

THE GREATNESS AND DECLINE OF THE CELTS

CHAPTER III

THE END OF CELTIC BRITAIN AND IRELAND. SAXONS, SCOTS, AND NORSEMEN

I

THE GERMANIC INVASIONS

THE historians lay the blame of bringing the Saxons into Britain on Vortigern, [Lloyd, CCCCXXXVIII, 79. Cf. A. W. W. Evans, "Les Saxons dans l'Excidium Britanniae", in LVI, 1916, p. 322. Cf. *R.C.*, 1917 - 1919, p. 283; F.Lot, "Hangist, Horsa, Vortigern, et la conquête de la Gde.-Bretagne par les Saxons," in CLXXIX.] who is said to have called them in to help him against the Picts in 449. Once again we see the Celts playing the weak man's game of putting yourself in the hands of one enemy to save yourself from another. According to the story, Vortigern married a daughter of Hengist and gave him the isle of Thanet and the Kentish coast in exchange, and the alliance between Vortigern and the Saxons came to an end when the latter treacherously massacred a number of Britons at a banquet.

Vortigern fled to Wales, to the Ordovices, whose country was then called Venedotia (Gwynedd). They were ruled by a line of warlike princes who had their capital at Aberffraw in Anglesey. These kings of Gwynedd, trained by uninterrupted fighting against the Irish and the Picts, seem to have taken on the work of the Dukes of the Britains after Ambrosius or Arthur, and to have been regarded as kings in Britain as a whole. [Lloyd, *op. cit.*, p. 102.]

It was apparently at this time that the name of Cymry, which became the national name of the Britons, came to prevail. The Cymry are the tribes who fight side by side, under the command of a chief called the *Gwledig*, against the Irish, Picts, or Saxons. The country of these Cymry is called Combrog in the British of that day, or Cambria. [Ibid., pp. 79, 84.]

A hundred years after this first settlement in Kent, the Saxons advanced rapidly. In 577 they reached the Severn, and cut off Wales from Cornwall for good. About 600 the foundation of a kingdom of Mercia shut the Britons up in the mountains of Wales, where they held their ground. [Ibid., p. 93. Cf. Windisch, p. 62.] Other kingdoms were founded in the north, which, united in the kingdom of Northumberland, reached the Irish Sea and from 613 onwards separated Wales from a group of Britons who hung on in the north on the borders of the Pictish country. These latter continued to form a kingdom, that of Strathclyde or Cumbria, and its

THE GREATNESS AND DECLINE OF THE CELTS

citadel of Dumbarton on the Clyde was not destroyed until the attack of the Norsemen of Ireland in later years. [Ibid., p. 103.]

The introduction of Christianity contributed greatly to the denationalizing of the Celts in Britain. It is true that the Saxons were not Christians when they settled in the island, and in Bede's time the Britons found it difficult to regard them as Christians. But the reforming mission of Augustine, sent to Britain in 596 by St. Gregory, had already shocked British opinion by the sympathetic impartiality which it showed to the newly converted Saxons. In Britain, on account of the rapid conversion of the Saxons and the way in which they were welcomed by the Church, the Celtic resistance could hope for nothing from Christianity. [Ibid., pp. 86, 96.]

By the end of the sixth century the game was lost. Celtic Britain had fallen to pieces and only a few fragments remained.

II

THE OCCUPATION OF BRITTANY

The emigration to Brittany or Armorica had begun very early. According to Gildas, who was one of the emigrants and ended his days on the shores of Morbihan, it occurred immediately after the settlement of the first Saxon invaders. Indeed, a bishop of the Britons, Mansuetus, appears at the Council of Tours of 461, and one may wonder whether the Britons who fought on the Loire against the Visigoths in 468 and 472, for Aëtius under a leader named Riotimus, belonged to Britain or Brittany. The latter was, according to Procopius, one of the most deserted parts of Gaul, and there was plenty of room there for occupation. [Loth, CCC-CLXXX. Cf. Loth, "La Vie la plus ancienne de St.-Samson," in CXL, 1923, pp. 1, 8. Cf. Windisch, p. 57.]

The Britons were not contented to fit themselves into a country left empty for them. They really colonized it and founded states, into which they remained divided. One part of Armorica was called Domnonea, and was occupied by Dumnonii of Cornwall; another was called Cornavia, being settled by Cornavii from Lancashire. They had kings. The story of Cædwalla, the last King of Gwynedd, who was still of some consequence at the beginning of the seventh century, is blended with that of one Salomo, *Rex Armoricanorum Brittonum*, a contemporary of Dagobert (who died in 638). [Loth, op. cit. For Celtic Armorica see Loth,

THE GREATNESS AND DECLINE OF THE CELTS

Mélanges d'histoire bretonne, Paris, 1907.]

There were probably more than one emigration. Geoffrey of Monmouth places one in 664. After years of defeat, famine, and plague, Cadwaladr, son of Cædwalla, flees to Armorica, and history adds that his flight marks the end of the British kings and the triumph of the English.

The history of Celtic Brittany is even vaguer than that of the emigration. Legend tells more about it than history, for it is inexhaustible on the subject of the kinships and common endeavours of the heroes and knights of Britain and Brittany. Tristram is a Briton; Lancelot has come from France to Arthur's court; Arthur has destroyed the demon of Mont St. Michel; Merlin flits to and fro between the two countries. This tradition is not without significance. Brittany never ceased to look towards Britain, bound to it by its resuscitated shipping, until the day when it found itself in contact with the very body of France, a France which was no longer Germanic or Celtic but was France, and absorbed Brittany naturally and without a struggle.

III

THE INDEPENDENT CELTS OF SCOTLAND AND IRELAND

The unceasing inroads of the Picts which disturbed Britain in the fourth and fifth centuries seem to point to a renewal of vitality. But, though we know the dates of their expeditions, we have no information about the Picts themselves or the Caledonians of Scotland. We only know that the Picts had been founding settlements in Ulster since the fourth century, and that they were formidable fighters. [MacNeill, CCCCXLI, p. 141.]

In Ireland, on the other hand, a series of political events occurred which gave a kind of organization, still very patchy, to the racial medley of natives, Goidels, Picts, Britons, and Belgæ, [Ibid., p. 109.] of which I have given some idea in the previous volume. About the time of St. Patrick this organization culminated in the institution of the High Kingship of Ireland, the Kingship of Tara. The strength and health which it gave to Ireland were utilized in expeditions abroad and expressed in civilization at home. All that is historical in the epic Cycles of Ulster and Leinster lies in this period of history.

THE INDEPENDENT CELTS OF SCOTLAND AND IRELAND

For these events we have no direct evidence, and contemporary Greek and Latin writers say almost nothing of Ireland. We must be content with two useful pieces of information which we owe to them. One-half of the sixteen peoples of the coast named by Ptolemy are identified anew, and a passage in the polygrapher Solinus, stating that there are no snakes in Ireland, is based on an authentic Irish tradition. For the Irish give to St. Patrick or to Finn mac Coul, as the case may be, the glory of having rid the island of snakes. [Joyce, CCCCXXXIV, ii, p. 514.] There were Irish exiles who kept the Roman commanders or governors with whom they happened to come into contact well supplied with information. We have only fragments of what they may have told.

On the other hand, we have a considerable mass of indirect information, furnished by the epics, local legends, laws, and, lastly, the Annals. These last can only be used in the most cautious and critical spirit. The older parts of the dynastic lists and pedigrees are composite, and we should note in general that the Annals hardly mention anything but exceptional occurrences, outside the normal course of life, and so give a false impression of the course of events. All these data have been utilized with great skill by Mr. Eoin MacNeill in the last chapters of his *Phases of Irish History*. [MacNeill, op. cit., pp. 178, 190.]

Although the Romans did not know Ireland, they were known there and their influence was felt there. Ireland had more or less continuous commercial dealings with Britain and with Gaul, which sent it wine. One curious witness to this influence is the alphabet. The Irish invented an alphabet of their own, in which the letters are represented by strokes drawn above or below or across a chief line, or obliquely to it. It has twenty letters - A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, L, M, N, O, QU, R, S, T, U, V, NG. There was no sign for X or for Y. It has only one letter, NG, which the Latin alphabet lacks. If the Irish had evolved their alphabet entirely out of their own heads, they would obviously have invented signs for the aspirated forms of their dentals, labials, and gutturals. But they did not even adopt those of Greek. It was, therefore, the Latin alphabet which they used when analysing sounds, though they did so in an original fashion - distinction of vowel *u* from consonant *u*, classification of sounds. The ogham inscriptions cover the same area as the Irish language of the time just before the earliest Christian phases of Ireland and the earliest manuscripts. Moreover, some ogham inscriptions are Christian. The use of oghams must be placed between an end, somewhere about the sixth century, and a beginning, doubtless about the second or third century. [Ibid., pp. 171 ff.]

Yet another feature presented by Ireland in the first centuries of our era may,

THE GREATNESS AND DECLINE OF THE CELTS

according to Mr. MacNeill, be due to imitation of the Romans. That is the troops of Fianna, the standing force of professional soldiers, who have their epic in the Leinster Cycle or the Cycle of Finn and failed Ireland so badly in after years. These troops have nothing to do with the early military organization of the Celts, and must have been levied in imitation of Roman military institutions. [Ibid., p. 150.] In any case, it was they who supplied the source of the power which we shall see at work.

The political development of Ireland lies between two terms - the existence of five equal, independent kingdoms in the time of Conchobar mac Nessa, King of Ulster, the king in the epic of Ulster whom the Annals with more or less truth make a contemporary of Christ, and the foundation of the kingdom of Meath as the realm of a High King, with his capital at Tara, in 488. An intermediate date emerges from the Annals, namely that of the reign of Cormac mac Airt, King of Connacht about 275, who conquers Tara. With the conquest of Tara by Cormac is connected the idea of the foundation of a High Kingship held by the Kings of Connacht.

The time of Conchobar is called *Aimser na Cóicedach*, the Time of the Five Fifths. Ireland was divided between the kingdoms of Ulster, Connacht, North Leinster, South Leinster, and Munster. Tara belonged to North Leinster, and Ulster stretched a long way westwards. The frontiers of Munster towards Connacht and Leinster varied a little, but it is not in that direction that one must look for great changes, but in the frontiers of Ulster and Leinster towards Connacht. [Ibid., pp. 100 ff.]

The epic of Ulster shows us all Ireland united against that luckless region, under the leadership of the Kings of Connacht. Gradually Connacht gains ground to the east at the expense of Ulster, which it reduces to Counties Down and Antrim, and of North Leinster, which in the end it absorbs entirely. These enlargements are the foundations of its hegemony; eventually it embraces half Ireland. [Ibid., p. 129.]

For, about 150, the people of Connacht occupy Uisnech. The Kingdom of Conchobar is by this time unrecognizable; moreover, it is almost entirely Pictish. A second stage is marked by the occupation of Tara by King Cormac; a third, by the destruction of the Kingdom of Ulster by exiles from Connacht, whose dramatic history is known to us. The single kingdom of Ulster is divided in two - the kingdom of Airgialla and Ulster properly so called. About 400, at the time of Niall of the Nine Hostages, Ulster is still further reduced in the south-west, and the sons of Niall take all that is still left to it in the north-west in County Donegal. The year 483 is marked by the battle of Ocha, which leads to the separation of the kingship of Connacht from the High Kingship, which is attached to the possession of the kingship of Meath with Tara.

THE INDEPENDENT CELTS OF SCOTLAND AND IRELAND

There are now not five but seven kingdoms in Ireland, [Ibid., pp. 113 - 117.] namely Meath, Connacht, Ailech, Airgialla or Oriel, Ulster, Leinster, and Munster. The last six are subordinate to Meath. This is the organization which St. Patrick finds in Ireland some years later. The kingship of Tara was still not firmly established, and the Saint took up his abode not there, but at Armagh. [Ibid., p. 160.] Leinster was not yet, after hundreds of years, resigned to its fallen estate, for it still occasionally attacked Connacht and the kingdom of Meath. But unity was practically an accomplished fact. The Irish represented Ireland or its kingship as a sublime princess, the mythical or metaphysical bride of the King of Tara, and this conception was expressed in poems which are sometimes wonderfully beautiful. Moreover, the distinction between the Goidels and the Aithech-thuatha, the rent-paying clans of which I have spoken, in which all non-Goidelic groups were lumped together, was gradually obliterated; in fact, an Ivernian, Eterscél, appears in the list of the great pre-historic kings. Yet it was at the end of the first century that the famous, if ephemeral, revolt of the Rent-payers took place, which drove the Connacht line out of the country to Britain, perhaps shortly after the time of Agricola. But the banished house returned with Tuathal Teachtmair, more powerful than ever.

A tendency towards unity, the sense of which became ever deeper, and a fusion of races - these were the results of the political development of Ireland which we have just surveyed.

IV

THE INROADS OF THE SCOTS

The Irish had been fighting for four hundred years, and so were well trained to warfare and daring. Also, some of them had been defeated. Groups had been driven out of their homes. The Desi, who lived about Tara, were reduced to vagabondage by the conquerors of Connacht. So Ireland seems to have had surplus men and energy to spend abroad. [Ibid., p. 188.]

From the third century, the Romans in Britain had to be on their guard against Irish incursions. The invaders are designated by the historians of the Later Empire under the names of Hiberni, Attecotti, Scotti. *Scotti* became one of the usual names

THE INROADS OF THE SCOTS

of the Goidels of Ireland. Attecotti does not appear outside the documents of that time. Scottus is a Gaulish name, and seems to mean “skirmisher”, “runner”. [Haverfield, "Ancient Rome and Ireland," in LXII, xxviii, 1913, p. 8. Cf. Zimmer, in CXLVIII, 1891, p. 280; Lloyd, CCCCXXXVIII, 51; MacNeill, op. cit., p. 148.]

The Irish did not halt in Britain, but went on to the Continent. St. Jerome [Jerome, *In Jovin.*, ii. Cf. Müllenhoff, CCCLXII, ii, p. 183.] speaks of inroads of the Attecotti, barbarous men with cruel habits and abominable morals. They cut off the breasts of women and ate them, he says, and they lived in promiscuity. They landed at the mouth of the Loire and engaged in brigandage in the country. Sometimes they came in large numbers, and Stilicho had to meet a real invasion of Irish. Sometimes they took service under Rome; the *Notitia Dignitatum* gives Attecotti Juniores and Seniores. Ammianus Marcellinus speaks of a body of scouts or spies called Areani. [Amm. Marc., xxviii, 3, 8; MacNeill, op. cit., p. 151.] These were Irish *vigiles* (in Irish, *aire* means “guard”, “watcher”). The Scots settled down in colonies; the village of Écuisses in Saône-et-Loire was originally Scotiæ. [For these settlements, cf. MacNeill, op. cit., p. 144.]

The Irish Annals and other documents show us the other side of these adventures. We are told, not of bands of pillagers, but of military expeditions led by kings. The earliest of these expeditions is ascribed to King Crimthann Nia Nair, who is said to have reigned over the whole of Ireland between 74 and 90. The conquests attributed to Crimthann the Great, who is supposed to have reigned from 366 to 379, coincide in a curious way with the command and victories of Theodosius, the father of Theodosius the Great. [Joyce, op. cit., i, 78 - 4.] The campaigns of Stilicho in Britain and Gaul have a counterpart in the expeditions of the famous King Niall of the Nine Hostages. He ravaged the north of Britain, unpeopled the country, and took thousands of captives, among whom may have been St. Patrick, who, as we know was a slave in Ireland. In 405 Niall was killed by a king of Leinster while fighting in Gaul, and his successor is likewise said to have warred in that country. [MacNeill, op. cit., p. 157; Joyce, op. cit., i, p. 77.]

At the same time the Irish were establishing themselves in Britain and on all the projecting parts of the west coast. Between 250 and 300 the Desi occupied the country of Dyfed. [Joyce, op. cit., i, p. 79; MacNeill, op. cit., p. 155. Cf. Windisch, *Das keltische Britannien*, p. 27; "Les Irlandais (Desi) en Dyfed," in CXL, 1917 - 1919, p. 315; Kuno Meyer, "Early Relations between Gaels and Brythons," in CLIV, 1897, pp. 59 - 195.] Then the Ui Liatháin, one of the chief branches of the Eoganachta of Munster, settled in Cornwall. [MacNeill, op. cit., p. 156.] In the north, the Dal Riada of Ulster took possession of Argyll and the neighbouring islands. [Ibid.] In Wales, the Goidels also occupied Anglesey and almost the whole of Gwynedd. The district held by them is dotted with ogham inscriptions and such

THE INDEPENDENT CELTS OF SCOTLAND AND IRELAND

names as Cerrig y Gwyddell (Rocks of the Goidels). [Joyce, *op. cit.*, i, p. 78. Cf. J. Rhys, "Three Ancient Inscriptions from Wales," in CCCLVI, p. 227. Cf. Windisch, p. 27.] They installed themselves and came to terms with the natives who remained. There were intermarriages and associations. This common life is perpetuated in the complete intermingling of Irish and British traditions, of which the Mabinogion and the legend of Tristram afford striking evidence.

Moreover, the Britons occasionally paid back the Irish in their own coin. [Joyce, *loc. cit.*; Loth, in CXL, xviii, p. 304.] In 250 we see an army of Britons led into Ireland by a claimant of the High Kingship, Lugaidh mac Conn. St. Patrick speaks of one Coroticus, who raided Ireland for captives. Now, Coroticus is the same as Ceredig ap Cunedda, the son and successor of the Cunedda who reconquered Gwynedd from the Irish about 400. A descendant of Cunedda, Maelgwyn, who died in 547, recovered Dyfed. At all events, by the middle of the fifth century the Irish kings seem to have given up expeditions on a big scale. The Britons had recovered ground in Wales and Cornwall.

V

THE SCOTS IN SCOTLAND

Of their conquests of those days, the Goidels kept the Isle of Man and Scotland. In Man they left their Goidelic dialect, which was kept up by constant intercourse with the Irish coast. In Scotland they founded a state which grew steadily, and finally absorbed the Picts and Caledonians (if, indeed, these last two were distinct).

The first landing seems to have been in the first half of the third century. Conaire II, who was a king of Munster but appears in the list of High Kings of Ireland from 212 to 220, had a son Cairbre Riada, who, on a famine breaking out in Munster, set off with his men to settle in the north of Ireland, in Ulster. Some of the Dal Riada remained there, in County Antrim. Another body crossed the sea and settled in Argyll. That, according to tradition, is the origin of the double kingdom of Dal Riada. In 470 Fergus mac Eirc, King of the Ulster Dal Riada and a descendent of Cairbre Riada, crossed into Scotland with his brothers. It was doubtless an attempt to reunite the two halves of the tribe. This is the official date

THE SCOTS IN SCOTLAND

of the foundation of the kingdom of the Scots and its royal line. The attempt succeeded, and a double kingdom was thus founded, the Isle of Man being attached to it.

This double kingdom furnished an interesting case for Irish public law, and the question was not settled until the famous Assembly of Druim Ceata, under the presidency of St. Columba, disposed of this and other like problems in 575. The King of the Scots in Britain was made independent of the authority of the High King of Ireland, and a mixed solution was adopted for the Irish kingdom of the Dal Riada, which had to serve the High King with its land forces and the King of the Scots with its sea forces. [MacNeill, *op. cit.*, pp. 194, 599. Cf. CXL, xxxix, 388; Ore, CCCCXIII; Joyce, *op. cit.*, i, p. 79.]

For a long time the Scottish colony of the Dal Riada was inconsiderable. At the end of the seventh century it was still confined to Argyll and the adjoining isles. On the east, the Picts extended southwards to the Firth of Forth. To the south, the Britons held the west coast to beyond Dumbarton, leaving a small group of Picts cut off from the rest in Galloway. But at this date the Scottish kingdom began to grow. By the time of Bede, the Scots had supplanted the Picts in the neighbourhood of the Firth of Forth.

Ireland identified itself with Christianity to such an extent and so successfully that it set it up in the place of its own heroes to express its national soul. St. Patrick became the true national hero of Ireland. [MacNeill, *op. cit.*, p. 159. Cf. Czarnowski, CCCCXXXIII; White, CCCCXLII.]

Christianity had certainly reached the country before his time. If we are to believe St. Jerome, Pelagius, who flourished in the fourth century, was an Irishman, swollen with Irish porridge. The Chronicle of Prosper of Aquitaine says that in 431 Pope Celestinus I sent a certain Palladius to the Scots who believed in God. St. Patrick arrived in Ireland in 432 at the earliest. [MacNeill, *op. cit.*, p. 162.] Zimmer, in a work of which I have spoken in connection with the relations of Gaul and Ireland, ingeniously suggests that from 419 to 507, between the date of the settlement of the Visigoths in northern Aquitania and the time when Clovis restored a little order in Gaul after the troublous years of the fifth century, the educated men of Gaul, and especially of Aquitania, found a refuge in Ireland. It is possible, but not proved. [Ibid., p. 165.] As a fact, neither the Latin of St. Patrick nor that of St. Columba, who adorned the Irish Church in the following century, shows any sign that they were disciples of the learned men of Aquitania and their preciosity. [Ibid., p. 166.] In any case, while it is almost certain that St. Patrick was not the first apostle of the Irish, it is beyond

THE INDEPENDENT CELTS OF SCOTLAND AND IRELAND

all doubt that Christianity was triumphant after his time.

Certain important things are to be observed immediately afterwards. There is no longer the least question of racial diversity in Ireland except in the legendary past. All are Gædhil, whether they be Ivernians, Picts, Gauls, or Belgæ by origin. Mr. MacNeill, who rightly lays stress on the question of the subject tribes, *Aithechthuatha*, thinks that at this date the distinction expressed by the opposition of the words *soer*, free, and *doer*, unfree, corresponds chiefly to the difference of status between the skilled craftsman, who is likewise called *soer*, and the peasant - a distinction similar to that maintained on the Continent between burgher and villain. These are social, not racial, differences. [Ibid., p. 229.]

Secondly, St. Patrick seems to have made a special fight against slavery, and particularly against the enslavement of prisoners of war and against war itself. He preached, for example, in favour of Christian brotherhood. He had been a slave in Ireland, and had been summoned back to the country by voices. The success of his preaching is attested by the stoppage of the slave-trade. There were no more expeditions, and, therefore, no more standing armies, and the institution of the Fianna became obsolete. Two hundred years later, the Venerable Bede, in telling of a raid made in Ireland by the Northumbrians in 684, describes them as falling on an inoffensive people. [Ibid., p. 159.]

Lastly, the superabundant energy of which I have spoken found a new outlet - the preaching of the Gospel. St. Columba and the monks of Iona went to the Continent, where they founded monasteries - Luxeuil and St. Gall - in which valuable Irish MSS. are preserved. [See Gougaud, CCCCXXVIII; Lloyd, op. cit., p. 109.]

From the sixth century onwards Ireland became a centre of Christian culture, a school of theology and morals. The substance of the earliest Penitentials is Irish. Bede tells us that a crowd of young Englishmen followed the teaching of St. Colman. Later, Alcuin corresponded with the monastery of Clonmacnoise. [MacNeill, op. cit., p. 242.]

But the Christian culture of Ireland was now as it were the flower of the national civilization. St. Patrick had attracted one of the intellectual classes to his side - the poets. Christianity gave them a better script than the oghams. In St. Patrick's time they already began to make written collections of the ancient epics. We shall see later that the honour of ordering these collections to be made is ascribed to Loegaire, King of Ireland in St. Patrick's time. It is a fact in the history of the Celts to be compared to the putting of the Homeric poems into writing in the history of the Greeks. In the seventh century, too, the Irish grammarians began to

THE GREATNESS AND DECLINE OF THE CELTS

extol and cultivate their language. All this movement likewise was originally started by St. Patrick. [Ibid., p. 167.]

VI

CHRISTIAN IRELAND TO THE SCANDINAVIAN INVASIONS

It was truly the Golden Age of Ireland that commenced with Christianity and lasted about three hundred years; three hundred years of continuity, peace, prosperity, and unity, things which no other Celtic people had ever had. The result was that Ireland had time to complete herself and to-day there is an Irish nationality, or rather an Irish nation, which, alone of the Celtic nationalities, has survived persecutions and disasters.

Not that all was golden in that Age of Gold. Ireland suffered by the disappearance of the mercenary militia which gave her a kind of army for defence and attack. She suffered also by her laws of succession. She suffered, lastly, by the rivalry of the ecclesiastical power and the state. There were internal wars, competitions between Leinstermen and men of Connacht and between the families descended from the Kings of Connacht, for the High Kingship. But these conflicts were not more than small incidents. Moreover, there is no history for this period but mere anecdotes.

One anecdote tells of the abandonment of Tara, the seat of the High Kingship, in the reign of Diarmait mac Cearbhail, a great-grandson of Niall, in circumstances which seem to be quite legendary, the city being cursed and abandoned in 545. In reality Tara was not destroyed at all, and probably not cursed, for a council was held there in 780. But it was really a gathering-place for festivals and a military camp rather than a city, and times were changed. Cruachain in Connacht and Ailinn in Leinster, which were likewise great camps, were likewise abandoned. The military organization was disappearing. Besides, although Irish Christianity was of such a national character, it could not do otherwise than change the old system of festivals and secularize the places in which they were held, unless it consecrated them. Now, St. Patrick had not established himself at Tara, but at Armagh. It seems, too, that the High Kingship was no longer absolutely bound up with the possession of Tara. [Ibid.]

THE END OF CELTIC BRITAIN AND IRELAND. SAXONS, SCOTS, AND NORSEMEN

VII

THE SCANDINAVIAN INVASIONS

The development of Ireland and its civilization in an evangelical and monastic peace along the lines laid down by St. Patrick was cut short at the end of the eighth century by a new movement of peoples. It was at this time that the peoples of the Scandinavian peninsula, followed soon after by those of Denmark, began to migrate. In reality the operations of the Norseman were more systematic and better organized than is usually imagined. They were expeditions of conquest and colonization, in the course of which true states were founded, and these states formed federations with each other and united with the mother-country. Magnificent plans of vast sea-empires for a moment came very near realization.

The Norsemen appeared about 790 in the northern archipelagos of the British Isles and on the coasts of Ireland. Some time after their first piratical raids, they occupied islands and peninsulas, establishing a fortified post at Dublin in 841 and another at Annagassan in County Louth about the same time. At Dublin they were between Leinster and Meath, and took advantage of the enmity of the two districts. Having thus succeeded in interfering in the internal affairs of Ireland, they got a foothold in the country, and in the tenth century a number of agreements and inter-marriages established their position permanently. From time to time they received reinforcements or new leaders, or a Norwegian fleet would come and establish or restore the authority of some distant king. From 863 Harold Fairhair was able, in the course of a long reign lasting three-quarters of a century, to form and consolidate his empire. [Ibid., pp. 248 - 253.]

The enterprise of the Scandinavians was destroyed by the rivalry of the Norwegians and the Danes. The latter first appear in Ireland in 851, being described in the Annals as black heathen. Ireland, which had been taken by surprise by the Scandinavian invaders when it was without any military organization, had great difficulty in making a recovery. But by 870 the whole north of the country seems to have rid itself of the Norsemen. From that date, the struggle is mainly concentrated in the southern provinces, the Kings of Cashel playing an important part with varying success.

It seems that the Irish never mixed up their civil wars with these national conflicts. Leinster is at war with Munster, and Cormac, the good King-Bishop of Cashel, is slain in 908. In Munster, the rival families of the Eoganachta and the Dal

THE GREATNESS AND DECLINE OF THE CELTS

Cais contend for the kingship. About 1000 the Dal Cais are in power, under Brian Bóramha (Brian Boru). He is one of the outstanding figures of Irish history. A shrewd politician and a temporizer, he aimed at the High Kingship, but was content with exercising a real hegemony. It was the whole of Ireland that followed him in 1014 to the victorious battle of Clontarf. Sigtrygg, King of Dublin, had called in Sigurd, Count of Orkney. The battle was decisive; Brian won the day but was killed. The prestige of the Norsemen was destroyed. An attempt on the part of Magnus, King of Norway, to restore it in 1108 was a failure. [Ibid., pp. 253 - 280. Cf. Vendryès, in CXL, 1920 - 1, p. 348.]

In Scotland, the Scandinavian inroads benefited the small kingdom of the Dal Riada, which successfully opposed them, while they weakened the Picts in the north and the Angles in the south. The Scots, having now a good foothold in the interior, concentrated there, fortified their positions, and made ready to step into the shoes of their neighbours. In the middle of the ninth century the kingdom of the Picts came to an end and was absorbed by that of the Dal Riada. In 870 Olaf and Ivar, the Scandinavian Kings of Dublin, took Dumbarton. But at the end of that century the Scottish kingdom was extending at the expense of the Angles in the old domain of the Britons in the south of the present Scotland. The colonization which followed the conquest is attested by the diffusion of Gaelic place-names all over Scotland. Gaelic also gained ground in the Scandinavian settlements of the west coast and the Isles. Here small states had grown up - the earldom of Orkney, the kingdom of the Isles (the Hebrides), the kingdom of Man - all subject to the King of Norway in varying degrees. [MacNeill, *op. cit.*, pp. 211, 216.] The Danes who came after the Norwegians had set up in 980 a Danish kingdom of the Hebrides, which seems to have come to an end in 1005. Some of these small kingdoms remained in the allegiance of the Kings of Norway, such as that founded by Sumarlidi in Argyll and the Isles, which did not break off from that allegiance until 1269. Orkney was Norwegian until 1470, when James III of Scotland acquired it by marriage. It was still long before the Hebrides and Orkney became Scottish for good.

Wales, too, was touched by the Scandinavians, but they made no settlements there. The Welsh did not take advantage of this comparative tranquillity, nor of the stronger pressure to which the Scandinavians were subjecting the Anglo-Saxons, to reconquer the ground which they had lost. Sometimes, notably in the reign of Alfred the Great, they fought against the Danes by the side of the Anglo-Saxons. A certain amount of assimilation had eventually taken place. The Kings of Wales entered into the allegiance of the Anglo-Saxon Kings. In the tenth century, in time of peace, they

THE GREATNESS AND DECLINE OF THE CELTS

appeared at their councils; Howel the Good called one of his sons Edwin. So Wales did not succeed in forming a strong and really lasting state, in spite of occasional attempts like that of Howel the Good to unify the country. [Lloyd, *op. cit.*, pp. 112 - 129.]

We must, however, recognize that they were the Celts who best resisted the Scandinavian assault on the Western world, and that their resistance did more than that of any other people to break it. That was a great achievement.

VIII

THE WARS OF INDEPENDENCE

1. Wales

The Norman followers of William the Conqueror who took the place of the Anglo-Saxons in 1066 showed themselves more capable than they of reducing and absorbing the Celtic states of the British Isles. The fact was, they had become French in two generations. Their undertaking bears no resemblance to the movements of the Scandinavians described above. It was an act of policy, served by the self-interest of a crowd of adventurers. The object was to enlarge possessions, to obtain feudal lands. The island Celts were the dissenters of the West, and they had against them the Pope, that is the head of the society which was created by the amalgamation of Germanic elements in the now Christian Roman Empire. The Normans conquered the country permanently, and very soon transformed it. The change was not at all unlike that which so surprised us in Roman Gaul. The Normans were great builders, in an age of lavish building. Wherever they set foot, they built churches, castles, and towns, and everywhere they were imitated, until the face of the country was utterly changed.

The Welsh, having committed themselves to resistance, brought the Conqueror down on them. He operated along the Marches in 1070, and left it to the Earls of Chester and Shrewsbury to subjugate them gradually. At the beginning of the twelfth century the Welsh still held the mountains, while the Normans were on the coasts and in the valleys. On the death of Henry I, the Welsh took sides with Matilda, the late King's daughter, against Stephen of Blois. They took sides against King John, and in 1258 with Simon de Montfort against Henry III. Really, the

THE WARS OF INDEPENDENCE

Welsh kings and princes of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries recognized the overlordship of the Norman kings; but they revolted often. In 1282 Edward III, having put down one of these revolts, reserved the title of Prince of Wales for the heir to the English crown. [Ibid., pp. 150 - 199.]

The historical development is rather well symbolized by the figure of Giraldus Cambrensis, Gerald of Wales. He was the son of a Norman baron and a Welsh mother, studied in France, and became an official of Henry II. He has left a series of books, including the *Itinerary of Cambria* and the *Conquest of Ireland*, which show a real knowledge of Celtic matters and an interest in them not always friendly.

It was in the days of the Plantagenet kings, perhaps at the court of Henry II, in the circle of Giraldus and Walter Map, that the Arthurian legend developed, [cf. Faral, Bruce, *opp. cit.*] based partly on a Welsh narrative which, according to Giraldus, was composed by one Bledri, *famosus ille fabulator Bledhericus*, and partly on the traditions of Glastonbury Abbey.

The Britons submitted quickly, the Normans and they seem to have taken to each other fairly easily.

2. SCOTLAND

The Gaelic kingdoms of Scotland and Ireland did not fall into the arms of the Normans so quickly. In Scotland, King Malcolm had received and taken under his protection the Anglo-Saxon royal family, and married Margaret, grand-daughter of King Edmund, in 1067. She, who afterwards became St. Margaret of Scotland, exercised great influence, and it was not in favour of Celticism. Thanks to her and to most of Malcolm's successors, the Anglo-Saxon element gained in Scotland, in language and in institutions. But neither William the Conqueror nor his successors made any progress in Scotland. In spite of the extinction of the royal line and the rivalries of claimants to the succession, neither Edward I nor Edward II managed to conquer the country, and Robert Bruce made a victorious resistance at Bannockburn. But Scotland was increasingly won over by contact, growing less and less Celtic, until the process culminated when the Stewart line ascended the throne of England in the person of James VI and I. [MacNeill, *op. cit.*, pp. 203 ff.]

This does not mean that the spirit of independence disappeared wholly in Wales and Scotland. The peoples kept their native character. But the capacity and

THE WARS OF INDEPENDENCE

the desire to form an independent national body had gone.

8. IRELAND [Ibid., pp. 300-322.]

The case of Ireland was quite different. [Ibid., p. 309.] It was free of the Scandinavians, but was in a condition of moral and material distress of which we hear from St. Bernard, the friend of the Irish St. Malachy. There was a movement of Cistercian reform at the beginning of the twelfth century, but it came into conflict with an independent movement of reform in the Irish monasteries, which went with a revival of the schools. The Cistercian circle of Henry II took offence, and the King suggested to Pope Adrian IV that he should conquer and reform Ireland. The Pope claimed rights over Ireland in virtue of the famous but apocryphal Donation of Constantine. He gave the King of England *carte blanche*. Once again Norman conquest was to bring the Western dissenters into the fold.

An army of Normans, Flemings, and Welsh landed in Ireland in 1169. Henry II arrived in person in 1171. There was still a High King in Ireland, Rory O'Connor. He was the last of the High Kings, for he was compelled to acknowledge the overlordship of the King of England. But only the edge of Ireland had as yet been touched. The invaders had made hardly any real conquest outside Counties Dublin, Meath, Kildare, and Louth. Henry II left the task of completing the conquest to a few great feudal magnates, the FitzGeralds, the De Courcis, the De Burghs, who had to secure real possession of their fiefs. They took advantage of dynastic rivalries and civil wars, always had Irish supporters on their side, and succeeded in concluding agreements and matrimonial alliances with the families of Irish chiefs. They built castles, and sometimes, as at Downpatrick, transformed fortified monasteries into castles.

After 1255 comes a series of setbacks for the conquerors. A national reaction arises and lasts until Tudor times. The de Burghs, having tried to secure a real hold on the districts in Ulster and Connacht which had been assigned to them, found themselves confronted by an Irish coalition, formed by the Kings of Thomond and Connacht and Brian O'Neill, King of Tir Eoghain (Tyrone), who led the resistance. The Gall-Ghaedhil of the Hebrides supplied a nucleus of permanent troops. The Irish then started looking for allies and leaders abroad; in 1263 they applied to Hakon, King of Norway, then in the Hebrides, and in 1314 to Robert Bruce, who sent them his brother Edward. [Ibid., pp. 323 ff.]

THE WARS OF INDEPENDENCE

At the beginning of the fourteenth century the son of Brian O'Neill wrote to a successor of Adrian IV, repudiating the Plantagenet overlordship of Ireland and claiming the right of the country to choose its own sovereign. At the same time, the feudal lords established in Ireland sometimes became Irish. The conquerors conformed to the Irish practice of sending children away from home to be brought up by foster-parents, placing them with Irish people, and so real bonds were created, which were reinforced by matrimonial alliances. The old Irish families restored the kingdoms. Truly national feasts were held - in 1351 by O'Kelly, to celebrate the restoration of his kingdom, and in 1433 by Margaret, daughter of O'Carroll, King of Eile, and wife of O'Connor, King of Offaly. [Ibid., p. 344.]

This state of things went on to the end of the sixteenth century, to the time of Elizabeth and James VI and I, or rather to that of Cromwell and William of Orange. Ireland took up the Stewart cause; it was conquered, but not absorbed, and was always ready to revive. Then began the endless succession of brutalities and extensive expropriations under the ignorant and unskilful direction of legislators, which led to the revival of Ireland at this day.

IX

CONCLUSION OF THIS HISTORY

Such was the history of the Celts, those groups of Aryan tribes which had become aware of their native character and covered half Europe in their migrations. There they were conquered and merged in new nations. In the islands, they resisted. Then they retired. They were turned back on themselves; they were partly absorbed by the Roman Empire. What survived the fall of the Celtic states in Britain was absorbed by the Normans, the last Germanic people to emigrate. There remains nothing but one small, indomitable nation, full of vigour, on the outermost edge of their earliest conquests, and, behind that front, in Scotland, in Wales, in Brittany, Celtic-speaking communities which are no longer nations.

