NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS.

The Religion of the Ancient Celts, by the Rev. J. A. MACCULLOCH, D.D.
(T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1911.)

MANY have essayed to write an account of the religious beliefs of the Ancient Celts, but such an undertaking is attended with manifold difficulties. We possess little definite information concerning the pantheon of the Gauls, and the Insular Celts were officially converted to Christianity several centuries earlier than the Teutonic peoples. The task is rendered still more unsatisfactory by the fact that most of our records of Welsh or Irish heathendom are preserved in MSS not older than the beginning of the twelfth century. The scantiness of the material naturally opens the door to speculation, and the tendency with previous writers on the subject has been to find solar or culture heroes *ad nauseam* in the surprising wealth of saga literature. Aware of such pitfalls, Dr MacCulloch has presented us with a very valuable handbook which contains much sane criticism of his predecessors, and gives in a convenient compass a variety of information never before collected in a single volume. The latter half of the work dealing with the Cult of the Dead, Nature- and Animal-Worship, and Magic, seems to me to be greatly superior to the earlier portion. However the general attitude towards these questions may change, time is hardly likely to add much to the information contained in these chapters. In the sections devoted to the Gods of Gaul, the Tuatha Dé Danann, and the Gods of the Brythons, the writer appears to fall too easily into the error which vitiates so much of the work of his predecessors. Chap. vii contains some drastic criticism of those scholars who regard Cuchulainn as a solar hero, but in the preceding chapter we find it stated that 'Taliesin was probably an old god of poetic inspiration' (p. 117), and again that 'we may postulate a local Arthur saga fusing an old Brythonic god with the historic sixth-century Arthur' (p. 119). Is this necessary? In default of better material than the Mabinogion it is almost vain to speculate on British mythology. In the case of Ireland the situation is somewhat different. But here history, mythology, and the synchronizing mania have produced a curious medley which still awaits a critical investigator. It seems to me unfortunate that Dr MacCulloch inclines to accept most features of Irish story as primitive. This leads him to make such statements as the following: 'They (the Fomorians) were probably beneficent gods of the aborigines, whom the Celtic conquerors regarded as generally evil' (p. 56). I very much doubt if at the time of the introduction of Christianity it would have been possible to distinguish between the gods of the Celts and those of the peoples they subdued. What is

then to be expected of the sources we possess, watered down as they must have been by successive generations of copyists? The author is, moreover, apt to be dogmatic as regards points on which there is as yet no general agreement, as when he states that 'the loss of *p* in Celtic must have occurred before 1000 B.C.' (p. 14).

A few details may be pointed out for correction in future editions.

On p. 14 there is a curious contradiction: 'The folk of a Celtic type . . . exhibit the same old Celtic characteristics—vanity, loquacity, excitability, *fickleness*, imagination, love of the romantic, *fidelity*.' On p. 28 we read: 'Neton, a war-god of the Accetani, has a name connected with Irish *nia*, warrior.' This is taken from Holder, but is improbable, as *nia* counts as a disyllable in early Irish poetry. On p. 32 Cernunnos is explained as 'the horned' from *cerna*. The author's authority, Holder, gives *cernu*-. The etymology of the name Cassiterides given on p. 39 is extremely doubtful, and should not be quoted as if it were well established. It is surely preposterous to state that 'the numerous Avons are named from Abnoba, goddess of the sources of the Danube' (p. 43), when Welsh *afon* and Irish *abann* are the ordinary term for river. In a footnote on p. 50 the euhemerizing process is represented as first appearing in the poems of Eochaidh hua Floinn (d. 1003), whereas it is found in verses by Maelmura (d. 887), and probably began still earlier. Dea Domnu (p. 59) is styled 'a Fomorian goddess of the deep, i. e. of the underworld and probably also of fertility' on the strength of an uncertain etymology. The equation of Irish Artigan with Gaulish Artigenos (p. 213) is philologically impossible. P. 244: it was hardly to be expected that so learned a writer would be led astray by such absurd popular etymologies as Eilean mo Righ, Eilean a Mhor Righ, to explain Eilean Maree (= Maelrubha).

The author's spelling of Welsh names is often at fault. Kulhwych (pp. 97, 107, 109, &c.) should everywhere be Kulhwch. Similarly on p. 98 Matholwch appears in place of the correct Matholwch. Yspadden (p. 97) for Yspaddaden. In *amæth* on p. 107, and in a number of similar words, *æ* is printed instead of the regular diphthong. The extraordinary form Maeloeohlen on p. 202 should be spelt either Mael-sechlainn or Malachy.

However, in spite of all these imperfections, Dr MacCulloch is greatly to be congratulated on producing a valuable work, for which Celtic scholars and students in other fields of learning will be very grateful.

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