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The Lost Land. "Carmina Gadelica"

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germinating to a new spring. All these were broken into fragments, and trampled beneath the hoofs of a brutish multitude from the north. For a thousand years the silt and slime of that huge deluge overlay the budding germ of civilisation, and the naked horror of sensuality, ignorance, and martial law was laid bare. Good things of day began to droop and drowse, and night's black bird made wing for the leafy woods. To this day the wrecks and fragments of that noble empire are hurled against each other upon a restless and barren ocean of war or preparation of war. The gripe of the Vandal is still on the throat of Europe.

It is one of the colossal misapprehensions of history, and one which owes its origin to the uncandid egotism of our northern writers, that the exhausted populations of the south were refreshed and invigorated by the young warlike blood of the north. The Cimmerian regions, until they were touched by the quickening contact of the south, bred nought but ignorance, slow melancholy, and war. The peoples whom the "Father of History" beheld upon their knees worshipping the naked sword, seem to have been absolutely incapable of raising themselves without assistance out of the primæval welter. The renaissance, and modern civilization made their way through the silt and mire of that northern deluge, in spite of Cimmerian influences, and not through their help. Else how comes it that through the length and breadth of that vast Aryan land, from the Isles of Britain to the Great Wall of China and the extremities of Kamschatka, we light nowhere upon any trace of the civilization which, upon the theory of chances, their young warlike blood must at least somewhere have succeeded in establishing, somewhere the birth of a noble piety; somewhere the invention of letters, somewhere the existence of beautiful manners and some noble theory of life. We do not ask for any sublime ruins upon the Baltic comparable to those which fill men's eyes with tears as they travel through Southern Italy and along the shores of the Levant. We ask for no Republican Tartary, with multitudinous free states pouring their light like stars upon the dark turmoil of the mediæval night, with some pile-built Venice on the Sea of Aral, bright Lucifer of the starry flock. We crave but some slight proof of some slight indigenous civilization, some echo of a strain sweeter to the ear than the howl of the wolf and the war-cry of the Slave. We look and listen in vain. There is none. Whatever may have been the capacities of the northern peoples and their latent aptitudes, it was with the Turanian and Semitic peoples, southern races, that civilizations have had their origin.

So much may be fairly said, regarding critically the exact results of time, but yet we must remember that civilization, like culture, is by no means so great or all-important as we have been taught to believe. Civilization indeed seems to be nothing else than the art or faculty of directing into beneficent and lasting results those forces of human nature which have been generated by causes with which civilization has nothing in common, primal spontaneous energies of the human soul. The Edda of Snorro, the Niebelungen Lied, and the Irish bardic literature, especially that priceless portion of it which deals with the age of Cuculain and the Ultonian Knights of the Red Branch, would doubtless never have reached us at all, nor would the elements of which they are composed have been moulded into even the rudest epic

forms, but for influences stealing into the North of Europe from the civilized South.

And yet we perceive clearly in those literatures indications of an inherent magnanimity of spirit, a courage, a tenderness, a constancy and loyalty to the great and the beautiful, the knowledge of which that they did urge forward and sustain countless multitudes more satisfies the mind than half the results of civilization.

BASQUE AND CELT.

The Irish are a mixed race, the Basque and the Celt went to their formation. The original inhabitants of the country were Basque, but successive Celtic invasions obliterated the ancient Basque language, and altered the physical appearance of the people. In this respect the history of Ireland, and indeed of all North-Western Europe, resembles that of Greece. In the times of which Homer sang, the Greek nobles had yellow hair and blue eyes. At the time when the heroic literature of Ireland was composed, the Irish nobles had yellow hair and blue eyes. Athene seized Achilles by the "yellow locks," while she herself was a blue-eyed goddess. Crimthann, who held in check the rebellious sons of Cathair More for Conn of the Hundred Battles, was surnamed Culboy, "because the smelted gold was not yellower than his hair;" while the locks of Cuculain, the great Ultonian hero, were yellower than the blossom of the sovachy, which we call the St. John's wort. On the other hand, the historic Greeks resembled physically the Italians, and were, equally with them, surprised at the tall stature and fierce blue eyes of the northern warriors, while in Irish bardic literature the lower orders are represented as dark. The history of both countries was perhaps the same. The aborigines, a dark Turanian people, were conquered and submerged by successive Celtic invasions, until their language was lost in that of their conquerors. The purest type of Irish beauty has been produced by this blending of races. We often see in Ireland, not so often elsewhere, blue eyes fringed with lashes as black as jet, a pure clear skin through which glows the warmth of southern blood.

(To be Continued).

THE LOST LAND.

"Carmina Gadelica." By Alexander Carmichael. (Edinburgh: Norman Macleod. £3 3s.)

"The Long Island," writes the author, "is composed of a series of islands separately known as Barra, South Uist, Benbecula, North Uist, and Harris and Lewis. This chain is 119 miles in length, varying from a few yards to twenty-five miles in width. Viewed from the summit of its highest link, the Long Island chain resembles a huge artificial kite stretched along the green Atlantic Ocean, Lewis forming the body, the disjointed tail trending away in blue haze and terminating in Bearnarey of Barra."

Mr. Alexander Carmichael has spent close upon half a century in collecting the traditional poetry and old-world lore of this wild region. Two beautiful volumes, in white vellum binding, with rich adornments of old Gaelic art, are the outcome of these years of devoted labour. Cottars, shepherds, tinkers, fishermen, cobblers, servant-maids, and all sorts of humble and wandering people, have contributed to these pages and given up to be enshrined here what they had treasured of ancient poetry and myth. And it was, indeed, time that this work was done. The Atlantic on these Western Isles is even now going

over what was once dry land, tiled and dwelt on by men, and fragments of ancient masonry are dredged up by fishing boats off these mysterious coasts. Many of the spiritual creations of an old and singularly gifted race are already not less irrecoverably lost than the evidences of its material civilisation, and the waters of a more relentless ocean of forgetfulness will soon bury what is left. Many workers in the Celtic regions of the United Kingdom have been labouring to preserve the relics of the Celtic spirit, but none more successfully than Mr. Carmichael. Dealing in verse alone, and drawing nothing from books, but only from the lips of men, these volumes, with their fascinating introduction and notes, reveal nothing less than a whole lost world of culture, the deepest spiritual life of a race. The very titles of these sea-runes, weaving-runes, sleep-charms, love-charms, milking-croons, smooching-blessings, hunting-charms, herding-charms, invocations, incantations, spells and maledictions, are enough to bring before the reader a picture of the life that was lived on these remote islands of rock and moorland among the rushing tides of the Atlantic. And it is a life well worth knowing and preserving as far as that might be; for obscure, unlettered and isolated as these people were, they developed among themselves a traditional culture, brilliant, imaginative, full of grace and dignity, such as it would be hard to parallel among the records of any other primitive people.

It is impossible to give an idea of the contents of a treasure-house by showing a coin or two; but a few extracts may here be made from this great collection to illustrate the peculiar quality of popular Highland poetry. The following is a Herding-Blessing from a section of poems devoted to Labour:—

Travelling moorland, travelling townland,
Travelling mossland long and wide,
Be the herding of God the Son about your feet,
Safe and whole may ye home return,
Be the herding of God the Son about your feet,
Safe and whole may ye home return.

The sanctuary of Carmac and of Columba
Be protecting you going and coming,
And of the Milkmaid of the soft palms,
Bride of the clustering hair golden brown,
And of the Milkmaid of the soft palms,
Bride of the clustering hair golden brown.

These poems are characterised, when not evidently of a mystical nature, by great simplicity and directness of thought, but combined with these qualities one finds a lyrical passion that frequently expresses itself in phrases of striking beauty and intensity, together with that curious elaboration of metrical structure which has marked Gaelic verse for fully a thousand years. A stanza from a dirge for Glencoe which illustrates the last-named point may be quoted from Mr. Carmichael's Notes (II. 241):—

Tha caoidh us caoineadh am beinn a cheo,
Tha gul us glaothaich am beinn a cheo,
Tha bur us baoghal, tha murt us maoghal,
Tha fuil ga taomadh am beinn a cheo.

There is hardly a word in this stanza which has not

its relation of assonance with some other. Mr. Carmichael's literal English version may be appended:—

There is gloom and grief in the mount of mist,
There is weeping and calling in the mount of mist,
There is death and danger, there is maul and murder,

There is blood spilling in the mount of mist.

Perhaps the highest mark of lyrical exaltation is reached in a long poem, entitled "The Invocation of the Graces" (I. 7), beginning:—

I bathe thy palms In showers of wine, In the lustral fire, In the seven elements, In the juice of the rasps, In the milk of honey, And I place the nine pure choice graces In thy fair fond face.

How much the translation has lost may be seen when we place it beside the original, with its exquisite interweaving of chiming assonances:—

Ionnlaime do bhasa
Ann am frasa fiona,
Ann an liu nan lasa,
Ann an seachda siona,
Ann an sabh craobh,
Ann an bainne meala,

Us cuirime na naoi buaidhean glan caon,
Ann do ghruaidhean caomha geala.

Mr. Carmichael tells us that he has again and again laid down his self-imposed task "feeling unable to render the intense power and supreme beauty of the original Gaelic into adequate English." Yet his translation is indeed all that can be desired or expected in a prose version. A very few words we have indeed noted which seem strained or out of place, but on the whole Mr. Carmichael's English is simple, direct, and thoroughly poetic; and it carries much of the aroma of the original about it. No attempt at a metrical version, unless accompanied, as in Dr. Hyde's "Love-Songs of Connacht," by a literal prose rendering, would have been at all so satisfactory. The Gaelic is always printed side by side with the English.

(To be Continued).

FAIRIES AND FOLK-LORE.

I fear your correspondent "M." has made for himself an Irish peasant to order, and therefore is convinced that all his attributes are exactly as he thinks they are. I wonder has "M." been much in the West. One does not talk much to country people about fairies. If a countryman is asked whether he believes in them, he would deny it even if he did believe. About a month ago I was talking to a peasant whom I know well about old folk-lore and shanachies and such like, and I drew from him the admission that he firmly believed in fairies, and moreover that he saw one! "And if it wasn't a fairy what was it?" I could give no decisive answer, and that seemed to settle the question! So, the fairies are not "as dead as Brian Boru." The fact that, in the vernacular, they were called the "good people" is proof of the general belief. I have no doubt, however, that in those bygone days there were, as now, superior persons with "hard heads," who considered all that side of things nonsense and superstition.

D. M.

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