Munro, *Prehistoric Scotland*, p. 480: London, 1899.

the earliest times. Yet in historical times we find among the Irish *kings* traces of the former priestship which had originated in the furthest past ages from the divine adoration of mighty magicians.

For the Indo-European peoples once believed what savages of the present time believe that their divine¹ ruler was the centre of the universe, that he could disturb the course of nature by merely moving his hand; and therefore saved their king from the perils which surrounded him, even after every common mortal had been rendered harmless through numberless taboos' (prohibitions). The Indo-European races had given up these beliefs, however, before they had left the common native home.

We detect such traces of the former divinity of the kings, not only in Homer, when he speaks (*Od.* xix. 109) of a ruler who honours the gods and reigns powerfully, so that the earth is fertile and the wealth of the people grows—because of the virtues of the king—but also in Ireland and Wales.

The Celts believed that there would be bad crops as a punishment for bad rulers. In the Book of Leinster we read that under Cairbre Cinnchait, who won the kingdom of Ireland by violence and killed mercilessly the children of the nobles, every ear of corn bore only one grain, and every oak only one acorn. But when the old dynasty came again to the throne, Ireland recovered its fertility. To every new king the Ollamh, the head-bard, sang some verses, wherein he admonished him to reign well, or else famine and disease would spoil the land; and in a Welsh poem of the twelfth century it is said: 'We shall have bad years and [long] days with false kings and failed crops' (The Black Book of Carmarthen).

We hear besides of many taboos which the Irish kings were obliged to observe even in historical times in order not to ruin their land.²

¹ Cf. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, i. pp. 233, 234 : London, 1900.

² *Ibid.*, i. p. 240.

Thus, for example, the sun might not rise on the King of Ireland in his bed at Tara, the old capital of Erin; he was forbidden to alight on Wednesday at Magh Breagh, to traverse Magh Cuillinn after sunset, to incite his horse at Fan Chomair, to go in a ship upon the water the Monday after Bealltaine, and to leave the track of his army upon Ath Maighne the Tuesday after All-Hallows.

The King of Leinster might not go round Tuath Laighean left-hand-wise on Wednesday, nor sleep between the Dohair and the Duibhlinn on Monday, nor ride a dirty, black-heeled horse across Magh Maistean.

The King of Munster was prohibited from enjoying the feast of Loch Lein from one Monday to another; from banqueting by night in the beginning of harvest before Geim at Leitracha; from encamping for nine days upon the Siuir; and from holding a border meeting at Gabhran.

The King of Connacht might not conclude a treaty respecting his ancient palace of Cruachan after making peace on All-Hallows Day, nor go in a speckled garment on a grey-speckled steed to the heath of Dal Chais, nor repair to an assembly of women at Seaghais, nor sit in autumn on the sepulchral mounds of the wife of Maine, nor contend in running with the rider of a grey, one-eyed horse at Ath Gallta between two posts.

The King of Ulster was forbidden to attend the horse fair at Rath Line among the youths of Dal Araidhe; to listen to the fluttering of the flock of birds of Linn Saileach after sunset; to celebrate the feast of the bull of Daire-mic-Daire; to go into Magh Cobha in the month of March, and to drink of the water of Bo-Neimhidh between two darknesses.

Hence it follows, that the kings of the Gaels, like those of other Indo-European peoples, originated in priests and we may conclude, especially as we find the survivals so fresh and vivid in Ireland, that the kings of the Gaels when they conquered the British Islands were at the same time their priests.

In the British Islands the Gaels had found an aboriginal race which had come over from the Continent in early neolithic times when Ireland and England were still connected with the Continent (?). These immigrants were of a small stature, muscular, with dark hair and dark eyes. They were religious, for they buried their dead; and for the nobler ones they erected great stone monuments. Their culture was that of the Stone Age. Tacitus thinks them from their appearance Iberians, and it is at least noteworthy that the skulls which have been discovered resemble strongly those of the Basques, though it is impossible to prove anything from that fact.¹

Their race is still preserved in the dark-eyed, brown-and-black-haired population in the west of Ireland, in South Wales, in Scotland, in the Isles of Mull and Arran, in Argyll and Inverness, and also in Cornwall.

But if we assume that this race was not wholly crushed out by the invading Celts and that they transmitted their magicians too, then their nationality must have been very strong, as indeed it was, for it has left its traces till to-day on the British Isles. I shall not speak here of the linguistic remains preserved in the topography and in the Celtic languages, nor of the numberless Fetish-stones that are to be met with in the British Isles, where they are worshipped even in our times. I shall only take a few interesting points out of the rich material.

The testimonies of Diodorus and Strabo concerning cannibalism among the Irish is strengthened by St. Hieronymus, who says in his writing, 'Adversus Iovinianum': 'Quid loquar de ceteris nationibus, cum ipse adolescentulus in Gallia viderim Scotos, gentem Britannicam, humanis vesci carnibus? Et cum per silvas porcorum greges et armentorum pecudumque reperirent, pastorum nates et feminarum et papillas solere abscindere et eas solas ciborum delicias arbitrari?' Nobody will contend that we can ascribe such customs to Indo-Europeans. An obscure memory of these times survives

¹ Cf. Munro, *Prehist. Scotland*, pp. 460, 480.

still among the Celtic people, and we find in Wales and Scotland tales of giants and ghosts who ate their captives and drank their blood. Also the custom quoted by Strabo, that the old Irish devoured the corpses of their fathers we can hardly ascribe to the Celts. Even to-day we can trace the remains of this custom.

Wood-Martin tells us that the custom, existing still in Ireland, of taking some food in presence of the dead body is but a form of the old custom of consuming food which had been laid on the corpse with the intention of transmitting to those doing so certain faculties of the departed one. I think it to be a survival of the old, barbaric custom of consuming the corpse itself.

Schrader has proved that the idea of family must have been throughout an agnatic one in the primitive ages of the Indo-European people—the principle of relationship in the male line prevailed already in the common past of the Indo-Europeans. Therefore, if we can detect traces of matriarchy in the British Isles we must ascribe them to a pre-Celtic population.

It has been fully proved by Zimmer that even in historic times matriarchy prevailed among the Picts of Scotland. At any rate the Picts possessed a large substratum of pre-Celtic blood. I think them to have been a non-Aryan race, soon however Celticised, first by the Gaels and then—but in a lesser degree—by the Britons.

In Wales we can detect in the families of the Mabinogion traces of matriarchy, and many may also be found in Ireland. While among the Indo-European peoples it was the father who gave the first food to his child (what for India, the Grihya-Sutras of Apastamba and Hiranyakesin prove¹ and Speijer has proved in Yatakarma (p. 103 ff.) for the other Indo-European peoples), Solinus tells us that in Ireland it was the mother who gave to the new-born the first food, on the point of her husband's sword, with the wish that he might die only in battle.

¹ M. Muller, *Sacred Books of the East*, xix. pp. 213, 281.

A. Potter ('Description of West-Meath,' 1819) tells us that all married women are called by their maiden names, a custom still extant in Ulster. According to Wood-Martin, women in many English-speaking districts retain their maiden names and follow rather their mother's relations.

The couvade, too, surely a non-Indo-European custom, is to be found all over the British Isles. In Ulster it was known in very olden times, for we read in the Book of Leinster that all men, with the exception of Cuchulainn, lay in their beds unable to fight when Queen Meave of Connacht made a progress to Ulster with her army. A pregnant wife had cursed them, to suffer once a year the throes of women.

In England also the couvade once existed, for in Yorkshire the mother of a girl who has borne an illegitimate child goes out to seek the seducer, and the first man she finds in his bed is held to be the child's father.¹

Already for the Iberians matriarchy is not only proved, but also the couvade, which we find also among their descendants (?), the Basques. That would make it possible that there was some connection between the aborigines of the British Isles and the Iberians. Moreover we find this custom in Southern India, China, Borneo, Kamtchatka, Greenland, and among many tribes of North and South America.

We have seen now, that the race of the aborigines of the British Islands had not been exterminated by the conquering Celts. It is also certain that it was not wholly suppressed, but that the conquerors intermarried very closely with their subjects. For even in the oldest times we find in Ireland no miserable plebs as in other countries conquered by Indo-Europeans. There were no castes, only different stages of society, and a family could easily, by acquiring fortune, rise from the lowest to the highest rank.

There was perhaps rather an infiltration of the Celts than a real conquest, but perhaps we shall not be astray in

¹ *The Academy*, xxv. p. 112.

seeking the reason of that fact in the great beauty and uncommon loveliness of the women of the aborigines. The beauty of Celtic women is well known, as also the fact that they mostly have dark hair, which indicates apparently a non-Aryan origin.

Among no other people is the 'feminine' of such importance as among the Celts. Their literature is given to the service of women. No literature has so many sweet love-stories as the Irish.

'The absence of feminine interest in the earlier chansons de geste has often been noted. The case is different with Teutonic heroic literature, in which woman's rôle is always great, sometimes pre-eminently so. The love of man, and immortal, or, if mortal, semi-divine maid is a "constant" of heroic tradition. Teuton and Celt have handled this theme, however, in a very different spirit. In the legends of the former the man plays the chief part; he woos, sometimes he forces the fairy maiden to become the mistress of his hearth. As a rule, overmastered by the prowess and beauty of the hero, she is nothing loth.

'It is otherwise with the fairy mistress of the Celtic hero; they abide in their own place, and they allure or compel the mortal lover to resort to them. Connla and Bran and Oisín must all leave this earth and sail across ocean or lake before they can rejoin their lady-love; even Cúchulainn, mightiest of all heroes, is constrained, struggle as he may, to go and dwell with the fairy queen Fand, who has wooed him. Throughout, the immortal mistress retains her superiority; when the mortal tires and returns to earth she remains, ever wise and fair, ready to welcome and enchant a hero of a new generation. She chooses whom she will and is no man's slave; herself she offers freely, but she abandons neither her liberty nor her divine nature. Even where the love-story passes wholly among mortals, the woman's rôle is more accentuated than in the Teutonic sagas. She is no mere lay figure upon a fire-bound rock, like Brunhild or Merglad, ready, when the destined hero appears, to fall straightway into his arms. The Celtic woman takes her fate in her own hand, and chooses herself the husband or makes him accept her conditions.'¹

¹ A. Nutt, *Studies in the Legend of the Holy Grail*, pp. 231-233: London, 1887.

In one of the most ancient Gaelic chronicles we read :—

‘ But the fairest of the women who came into Erin with the sons of Milidh was Feale, the wife of Luaidh, who had lived alone in the western regions of Spain, in an inland valley, until she was wooed by Luaidh . . . and men said concerning Feale, that she was too beautiful to live.’

But the Irish historians called by the name ‘ Milesians,’ or ‘ Sons of Milidh,’ the non-Aryan, dark-haired and dark-eyed Irish race, which on account of their complexion they thought to be immigrants from Spain.

All this makes it possible that the aborigines had influenced the Gaels very strongly, but before we can assume with probability such a great religious influence we must try to find out some analogy for such a fact.

The aborigines of the British Isles stood, as we have seen, on a very low level of culture—they were savages. We shall first investigate what ideas one savage people receives from another.

‘ Everything new is apt to excite the awe and dread of the savage. So the unusually heavy rains, which happened to follow the English survey of the Nicobar Islands in the winter of 1886-1887 were imputed by the alarmed natives to the wrath of the spirits at the theodolites, dumpy-levellers, and other strange instruments which had been set up in so many of their favourite haunts.’¹

Naturally the savage thinks foreign land to be enchanted too.

‘ Among the Ovambo of South-Western Africa in time of war the chief names a general who leads the army to battle. Next to the general the highest place in the army is occupied by the “omunene u oshikuni,” that is, the owner of the firewood, who carries a burning brand before the army on the march. If the brand goes out, it is an evil omen, and the army returns. In that case the fire borne at the head of the army may have been intended to dissipate the evil influences, whether magical or spiritual, with which the air of the enemy’s country might be conceived to teem.’²

¹ *The Golden Bough*, i. p. 347.

² *Ibid.*, p. 305.

All the more the savage believes the inhabitants of another country to be sorcerers, especially if these are of an alien and less civilised race. We not only detect the same fear among savages but also among peoples of a higher culture. In the Ongtong Java Islands strangers, when they land on the islands, are first of all received by the sorcerers, sprinkled with water, anointed with oil, etc. Only after they have been 'disenchanted' can they be introduced to the chief.¹

It is also known that the Hindus despise the non-Aryan aborigines as unclean, but that they fear them on the other hand, as they consider the Parias to be in possession of secret magic arts and to be associated with the old gods of the country.

It is then very probable that the conquering Gaels thought the aborigines were beings endowed with supernatural powers, who possessed great knowledge of the secrets of nature.

How many superstitions are connected with the so-called fairy-arrows (the arrow-heads of flint which the pre-Celtic aborigines used during the Stone Age) among the Celtic population of Great Britain and Ireland. Perhaps these superstitions go back to the time when the Celts were fighting with a people who used flint-weapons and were then already feared as endowed with supernatural powers. Another belief connected with iron may also be quoted.

Iron is said to possess the power of keeping off bad spirits. In the north-east of Scotland after the death of an inmate of the house a bit of iron is put into all victuals, in order that the 'death may not enter them.'² In many Welsh fairy-tales a fairy abandons her lover in the moment when he touches her with iron.³ On the Western Isles of Scotland it is said that every one who enters a knoll where the fairies are dancing must leave a bit of iron on the threshold, for only in this way is he able to prevent the fairies from closing the door and keeping him as a prisoner for ever.

¹ *The Golden Bough*, p. 303.

² W. Gregor, *Folklore of the North-East of Scotland*, p. 206.

³ *Transactions of the Hon. Society of Cymmrodor*, vi. p. 2.

This fear of ghosts seems to be a heritage of the aborigines, who did not know metals, and may often have yielded to the better weapons of the Celts. The savage aborigines of a country appear very often in the later popular superstitions as ghosts, giants, or dwarfs.

Of course the Celts felt especial reverence for the medicine-men of the aborigines, the Druids, for they observed how these were dreaded by their countrymen. Among savage tribes the king develops mostly out of the sorcerer, who can, as they believe, inflict misfortune and death. The Gaels, full of admiration, called these magicians 'Druides,' the very wise ones.

The true character of the Druids was that of mighty sorcerers, and entirely contradicts that of an Indo-European priest. In Ireland, which was least exposed to foreign influence, we can most probably hope to find Druidism in its original form. They appear to us there chiefly as magicians and sorcerers. They change the day into night, wind and wave obey their orders, they pour down fire and blood. Such ideas, that man has power over the elements, we only find among savage peoples who do not possess the idea of the 'supernatural.' That the Druids were physicians is closely connected with their profession as sorcerers, as is also their prophetic faculty. So strong is their power that even St. Patrick prays to God that He may protect him against the incantations of the Druids. In the old Irish literature the word 'druí' is always used synonymously with 'magus,' and in the neo-Celtic languages the word for Druid signifies 'sorcerer.'

'The Druids are sorcerers and rain-doctors, who pretend to call down the storm and the snow, and frighten the people with the fluttering wisp and other childish charms. They divined by the observation of sneezing and omens, by their dreams after holding a bull-feast or chewing raw horseflesh in front of their idols, by the croaking of their ravens and chirping of tame wrens, or by the ceremony of licking the hot edge of bronze taken out of the rowan-tree faggot. They are like the Red Indian medicine men, or the Angekoks

of the Eskimo, dressed up in bull's-hide coats and bird caps with waving wings.'¹

It was probably in the Highlands of Scotland north of the Grampians that the aborigines maintained their independence the longest time, and therefore preserved best the institution of the Druids as sorcerers, for we read that all who wish to learn very exactly the wicked art of sorcery set out for Scotland. Also Pliny the Elder tells us that Britain was ill-famed on account of its magic, and from the report of Tacitus of the destruction of the isle of Mona we perceive clearly that the Druids were sorcerers.

But how does it happen that they are painted by the writers of the antiquity as also philosophers, as teachers of pure ethics?

In Gaul Druidism was not founded upon birth, but upon the engagement and training of novices. Also in Ireland we find the Druids as teachers of the youth, and of the Druid Cathbad it is expressly stated that he taught his pupils the Druidic science (*druidecht*). From that we assume as certain that among the aborigines a transference of the magic art also took place by initiation and instruction.

Where the Gaels came into friendly terms with them they certainly were anxious to partake of that instruction, and we find in Ireland no distinct Druidic caste; but we know of poets who were Druids, also of some kings—*e.g.* the grandfather of the famous Irish national hero Finn and the father of King Connor were members of that priesthood. So the Druids grew by time to be a Gaelic institution, and the priestly power of the king was transferred to them, so that they had finally the highest rank after him; there was even a rule that the king should not speak in the presence of his Druid before the latter had spoken.

An obscure memory of the time when the Druids were the magicians of a hostile race can be detected in the Celtic myths which tell us that the magic power of the Druids had been so great that they won even the victory over the gods

¹ *Lectures*, O'Curry, who gives also another explanation.

—a notion that on the one side reminds us of the 'Schaman,' on the other side can be easily understood if we take into consideration that the Druids originally, as sorcerers of the aborigines, were hostile not only to the Celts but also to their gods. We have also often a curious antagonism to note between the Druids and the Celtic gods which is easily explained in such a way (cf. 'Echtra Condla').

No wonder that the Gaelic poet-prophets (for the Celts had also their own prophets) looked at the new rivals with jealous eyes—a jealousy ending finally with the abolition of the Druids in Ireland, for when St. Patrick introduced Christianity into Ireland he found in the Druids his greatest enemies whom he could only vanquish by uniting himself with the 'filid' (637, Battle of Moyrath).

It is not strange that the more highly civilised Celts deemed the priests of the aborigines great sorcerers; we find among the Germans something analogous.

'The Finns, who occupied in the past ages a great part of the Scandinavian peninsula, were deemed by the conquering Germans as endowed with magical powers, so that the old Norse *finngerð* (literally, a Finn's work) is used for "sorcery," and also in their own religion the priest-sorcerer, the "Schaman," who is the mediator between men and gods, and even by his arts compels the latter to serve him, occupies the foremost place.'¹

Is it too rash to assume that the aborigines of the British Isles had a culture similar to that of the Finnic-Lappic tribes? Similar primitive conditions produce similar cultures, and J. F. Campbell, a prominent connoisseur of Finnic antiquity, was so struck by the surprising similarity of many ancient Scottish dwellings with those of the Finns that he did not hesitate to declare that the aborigines of the British Isles were a people related to the Finns; and, though a primitive Iberian population seems very possible, I have come to the opinion that there may have been also a Finnish race on British soil.

When the Gaels sent their sons to be initiated into the

¹ R. Much, *Deutsche Stammeskunde*, p. 31.

teaching of the Druids, they did not forget their own Indo-European religion, and the same thing took place among the Gauls, who conquered Britain several hundred years later, and adopted Druidism from the inhabitants of the country as the Gaels had taken it from the aborigines. In such a way we can easily explain the strange contrast of noble and mean doctrines which we detect among the Druids. If Pliny the Elder painted the Druids only as magicians and priests of the oak, he therewith told to his contemporaries something new: their noble doctrines had been well known long before.

We have also elsewhere sufficient examples of a noble religion tolerating the old, crude faith. We can observe till to-day, in Catholic countries, the feast of Adonis; and the Church tolerates the old, pagan midsummer and harvest customs, and we may safely assume that in the British Isles the pre-Celtic faith existed under the dominion of the Celts.

Andrew Lang quotes, in his *Custom and Myth*, an example of a similar toleration which is related to us by Gercilasso de Vega, the son of a Spanish conqueror and an Inka princess:—

‘In the pre-Inca period an Indian was not accounted honourable unless he was descended from a fountain, river, or lake, or from a wild animal; but there was not an animal, how vile and filthy soever, that they did not worship as a god. But when the Inca appeared and sun-worship became the established religion, worship of the animal was still tolerated, and the sun-temples also contained images of the beasts which the Indians had venerated.’

But I think I have found a sure argument that Druidism took its origin in the British Islands, and was not brought thither by the Celts.

Pliny the Elder describes the Gaulish Druids as priests of the oak-worship, wherein also the mistletoe plays a prominent part. The worship of the oak can be certainly proved to be of Indo-European origin. This is so well known that it is unnecessary to prove it specially. Max. Tyrius says, moreover, that the Celts worshipped Zeus under the image of an

oak. In a word, we find the Druids as priests of an Indo-European religion.

But if the Celts had had Druids who were already priests of the oak before the occupation of the British Islands, they certainly would have brought that worship with them to Ireland. For in ancient times Ireland was very rich in oak woods, and we can trace yet over thirteen hundred place-names which begin with 'doire, daire' (oakwood), Anglicised 'derry,' not to speak of the other compositions. The name of the oak occurs in many more names of places than that of any other tree.¹

How strange must it seem to us, then, that we so seldom hear of the oak in the rich, traditional literature of the Irish. I know no Irish superstition connected with the oak, and *the Irish Druids are never mentioned in connection with the oak*. Their holy tree is the yew, and they bear in their hands wands made of that wood. Also the Druidic fire is kindled with the wood of the yew.

That strange fact, that the oak plays no part in the life of the Irish Druid and a very small one in the popular superstition can be explained only if we assume that the Druids were originally the priests of a people who did not know the oak worship.

The Gauls who had remained in their own country were much less influenced by the pre-Celtic population of Britain than the Gaels, and retained, therefore, besides the new Druidical faith, the old customs of their Indo-European ancestors.

We perceive, then, that the Druids must have been once the priests of a people who did not know the worship of the oak. But the oak-worship of the Celts is vouched for several times, therefore the Druids cannot have been originally a Celtic priesthood. We know also that Druidism took its origin in the British Islands, and it can only have originated among the people who occupied those countries before the Celts. We have seen that such a people existed on the

¹ Joyce, *Irish Names of Places*, 3rd ed., p. 487.

British Islands and that they were a people powerful enough to influence strongly the conquering Celts; we know also that it is possible, and it has often happened, that a people of a lower stage of culture has influenced the religious beliefs of a more highly civilised one.

Besides, Druidism shows so many non-Indo-European features that we must for that reason alone seek the origin of its priesthood among a non-Indo-European people.

We can, therefore, assert with somewhat of certainty that Druidism originated in a people who inhabited the British Islands before the Celts, and who were probably related to those great races who occupied Western and Southern (or Northern?) Europe long before the first Indo-European set his foot there.¹

UNPUBLISHED POEMS BY ALEXANDER MAC- DONALD (MAC MHAIGHSTIR ALASTAIR)

PROFESSOR MACKINNON

II. *Poems hitherto unpublished.*

(*Continued from vol. iv. p. 305*)

THE following poems, now printed for the first time, are all, with the exception of the last, political poems and satires. They are of like character with those of the same class published by the author in 1751. Whether the poet, had he himself printed them, would have changed these in any way, as he changed, *e.g.*, 'The Ark' and *A Thearlaich Mhic Sheumais*, it would be bootless to inquire. There is no heading or title to any of them, but the stanzas are for the most part consecutively numbered. The Satires, it will be observed, are fierce denunciations of Hanoverians in general, but especially of the Campbells who devastated the forfeited lands of Moydart and the neighbourhood, and of a lady of the

¹ A recent stay in Ireland has confirmed my opinion as to the pre-Celtic population. I found traces of two distinct pre-Celtic races; the one with beautiful European features, probably Iberian, the other similar in appearance to the Samojeeds, perhaps cognate with the Finnic-Lappic races. Druidism originated first, probably, among the latter.