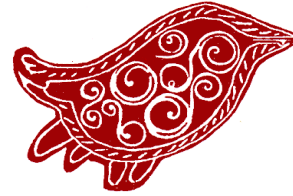


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# JOURNAL

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## CORK HISTORICAL AND ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY.

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No. I.

### *Introduction.*

BY DENNY LANE, M.A., VICE-PRESIDENT.



MORE than the history of any other country should the story of its own land excite and gratify the curiosity of every nation. That period of time in which we live concerns us more than past or future, and that narrow portion of space in which we are destined to abide must fill more of our thoughts than the broader area outside it. Let a man be ever so much of a citizen of the world, still his thoughts must be focussed upon the home of his race, which, embracing as it does, the home of his family, is nearest to his heart. This feeling may be called "provincialism," if you will; but it is a sentiment which has roused the manhood, and evoked the poetry of every noble race. "A poor thing, but mine own." And, as in social life, the narrow limits of a mean estate draw closer the ties of the family, so, in national life, we often see that the natives of the less favoured countries cling the closer to their native land. The dweller in the mountain more often feels the recurring fever of home-sickness than the man whose birthplace lies in the midst of the broad and fertile champaign.

The attachment of our people to "the poor old country" is as hearty and as deep as any that ever fired the heart of the Swiss mountaineer; but the annals of our "most distressful country" record but too many causes why the springs of history have been dried up almost at their source, or lost in the shifting sands of social and political change. A war of races succeeded by a war of religions, which ended in the proscription of education through the greater part of Ireland—the destruction of our ancient seats of learning;

the suppression of the chapters and the religious orders, which had kept alive the flame of learning through the darkness of the middle ages, and had revived the philosophy and letters of the classic times; the destruction of much of the municipal and most of the ecclesiastical records—these and other causes were so active, that it is surprising how anything is left to us out of the ruins of the past. The relics are not numerous—nothing like what are preserved in England, who so long acted as a cruel step-sister to our less happy land. For a long time many of her sons seems inspired with a spirit of iconoclasm, which sought delight in destroying all that remained of our ancient culture, of our dawning literature, of our early art. The cathedrals lay prone; of the monasteries nothing remained but roofless aisles and crumbling cloisters, and the ivy shrouded with its merciful pall the chapels, where formerly the learned monks recited the psalter, and the libraries, where had been written those unique manuscripts which remain unsurpassed in the beauty of their penmanship. Those that have been preserved in so many libraries of Europe show to what extent the awakening ages drew their light from that vivid flame of learning, which had been tended and nursed and fed amongst the "fair hills of holy Ireland." From Cashel of the Kings—from Lismore of the Saints—from Bangor in the east to Lough Ree in the west—from Kilbarron by the sea, and Innisfallen in the lake—shone forth that galaxy of light which helped to guide the intellect of Europe through the glimmering dawn of mediæval learning.

The fewer the materials, then, from which

we can reconstruct the image of the past, the more we should cherish and try to preserve what remains. If the third of the Sybilline books outweighed in value the other two, the fragments that are still left to us are to be treasured the more, increased where possible, but certainly to be garnered up with all the care that a precious heirloom demands.

The society, so lately established, has already met with so much success, that we trust that the memorials which exist will be carefully maintained, and that new sources of information will be discovered. There are three strata that may be tapped to feed the stream:—1st. The MS. records of the past. 2nd. The printed books which have become scarce, or attainable only by the wealthy. 3rd. The oral traditions which survive around us, and the recollections of the older citizens amongst us. With regard to the first two sources, it is important that copies should be preserved and multiplied, and that their contents should be illustrated and explained from cognate works. From the third source, it is still possible to secure information which every day that passes, and every death-knell that is tolled, make scarcer. Committed to writing, these fleeting shadows are condensed into an enduring form, and the agency of the press, multiplying without diluting, will preserve for those who come after us those perishable materials which otherwise would be lost; as lost they would be, were it not for the conservative principle by which we propose to maintain their strength and their value.

For the annals of our county or city the great text-book is Smith's *History of Cork*, which was first published in Dublin in 1750, a subsequent edition appearing in Cork in 1815. Both editions have become extremely scarce. At the time when Smith wrote, materials were available which we no longer possess, but since that time other records have come within our reach, and a member of our society, Mr. Robert Day, who holds a distinguished rank as an archæologist, has placed at the disposal of the Society a copy of the work, annotated by Mr. Crofton Croker, Dr. Richard Caulfield, and by himself. The fairy legends collected by Crofton Croker have made known throughout Europe the singular and poetic folklore which permeated the country at the early part of this century. Since then the dreadful famine of 1846-47, the whole-

sale emigration from some districts, the gradual substitution of the English for the Irish language, have done much to erase from the people's memory the weird legions of "the good people," and it is fortunate that Croker was able to preserve for us so much of the poetical tales of an imaginative people. It was not the legends alone that interested him. In every department of our local story he felt a deep interest, but his MS. notes have never been published. He was succeeded by Dr. Richard Caulfield—a friend whom so many of us remember—a man with a genuine and self-sacrificing love of learning; a scholar, indeed, whose knowledge was far-reaching, and whose acquaintance with the mediæval Latin in which our old charters are written was rarely excelled. Every line in our annals, every tradition that floated vaguely or clearly in the memories of our people, every relic of our ancient edifices, every gravestone that bore a record of the men of the past, was of interest to him, and with an accuracy which is, I regret to say, not common amongst us, he recorded these observations. Amiable, generous, and kind, he passed the last days in the library of our college amongst the books he loved so much, and has left behind him a memory that "smells sweet and blossoms in the dust." To these annotations Mr. Day will himself add the result of his own varied knowledge, so that the work of Smith, supplemented by the tripartite criticism of Croker, Caulfield, and Day, will form an enduring record of our local history.

If this work is appreciated—as we trust it shall be—the publication of other scarce books will follow, including Tuckey's valuable *Cork Remembrancer*, *Alexander the Coppersmith*, &c. It is also proposed to publish a collection of the Poetry and Legendary Ballads of the South of Ireland, commencing with the *Monks of Kilcrea*. This is a field in which many a flower may be gathered.

Indeed, the papers already communicated to our society, show that from our members may be expected many a contribution interesting not to Corkmen alone, but to all Irishmen who wish to trace in the story of our southern province, the causes which have made us what we are, and, from the consequences, to elicit some light to guide us in the future.