

# THE GREATNESS AND DECLINE OF THE CELTS

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SETTING OF SOCIAL LIFE

CELTIC societies lived in a setting which they had in part made themselves—time, space, and number.

#### I

#### SPACE : FIELDS, DWELLINGS, AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION

We can get an idea of the space, the landscape in which our Celtic societies moved, if we interpret the features presented by the same regions to-day. Gaul had none of the long curtains of poplars which give such unity to the aspect of modern France. But the look of a cultivated country—and the Celtic lands were cultivated—is chiefly due to the shape of the fields, which in its turn is due to the conception of the ownership of land. The law is written down on the soil. The Celts of both Ireland and Gaul had a system of land-measurement.<sup>1</sup> The French still have the Gallic *arpent* (*arepennum*) and the Gallic league (*leuga*)<sup>2</sup>; the servants of the Roman Fiscus who made the survey took over the Gaulish names. In France there are still two types of field, the closed field and the long, open field. The first type makes a landscape of hedges, the second a landscape of plains or hillsides whose unbroken surface is patched with variously coloured strips of crop. As we have already seen, the first type is found in Ireland, Wales, England, Brittany, Vendée, Western France, and part of North-Western Germany; the second predominates north of the Seine to the Rhine. The first corresponds to family groups settled in isolation and to family property, the second to village communities working common property under common rules, particularly as regards fallow, with possible partitions. Both systems existed among the Celts. The

<sup>1</sup> Jullian, **CCCXLVII**, ii, 394; iv, 283.

<sup>2</sup> **CXXXIX**, 1914, ii, p. 137, on the Gallic league.

first covers a region corresponding to their earliest settlements in Gaul and the British Isles, the second to their later settlements in Gaul and their settlements on the Rhine.

Traces of prehistoric cultivation have been found in the forests round the Hallstatt settlements. These consist of parallel depressions, which were once fields with raised edges like garden beds, probably worked with the mattock or hoe. German archæologists call them *Hochäcker*, "high fields."<sup>1</sup> In general cultivation moved downwards towards the plains, encroaching on the swamp and swampy forest. Clearing extended in the valleys, and the forest gained ground on the heights. But the general aspect has changed little since Cæsar's time. The Gallic population, as described by Polybios,<sup>2</sup> lived dispersed about the cultivated land, being particularly scattered in districts where the park system obtained and everywhere in the grazing season. Some French villages, which get their names from estates (*fundi*), have their origin in Gallo-Roman villas; and so we must imagine the Gallic village as a small collection of huts in which the remoter relations or servants of a great man lived round his house; that was what a villa was.<sup>3</sup> There were quite large rural communities in Gaul, to judge from the size of their cemeteries.<sup>4</sup>

As well as these open settlements, the Celts had fortified settlements. Ireland bristled with little forts built on hills, called raths or duns, to which the names of the heroic families of the epics were attached. As we have seen, these were private strongholds, and they were also refuges.<sup>5</sup> In the plains in which the assemblies of Ireland were held the raths were occupied only temporarily. But in Gaul, a more highly developed country, they tended to be used as permanent abodes. At Gergovia the Arvernian nobility had their residences just as the later French provincial nobles had their mansions in the towns in which their interests lay.<sup>6</sup> In Gaul the town grew up round the *oppidum*, and even

<sup>1</sup> Weber, "Neue Beobachtungen zur Alterfrage der Hochäcker," in **LXXXIII**, xxix, 1908, p. 17. Cf. id., "Das Verhalten der Hochäcker," in **XX**, 1906; **CXXXI**, xxvii; *Pr. Z.*, 1911, p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 210.

<sup>3</sup> **LXXX**, 1911, p. 118.

<sup>4</sup> D'Arbois, **CCXCIX**, p. 96.

<sup>5</sup> **LXXX**, loc. cit.

<sup>6</sup> Jullian, **CCCXLVII**, ii, p. 62.

had its suburbs. In theory, the Gallic *oppidum* was the capital of a *civitas* or a *pagus*<sup>1</sup>; but some *oppida* continued to be strongholds. An *oppidum* usually stood on an isolated height with a distant view, and sometimes (e.g. Lutetia and Melun) on an easily-defended island. In their demand for security, at the end of the La Tène period the Celts revived the tradition of building palafittes; an example is the lake-village of Glastonbury, where much excavation has been done.<sup>2</sup> These were sometimes built on piles and sometimes on an artificial island consisting of a timber framework filled with stones.

Apart from some stone houses of Roman type excavated at Mont Beuvray, town and country buildings were usually made of wood and roofed with thatch.<sup>3</sup> There were round huts and rectangular houses. In the first century B.C. the timbers were nailed together and the walls of woven branches were coated with clay. A farm was a group of huts rather than one big house. The Celts stored their provisions in silos, which developed into cellars of masonry. At the same time they erected drystone buildings, of which there are many specimens in Ireland and Scotland; they had walls composed of two faces filled with rubble, and roofs consisting of false vaults. In this way they built small round huts like beehives, rectangular chapels, galleries, and guardrooms in the Irish duns, and in Scotland they erected brochs. These brochs were round towers with a central court, with stairs and vaulted galleries and chambers in the thickness of the wall.<sup>4</sup>

The sites of these settlements were determined by the crossings of roads. Peoples established themselves along a river, and when they had done so they made arrangements together for free transit or the collection of tolls, as the Senones did with the Parisii and Ædui.<sup>5</sup> Forts were placed

<sup>1</sup> D'Arbois, **CCCXLVII** (Propr.). Cf. **CIX**, 1910, p. 723; **CXXIV**, 1912, p. 205; and, for the excavation of Sos, an *oppidum* in Lot-et-Garonne, **CXXXIV**, 1913. Cf. Thompson, **CCCLXI**; **CCCLXXXIV**, p. 122; Philipon, "Le Gaulois Duros," in **CXL**, 1909, p. 73; Dottin, **CCCXXII**, p. 332.

<sup>2</sup> **CXXXIV**, 1912. Cf. "The Glastonbury Lake-village", in *Gl. Antiquarian Society*, 1911; Déchelette, iii, pp. 974-7.

<sup>3</sup> Joyce, **CCCCXXXIV**, ii, p. 65; Caes, v, 43, and viii, 5. Cf. Macleod, "Further Notes on the Antiquities of Skye," in **CXXIV**, xvi, 1911-12, p. 202.

<sup>4</sup> E. Sloat, "Some Shetland Brochs," *ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>5</sup> Strabo, iv, 3, 5; 1, 14. Cf. Jullian, **CCCXLVII**, ii, p. 223.

on peninsulas. Natural roads, some of which were international routes, like the tin route, received very little engineering.<sup>1</sup> There were fords, bridges, and ports to which tracks ran, and these tracks were raised on causeways in swampy parts.<sup>2</sup> So life developed in the Celtic communities on the chess-board of the land-survey, along ways of communication which formed the veins and nerves of the settlements.<sup>3</sup>

## II

### TIME AND NUMBER

The movements of this life were set in the year, divided up by seasonal occupations, assembly-days, and the cycle of the months. The Coligny Calendar shows that on the top of the calendar of the seasons, which seems to have been the popular calendar of Northern Europe, the Celts had superposed a calendar which was at first purely lunar and was afterwards brought into agreement with the course of the sun by means of intercalations. The months continued to be lunations, but not of a strict kind. The interior of the month seems to have been arranged on another principle, that by which the year is divided into half-years and the season into half-seasons. The Celts adopted the fortnight, and it has survived in the British Isles and in France. They divided the month into two halves, originally marked roughly by the full moon. In the Coligny Calendar the second half is called *atenoux* (perhaps cf. Irish *athnugud*, renewal). The Irish expression "the three fortnights" shows for one thing that the fortnight is a unit and for another that the system of half-seasons of forty-five days was maintained side by side with the system of months.

The Celts reckoned time by moons and nights. It seems, too, that the Irish year began with its dark half, at the feast of Samhain (1st November). The Coligny Calendar would seem to indicate that the year began between May and June. But it is known that all over Northern Europe the beginning

<sup>1</sup> Jullian, *op. cit.*, iii, p. 17. Cf. Caes., ii, 5, 6.

<sup>2</sup> **CIX**, 1911, pp. 55-6.

<sup>3</sup> Polyb., iii, 42, 2; Strabo, iv, 1, 11. Cf. Jullian, *op. cit.*, ii, p. 228; Joyce, *op. cit.*, ii, pp. 393, 399.

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of the year wavered between the spring festival and that of harvest.

In general, all reckoning in social life, all repetition and division, was governed by a numerical law and favourite numbers—periods of three and of nine nights, cycles of three and of seven years, and divisions into two, three, twelve and, above all, four.

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## CHAPTER V

### SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

THIS is not the place to reproduce the picture of the social life of the Celts which has already been drawn for two Celtic peoples by M. Jullian in the third volume of his *Histoire des Gaules* and by Mr. Joyce in his admirable *Social History of Ancient Ireland*. We have not to describe, but to bring out, the essential features which give Celtic societies their peculiar character, to show how far they had progressed when their independent evolution was arrested, and in particular to determine the native characteristics of their economic and industrial activity.

Some of these activities, namely law and religion, I have described in speaking of the structure of society. Another, warfare, we have considered in dealing with the history of the Celts. The Celts were fond of fighting, and war held a very great place in their social life. Peace was precarious, and was disturbed by feuds and rivalries, between families and inside them. Here we have to speak of economic and industrial activity.

### I

#### ECONOMIC LIFE

##### *The Coins of Gaul* <sup>1</sup>

Before making regular use of coin struck in the Greek fashion the Celtic peoples tried various kinds of money. In Cæsar's time <sup>2</sup> the Britons still used bars or rings of copper or silver of a determined weight. A good deal of iron currency has been found, in hoards or scattered about, in the shape of bars weighing multiples of a pound of 309 grammes (11 oz.) with an average weight of a mina of 618 grammes (22 oz.).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For Gallic coinage in general, see Blanchet, CCCVI ; Forrer, DXLIII ; Déchelette, ii, 3, pp. 1557 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Caes., v, 12 ; iii, 21.

<sup>3</sup> Déchelette, ii, 3, p. 1558, fig. 720.



Déchelette held that he had proved that the Gauls used a currency of spits,<sup>1</sup> as the Greeks did at one time.

Coined money did not come into use among the Celts before the third century B.C. From then onwards they were amply furnished with coins of Greek origin, and they copied them extensively for their own use. The Celts of the Danube and the East copied the tetradrachms and silver staters of Tarsos, Thasos, Byzantion, the Pæonian ruling houses, and, above all, the Kings of Macedonia. Those of the West imitated the drachmæ of Marseilles, Rhoda, and Emporion. A gold coinage also appeared, based chiefly on the famous "Philips", which came through Marseilles and were copied as far as Britain, while staters of Alexander reached Celtic lands by way of Raetia. Roman models furnished new types, and gold and silver were supplemented at an early date, but always on the same models, by a very abundant and plentiful coinage of bronze or tin.

The Celts copied not only the types but also the sizes and weights of their models. In general, silver coins were based on the tetradrachm in the East and on the drachma in the West, and gold coins on the gold stater. So Gallic coinage is an extension of Greek coinage. It is indeed a counterfeit of it in every respect. Execution, weight, and quality of the metal deteriorated, and depreciation took place so fast that it is obvious that there was no regular control of issues. It is very possible that the right of striking coin was not reserved by the state; yet peoples certainly seem to have exercised this right. Certain late coins of the Meldi, Mediomatrici, and Lexovii bear the word *Arcantodan*, which must designate some mint official.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, either because coin was still rare or because its bad quality made it unpopular, the old way of reckoning values did not go out completely. We find the connection between *pecunia* and *pecus* reappearing in Low Breton, where *saout* "cow" comes from *soldus*,<sup>3</sup> although the relationship is here reversed and it is the coin which has given its name to the animal used as a standard of value. The trade which we may suppose to have taken place between Gaul and Ireland did not bring coinage into the latter country.

<sup>1</sup> Id., in **CXLIII**, 1911, pp. 1 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Loth, in **CXXXIV**, 1919, p. 263.

<sup>3</sup> Id., in **CXXXIV**, 1916, p. 281.

No stamped coins are found there before the seventh century, and the name by which they are called, *pinginn*, is of Anglo-Saxon origin.<sup>1</sup> For money there were "standard values"—gold pins weighing an ounce (*briar*), gold rings or necklaces, open rings (now often called *fibulæ*), also having a determined weight and being used as ingots. But in the practice of law and probably of trade, prices were reckoned in cattle or slaves.

It must have been the same in Gaul, although there was coin in the country. For coin ceases to exist in trade as soon as the standard and weight have to be checked every time, and it is evident that the Gallic financier must often have had his scales in his hand.<sup>2</sup> Yet money circulated actively. The spread of types in Gallic copies is a proof of this; but the composition of treasures, in which four-fifths are local types, shows that they were used only to a limited extent in payments between one district and another.<sup>3</sup> It is also unlikely that the bad coinage of the Celts was ever used for settling commercial accounts between Celtic and foreign countries.<sup>4</sup> But the only exchanges of money between Celts and non-Celts of which we hear are the payment of mercenaries and political subsidies; and certain Gallic issues known to us, coins of Vercingetorix, of the league against Ariovistus or the Helvetii, were definitely struck for political purposes.

Even though confined to these services, money had, and from the very beginning, a place in general economic life, by the mere fact of its accumulation. It certainly did not constitute capital, though it was the best measure of it, but it was the instrument of the formation of the movable capital which is in part made of credit, of belief in a power. In all phases of its history, money has been a sign of power, of which its purchasing capacity is only one manifestation. If Gaul fairly quickly became a country of movable capital after the conquest, it was because the development which

<sup>1</sup> Joyce, *CCCCXXXIV*, ii, p. 381. Cf. Ridgeway, *The Origin of Metallic Currency and Weight Standards*, 1892.

<sup>2</sup> Scales from Beuvray and Gergovia. Déchelette, ii, 3, p. 1573, n. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Forrer, *op. cit.* (list giving provenance of Celtic coins). This list indicates that some of the purchases made by Mediterranean merchants among the Celts were paid for in Greek coin, and that the native middlemen paid gold for the goods which they were commissioned to buy from those merchants.

<sup>4</sup> Blanchet, *op. cit.*, ii, p. 517.



at once took form under the Roman Empire had begun in the days of independence.

One must not picture the Celtic societies as groups of specialized warriors leaving their wives to look after the cattle and the crops with the aid of captives. In Ireland the king was forbidden to touch the plough or oversee his byres; but that was only because he was the king. All other men took their share in the work of their farms; only the king had to stand aloof. So the economic life of the Celts was chiefly rural<sup>1</sup>—mainly pastoral in Ireland, part of Britain, and Spain, and mainly agricultural among the Gauls and Belgæ. It is probable that agriculture began to gain ground in the Hallstatt period. The Celts practised fallow and invented the great two-wheeled plough, drawn by several span of oxen (Pliny calls it *ploum*), which made it possible to work heavy land.<sup>2</sup>

Rural activities aimed at the market<sup>3</sup> and were not confined to production. Exchange and sale were the object as well as exploitation of the soil. Gallic bacon filled the pickle-tubs of Italy in the time of Cato, and in the days of Cæsar and Varro Gaul was famous for its hams. The rapid development of the culture of the vine and olive in Provence shows that Gallic agriculture could adapt itself to the requirements of an international market.<sup>4</sup> Once wine-growing was introduced in Gaul, Gallic wine travelled to Britain and Ireland. The organs of rural trade were the markets and fairs.<sup>5</sup>

This development of marketing introduced into Celtic society specialists in trade and in industry<sup>6</sup>; it was the development in trade which gave birth to industry. The Celts of the Bronze Age had already advanced beyond the stage of household economy. A Celtic household made part of its material and repaired its tools, but it bought them outside. And Celtic artisans had spread in foreign countries, like the smith Elico, who was established in Rome and summoned Brennus.<sup>7</sup> With the rise of town life, professional crafts increased at the expense of household

<sup>1</sup> See the evidence of Pytheas in Diod., v, 21.

<sup>2</sup> Pliny, 18, p. 172, Roth's ed., p. 288.

<sup>3</sup> Jullian, CCCXLVII, ii, p. 239.

<sup>4</sup> Pliny, x, 53; xix, 8; xi, 240.

<sup>6</sup> Jullian, op. cit., ii, p. 237. Cf. Strabo, iv, 2, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Caes, iv, 2, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Pliny, xii, 5.

industry, and the town population was formed of the waste material of the tribal organization. Among this material there were slaves, who were a large part of the industrial labouring class. But there were also free workers who hired themselves out. Strabo, following Poseidonios, tells us of a man at Marseilles who hired out men and women for navy work.<sup>1</sup> In Gaul the crafts were chiefly pursued by free workers, masters and men. In Ireland the craftsmen formed groups<sup>2</sup> which aspired to imitate the college of *fili*. A large part of society, perhaps the greater part of that amorphous plebs of which Cæsar speaks, became reconstituted on the basis of the crafts. Economic life had become an organizing principle for Celtic society.

The state then stepped into the organization of trade and industry, by means of taxes and tolls and by creating markets and policing them. The holding of the great fairs necessitated truces. Here we see the outlines of a market-law which must have been fairly complex.

We know little about the internal trade of the Celtic world before the Middle Ages,<sup>3</sup> when we have definite evidence of the commercial relations connecting Ireland with a no longer Celtic Gaul. On the other hand, the trade of Gaul with the Mediterranean countries is attested by many discoveries of Greek or Italian objects in Celtic tombs or settlements.<sup>4</sup> Déchelette gives a list of these objects, gold wreaths, mirrors, bronze hydriæ, and cups of painted ware. The Greek, Italian, or Gallic traders went up the Rhone and its tributaries, bringing, in particular, amphoræ of wine and other requisites of the drinker to the fairs of Franche-Comté, Burgundy, and the Rhineland. The Celts appreciated wine.<sup>5</sup> They paid for their purchases with a great variety of articles, such as textiles, particularly woollen garments. We know, too, of the trade and traffic in British tin, which was landed at the mouth of the Loire and taken by a portage to the valley of the Rhone.<sup>6</sup> Slaves, too, were doubtless offered by the Celts in payment for goods.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Strabo, iii, 4, 7.

<sup>2</sup> MacNeill, **CCCCXLI**, pp. 75, 82.

<sup>3</sup> Zimmer, in **CXLVIII**, 1909, pp. 363-400. Cf. Tac., *Agr.*, 24.

<sup>4</sup> See *Rise*, pp. 162-4.

<sup>5</sup> Müllenhoff, ii, p. 137; Jullian, *op. cit.*, ii, p. 225; Caes, xi, 22, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Lloyd, **CCCCXXXVIII**, p. 41.

<sup>7</sup> Diod., v, 26.

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The Celtic countries were also rich in gold<sup>1</sup>; the Helvetii had an established reputation in this respect.<sup>2</sup> The gold which the Celts gave in exchange was not money, but it did the work of money.

### II

#### CRAFTS

The literatures of the Celts give a lively picture of their industrial activity. The *Mabinogi* of Manawyddan, son of Llyr,<sup>3</sup> is particularly rich in information about the trades plied in towns and villages. Manawyddan, a sea-god, and Pryderi, son of Pwyll, the sole survivors of a massacre of gods, fled into Dyfed, but one day the country was turned by enchantment into a wilderness, and they were compelled to leave it. They then settled at Hereford, where they opened a saddlery and did so well that they took all the custom from the saddlers of the town. The latter plotted to kill them, and the two heroes went off to seek their fortune elsewhere. They established themselves as shield-makers and the same thing happened again. In a third town they started as cordwainers and joined a goldsmith, whose trade Manawyddan learned, but once again they had to fly. The Celtic mythologies tell of other working gods,<sup>4</sup> and people who own or make marvellous tools.<sup>5</sup> In religion these great artisans are the protectors of the crafts, which are grouped in guilds like those of the Middle Ages, equally exclusive and unfriendly to outsiders.<sup>6</sup>

Manawyddan learned the trades of goldsmith and cordwainer in the course of his wanderings. Now, enamelling and leather-work were just the arts in which the Celts excelled, and the former is perhaps the best-known of all the industries

<sup>1</sup> Déchelette, ii, 3, p. 1207.

<sup>2</sup> Strabo, iv, 3, 3; vii, 2, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Loth, **CCLXX**, i, pp. 151, 599.

<sup>4</sup> Thus Goibniu, the smith or cooper, became one of the most popular figures in Irish folklore, the Gobhan Saer, the all-round craftsman.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the Welsh romance *Kulhwch and Olwen*. Loth, op. cit., i, pp. 243, 599.

<sup>6</sup> In the *Mabinogion* these heroes live in the midst of craftsmen. But the state of society described in this work is not that of the Middle Ages; it takes us back to the time of the Roman conquest of Britain. For instance, Manawyddan adorns the metal parts of the saddles which he makes with blue enamel (Loth, op. cit., p. 46) which is the Celtic enamel of Britain rather than French enamel of the twelfth century.

of Gaul.<sup>1</sup> At Mont Beuvray<sup>2</sup> enamellers and blacksmiths had their workshops in humble buildings of drystone with thatched roofs. But if their premises were wretched, their stock of tools was quite good. They seem to have specialized in the manufacture of buttons of enamelled bronze,<sup>3</sup> which must have had a respectable market and been sold largely at the fairs of Bibracte.

In the mining areas we find industrial establishments of another kind, isolated but grouped in districts. These were the ironworks, which were fortified workshops, with their heaps of slag.<sup>4</sup>

The manufacture and decoration of metal articles seem to have been practised industrially. The story of Elico the Helvetian<sup>5</sup> shows that at an early date they had a reputation as past-masters. They exported pigs of raw iron to Germany.<sup>6</sup> For the treatment of ore<sup>7</sup> and the preparation of the various qualities of the metal they seem to have had processes as scientific and highly developed as those of the other metal-workers of antiquity. Irish literature contains magnificent descriptions of the arms of its warriors,<sup>8</sup> and excavations have yielded specimens which reveal extraordinary skill and taste—the helmets of Amfreville, La Gorge-Meillet, and Berru, and the Battersea and Thames shields.<sup>9</sup> Every technical method which can be used for the decoration of metal—gilding, enamelling, engraving with the point and with acid<sup>10</sup>—was employed by the Celts. These processes, which a god like Manawyddan could learn in no time, imply professional training and trade traditions in mere mortals.

Leather-work seems to have been another craft which appealed to the Celtic imagination, since the gods excelled in it. The Gallic shoemakers who made the *caliga* or Celtic

<sup>1</sup> Déchelette, ii, 3, pp. 1547 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Bulliot, **CCCLXIX**.

<sup>3</sup> Buttons were a part of Gallic costume. One type of blouse in use was buttoned down the front from top to bottom; and, since the sleeves are represented as open, these too were probably buttoned. Cf. a relief from Dijon; Espérandieu, **CCCXV**, 3473, 3475.

<sup>4</sup> These settlements have not yet been studied except in the valleys running into the lower Loire (L. Maitre, in **CXXXIX**, i, 1919, pp. 234 ff.; cf. id. in *B.A.C.*, 1905, p. xliv).

<sup>5</sup> Pliny, xii, 11.

<sup>6</sup> Kossinna, in **LXXXV**, 1915, p. 117.

<sup>7</sup> Refining-furnace. Bushe-Fox, **CCCVIII**, p. 72. Déchelette, ii, 3, pp. 1539 ff.

<sup>8</sup> *Táin*, ed. Windisch, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> See *Rise*, p. 95, fig. 4; p. 125, fig. 31.

<sup>10</sup> Déchelette, ii, 3, p. 1148.

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boot fashionable in the Roman world <sup>1</sup> were doubtless better than others. The goods produced by the weavers were equally in demand, but we do not yet know what was the nature of the woollens and linens which the Gauls sold to Italy.<sup>2</sup>

By the side of these industries of metal, leather, wool, and linen, we must allow a large place to the manufacture of metal vessels and coopering in estimating the position of the Celtic crafts in ancient industry as a whole. The Gauls were not only expert horsemen, keenly interested in the harness and trappings of their mounts <sup>3</sup>; they contributed more than any other people in Europe to the use of the horse as a draught-animal. They invented a war-chariot, the *essedum*,<sup>4</sup> and their various types of vehicle, the *carpentum* or heavy travelling-waggon, the *rheda*, and the *cissum* or two-wheeled gig were adopted, name and all, by the Latins. Of all these vehicles nothing remains but some representations <sup>5</sup> and great quantities of ironwork,<sup>6</sup> the complexity of which bears witness to great inventiveness.

The Gallic coopers, of whom we have some complete barrels, and the makers of wooden utensils, who have left only a few fragments, plied trades which had thriven from the earliest times in the countries of Northern Europe, where men had abundant raw material at their disposal and could study it and choose it according to its qualities. The share of the Celts in the progress of these industries is attested by the name of the *tun*, which seems to have been taken from the Celtic languages.<sup>7</sup>

Inventors in coopering, coach-building, and enamel-work, the Celts were also inventors in the manufacture of various tools, the more complicated of which are unknown to us.<sup>8</sup> They introduced some new agricultural implements—

<sup>1</sup> Jullian, op. cit., ii.

<sup>2</sup> Textiles of the Cadureci; Jullian, op. cit., ii, pp. 272, 525, n. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Bits peculiar to the Celts; Arr., *Ind.*, 16, 10; Hor., *Odes*, i, 8, 6. Cf. Déchelette, ii, 3, pp. 1199-202.

<sup>4</sup> Jullian, op. cit., ii, pp. 187, 234.

<sup>5</sup> Expérandieu, op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> Déchelette, ii, 3, pp. 1197-9.

<sup>7</sup> *Tunna* (Low Lat.). MacBain, **CLXXXIX**, p. 382. Barrels of the Roman period found in Holland (**CXXXIX**, 1918, p. 249).

<sup>8</sup> E.g. the *terebra Gallica*, an auger with a spiral bit (Pliny, xvii, 15). The great quantity of tools found in tombs and *oppida* bears witness to the skill of the Gallic metal-worker (cf. Déchelette, ii, 3, pp. 1352 ff.).



the large hay-sickle, types of harrow, the great plough, and even a reaper.<sup>1</sup> We must not forget the riddle in cooperage nor the coat of mail in metal-work.<sup>2</sup> So the Celts not only practised most of the industrial arts of the ancients with skill but brought to them an originality and inventiveness which can be explained only by the great place held by industry in social life, whether through the needs which it had to meet or through the quality of the men engaged in it.

## III

## ART

On the whole the art of the Celts is entirely decorative.<sup>3</sup> The kind of decoration which the Celtic artist put on his works usually has no meaning, except in some objects used for religious purposes. We find neither representations nor symbols. Ornament generally consists of geometrical patterns without ritual significance, stylized foliage, scrolls, and the like. Except in a few religious objects like the Gundestrup cauldron and the gods of Bouray and Stuttgart, art has added nothing but beauty. The Celts made works of art in almost every class of manufactured article, even the humblest brooch, for example. The plainest sword had a handsome chape; shields, helmets, and vases were decorated. The Celtic craftsman liked beauty, and he had taste. He was particularly drawn to curvilinear decoration, the elements of which he took from the Greek palmette.

In their decoration the Celts broke up the model selected and conventionalized it. The artists of Gaul and Ireland were not given to realism.<sup>4</sup> On the stela of Entremont, on which, of all the monuments of independent Gaul, human and animal forms are treated with the most freedom (and that under Greek influence), the horsemen are framed in a decorative scroll. The outer figures of the Gundestrup cauldron are treated as pure decoration. Celtic art went in for broad planes in relief, maintaining a right balance between broad and delicate features in decoration and a right

<sup>1</sup> Four-wheeled plough (Pliny, xviii, 48); reaper (ibid., 72); harrow (Jullian, op. cit., ii, p. 276).

<sup>2</sup> Sieve (Jullian, op. cit., p. 277); coat of mail (Déchelette, ii, 3, p. 1155).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Allen, **CCXCVIII**; Verworn, **CCCLXXXIX**.

<sup>4</sup> **CXL**, 1911, p. 245.



balance between the field and the ornament standing against it. In Roman Gaul, human figures of the Roman type were cast in bronze or carved in stone ; it was an art full of homely geniality and facility. The Celts were always addicted to fine weapons, beautiful jewellery, and rich, brightly-coloured garments. The decorative art of the Celts is art of good quality, but not a strong art. The Celtic genius was to expand more in another form of æsthetic activity—literature.

## IV

## LITERATURE

It is very difficult to obtain an idea of Celtic literature as a whole, for what remains of it comes entirely from the British Isles. Literature so much depends on changing tastes and fashions that it would be very rash to try to picture one literature from what one knows of another some hundreds of years later, even though it belongs to a people of the same stock.

First, we are faced with a complete absence of any definite information about the literature of the Continental Gauls. They were great talkers, and interested in things of the mind.<sup>1</sup> Men like Deiotarus and Diviciacus impressed Roman intellectuals by their culture. The Druids had a reputation as philosophers. Gauls like Vercingetorix displayed a broad and elevated intelligence in the political domain. Lastly, when Gaul was Romanized it at once produced such a crop of teachers, great advocates, and distinguished administrators that we must suppose that the people was already prepared. It had had the literature of its *vates*, epic traditions such as the story of Ambicatus which Livy has transmitted to us ; this fragment of a history of the beginnings of the race must have been something corresponding to the histories of origins incorporated in the *Leabhar Gabhála*.<sup>2</sup> But these were the traditions of a society, and, as we have seen, that society was disappearing when the Roman conquest intervened. Gallic society was already divided into two parts, a nobility which was above tradition and a popular

<sup>1</sup> Diod., v, 31, 1. Cf. Jullian, *op. cit.*, ii, p. 360.

<sup>2</sup> See d'Arbois, **CCL**.

class which was beneath it. This revolution hastened the neglect and loss of the national tradition.

Ireland, too, underwent a rather similar development. By the seventh century its ancient literature was becoming forgotten, being perhaps discredited or superseded by Christianity. The great ecclesiastical histories and, above all, the stories of the saints offered the newly converted Irish novel and attractive matter. But an effort was made to save tradition. This was done chiefly by the corporation of *fili*, who were interested in the preservation of the old tales. Their chief, Senchan Torpeist, who lived in the time of Guaire Aidne, King of Connacht (died 659), endeavoured to collect the fragments of the *Táin*.<sup>1</sup> The difficulty of the undertaking is shown by the legend that his son Muirgen had to call up the soul of the hero Fergus from the dead.<sup>2</sup> But tradition, once revived, was not lost again, and Christianity, which had made an alliance with the *fili*, kept it up.

The Britons had thrown all their literary traditions overboard and become Romanized. Only scraps of the Mabinogion, which form the oldest part of Welsh tradition, can be older than the Irish conquest of the west coast of Britain, and they contain a mass of Irish traditions. The rest of the tradition, which centres on Arthur, dates from the Saxon conquest, if it is true that Arthur was a historical personage who developed into a national hero. It is true that this new cycle of traditions contains some remains of an older tradition in the form of allusions, isolated names, and mythical subjects. But here Celtic tradition was saved by the conquerors, especially the Normans, who by adopting the history of the hero of the conquered in this way caused it to pass into literature.<sup>3</sup> The Welsh reconstructed their literature, the Irish rediscovered theirs, but that of the Gauls is lost. We lack the essential portion, and the most ancient.

We meet a second blank in regard to what may be called dramatic literature. Festivals in Gaul must have included dramatic performances, as is shown by the erection of a great number of theatres and arenas in the country in the very first years of the Empire. Some stood at places which

<sup>1</sup> Thurneysen, **CCLXXXIX**.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pt. iii, ch. i.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Rhys, **CCLXXXI**.

were the scene of great pilgrimages, such as Saint Cybard of Aix and Champlieu ; others were too large for the towns by which they stood and can only have been filled by crowds drawn from outside by the games.

It is certain, too, that the Irish feasts comprised dramatic representations, since they comprised games which are a kind of drama. Legends of heroes were attached to them and commemorated. But of these performances we have not the barest scenario. It is a whole side of the creative activity of the Celts of which we know nothing.

Let us, then, be content with what we have, namely, the written literature of Ireland and Wales. This literature, particularly that of Ireland, although it cannot have assumed its written form earlier than the seventh century, contains ancient elements which are often hard to understand. It may be able to give us an idea of its own past.<sup>1</sup>

It is composed mainly of *chansons de geste* in prose mixed with verse on epic and mythological subjects. In Ireland they are classified and catalogued under titles which describe them by class. There were Takings of Cities or Houses, Feasts (like that of Bricriu), and series of Battles (*Cath Muighe Tured*), Wooings (*Tochmarc Emire, Tochmarc Etaine*), Forays (*Táin*), Rapes (such as the story of Grainne), and Journeys to the Other World (like the *Journey of Bran*). These stories were arranged in three cycles, a Mythological Cycle and the two heroic cycles of Ulster and Leinster.<sup>2</sup>

The Mythological Cycle is the history of the successive gods and invasions of Ireland. The versions which have come down to us have undergone many transformations. One of them is the *Leabhar Gabhála*, the Book of Invasions, in which a great many narratives are linked together ; it was recast by O'Clery as late as 1631.<sup>3</sup>

The Ulster Cycle is that which has Cuchulainn and King Conchobar for its principal heroes. The chief epic in the cycle is the *Táin Bó Chuailgné*, which is over six thousand lines

<sup>1</sup> See O'Curry, **CCLXXVIII** ; d'Arbois, **CCXLVIII**, and esp. **CCXLIX** ; Best, **CCLII** ; K. Meyer, "Addenda to the *Essai d'un catalogue de la littérature épique de l'Irlande*," in **CXL** ; D. Hyde, *Story of Early Gaelic Literature*, Dublin, 1920.

<sup>2</sup> Squire, **CCCCLIX** ; Hyde, **CCLXIV**. Cf. K. Meyer, "The Death-tales of the Ulster Heroes," in **CXXII**, xiv ; d'Arbois, *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Squire, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-135 ; d'Arbois, *op. cit.*, ii, p. 155 ; Rhys, **CCCLXXXII**, p. 146.

long. It tells of a great war waged upon the heroes of Ulster by the rest of Ireland, led by Queen Medb, for the sake of a wonderful bull. Many famous passages which have come down to us separately are connected with this central theme, such as the stories of the birth of Conchobar, the conception of Cuchulainn, his sickness, his love of the goddess Fand, and the intoxication of the Ultonians, which compelled Cuchulainn to defend Ulster single-handed for several days. That is the most ancient part of this epic literature. But the whole cycle was modernized by the men who recast it, just as the annalists place King Conchobar about the beginning of the Christian era.<sup>1</sup>

The Leinster Cycle is known as the Fenian or Ossianic Cycle. It tells of Finn, his son Oisín or Ossian, and their kinsmen and comrades, the Fianna. It is represented in the ancient manuscripts by a not very large number of complete stories, and there are allusions and lists of subjects for recitation which show that its main elements were in existence about the seventh century. The annalists place Finn in 200 B.C. These datings, done long afterwards, are of no great importance, but the cycle in its original form seems to correspond to a state of civilization and society obtaining about that time. It developed later than the Ulster Cycle, but lived on in the folklore of Ireland and Gælic Scotland. Its origins are very ancient. Finn is probably a hunter-god, particularly a hunter of the boar, like the typical Celtic hero. He is designated by the epithet Fair-haired, springs from the family of the gods of death, and is the same as the Welsh Gwyn. This cycle never attained the cohesion of the Ulster cycle,<sup>2</sup> although it was

<sup>1</sup> The chief texts regarding Ulster are collected in Windisch, **CCXCV**. A translation of the more important ones will be found in d'Arbois, **CCXLVIII**, v, "L'Épopée celtique en Irlande." For the Ulster cycle, see Hull, **CCLXIII**; Thurneysen, **CCXC**; Nutt, **CCLXXVI**; Lady Gregory, **CCLIX**; Faraday, **CCLVIII**; Windisch, **CCXCVI**; E. MacNeill, "Relation of the Ulster Epics to History," in **CXI**, Feb., 1907; Joseph Dunn, *The Ancient Irish Epic Tale Tain Bo Cuailnge*, London, 1914; and above all Thurneysen's admirable work **CCLXXXIX**, which deals with the constitution, text, and interpretation of the whole cycle.

<sup>2</sup> The chief ancient texts of this cycle will be found dated and in part translated in K. Meyer's excellent *Fiánaigeacht*, in **CXII**, xvi, 1910. Many texts, usually later, are collected and translated by O'Grady in **CCLXXIX**. Lastly, a large number of valuable texts have been published, often somewhat hastily and from late versions, in the six volumes of **CCXCII**. Mr. MacNeill has edited, with an important introduction, a collection of poems related to this cycle in his *Duanaire Finn*, in **CCCXV**, vii. A great many

the cycle of the Fianna or mercenary troops of Ireland and was taken up by the poets and popular story-tellers.

The principal and most valuable portion of Welsh literature consists of the collection of plots of epic narratives called the Mabinogion, the plural of *Mabinogi*, meaning "literary apprentice".<sup>1</sup> Four of these stories intended for "literary apprenticeship" deserve the name more particularly; the Red Book of Hergest calls them the Four Branches of Mabinogi. They are mythology heroicized, based on legends of South Wales. The first tells the story of Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed and god of the dead; the second, of the marriage of Bronwen, the daughter of the sea-god Llyr, to a King of Ireland; the third, the hero of which is Manawyddan, son of Llyr, is a continuation of the first two; the fourth is about Math, son of Mathonwy. Five other stories belong to the Arthurian cycle, but behind three of these lie the earliest French poems of the Round Table.<sup>2</sup> Another, entitled *Kulhwch and Olwen*, is of genuine Welsh inspiration. Two others are closely associated with them, namely the *Dream of Macsen Wledig* and a mythological story called *Lludd and Llevelys*, a doublet of the story of Manawyddan.

The great Welsh manuscripts also contain poems, many

stories linked with this cycle have been collected in the chief collections of tales of the Gaelic countries, particularly in three volumes published under the name *Waifs and Strays of Celtic Tradition, Argyllshire Series (CCXCIII)*: MacInnes and Nutt, *Folk and Hero Tales*; Macdougall and Nutt, *Folk and Hero Tales*; J. F. Campbell and Nutt, *The Fians*, all three volumes containing interesting commentaries by Nutt. Consult also Campbell, CCLIV; Curting, CCLV; Croker, CCLVII. One should also mention the collections of popular ballads and poems in Gaelic in Campbell, CCLIII, and in the *Book of the Dean of Lismore*, a sixteenth century collection edited by Skene (Edin., 1862). For these ballads and the use made of them by Macpherson, see Stern, in CLXXIII, vii, pp. 51 ff. Certain texts connected with the Leinster cycle are translated in d'Arbois, *L'Épopée celtique en Irlande*. Some of the finest stories in this cycle are adapted rather than translated, but on the whole delightfully and faithfully, by Joyce in his *Old Celtic Romances*.

For the interpretation of the whole cycle, see Nutt in the appendices to the collection of tales cited above; Rhys, CCCXXXII, pp. 355, 553; Squire, pp. 201-216. These writers believe that the cycle is ancient and its origin mythological. MacNeill, in his introduction to the *Duanaire Finn* quoted above and CCCXLI, favours a later date. Zimmer connects the cycle with the time of the Scandinavian invasions, particularly in CCLXVI.

<sup>1</sup> CCLXXXIV; Loth, CCLXX. Cf. Lady Guest, CCLX; Skene, CCLXXXVII; Rhys, CCLXXXI-CCLXXXIII.

<sup>2</sup> Weston, CCXCIV; Nutt, CCLXXVII. Cf. Faral, CCCXXVI; Bruce, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance*, Göttingen, 1923; Wilmotte, *Le Poème du Gral et ses auteurs*, Paris, 1930.



of them very ancient, which are ascribed to four bards, Aneurin, Taliesin, Myrddin (Merlin), and Llywarch Hen. They seem to represent the tradition of the north of British lands.

To all this romantic and poetic literature we must add a literature which might be called gnomic. In Ireland it consists of the *acallamh*, dialogues or colloquies,<sup>1</sup> such as the dialogue of Oisín and St. Patrick, dialogues of old men, and of the two wise men, which are connected with the romantic cycles. In Wales the literature of the Triads gives lists of allusions in gnomic form.

In both countries annals flourished. In Ireland a whole literature of antiquarianism, of dictionaries, of collections of local traditions and etymologies (*Dinnshenchas*) grew up.<sup>2</sup> We need not, of course, touch upon Christian literature.

One thing should be noted. The Cycles of Ulster and Leinster, which have survived, are composed of the traditions of those Irish kingdoms which were least successful politically, at whose expense the others expanded, and which were sometimes regarded by them as being peopled by foreigners. The truth is that what has come down to us is an inter-tribal tradition, which forgets internal conflicts. The subjects are selected on their æsthetic merits. It is the same in Wales, where the traditions of Dyfed, a conquered country, are preserved best. In other words, these literatures are already national literatures.

Starting from these data, we can recover in some measure the common characteristics of the ancient literatures of the Celts and the distinctive features of their intellectual activity.

The literature of the Gauls was an oral literature, and so were those of the Welsh and Irish. Every oral literature is a paraphrase of known themes and centos. Since the most powerful memory has its limitations, these themes are few. Popular literature is poor, although there are so many collections of folklore; oral literature partakes of the nature of popular literature. It is not very varied. In Ireland the *ollamh*, or chief of the *fili*, had to know three hundred and

<sup>1</sup> See esp. **CCLXXXIX**, i, ii.

<sup>2</sup> See Squire, **CCCCLIX**; D. Hyde, *op. cit.*; Loth, *op. cit.*; Gwynn, **CCLXI**.



fifty stories, two hundred and fifty long and a hundred short. We have catalogues of the resources of the *fili*. The prose parts of the Irish romances seem to have been a foundation on which all kinds of fancies could be built up. The metrical parts were those which had acquired more permanence; they were usually *bravura* passages. The oral tradition went on long after the form of the story had been fixed by erudition. Some of the most famous and affecting passages in the heroic legends and even in the Mythological Cycle, to which the ancient texts merely allude, were only developed in late poems of the seventeenth or eighteenth century—for example, the story of the sons of Ler being turned into swans by their stepmother. From this point of view we may say that “Ossian” Macpherson remained in the Celtic tradition; only he took greater liberties than the ordinary arrangers of these themes.

Celtic literature was essentially a poetic literature. The Irish probably invented rhyme on their own account.<sup>1</sup> The Celtic reciter added music to verse, like the minstrel of the Middle Ages. The harp was the tool of his trade. The literary profession was exercised by clans of specialists, who had their order of rank. We must not think of Celtic poetry as lyrical outpourings, but as elaborately ingenious exercises on the part of rather pedantic literary men. Yet Celtic literature was popular as no other was. The whole nation entered the field, not as specialists, and some of the best modern Celtic poets have been men sprung from the people. Romance literature also became popular. Nowhere else do oral tales contain more memories of heroic literature. In Celtic lands there is constant interchange between literature and folk-tale.

This literature<sup>2</sup> has a remarkably dramatic quality. Not only are the epics extremely interesting, lively, and full of movement, but the actors in them are real characters. Cuchulainn, Emer, King Conchobar, and Cathbad the Druid are living people. The Celts gave to the literature of the world Tristram and Yseult, to say nothing of Arthur and his companions. *Tristram and Yseult* is a Cornish tale, the

<sup>1</sup> Joyce, **CCCCXXXIV**, ii, pp. 499–501.

<sup>2</sup> For the general character of Celtic literature, see Arnold, **CCLI**; Renan, **CCLXXX**; Magnus MacLean, *The Literature of the Celts*, London, 1902; Nutt, **CCLXXV**.

Irish pendant to which is that of Diarmait and Grainne.<sup>1</sup> These last are passionate lovers who fly to the forest, whither they are pursued by Finn, Grainne's husband. It is hard to imagine that the story-tellers of Gaul had less aptitude for dramatic narrative than their brethren in the British Isles. And one thinks of the men who were probably carrying on their work in French or Franco-Latin literature, and more especially of the long succession of chroniclers who, from Gregory of Tours and the monks of Saint-Denis, have made the history of France the finest historical narrative in the world.

Moreover, even if the Celtic literatures are not alone in presenting heroes who are on the one hand dipped in the marvellous and on the other bound to a chain of fates and responsibilities which can never be broken, at least they have obtained incomparable æsthetic effects from these two elements. The fantastic is always there. Gods or fairies are behind the door. You never know whether you are dealing with a man or a spirit. A man is often a reincarnation and sometimes he remembers it. The mysterious world which makes the setting of the story is the world of the dead; the idea of death dominates everything, and everything reveals it. All Celtic literature suggests mystery with a rare power of evocation. And it is also because that literature carries a hidden meaning that it turns readily to humour. There is in Celtic literature a humorous vein we find even in the finest of its early products, the *Feast of Bricriu*<sup>2</sup> and *Kulhwch and Olwen*.<sup>3</sup>

## V

## A PICTURE OF CELTIC LIFE. THE MORALITY OF HONOUR

Let us end by trying to picture the Celts in peace and ease, for example at one of the banquets described for Ireland in the *Feast of Bricriu* and for Gaul in Athenaeos. Luckily

<sup>1</sup> Joyce, **CCLXVII**, pp. 274-350. Cf. **CCXCII**, iii.

<sup>2</sup> For editions of this text and its composition, see Thurneysen, **CCLXXXIX**, pp. 445 ff. It is edited by Windisch in **CCXCV**, i, p. 235. Stern has published an edition from another manuscript in *Z.C.P.*, iv, 143, there is a complete edition by Henderson in **CCLXV**, ii, 1899, and it is translated by d'Arbois in *L'Épopée celtique en Irlande*, p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> See Loth, **CCLXX**, i, pp. 243-599.

the ancients found the Gauls picturesque enough to be worth describing or portraying.

The Gauls sit in a circle in a round building, with the chief or host in the middle, at an equal distance from all men of equal rank. If they are nobles, the guests have with them, behind them, some seated and some standing, according to their degree and office, their squires or servants. In Ireland the arrangement is different. The building is rectangular and divided into compartments, and every man has his proper place according to his station. The women are apart, but they appear when the time comes. Strangers are welcomed, for we are hospitable.<sup>1</sup>

All are clean and well dressed. The Celt is very particular about his person, and is not afraid of a bath. They are clean-shaven save for the moustache, and their hair, which they wear at half-length, is drawn back from the brow and is sometimes dyed, or rather bleached; soap (*sapo*) is a Celtic invention, used for this purpose.<sup>2</sup> Tattooing or painting of the body completes the adornment.<sup>3</sup> The men wear trousers or breeches which vary according to the country, smocks, and cloaks fastened with brooches; their footgear is hose not sandals. The colours of the clothes are bright and varied. The Gaul even had tartan, and the colours may have been governed by tribal rules, as at the present day. The men carry arms.

The furniture is meagre.<sup>4</sup> The party sit on bundles of reeds on the ground.<sup>5</sup> Seats, if not unknown, are rare. The meat and bread are laid out on low tables. Meals consist mainly of butcher-meat and venison; there is plenty of this latter, for game is abundant, and the Celts are keen and well-equipped hunters, with famous hounds. Fish also appears on the table. Meat is either roasted and taken off the spit on the table or boiled and lifted out of the pot with iron hooks.<sup>6</sup> It is also baked on hot stones in holes dug in the ground. In addition there is porridge made of oats or barley. Poseidonios says that the Celts ate their meat in their fingers, occasionally using a small knife to cut stringy bits and to separate bones. The meal is washed down

<sup>1</sup> Diod., v, 28.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 270; Pliny, xxviii.

<sup>3</sup> Déchelette, ii, 3, p. 1206; Isid. Sev., 19, 23. Cf. XIII, xii, 1913, p. 73.

<sup>4</sup> Pliny, viii, 73; xix, 2. Cf. Girald. Cambr., i, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Diod., vi, 28.

<sup>6</sup> Déchelette, ii, 3, p. 1028. Cf. Joyce, CCCCXXXIV, ii, p. 123.

with beer or wine.<sup>1</sup> At first wine came from Italy or Greece in amphoræ, and it was drunk in the Greek fashion with all the complicated apparatus of the Greek drinker. Later on the Gauls produced their own wine and exported it. Beer was made with wheat or barley and seems to have been flavoured with herbs. It was drunk when new-brewed. Mead was also made.

Festive parties drank deep and heads grew hot.<sup>2</sup> Drunkenness was a failing of the Celts, and things often ended ill, since all were armed. But causes of strife arose at the very beginning of a meal. Various portions of the food had their order of superiority, corresponding to the order of rank among men, and nobody would have deigned to accept anything but what was his due. An inferior portion offered to the wrong man might be a serious insult. But many might have a claim to the best portions, and it was not easy to satisfy them all. In the *Feast of Bricriu*, Bricriu wants to lead the heroes on to kill one another. He invites them to a banquet. There was a "hero's bit", the best portion. To whom is it to be given? All rise up, ready to fight. The women join in. They agree to undergo trials, from which Cuchulainn emerges victorious. The Celts were a touchy race, and this sensitiveness was easily exasperated in company. In addition, there were memories of old quarrels, some of which had not been properly settled.

I have chosen this example rather than others because the feasters here afford an illustration of the very principle of social and moral life among the Celts, namely honour. The moral tales which the Greek writers relate of the Celts, that of Chiomara throwing down at her husband's feet the head of the centurion who had violated her, and that of Camma poisoning herself with her persecutor before the altar of Artemis, are all based on this morality of honour. The Celts did not excel as citizens, and that was one great source of their weakness. But in this refinement of the morality of honour there was a principle of civilization which did not cease to develop on the political collapse of the Celtic societies. The Celts bequeathed it to their descendants.

<sup>1</sup> Ath., iv, 152; Dioscorid., ii, p. 110. Cf. Windisch, **CCXCV**, i, pp. 319-320; Vendryès, "Les Vins de Gaule en Irlande," in **CXL**, xxxviii, 1920, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> D'Arbois, **CCXLVIII**, i, p. 297.

# THE GREATNESS AND DECLINE OF THE CELTS

## CONCLUSION

### THE HERITAGE OF THE CELTS

THE peculiar destiny of the Celts had carried them in a few centuries over the greater part of Europe, of which they had conquered and colonized a good third—the British Isles, France, Spain, the plain of the Po, Illyria, Thrace, Galatia, and the Danube valley, in addition to Germany, almost to the Elbe, which was their cradle. In a still shorter time they had lost all their Continental domain and part of the British Isles, being reduced to subjection in one place, driven out of another, and everywhere deprived of all political power. Then there had been a respite. But from the sixth century onwards the independent states in the British Isles were subjected to unceasing attacks, to which they succumbed. Only one is reviving, Ireland. The political creations of the Celts are among the great failures of the ancient history of Europe. The historical role of the Celtic peoples, except the Irish, for whom the future is opening again, is a thing of the past. I have tried to suggest that that role was once a large one, and that much of it remained. Certainly this was the feeling of their opponents. One has only to try to imagine what the history of the Celts would have been if Cæsar had not described the resistance of Vercingetorix and the Anglo-Normans had not adopted Arthur. But also how little evidence the Celts have left of themselves, compared with what we know of the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, even the Germans! Even now, there may be some who fear, when confronted with this history, which has left so few monuments but which we are none the less tempted to regard as great, that they are the victims of a mirage produced by the imagination of Greek and Latin writers and the fancy of Celtic archæologists. One last check is needed, that of language.

There are still Celtic languages in existence, but they are no longer, as it were, languages working full time, completely sufficient for the social life of a whole society and, what is more, sufficient to themselves. Irish, it is true,



has once more become an official language, now that Ireland is once more a political community. But many Irish patriots have had to learn their language anew. The example of Breton is still more striking; it is the mother-tongue of a dwindling part of the population and a learned or rather a poetic language for a few lovers of the past. In different degrees, all Celtic languages were in this state. The difference which we see in the case of Irish and Welsh is due to the existence in both countries of an older and richer literary tradition. These various languages borrowed largely from all those which brought them into contact with a new life, particularly Latin. The degree of their independence is proportionate to the extent to which the peoples who spoke them resisted those who sought to assimilate them. They did not maintain themselves in their original independence and dignity.

But the Celtic languages are no longer spoken save in a very small part of the regions in which the Celts have left descendants. Great numbers of Britons remained in Britain after the Roman, Anglo-Saxon, and Norman conquests. Celts also remained in Gaul, where they formed the basis of the population. Many certainly remained in Spain and Northern Italy. But it is interesting to note how many remnants of Gaulish were preserved in Low Latin and French.

For Gaulish did not vanish as if by magic, quickly though Latin spread in Gaul.<sup>1</sup> A preacher like St. Irenaeus still had to learn it at the end of the second century,<sup>2</sup> and the Emperor Alexander Severus seems to have understood it.<sup>3</sup> In the time of Ulpian, the beginning of the third century, it was possible to draft certain acts in Celtic.<sup>4</sup> In the fourth century, St. Jerome could compare the speech of Treves and that of the Galatians. Sulpicius Severus in the fifth century perhaps knew a little Celtic,<sup>5</sup> and Ausonius, Gregory of Tours, Fortunatus, and Marcellus of Bordeaux<sup>6</sup> knew a few words each. This evidence is confirmed by inscriptions. Celtic continued in use for a long time, but in circles which grew ever smaller. Still, in abandoning their

<sup>1</sup> Loth, in **LVIII**, 1916, p. 169; Babut, "Le Celtique en Gaule au début du Ve siècle," in **CXLI**, 1910, pp. 287-292.

<sup>2</sup> Iren., *Contra Haereses*, i, pref.

<sup>4</sup> Ulp., *Digest*, xxxii, 11.

<sup>6</sup> *R.C.*, 1904, p. 351. See **CXXXIV**.

<sup>3</sup> *Life of Alex. Severus*, p. 60.

<sup>5</sup> Sulp. Sev., *Dial.*, i, p. 27, 1-4.



language, the vast majority of Gauls kept their manner of speaking and a great number of words for which Latin gave no equivalent.

Thus, Gaulish had lost *u* ; the Gauls did not take up the Latin *u*, pronouncing it *u*.<sup>1</sup> In the syllable *um* in the genitive plural and accusative singular masculine of stems in *u* or in the nominative and accusative singular neuter of the same stems, they gave it a sound rather like *o*, which assimilated these terminations to Celtic terminations in *om*. They said *dominom*. So, too, they kept certain methods of noun-formation which were peculiar to their language, which formed adjectives in *-acos*. Names of *fundi* and some other words were formed in *-acus*.<sup>2</sup> Certain words passed into the Latin vocabulary, such as *cantus*, the iron felloe of a wheel, from Gaulish *cantos*<sup>3</sup> (Welsh *cant* "circle").<sup>4</sup> Others survived in the Latin of Gaul, such as *esoæ* "salmon" (Welsh *ehawk*, Irish *eo*), *cavannus* "owl" (Welsh *cuan*). A large number of these relics remained in the Romance languages and some in French, in addition to the geographical names, proper or common nouns, which remain in languages as fossils. Gaulish left to the Romance languages names of plants like *verveine* (*verbena*), beasts like *alouette* (lark), and others. *Clock* and *cloche* (bell) are Celtic (Low Latin *clocca*, Old Irish *cloc*) ; bells were worn by animals, but in Ireland only by those of *nemed* or holy men. *Cruche* (jug) is of Celtic origin (Irish *crocan*, Welsh *crochan*). *Bar*, *tringle*, *barque*, *beret*, *chimney*, and *biretta*, and their French equivalents all come from Gaulish, and so do *chemin* and *bief* (mill-race). M. Dottin has made as full a list of these words as possible but it is not yet complete, and research among local *patois* will increase it.

On the whole, a great deal of Gaulish has survived in the Romance tongues. When one people progressively adopts the language of civilization of another people which rules it, it never completely gives up its own ; the two languages become blended. Latin must have been spoken in Gaul in the same way as French in Périgord. First people go over from one language to another ; then a time comes

<sup>1</sup> Meillet, in **XLVII**, 1922, 5. Cf. *ibid.*, xxi, i, 1918, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> MacNeill, **CCCXLI**, p. 152.

<sup>3</sup> Schoell, "Zur lateinischen Wortforschung," in **LXXI**, xxxi, p. 319.

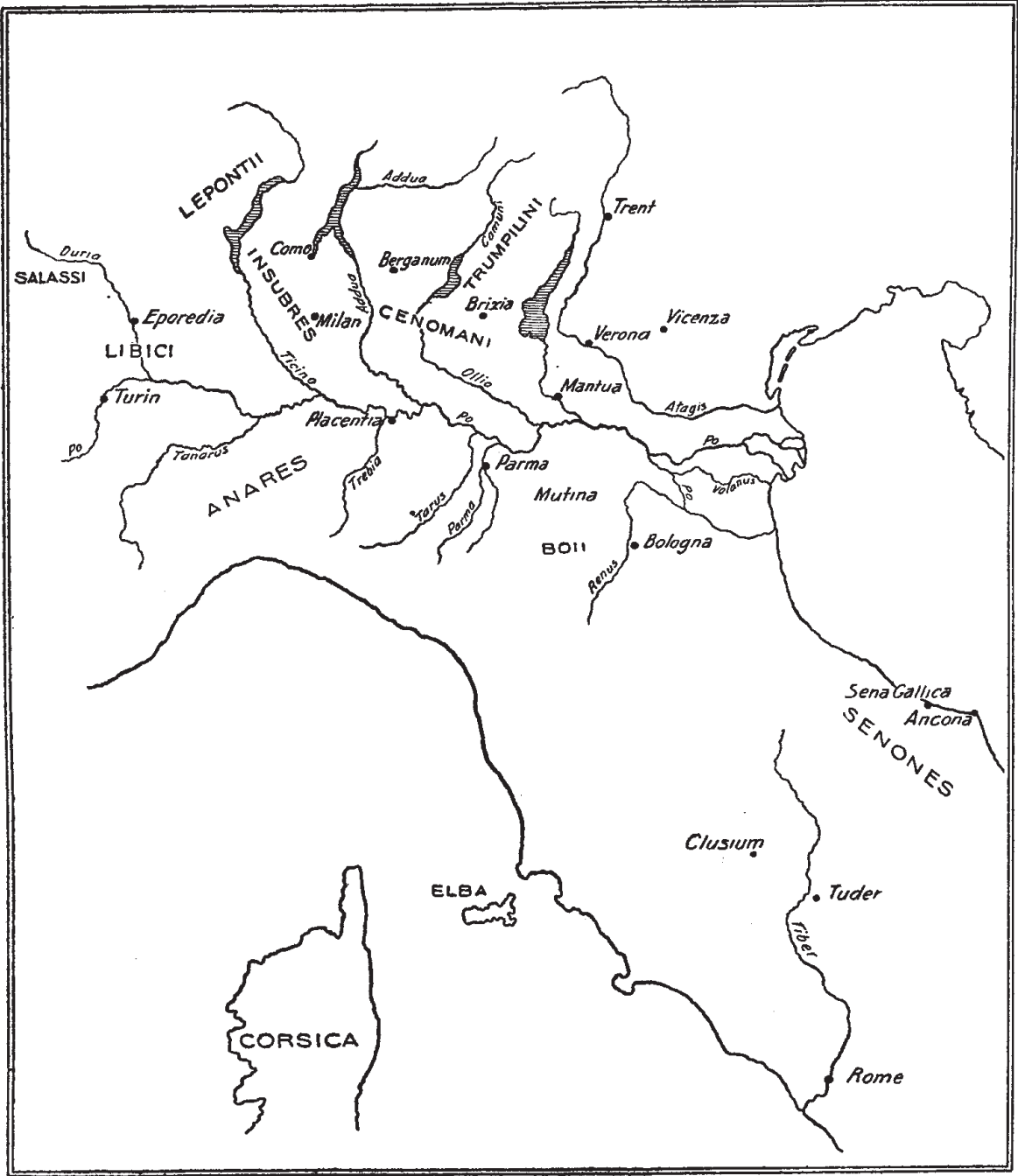
<sup>4</sup> **CXL**, 1913, p. 240.

when a mixed tongue comes into being. To a certain extent, French stands in the same relation to Gaulish as the English dialect of the Lowlands to Gælic.

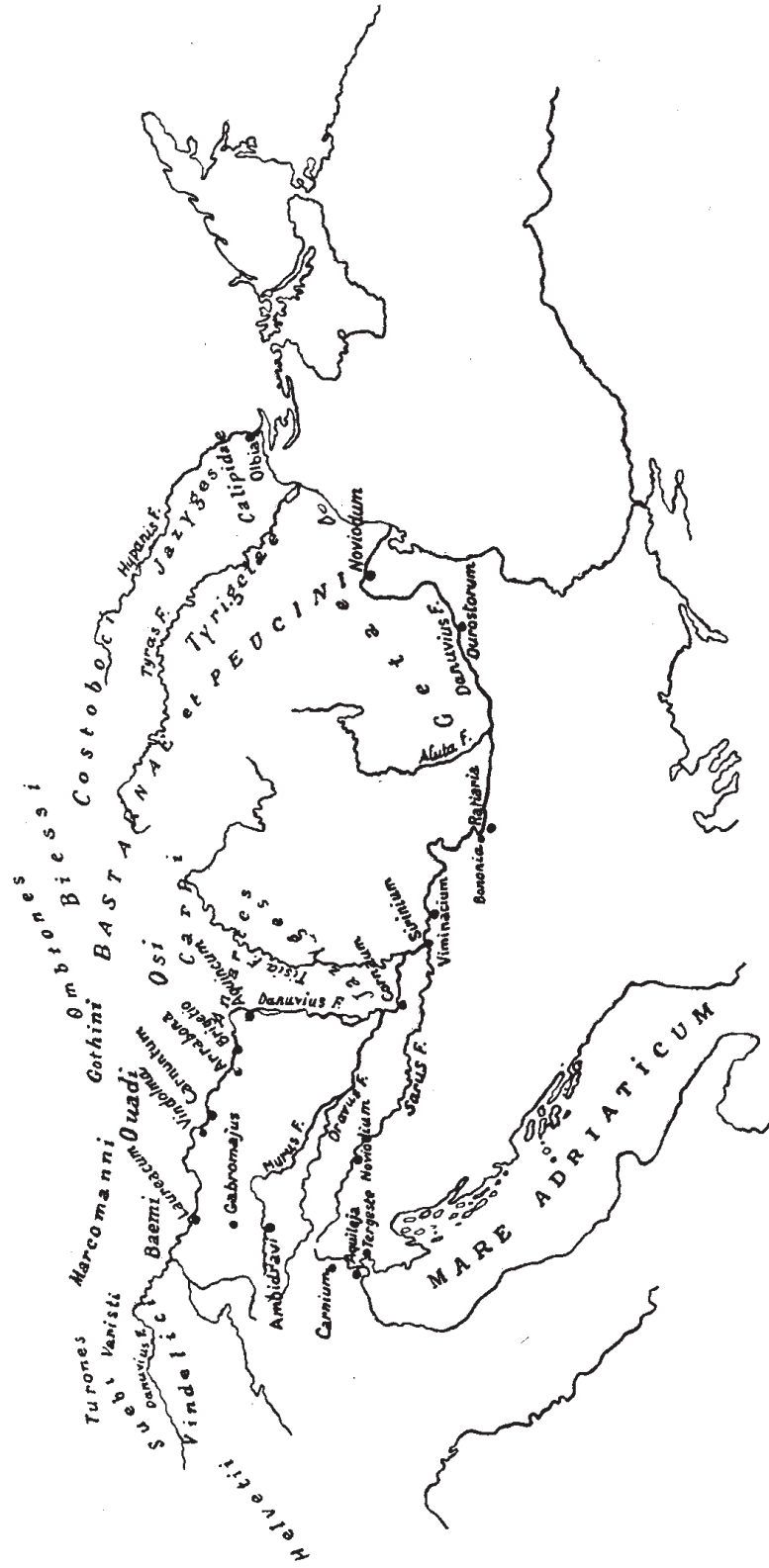
So the Celtic languages survive in two ways, in structure (but with the admission of many foreign elements) or in the shape of single elements embedded in languages of other structures. Everywhere there is something left of them, but they were only the remnants of a vanishing life until the revival of Irish, because the Celtic societies had not lasted as Celtic nations and states. The language will be saved by the Irish Free State.

Such, as I said, has been the peculiar fate of the Celts ; they were unable to create lasting states, and their languages have survived only in a partial and diminished condition. But that original, vigorous race, although it failed politically, chiefly through having no sense of the state or an insufficient sense of discipline, made very great contributions to civilization, to industry, art and, above all, literature. The La Tène craftsmen were masters in the arts and industries in general, and particularly in jewellery, and the earliest tellers of the Celtic epics showed a feeling for heroic poetry, a sense of the marvellous, mingled with humour, and a dramatic conception of fatality which truly belong to the Celts alone. Gaston Paris made the profound observation that the romance of *Tristram and Yseult* has a particular sound, which is hardly found elsewhere in Mediæval literature, and he explained it by the Celtic origin of these poems. It was through *Tristram and Arthur* that all that was clearest and most valuable in the Celtic genius was incorporated in the mind of Europe. And that tradition has been kept up by the unending line of poets and prose-writers of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and Brittany who have adorned English and French literature by bringing to it the genius of their race.

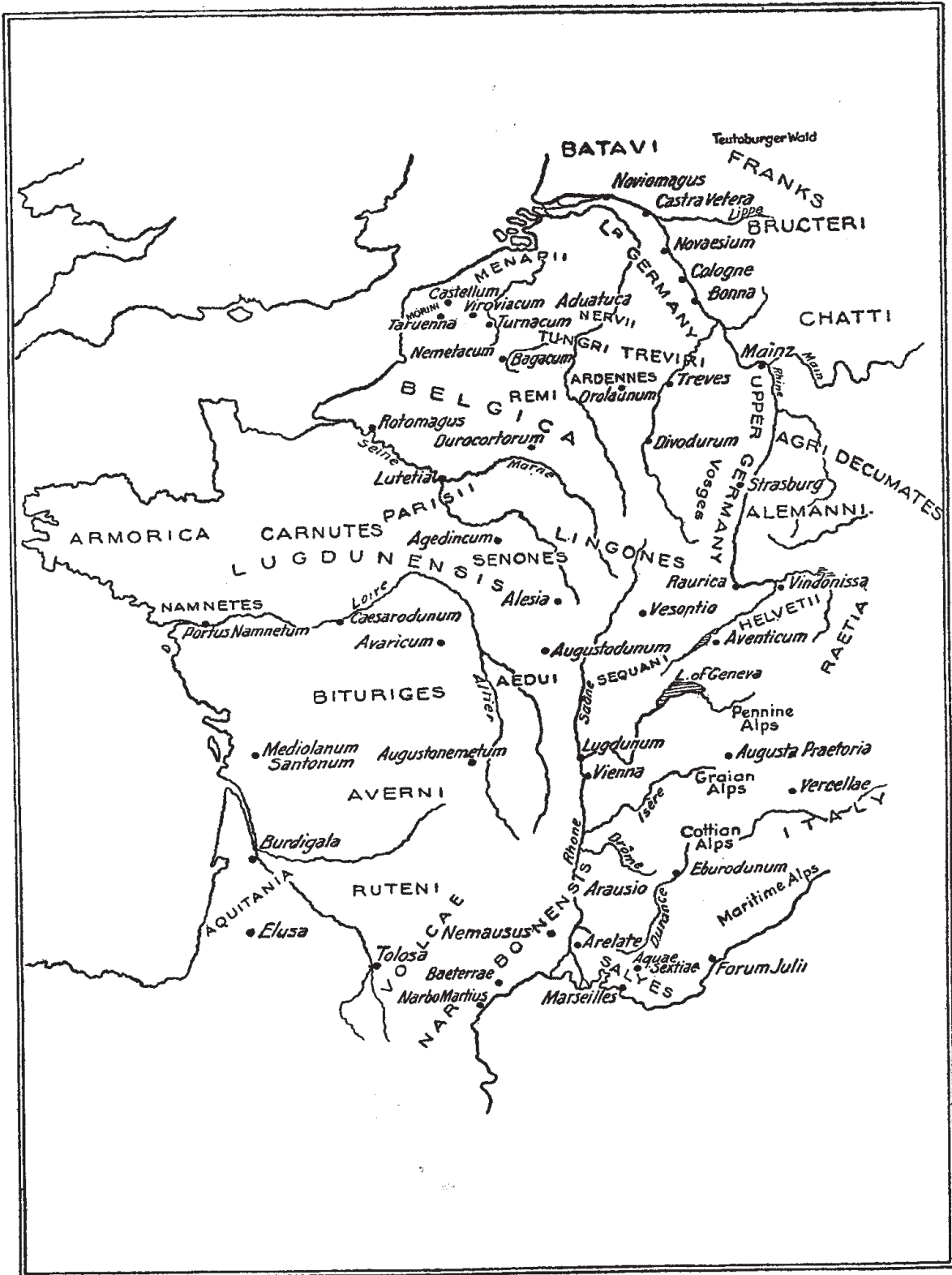
I said above that the historians of France, who wrote such a peculiarly fine history, had in them the spirit of the Celtic race. But the very story which they were telling, the history of that undestroyable people of peasants, warriors, and artists, with its glories and tumults, its hopes and enthusiasms, its discords and rebirths, is surely the story of a nation whose blood and bones are mainly composed of Celtic elements,



MAP 1. Cisalpine Gaul.



MAP 2. The Celts of the Danube.



MAP 3. Gaul.