



Folklore

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rfol20>

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Published online: 14 Feb 2012.

To cite this article: Miss Eleanor Hull (1910) The Ancient Hymn-Charms of Ireland, *Folklore*, 21:4, 417-446, DOI: [10.1080/0015587X.1910.9720538](https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.1910.9720538)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.1910.9720538>

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Folk-Lore.

TRANSACTIONS OF THE FOLK-LORE SOCIETY.

VOL. XXI.]

DECEMBER, 1910.

[No. IV.

THE ANCIENT HYMN-CHARMS OF IRELAND.

BY MISS ELEANOR HULL,

(Read at Meeting, March 16th, 1910.)

THE native hymns and eulogies of Irish saints are amongst the oldest in western Europe, some of them,—such as Sechnall's poem in praise of St. Patrick, St. Patrick's *Lorica*, the poem of Ultan to St. Bridget, and the *Altus Prosator* of St. Columba,—belonging, by every test of language and sentiment that can be applied to them, to the period to which tradition has ascribed them (*i.e.* the fifth to the seventh century).¹ Only a few of the Latin Church hymns of western Europe date so early as this, though those of Hilary of Poitiers (d. 368) and St. Ambrose (d. 397), who are reckoned by mediæval writers to be the earliest

¹The dates of the earliest Irish hymn-writers are,—St. Patrick, †461; St. Sechnall, contemporary of St. Patrick; St. Columba, †597; St. Ultan, †656; St. Broccan, †650; St. Cummain the Tall, †661-2; St. Cuchuimne, †746; St. Colman mac Ui Cluasaigh, †731; St. Ængus mac Tipraite, †745.

authors of Latin hymns, date from the middle and close of the fourth century. The use of hymns in the Offices of the Church was not encouraged by Rome; it only began to be admitted reluctantly in the twelfth century, but Hraban Maur (786-856) tells us that in his time the custom of singing hymns was elsewhere universal in the West.² In Irish monasteries the use of hymns in liturgical worship must have begun early, as we hear in Adamnan's *Vita S. Columbæ* (Lib. ii. 9) of a *hymnorum liber septimaniorum sancti Columbæ manu descriptus*, or book of hymns for weekly use; and in the same life we are told that, on the morning of St. Columba's death, hymns were sung in the Office at Iona, *hymnis matutinalibus terminatis* (Lib. iii. 23); also a tradition connected with St. Columba's *Altus Prosator* says that, in acknowledgment of the saint's gift to him of this fine hymn, Pope Gregory sent him in return, among other gifts, "a hymn for every night in the week." The story of Gregory's gift may be an invention, but the use of hymns in the daily Offices seems clear, and that it became the general custom of the Irish monastic Church we know from the hymns for the canonical hours in the eighth-century Antiphonary of Bangor and other early Irish service books.

But it is not of the use of hymns in Church worship that we have to speak here, but of hymns composed with quite another purpose and used in another way. Among the early hymns and religious songs that have come down to us are several composed as charms to ward off disease or plague, to protect the author or those who used the hymn from the perils of a journey, or in various ways to bring him good luck and freedom from danger. Among the twenty hymns or songs of Irish composition collected in the book known as the *Liber Hymnorum*,³ (of which two copies,

² In 563 the Council of Braga forbade the use of hymns, but this opposition was broken down at the Council of Toledo in 633, and Spain used them largely.

³ Edited by Barnard and Atkinson, 2 vols. (Henry Bradshaw Society, 1898).

differing only slightly, exist), ten were written expressly for the protection of the writer from some peril, bodily or spiritual, or are said to confer similar protection on those who recited them. In some cases, no doubt, their use as charms was a later result of the tradition of sacredness attaching to their authorship or age, but in others the authors themselves are believed to have conferred upon them their special charm-power. Just as the small hand-bells of the monks were used not only to call the hours of prayer but to exorcise evil spirits, so the charm-hymn, while nominally it commemorated some dead saint or eulogised a living one, had also the more practical quality of warding off disease or death from those who recited it. These hymns partook of the same character, and in many cases were thrown into the same form, as the pagan charms which they to a certain extent replaced.

The first extant Irish hymn is Sechnall's or Secundinus' Latin hymn in praise of St. Patrick, *Audite omnes*, a long hymn of which, in a fashion very common in early Ireland and not unknown elsewhere, every quatrain began with a successive letter of the alphabet. In order to get Patrick to listen to his poem, Sechnall is said to have suppressed the first stanza, which conveyed the fact that it was a eulogium on himself, and Patrick expressed himself so well pleased with the hymn that, at the close of its recitation, he offered Sechnall a variety of rewards for its composition, such as that as many sinful souls should go to heaven for the sake of this hymn as there were days in the year or threads in the hood of his cowl. Sechnall contemptuously rejected the terms. "What believer," said he, "would not take with him as many as that to heaven without the trouble of eulogising a man like thee at all?" Finally, St. Patrick, who had already promised a full table to everyone who will recite the hymn before dinner and a special protection to every new house in which it is recited on entering, raised his offers to a promise of heaven to everyone who

will recite it at lying down and at rising up. Even with that Sechnall was dissatisfied. "The hymn," he truthfully said, "is long, and not everyone will be able to remember it"; and, finally, St. Patrick compounded for the recitation of the last three stanzas only, which will convey a blessing equal to the whole. "*Deo gratias*," said the eulogist, satisfied at last. It would appear that the Irish mediæval memory was not to be trusted for long efforts, and that the convenient method of making three stanzas serve for the whole poem was one commonly resorted to, and we find indeed that in the Book of Mulling, in which this poem takes its place with other hymns in a special Office to invoke divine protection against that dreadful scourge of Ireland, the Yellow Plague, only three stanzas are used. The same thing occurs in this same service with regard to the hymns *Noli Pater* of St. Columba, that of Cummain Fota, *Celebra Juda*, and that of St. Hilary, *Hymnum dicat*, in all of which cases three stanzas serve for the whole hymn. This convenient plan of claiming the rewards of devotion with a minimum of effort is further shown by an abridgment of the Psalter found in the *Liber Hymnorum*, in which a collection of 365 verses is made to do duty for the whole Psalter, the Preface stating that the selection was made by Pope Gregory and bore his special commendation. That the promise of St. Patrick was fulfilled may be held to be proved by a story in the Life of St. Canice, in which a man is said to have been saved from demons by reciting the last three stanzas, "*nam vir ille tria capitula de hymno S. Patricii ante mortem . . . cantavit et per hoc liberatus est de manibus nostris.*"⁴

⁴ Colgan, *Tr. Thaum*, p. 210. In the case of the hymn *Christus in nostra*, only the three last verses are extant, all the remaining stanzas of this alphabetical hymn having apparently been forgotten. In the Basle Psalter (Ms. A. vii. 3) the hymn is described as *Xps in nostra*.

For other examples of the benefit derived from reciting three stanzas see "The Colloquy," *Silva Gadetica*, vol. ii., p. 202; Mugroin, abbot of Ili, is said to have been "skilled in the three verses."

A similar blessing is ascribed to the recitation of a Latin hymn of St. Ængus mac Tipraite (†745) to St. Martin, which was a "protection or charm against every disease, and secured heaven for reciting it on lying down and rising up," besides ensuring to a person who recited it before visiting a prince or a synod personal reverence and respect.

Two hymns of extraordinary richness and melody,—viz., that ascribed to S. Cuchuimne (†746?), "Hymn to the Virgin," and that of St. Colman Mac Murchon, Abbot of Moville, (†731) in praise of St. Michael,—have also the character of personal charms, here intended solely for the benefit of the composers. The object of the former was, (as we learn from the preface), to free him from the evil life he was leading, or to smooth the difficulties of his studies; while the latter was composed, according to the guess of the writer, for the relief of the three sons of Murchu of Connaught, a bishop and two priests, who were making pilgrimage across the Ictian Sea (*i.e.* the English Channel) and who were overtaken by a tempest and thrown upon an island, where a great famine fell upon them. St. Michael was the special guardian of the Irish against disease, and was, in general, regarded by the Celts as a protector against demons of all kinds. In an Irish tract we read,—“the three hostages that were taken on behalf of the Lord for warding off every disease from the Irish are Peter the Apostle, Mary the Virgin, and Michael the Archangel.”⁵ The idea that these three august personages were held in hostage by the Deity for the safety of the people is peculiarly Irish. These two hymns, though written in Latin, are specimens of mediæval Irish verse at its best and richest. All the intricate, native-born systems of rhyme, correspondence, assonance, and alliteration are brought to bear to produce poems of that luxurious and gorgeous quality which Ireland alone produced at this period, and which was, in the combination of its features and the care bestowed upon it,

⁵ “Second Vision of Adamnan,” ed. Stokes, *Rev. Celt.* vol. xii., sec. 19.

peculiar to Irish verse structure of the best period. Dr. Atkinson, in writing of these hymns, draws attention to the rich trisyllabic rhymes occurring throughout, the double consonantal alliterations in each line, and the correspondences between the succeeding lines. "These pieces," he says, "are poems in Latin written in popular metre by Irish poets; the prosody of the classical language is replaced by accent and rhyme, and the rhymes in each case are rich and perfect."⁶

The largest section of the charm-hymns is directed to the attainment of personal benefits, but one or two were apparently used for the purpose of preventing public calamities. Such is the short hymn in abrupt, rough Latin ascribed to St. Columba, beginning *Noli Pater indulgere*, which was primarily intended as a protection against fire and lightning, but which appears to have been used in a penitential office against the Yellow Plague, which decimated Ireland at frequent intervals during the seventh century. According to an ancient prophecy, a visitation of Fire and Plague was to come in connection with St. John's Day, and special Offices were drawn up to stave off the calamity. Professor Lawlor identifies this hymn⁷ as one of those occurring in the office of the *Book of Mulling*, and also in the *Second Vision of Adamnan*, both of which were penitential acts in view of the visitation of Plague, and Dr. Bernard

⁶ The Hymn of St. Cuchimne, *In laudem S. Mariae*, begins:—

Ca'nte | mus in | om'ni | die | Con'ci | nentes | va'ri | e'
Con'cla | man'tes | de'o | dig'num | ym'num | sanc'tæ | Ma'ri | æ'.

As an example of St. Colman's hymn to St. Michael we take the first stanza and the last stanza but one:—

In trinitate spes mea fixa non in oimne
et archangelum deprecor Michaellem nomine

.

Æterna possint præstare regis regni aulia
ut possideam cum Christo paradisi gaudia.

⁷ Lawlor, *Book of Mulling*, cap. vii.

is disposed to accept his verdict. Connected also with the visitation of the Plague is St. Colman's curious Irish hymn, with Latin phrases intermixed, *Sen Dé* ("Blessing of God"), which is said to have been composed by St. Colman mac Ui Cluasaigh, a scholar from Cork, and by his fellow-students, to save themselves from that visitation of the Yellow Plague that occurred in the time of King Aedh Slane (c. 600). According to the Preface, which is amply supported by other authorities, the pestilence "ransacked all Ireland, and only one man in three was left alive." Colman and his fellow-students took to flight before it, and sought refuge on an island, according to the universal Irish belief that pestilence could not cross the water, and that at a distance of "nine waves" from the shore they were safe. A most curious story in one of the prefaces to this hymn relates that this visitation of the *Buide Connaill* or Yellow Plague came in consequence of a struggle between the oligarchy and democracy, owing to the great increase in the population, which caused a scarcity of agricultural land. The nobles of Ireland, supported by three well-known abbots, and with their two joint-kings at their head, fearing a famine, assembled together and prayed and "fasted" before God to get the population reduced.⁸ The plague came in answer to their prayers, but it is satisfactory to note that, instead of merely cutting off the superfluous common people, as the combined church and state of the day desired, it selected as its first victims every one of the important personages who had demanded its aid.⁹ This long hymn, to which there are various

⁸ In the Life of St. Gerald of Mayo, he is said to have disapproved of the action of the abbots, and refused to join with them.

⁹ The worst outbreaks of the *Buide Connaill* or "Great Death," as the Yellow Plague was variously called, occurred in Ireland in the years 543 and 562, and again during 664-669. During this later outbreak the two joint-kings of Tara died, and the Abbots of Clonard, Fore, Clannacnois, and other monasteries. Four Abbots of Bangor, Co. Down, succumbed to it in succession.

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specially Irish additions, invites the aid of the saints of the Old and New Testaments in turn in a sort of Litany, and relates Biblical instances of deliverances, such as Noah from the flood, Lot from fire, Daniel from the lions, etc., in the regular charm form. The last of these miscellaneous charm-hymns of which I shall make mention is St. Columba's great poem the *Altus Prosator*, which conferred on those who recited it "many graces," freedom from famine and nakedness and strife, the protection of angels, and safety from the attacks alike of earthly foes and of demons, with the certainty that no death should befall the reciter save ordinary death in a bed, or "death on pillow" (*absque pretiosa*) as the writer of the preface puts it. This long alphabetical hymn, well known in the Gallican Church, and long ascribed to Prosper of Aquitaine,¹⁰ may be called the Paradise Lost of mediæval Ireland. It begins by a recitation of the glories of the Trinity, and describes the creation of the Angels, their nine grades and their fall, the creation of the earth and man, the praises of the Hosts of Heaven (meaning here the Angels), the creation of the clouds and sea, rain and rivers, the foundations of the earth, hell, and the worship of the under-world, the Garden of Eden, the thunders of Sinai, future judgment, and the last things.

The cosmogonic speculations in this remarkable hymn are closely akin to those of *The Book of Enoch*, a book which, though lost until quite recent times elsewhere,

It was followed by a great mortality among the cattle, which brought about a famine all over the country. A marginal note states that the man who was allotted to compose lines 41-43, which are in a different metre, died of the plague.

¹⁰ A large portion of the *Altus* was incorporated by Hraban Maur (786-856) into a long poem beginning *Æterne rerum conditor*. It is found in four Mss. among works attributed to St. Prosper of Aquitaine (403-465). In three cases the hymn follows directly on the *De vita contemplatiua*, a work now usually attributed to Julianus Pomerius (c. 500), though formerly believed to be by Prosper. These copies contain no preface, titles to the stanzas, or glosses.

seems to have been well known in the mediæval period in Ireland. The idea still prevalent in Ireland that the meddling and malicious fairies are the angels who fell with Lucifer, and who were on their way down to hell when our Lord held up his hand, which caused them to remain stationary wherever they happened to be at the time, seems to find an echo in this poem, which says that "the spaces of air are closely crowded with a disordered crew of rebel satellites, held invisible lest man should become infected by their evil examples and their crimes, if there were no wall or screen between him and them." The great age of the composition, and its probable Irish origin, are shown by what the Editors, Drs. Bernard and Atkinson, call its "rude and barbarous though vigorous Latinity," by its use of an old Latin Biblical text as its foundation, and by the employment of those strange and bizarre Latin words found in the *Hisperica famina*, and peculiar, if not to Ireland alone, to the Celtic districts of S.W. Britain and Ireland. The title of the first stanza, speaking of Columcille as "the latest and noblest of Ireland's prophets," seems also to suggest a date close to Columba's own time, for these titles were added later than the composition of the poem itself.

None of the poems that we have hitherto passed in review, though composed as charms or believed by later reciters to contain definite charm-power, can be said to show any connection in form or style with the Pagan or native charms which they displaced; they were formed upon another and foreign ecclesiastical model. But we come now to a group which, whether written in Latin or in Irish, show a marked similarity to the native charms common to this day throughout Ireland and the West of Scotland. At the head of this group of native-born charm-poems we may place St. Patrick's *Lorica*. The word *lorica* or *lurica*, the corselet or breastplate, though

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a Latin word, no doubt adopted from St. Paul's expression *induti lorica[m] justitiæ* (*Ephesians*, vi., 14), is one found in the body of several of the hymn-charms we have been considering, and it forms the express title of those we are now about to consider. It became the usual word used to express a poem of which the recitation was designed to form a protection against some explicit evil, or to give an indulgence to the reciter. It is quite possible that the poems were originally written in the form of a breastplate, just as charms in the form of crosses, circles, and squares with cross lines, are found in manuscripts and in written charms still in use.¹¹ Six of these *Loricas*, or "Hymns of the *Lorica*" as they are sometimes more justly styled, have up to the present been printed. They are—

(1) The *Lorica* of St. Patrick.

(2) The *Lorica* of Lodgen, so called in the Book of Carne; called also the *Lorica* of Laidcend mac Buith bannaig (in *Leabhar Breac*), and of Lathacan Scotigena (in Darmstadt or Köln MS.); usually known as the *Lorica* of Gillas or Gildas.

(3) The *Lorica* of Columcille; edited from Yellow Book of Lecan, by Dr. O'Donovan, for the Misc. of the Celtic Society.

(4) The *Lorica* of Mugron, Abbot of Hi or Iona, †980; edited by Dr. Kuno Meyer from Ms. Rawl. B. 512, (*Hib. Min.*, Anecdota Oxon., 1894).

(5) *Lorica* of Leyden; edited by Dr. V. H. Friedel in *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, vol. ii., p. 64.

(6) *Lorica* from MS. E³₁₆, p. 237, Royal Irish Academy; printed in Bernard and Atkinson's edition of the *Liber Hymnorum*, vol. ii., notes, p. 210.

A good deal of attention has been bestowed upon these poems in recent years on account of the similarities which several of them show to the tract known as *Hisperica*

¹¹ See, for example, "The Circle of St. Columcille" in Ms. Cott. *Vitell*, E, xviii., fol. 13.b, and another charm for discovering a thief quoted by Cockayne, *Saxon Leechdoms*, vol. i., pp. 395-396; Hyde, *Religious Songs of Connacht*, vol. ii., p. 32.

famina,¹² a long piece written in that artificial and pompous style of Latin which seems to have been cultivated in Irish monasteries, or monasteries having in them a strong Irish element, in the seventh and eight centuries. Zimmer places its use even earlier, and this opinion seems to be borne out by the occurrence of similar words in these early *Loricas*.

The question of their archaic and singular linguistics, however, is not one which concerns us here, unless it could be proved that these bizarre forms were of the same kind and had arisen out of the same causes which tend in charms generally to preserve words whose meaning is forgotten, or which have become corrupted through their usage by persons who did not understand their meaning. In any case we know that in Ireland there existed one or more special and artificial kinds of the native tongue called *bearla féini* or *berla na filed* ("poet's speech") employed only by poets and brehons, and it is possible that similar vagaries of language may have been thought by the students of the cloisters to be specially suitable to certain kinds of composition. So far as is at present known, the existing examples of it are confined to one long prose treatise, the *Hisperica famina* itself, chiefly occupied with a description of natural objects, the heavens, fire, the sea, the firmament, the winds, etc., subjects

¹² The *Hisperica famina* was first published by A. Mai in the fifth vol. of *Classici Auctores*, pp. 479-500, from *Cod. Vat. (Reg. lxxi.)*; see also Migne, *Pat. Lat.*, vol. xc., pp. 1187-96. The latest edition is that of F. J. Jenkinson (1908). It is of unknown authorship. Mai and Thurneysen consider that the examples all hail from Irish sources. Zimmer believes that they were written in some S.W. British or Armorican monastery that had a strong Irish element in it. For a discussion of the whole subject see Zimmer's *Nennius Vindictus* (App., pp. 291-342); Thurneysen, *Revue Celtique*, vol. xi., pp. 89-90, and "Gloses Bretonnes," *ibid.*, p. 86. The St. Omer poem was published by Bethmann in *Zeitschrift für Deutsches Alterthum*, vol. v. (1845), p. 206. See also Stowasser's *Wiener Studien*, pp. 9., 309-322, and his "Incerta auctores Hisp. Fam. denuo edidit et explanavit," *Vindob.* 1887 (*Programm des Franz-Joseph's Gymnasiums*, 1888-1889). Thurneysen's edition (above) gives Stowasser's readings of the poem and the Breton glosses.

which seem to connect it with St. Columba's *Altus Prosator*, where some of the same obscure terms are found; an Alphabetical Poem, (*i.e.* that found in the St. Omer Ms., no. 666); and the *Loricas* of Gildas and St. Patrick.¹³ Hence it may be looked upon as being confined in its use to poetic or oratorical flights, a sort of monastic euphuism or *bearla féini*.¹⁴

To us it is more important to notice that the structure of these poems, (or of most of them), tends to fall into a fixed form. Four out of the six known to us begin in the same way, with an invocation of the Trinity; after this opening, the *Lorica* of Gildas (or *Lodgen*, as it is also called), and the *Lorica* of Leyden proceed to a lengthy and extraordinarily minute enumeration of the parts of the human body, from head to foot, for which protection is invoked, and the pieces wind up by calling on angels, archangels, cherubim and seraphim, thrones, dominions, and powers, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, virgins, and confessors to defend the reciter from all ills. The *Lorica* of the Royal Irish Academy replaces the list of the parts of the body by an enumeration of the perils from which the author prays to be preserved, and its list of saints whose aid is appealed to is simpler; it does not take the fixed form of the "9 grades" of heavenly powers,¹⁵

¹³ The *Folium Luxemburgense* fragment is an enlarged repetition of part of the *Hisperica famina* with a glossary of difficult Latin words.

¹⁴ A poet named Teigue O'Rody wrote in the year 1700,—“Irish is the most difficult and copious language in the world, having five dialects, viz., the common Irish, the poetic, the lawyer's dialect, the abstractive and separative dialects: each of these five dialects being as copious as any other language, so that a man may be perfect in one, two, three, or four of these dialects and not understand even a word of the other”; (see O'Reilly, *Dictionary*, Supplement, *s.v.* *bearla féini*).

¹⁵ Eight of the nine grades are mentioned in each of these *Loricas*, one (different in each) being omitted. They are in the usual order. The idea of the nine orders of angels was adopted in the Western Church from the homilies of Gregory the Great (c. 600); it was originally introduced through the Greek mysticism of the writings of Dionysius in the fifth century.

such as is found in the two *Loricas* of which we have spoken. Instead it calls for protection upon

“Every (blessing) without pain, every pure prayer,
Every ladder that reaches heaven shall be an aid to me,
Every good saint who suffered on the Surface of the Earth,
Every chaste disciple who was tortured for Christ,
Every meek, every gentle, every candid, every pure person,
Every confessor, every soldier who lives under the sun,
Every venerable patron saint who should reach me for luck,
Everyone, gentle or simple, every saint who has suffered the
Cross.”

The *Lorica* of St. Patrick is more complicated and broken in its structure, and as a devotional poem it is far finer than any of the others. It is divided into seven parts, five of them connected together by the repetition of the word *Atomriug* (“I raise myself” or “I arise”), the final portions being preceded by the solemn invocation of all the forces hitherto appealed to, to come to the aid of the reciter

“Against incantations of false prophets
Against black laws of paganism
Against false laws of heresy
Against deceits of idols
Against spells of women and smiths and druids
Against all knowledge that is forbidden to the human soul.”

This piece both begins and closes with an invocation of the Trinity, which is preceded at the end by the well-known passage appealing for the aid and presence of Christ on every hand, and on all with whom the reciter is brought into contact.

In the earlier divisions, instead of a banal list of the members of the body, such as we had in the previous *Loricas*, we get a short litany of the events of our Lord's life, succeeded by a recitation of the grades of angels and confessors. After this we have a short group of phrases appealing for the aid of the elements; for the

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"Might of Heaven, brightness of the Sun, whiteness of snow, splendour of fire, speed of light, swiftness of Wind, depth of Ocean, stability of Earth, firmness of Rock," to intervene in his behalf.

The remaining passage is a fine invocation of the power of God to exert itself in different ways against

"Snares of demons, allurements of vices,
Solicitations of nature,
Against every person who wishes me ill,
Far and near, alone and in a crowd. . . ."

"The Might of God for my piloting
The Wisdom of God for my guidance
The Eye of God for my foreseeing
The Ear of God for my hearing
The Word of God for my speech
The Hand of God for my guardianship
The Path of God for my precedence
The Shield of God for my protection
The Host of God for my salvation."¹⁶

Here we have the complete charm-form carried over into the Christian hymn, with its iteration of the same idea with slight changes of wording. Let me illustrate this by pointing to a charm, Christian also in sentiment but going behind the Christian period in its form, from the Western Isles of Scotland, which is almost identical with parts of this hymn of St. Patrick:—

"Rune before Prayer.

I am bending my knee
In the Eye of the Father who created me,
In the Eye of the Son who purchased me,
In the Eye of the Spirit who cleansed me,
In friendship and affection.
Through thine own Anointed One, O God,
Bestow upon us fulness in our need,
Love towards God,

¹⁶ *Liber Hymnorum*, vol. i., pp. 133-135; vol. ii., pp. 49-51.

The Affection of God,
The Smile of God,
The Wisdom of God,
The Grace of God,
The Fear of God,
And the Will of God
To do in the World of the Three,
As angels and saints
Do in heaven ;
Each shade and light,
Each day and night,
Each time in kindness,
Give Thou us Thy Spirit."¹⁷

Here is another beautiful Highland charm called the *Ora nam buadh* or "Invocation of the Graces." It has a strong pagan note :—

" 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.
The grace of form,
The grace of voice,
The grace of fortune,
The grace of goodness,
The grace of wisdom,
The grace of charity,
The grace of choice maidenliness,
The grace of whole-souled loveliness,
The grace of goodly speech. . .
A shade art thou in the heat,
A shelter art thou in the cold,
Eyes art thou to the blind,

¹⁷ *Carmina Gadelica*, vol. i., p. 3.

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A staff art thou to the pilgrim,
An isle art thou at sea,
A fortress art thou on land,
A well art thou in the desert,

Health art thou to the ailing. . .

Thou art the joy of all joyous things,
Thou art the light of the beam of the sun,
Thou art the door of the chief of hospitality,
Thou art the surpassing star of guidance,
Thou art the step of the deer of the hill,
Thou art the step of the steed of the plain,
Thou art the grace of the swan of swimming,

Thou art the loveliness of all lovely desires,
The lovely likeness of the Lord
Is in thy pure face,
The loveliest likeness that
Was upon earth."¹⁸

The Gaelic of part of this last *rann* is :—

*Is tu sonas gach ní eibhinn,
Is tu solus gath na greine,
Is tu doras flath na feile,
Is tu corra reul an iuil,
Is tu ceum feidh nan ardu,
Is tu ceum steud nam blaru,
Is tu seimh eal an t-snamhu
Is tu ailleagan gach run.*

This rhythmic iteration of the idea may be found in numberless runes and charms ; it is often really beautiful in its effect and in its thought, and no doubt tended to soothe both the reciter and the person to be benefited by the charm. The tendency of all charms everywhere is towards the repetition of phrases, but among the Gaelic-speaking peoples this tendency is specially marked.

Here is a prayer used in the Highlands :—

“O God,
In my deeds,
In my words,

¹⁸ *Carmina Gadelica*, vol. i., pp. 7-11.

In my wishes,
In my reason,
And in the fulfilling of my desires,
In my sleep,
In my dreams,
In my repose,
In my thoughts,
In my heart and soul always,
May the blessed Virgin Mary,
And the promised Branch of Glory dwell,
Oh! in my heart and soul always,
May the blessed Virgin Mary,
And the fragrant Branch of Glory dwell."¹⁹

Another, an "Exorcism of the Evil Eye," runs:—

"Power of wind I have over it,
Power of wrath I have over it,
Power of fire I have over it,
Power of thunder I have over it,
Power of lightning I have over it,
Power of storms I have over it,
Power of moon I have over it,
Power of sun I have over it,
Power of stars I have over it,
Power of firmament I have over it,
Power of the heavens
And of the worlds I have over it."²⁰

Here is a musical little prayer from Connemara, which reminds us of St. Patrick's *Lorica*:—

The Will of God be done by us,
The Law of God be kept by us,
Our Evil Will controlled by us,
Our tongue in check be held by us,
Repentance timely made by us,
Christ's passion understood by us,
Each sinful crime be shunned by us,

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. i., p. 27.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. ii., p. 45.

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Much on the end be mused by us,
And Death be blessed found by us,
With angels' music heard by us,
And God's high praises sung to us,
For ever and for aye."²¹

I would now take the passage in St. Patrick's *Lorica* which we have hitherto passed over.

"Christ with me, Christ before me,
Christ behind me, Christ in me,
Christ under me, Christ over me,
Christ to the right of me, Christ to the left of me,
Christ in lying down, Christ in sitting, Christ in rising up,
Christ in the heart of every person who may think of me,
Christ in the mouth of every one who may speak to me
Christ in every eye that may look on me!
Christ in every ear that may hear me!"

and compare it with a similar passage in the *Lorica* ascribed to Mugron, Abbot of Iona, in the tenth century, which shows either that he copied directly from St. Patrick's *Lorica* or, as is more probable, adopted a widely familiar form of phraseology:—

"The Cross of Christ with me in my good luck, in my bad luck;
The Cross of Christ against every strife, abroad and at home;
The Cross of Christ in the East with courage, the Cross of
Christ in the West at sunset;
South and North without any stay, the Cross of Christ with-
out any delay;
The Cross of Christ above towards the clear sky, the Cross of
Christ below towards earth.
There shall come no evil nor suffering to my body or to my soul,
The Cross of Christ at my sitting, the Cross of Christ at my
lying;

²¹ Hyde, *Religious Songs of Connacht*, vol. ii., pp. 12-13. For similar Irish charms see Lady Wilde, *Ancient Cures, Charms, and Usages of Ireland*, pp. 9-51; for Scottish charms see Wm. Mackenzie's "Gaelic Incantations, Charms, and Blessings of the Hebrides," *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, March 1892.

The Cross of Christ all my strength, till we reach Heaven's King!"²²

Or we may compare it with St. Columba's hymn *In te Christe*:—

"*Christus redemptor gentium, Christus amator uirginum,
Christus fons sapientium, Christus fides credentium,
Christus lorica militum, Christus creator omnium,
Christus salus uiuentium, et uita morientium,
Coronauit exercitum nostrum cum turba martirum, etc., etc.*"

and also with the "Beltine (or May Day) Blessing" in the Hebrides, in which the idea is identical—

". . . The strength of the Triune our shield in distress,
The strength of Christ, His peace and his Pasch,
The strength of the Spirit, Physician of health,
And of the priceless Father, the King of Grace . . .
Be the Cross of Christ to shield us roundward,
Be the Cross of Christ to shield us upward,
Be the Cross of Christ to shield us downward,
Accepting our Beltine blessing from us,
Accepting our Beltine blessing from us."²³

It may be said that these are all Christian poems, and not in any sense pagan; but in the charm and incantation the world of thought is pagan and Christian at once; there is no possible line of demarcation between them. In the fifth century St. Patrick, or the composer of the ancient *Lorica* ascribed to him, invokes the forces of the elements and the power of God to intervene between him "and every fierce merciless force that may come against body or soul":

"Against incantations of false prophets

"Against black laws of paganism. . . .

"Against spells of women, smiths, and druids,

"Against all knowledge that is forbidden the human soul."

²² Bernard and Atkinson, *Liber Hymnorum*, vol. ii., p. 212. Translated from two Mss. in Royal Irish Academy $\frac{23}{g. 4}$ and $\frac{23}{g. 5}$ by Professor E. J. Gwynn.

²³ *Carmina Gadelica*, vol. i., p. 189.

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and in a prayer or rune said to this day in the Island of Aran in Galway when going on a journey, the power of Mary and Brigit is sought to be placed—

“Between us and the Fairy Hosts,
 “Between us and the Hosts of the Wind,
 “Between us and the drowning Water,
 “Between us and heavy temptations,
 “Between us and the shame of the world,
 “Between us and the death of captivity.” ²⁴

A Highland rhyming prayer still in use asks for safeguard

“From every brownie and ban-shee,
 From every evil wish and sorrow,
 From every nymph and water-wraith,
 From every fairy-mouse and grass-mouse,
 From every troll among the hills,
 From every siren hard pressing me,
 From every ghoul within the glens,
 Oh ! save me till the end of my day,
 Oh ! save me till the end of my day.” ²⁵

Perhaps the most curious, as it is certainly one of the rudest and most pagan in tone of all the ancient hymn-charms of Ireland, is the *Lorica* ascribed to Columcille from *Leabhar Buidhe* or the Yellow Book of Lecan, a fourteenth-century Ms. It is said to have been composed by him as a “Path Protection” when, after his condemnation at Tara, he fled alone into Donegal to seek the protection of his own powerful clan of the O'Donnells against King Dermuid of Tara. It is promised “to give protection to any person who will repeat it going on a journey.” It breathes that extraordinarily fatalistic spirit which permeates Irish pagan literature and which probably the introduction of Christianity accentuated rather than dispelled. In it we

²⁴ *Religious Songs of Connacht*, vol. ii., p. 53.

²⁵ *Carmina Gadelica*, vol. i., p. 31.

have an enumeration of various methods of foretelling or divination against which the author prays to be protected. The meaning of some of the special terms is doubtful.

“Our destiny is not with the *sreod*,
Nor with the bird on the top of the twig,
Nor in the trunk of the gnarled tree,
Nor with a *sordan* hand in hand,
Better is He in whom we trust,
The Father, the One, and the Son. . . .
I adore not the voice of birds
Nor the *sreod* nor a *sén* in this life,
Nor a son, nor chance, nor woman ;
My Druid is Christ, the Son of God,
Christ, Son of Mary, the Great Abbot,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
My lands are with the King of Kings,
My order is with Kells and Moen” (Moone in Co. Kildare.)²⁶

Though in most extant and living charms Christ and Christian Saints have replaced the older pagan allusions and names, it is undoubted that many of the charms themselves have come down from a period earlier than Christianity. In some cases this can be traced directly. For instance, the charm for cure of a sprain of a horse or the human foot, still familiar in the Highlands,—

“Christ went out
In the morning early,
He found the legs of the horses
In fragments soft ;
He put marrow to marrow,
He put pith to pith,
He put bone to bone,
He put membrane to membrane,” etc.,²⁷

²⁶ Ed. J. O'Donovan, *Miscellany of the Irish Archaeological Society*.

²⁷ *Carmina Gadelica*, vol. ii., pp. 21, 14, 19, etc.; William Mackenzie, “Gaelic Incantations, Charms, and Blessings of the Hebrides”; and cf. Lady Wilde, *Ancient Cures, Charms, and Usages of Ireland*, p. 11, where it is St. Agnes who falls.

is the famous Merseburg charm for a lamed horse. But in the tenth-century German charm it is Balder's horse that falls, and it is Odin who effects the cure. The incantation is said on a black woollen thread with nine knots upon it, bound over the sprained limb. In a true Gaelic charm we never find such special introductions as that with which this cure begins.²⁸ In some very ancient charms, such as those found in the Irish manuscripts at St. Gall monastery, Switzerland, we find the names occurring of the great Irish pagan deities Goibniu, the smith or Vulcan of Celtic mythology, and Diancecht, the physician or healer, who was fabled to dip dead men in his Cauldron of Renovation and restore them to life and health again. "Very sharp is Goibniu's science; let Goibniu's goad go out before Goibniu's goad," says the incantation to extract a thorn; and in a charm against various ailments the afflicted patient says,—“May that be made whole whereon the salve of Diancecht goes. I put my trust in the salve which Diancecht left with his people.”

In a charm against wounds and poisons recorded by Lady Wilde, we find “The blood of one dog, the blood of many dogs, the blood of the hound of Fliethas—these I invoke. . . . I invoke the three daughters of Fliethas against the serpent,” etc.²⁹ But this kind of direct allusion or appeal to pagan deities seems to be rare. They have been ousted, and their place and duties are amply filled by certain all-powerful saints,—St. Michael, St. Columba, and St. Brigit. It is singular how frequently the names of these last two saints, the male and female agencies, occur in Gaelic charms, Irish and Scottish. They are the great necromancers of the Gael, gifted with all powers of poetry, of prophecy, and of healing. In St. Bride's or Brigit's case the matter seems fairly well explained by remembering

²⁸ Cf. K. Meyer in *Quarterly Review*, July, 1903, p. 27; George Henderson, *Norse Influences on Celtic Scotland*, p. 72.

²⁹ *Ancient Legends etc. of Ireland*, 1887, vol. ii., p. 85.

that, behind the Christian Brigit of Kildare, there lay another Brigit, more powerful and awful, the great triune goddess of Wisdom of pagan Gaeldom, presiding alike over poetry, medicine, and the arts.⁸⁰ She it is who seems to have given her name to the Brigantes, the tribe of Brigit; she whose connection with light and fire and healing powers were transferred over to her Christian successor "Brigit the ever-good woman, the golden flame, sparkling, the radiant fiery sun," the maiden who, on a wet day when she had been herding her sheep on the Curragh of Kildare, dried her cloak by hanging it "indoors across a sunbeam";⁸¹ she whose sacred fire, perpetually watched by forty virgins, might never be extinguished. Both in the ancient hymns and the later runes and charms, she has become everywhere confused with the Virgin Mary, and is represented as the Mother, or more generally the Foster-Mother, of our Lord; in Ireland she is commonly called "The Mary of the Gael."

She becomes thus naturally the guardian of the household and the hearth, associated with the fireside, and all this idea conveys of health and home. Many runes assign to Brigit and to the Virgin Mary a distinct share and place in the watching of the home. In the special prayers for "covering" the fire or "sparing it" as it is called (*i.e.* the nightly making up of the turf so that a seed of flame might be preserved until morning), that prevail everywhere in Ireland and in the Hebrides, Brigit or Bride

⁸⁰ In *Corniac's Glossary*, (ed. Stokes, p. 23, art. "Brigit"), she is described as Brigit, a poetess, the female sage or mistress of wisdom, the goddess whom poets adored on account of the greatness of her protecting care, whence she is called the goddess of poets. She is daughter of the Dagda, and her two sisters are Brigit the woman-leech or physician, and Brigit mistress of smith-craft or metal work. This is an interesting example of the breaking up of a triad of qualities into three personalities. So great and all-pervading was she that "with all Irishmen every goddess was called Brigit."

⁸¹ Hymn "Brigit be bithmaith," *Liber Hymnorum*, vol. ii., pp. 39, 42.

is represented as guarding the centre of the house, (*i.e.* the place of the hearth), and the Blessed Virgin the top or ends of it.

“As I save this fire to-night
Even so may Christ save me.
On the top of the house let Mary,
Let Bride in its middle be.
Let eight of the mightiest angels
Round the throne of the Trinity
Protect this house and its people
Till the dawn of the day shall be.”⁸²

This is the Innismaan version from the Aran Isles, Co. Galway. The Cork version is practically identical.

“I save this fire
As kind Christ saves.
Mary at the two ends of the house,
And Brigit in the middle,
All that there are of angels
And of saints in the city of graces
Protecting and keeping
The folk of the house till day.”⁸³

In the Highlands and Western Isles the idea is almost the same, whether for kindling or for “smoorling” the fire, as the “covering” is here called (*beannchadh smalaidh*).

“Kindling the Fire.

I will raise the hearth-fire
As Mary would.
The encirclement of Brigit and of Mary
On the fire and on the floor,
And on the household all.
Who are they on the bare floor?
John and Peter and Paul.
Who are they by my bed?

⁸² Hyde, *Religious Songs of Connacht*, vol. ii., p. 47.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

The lovely Brigit and her Fosterling.
Who are those watching over my sleep?
The fair loving Mary and her Lamb.
Who is that anear me?
The King of the sun, He himself it is.
Who is that at the back of my head?
The Son of Life without beginning, without time.”⁸⁴

So, in the Evening Prayer beginning with the familiar phrase—

“I lie down with God, and may God lie down with me,
That I may not lie down with evil
And that the evil may not lie with me,”

we get the same idea of Brigit being in the centre and the Virgin at the head of the sleeper.

“The girdle of Brigit round my middle,
And the mantle of Mary round my head.
Come, O young Michael, and take my hand
And make my peace with the Son of the Graces.
If there be any evil thing at all in wait for me
I put the Son of God between myself and itself.
From tonight until a year from tonight
And tonight itself,
And for ever!
And for aye!”⁸⁵

In connection with these Sleeping or Night Prayers and runes it may not be out of place to point out that the quatrain known as the White Paternoster, familiar all over Europe, is used also in Ireland. Dr. Hyde gives two examples of it,—

“Four corners to my bed,
Four angels round it spread.
If I die within the night,
God receive me into light.”⁸⁶

⁸⁴ *Carmina Gadelica*, vol. i., p. 235.

⁸⁵ (From Innismaan, Co. Galway), *Religious Songs of Connacht*, vol. ii., pp. 28-36; cf. *Carmina Gadelica*, vol. i., pp. 81-89, 95.

⁸⁶ *Religious Songs of Connacht*, vol. ii., p. 217.

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This is a Mayo version. Another from Aran is more familiar,—

“Four posts around my bed,
Four angels have it spread,
Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
Keep me, O God, till day shall dawn”

which is very nearly the common English version.⁸⁷

The immense number of native words in Irish and Scotch Gaelic relating to spells, charms, and divination show the prevalence of these ideas and the care with which one charm was distinguished from another. The most interesting to us is the spell called *faeth-fiadha*, (modern Irish, *feth-fia*, Scotch Gaelic, *fath-fidhe* or *fd' fith*), the name given to St. Patrick's *Lorica* and usually translated “The Deer's Cry,” in allusion to the tradition that, when St. Patrick and his followers were escaping from King Laery, they were changed into a herd of deer and so rendered invisible to him and to his hosts. It was a charm rendering the user of it invisible, but its original meaning has become confused with the Gaelic word for a deer (*fiadh*), with which it has nothing to do, and this story, combining the two ideas of invisibility and of the deer, has evidently been invented by mediæval writers to support this explanation. The learned guesses of modern philologists have not tended to make the matter clearer. But the *fath-fidhe* is still well-known in Scotland, and has been applied in quite recent times to decidedly practical purposes. A hunter poaching in his landlord's ground could, under the protection of this charm, come from the forest laden with the spoils of the chase, without any danger of being seen, or a smuggler could carry on his trade under the very eyes of the excise officer, safe from all chance of detection. Thus the composition of this Hymn was a *faeth-fiadha* or protective charm or word-

⁸⁷ Cf. article on “The White Paternoster” in the Countess Martinengo-Cesaresco's *Essays in the Study of Folksongs*, pp. 203-213.

spell,³⁸ rendering Patrick and his companions invisible. It was only a later reflection on the matter that suggested that they were turned into deer.³⁹ Here is the Charm called *fath-fidhe*, as given by Dr. Alexander Macbain in vol. xvii. of the *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, (April, 1891), and later, in March, 1892, by Mr. William Mackenzie in the same journal.

<i>Fá fíthe cuiream ort,</i>	I put on thee <i>fá fíthe</i> ,
<i>Bho chu, bho chat,</i>	From dog, from cat,
<i>Bho bhó, bho each</i>	From cow, from steed,
<i>Bho dhuine, bho bhean</i>	From man, from woman,
<i>Bho ghille, bho nighean</i>	From lad, from maid,
<i>'S bho leanabh beag,</i>	And from little child,
<i>Gus an tig mise rithisd.</i>	Till I come again.
<i>An ainm an Athar, á Mhic,</i>	In the name of the Father and
<i>'S ar Spioraid Naoimh.</i>	of the Son and Holy Ghost.

In a spell in *Carmina Gadelica*,⁴⁰ we find the same word used :—

“ *Fath fíth*
Will I make on thee,
By Mary of the augury,
By Bride of the corslet,
From sheep, from ram,
From goat,” etc., etc.

At p. 158, vol ii., we find a *Frith Mhoire* or augury of Mary made to discover where Jesus was when he stayed behind in the Temple. In making the Frith the recitation of the following formula is enjoined in Benbecula—“ I go out in thy path, O God ; God be before me, God be behind me,

³⁸ Hence *ferba-fath*, ‘ words of magic,’ *Revue Celtique*, vol. xx., p. 146.

³⁹ “ Thus the Holy Man composed that Hymn in his native speech, which is commonly called *feth fiadhe* and by others the breast-plate or Lorica of Patrick, and it is held among the Irish in the highest regard because it is believed—and proved by much experience—to preserve those who piously recite it from dangers which threaten them in soul and body.” Colgan’s *Tr. Thaum.*, p. 126, quoted in *Tripartite Life of St. Patrick*, Ed. Stokes, p. 48.

⁴⁰ Vol. ii., p. 25.

God be in my track : the knowledge (or spell ?) which Mary made for her Son (*i.e.* in seeking Christ). Brigit breathed through her palms, knowledge of truth, without knowledge of falsehood : as she obtained (her quest), so may I too see the semblance of that which I am myself in quest of.”⁴¹

In olden times the study of divination, the casting of horoscopes, and the elaborate rites for gaining illumination or knowledge of the future through an ecstatic trance formed one of the regular subjects of study in the advanced grades of the Bardic schools; and the ‘knowledge that enlightens’ was put into practice on every important occasion, such as the choice of a chief, the undertaking of a battle, or the going forth on a cattle-raid. In the tract dealing with the courses of instruction and the laws of Irish metric in the *Book of Ballymote* are allusions to various other charms to be studied during the ninth year of the course, charms for an alehouse, charms to track a thief or cow-stealer, charms to prevent a horse from stumbling, and charms for luck on entering a new house, or for guidance during a journey made on horse-back, and also one for long life in which, among other things, “The Seven Daughters of the Sea who weave the threads of the Sons of Long Life” are invoked, evidently a Norse charm.⁴²

The directions for exercising the *teinn-laeghdha* and *imbis-forosnai*, (*i.e.* the rites for securing a “trance of fore-knowledge”), are preserved. We meet also with other lesser rites, such as blowing through the palms of the hands, watching the wind blowing the twigs of a tree,⁴³ etc. Fionn macCumhail gained his magical powers by biting his thumb.

⁴¹ E. Henderson, *loc. cit.*, p. 73.

⁴² *Irische Texte*, vol. iii., Pt. i., 2nd Text, Secs. 95, 96, 97, pp. 51-53.

⁴³ Cf. an old Welsh poem given by Stephen, *Literature of the Cymry*, pp. 331-2, where a similar method of augury seems to be referred to,—

“If I had known as now I do

How clearly the wind blows on the sprigs of the waving wood,
I should not have done what I did.”

Among the St. Gall manuscripts are charms in Old Irish for extracting a thorn and against various diseases such as headache and sudden tumours, etc. The same charm given in the St. Gall fragments against headache is given in the *Book of Nunna Minster* against sore eyes. In the *Stowe Missal* are found charms for healing the eye and another for a thorn, the latter being curiously like a modern charm given by Lady Wilde in her *Ancient Legends etc. of Ireland*.⁴⁴

In Gaeldom, each act, both public and private, had its own charm or incantation or blessing. In olden days the king or chief was chosen and the clan undertook its public duties after the performance of magic rites and under the direction of a soothsayer ; today, in the Western Isles of Ireland and Scotland, the huntsman going to hunt, the fisherman to fish or lay his nets, the agriculturalist to sow or reap his harvest, and the weaver or spinner to wind his yarn, go forth to their work with some familiar charm-prayer or charm-hymn, (or, as they are often beautifully called, "The Blessings"), in their mouths. The milkmaid calling her cows or churning her butter, the young girl fearful of some neighbour's evil eye, and the cottager sweeping up her hearth in the evening, laying herself down to rest for the night, or rising up in the morning, soothes her fears or smoothes her way by some whispered *paider* or *ortha*, a prayer or a verse-charm. The whole of life is encompassed by invisible dangers, which it is the business of the charm to turn aside.

Nor, where all the ills of life are conceived of as being wrought by the malignant action of evil powers and removable by incantations, can any actual dividing line be drawn between the magic charm and the religious prayer. In the charm, the power of the Being to whom prayer is offered may be conceived of as more entirely transferred to the words of the spell itself, but in the larger number of cases I imagine that the belief is still in some Higher Power,

⁴⁴Vol. ii., p. 82.

personal or impersonal, *mana* or deity, outside the actual recitation of the words. In any case, the closeness of the resemblance was so universally recognised in the Middle Ages that we find in ancient service books, such as the *Leofric Missal* and the *Stowe Missal*, the *Book of Nunna Minster*, and *The Book of Carne*,—books which bear the marks of strong Celtic influence,—not only the *Lorica* of Gildas or Lodgen frequently taking its place among the hymns and collects, but charms for sore eyes, charms against the evil eye, charms to extract a thorn, and the enumeration of diseases and of parts of the body afflicted with them such as we find in the *Loricas*, with prayers for deliverance alike from the attacks of monsters and of powers of necromancy. Hence, to return to the original subject, we find hymns for charming away plague or peril among the canticles and hymns of the Irish *Liber Hymnorum*. The step “from Charm to Prayer,” as Mr. Marett might call it, is a short and easy one.

ELEANOR HULL.
