

Historical characteristics of the Celtic race

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HISTORICAL
CHARACTERISTICS
OF
THE CELTIC RACE.

AN ADDRESS
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HISTORICAL CHARACTERISTICS

OF

THE CELTIC RACE.

GENTLEMEN,—

YOU are met to-night as a Celtic Society, and that, too, as a Celtic Society in connection with the University—can it be justified? Has such an Association a right to exist, to make demands upon the students' time and attention, at a period when there is so much both to do and to know that needs to be done and to be known? It is a question not hastily to be answered, though some bold and crude spirits might at once volunteer an answer in the negative, consigning all things Gaelic, as they would all things Greek, to one limbo, a quiet euthanasia. To-night, I should wish to advance some reasons of a contrary kind, in arrest of judgment, in favour of preserving, even encouraging, an element which has some valuable qualities, with a special *differentia*, qualities both moral and intellectual, stripped of which the University and society would be undoubtedly poorer. For this purpose, I shall ask you to take a survey of some of the

best attested traditions as to the Celtic race, its fortunes and historical position, that we may better appreciate its individuality and special character, and in doing so, I hope to be able to show cause for such a union or society as the present, in order that the honourable, and often noble, associations belonging to your race may be preserved, and also that you may be stirred, by way of remembrance, to investigate your own antiquities for yourselves. Those antiquities are most fruitful and important, and a great harvest awaits the young Gael who is fortunate enough to enter the field with the proper weapons for its reaping, a harvest that will add to our knowledge of the past, and so increase the general treasure of humanity.

The Celtic race, as we know, occupies the outlying promontories of Western Europe, having been pushed in the pressure of the ages into remote fastnesses and picturesque, but shadowy, glens overlooking the western main. Brittany, Ireland, Wales, and our Western Highlands stand out as the fortresses of the Gael, the bluffs and promontories to which the Celtic speech has now retired. But although the Celtic-speaking population is thus squeezed into a corner, the Celtic element in Europe is of much wider extension, and is not limited to the Celtic-speaking area. Much of Scotland, for example, is really Celtic in the substratum, even where the Gaelic tongue has vanished; and it is not possible to understand Scottish history without a knowledge how much of the Celtic fire comes out in and underlies the *perfervidum ingenium Scotorum*. So with the great and

potential nation of France, we are entitled to claim it also as of Celtic stem, the French tongue being mainly a fusion of Latin and Celtic speech. We shall equally fail to comprehend the history of France, if we do not recognise in its great movements, the generous, though often wild, pulsations of the Celtic fire.

The rival Teutonic or Saxon element can claim, no doubt, to possess its own virtues and energies; and no one would deny that the world has been the better through these energies, has profited through the more solid, though, perhaps, less brilliant or electric qualities of the German. There is this, however, to be said of the literary achievements of the Saxons, that they had to be wakened up from abroad, and the flame had to be communicated from without, whether the spark came through the Welsh and Norman^[1] chivalry, through Classical Renaissance, or through French wit; and only then, when so touched by some external impulse, their genius flashed out in Chaucer, in Shakspeare, in Pope, in Goethe, and so became magnetised. The Celtic genius, on the other hand, may claim to be itself magnetic, not dependent on vivification from without, and this I take it is one main reason why we may affirm that the qualities of the Celt are of a different type from those of the Saxon, that they bear another image and superscription, a special mint mark of their own among the mental endowments of the nations of the earth.

In endeavouring to appreciate more precisely what these special endowments are, let us take a glance of inquiry as to the countries where we may expect to find the Celtic *differentia* giving evidence of its existence. If we take the names of the three kingdoms—England, Scotland, Ireland—we can gauge to some extent the Celtic element in their very philology. We find that in one, the Anglo-Saxon element occupies the whole area of the word, while in the other two the Celtic element has maintained its ground so far, and so far has not succumbed. Thus philology, in this instance, coincides with history. For it was only in England, and in England proper, as distinct from Wales and Cornwall, that the Celtic element was clean extirpated; and so the name of "England" has no trace of Celtic in its composition, while in the sister names of "Ireland" and "Scotland" the Celtic and the Saxon elements are found co-existing. Further, when we proceed to study the matter in minute detail, we find the evidence both striking and abundant. Thus to take the topographical nomenclature of Scotland and Ireland, we find it presenting a remarkable contrast to that of England, Not to go deeper than the names of shires, there is hardly a Scottish county but still bears in the etymology of its name homage to the Celtic race. Apart from a few county names of Saxon stem in the south, and a few Norse county names in the far north, all the Scotch county names are Celtic; but when we turn to England, the proportions are reversed. There is scarcely a county name south of the Cheviots, except Kent and York, that can be called Celtic, and these two are relics from old British days.

In some few, as in Cambridge, Oxford, the Celtic names of *rivers* still maintain a kind of footing, as appellatives, alongside of the Saxon substantive. And a few Roman names, like Chester, and some with mixed elements, survive, such as Lincoln, Dorset, Lancaster, Cumberland, which are *semi*. Celtic; but the rest of the English shire-names, as a rule, seem purely Saxon. As for the tribe-names of the ancient Britons—Iceni, Regni, Trinobantes, Brigantes, Silures—these have utterly perished on the soil of England,^[2] leaving no local reminiscences. If, however, we turn to the map of France, we find not merely river names and mountain names but tribe names largely preserved in the topographical vocabulary. The old clan names familiar to us in Cæsar, have their *simulacra* still floating in the geography of France—Lingones, Langres; Arverni, Auvergne; Treviri, Treves; Remi, Rheims; Caletes, Calais; Parisü, Paris; Veneti, Vannes; Turones, Tours; Mediomatrici, Metz; Bituriges, Bourges; &c. On the other hand, non-Celtic names like the German Strassburg or Scandinavian Bec in Normandy, are few and far between in the topographical nomenclature of France, which is therefore Celtic to the core. And whence this difference between France and England? Were the conquering Franks not Teutonic like the victorious Saxons? Yes, but the Franks under Clovis or Chlodwig simply subdued, the Anglo-Saxon under Cerdic and Hengist extirpated, and the reason of this seems to have been that the Saxon conquered while still heathen, the Frank obtained ascendancy after he became Christian; and hence arose the difference of

treatment meted out to the subject population. Further, the Frank not only preserved the subject people, but he did not rob them of their lands; although he imposed himself as an over-lord or signior, and exacted certain dues, he himself remained a huntsman and a sportsman, as well as a warrior; contented himself with the produce of the woods and the forest, and so by a happy compromise, as Gibbon remarks, left the cultivated parts to their Gaulish possessors. It is on evidence of this kind that historians affirm the people of France to be still largely Celtic (George Long will have it, to the extent of 19-20ths, which seems an over-estimate, and overlooks the Basque element in Gascony and Aquitaine), but in any case we can claim the people of France as illustrating largely the virtues and also the weaknesses of the Celtic character. Moreover, there is ground for affirming that the great eruption which we know as the French Revolution—the eruption which changed the face of modern society—was largely a Celtic movement; it was a bursting of the fetters imposed by the Teutonic Frank, the shaking off of the Feudalism which was the growth of Frankish institutions; and, as a result of this eruption, the France of the Revolution became under that movement more Gaulish and less Frankish. One of the songs of Béranger, the poet of the Revolution, bears witness to this. "Forward, ye Gauls and ye Franks!" "En avant, Gaulois et Francs!" where the Celtic element is made to accompany or even take precedence of the Teutonic. The relative proportion of these two elements in the French population has been still further altered by events taking place under

our own eyes: the excision of Alsace–Lorraine in 1870 has had the effect of eliminating still more the Teutonic, intensifying and concentrating the Celtic element in the French nationality.

Assuming, then, that you have as a race such kinship and affinities, I proceed to inquire what are the qualities that can be predicated as appertaining to the Celtic race in the various stages of its history. That history has been a long and chequered one—*Per varios casus, per tot discrimina rerum*; but amid the varying fortunes of the Celtic people, it will be found that in their pure and unsophisticated condition they have been in the main distinguished by these four qualities more particularly, Reverence religiously, devoted Faithfulness politically, Politeness or civility socially, and Spirit, or, as the French would call it, *Esprit* universally. In one word, Idealism is that which belongs essentially to the Celtic character, showing itself in the disposition to make the future, or the past, more important than the present; to gild the horizon with a golden age in the far past, as do the Utopian Conservatives; or in the remote future, as do the equally Utopian Revolutionists. This ideal tendency has no doubt its dangers, the risk, namely, of mistaking fancies for facts, and also neglecting hard and flinty facts, so receiving wounds and bruises in our environment; but, rightly regulated, this Idealism is at the root of all nobleness, for we must agree with the great burly Anglo-Saxon Dr Johnson, when standing upon the Celtic soil of Iona, and inspired by its sacred memories, he

declared that "whatever makes the past, the distant, or the future predominate over the present, exalts us in the dignity of thinking beings". That is an entirely Celtic sentiment, and once we appreciate it, we come to discern the origin of those qualities which have formed the strength and also the weakness of the Celtic people. The weakness, I say, as well as the strength, for just as a man's strong point is also found to be his weak point, through, it may be, vanity in himself, or through envy on the part of others feeling his superiority, so the Idealism of the Celtic race has had its weakness in this respect that, while they meditated and dreamed, other and more realistic and less imaginative races *acted*, and so stepped in before them frequently in the arena of the world.

To expound in any adequate form the influence of this Idealism in the various relations we have indicated is beyond our present purpose. We can only glance at a few of the more salient features. Thus we are compelled to omit entirely one aspect of the Celtic Idealism—that which we have called their faithfulness or loyalty, whether seen in things political or ecclesiastical, that disposition which has prompted them to look up to chieftains and leaders implicitly, asking no questions, and often suffering accordingly when under unwise leadership. Culloden and the war in La Vendee tell the same tale of devotion to chiefs and leaders, and it has been well avouched on many a battlefield since; yea and the Saxon race has been helped to its present position to-day because of that devotedness of its Celtic troops which leads them to obey implicitly at the

cannon's mouth, and makes them at Balaclava as at Tel-el-Kebir the backbone of the British army. In this regard, the glowing picture given by [Lord Byron](#) of the Albanian mountaineers suits well the mountaineers of Albyn nearer home, and it is possible that the features he has portrayed were originally recognised among the Deeside hills, for, with him, Lochnagar, as well as Ida, rose over all the Orient.

Fierce are Albania's children, yet they lack
Not virtues, were these virtues more mature.
Where is the foe that ever saw their back?
Who can so well the toil of war endure?
Their native fastnesses not more secure
Than they in doubtful time of troublous need.
Their wrath, how deadly I but their friendship sure,
When gratitude or valour bids them bleed,
Unshaken, rushing on where'er their chief may lead.

—([Childe Harold](#), ii. 65).

With what emotion, therefore, ought we to read in the Gallic war of Cæsar such an entry as this regarding an ancient Lochiel—*Litavicus cum suis clientibus, quibus more Gallorum nefas est etiam in extrema fortuna deserere patronos, Gergoviam perfugit*—"Litavicus succeeded in escaping to Gergovia along with his clansmen. To desert

their chief, even in the extremity of fortune, is, in the moral code of the Gauls, accounted as a crime."

Let me now ask you to accompany me in a short survey of the more notable historic scenes in which the Celtic race has figured, and in which, therefore, their peculiar character may be expected to be discerned.

At the dawn of recorded history, we find the Celt already occupying a vast area of Western Europe, and exercising a wide ascendancy. We know of no period during which he is not in possession; we find him always in the stream of history, never in the fountain. From low down the Danube, along by the ridges of the Alps, we discern his tribes entrenched; and the topography of Western and Middle Europe, in so far as its river names and mountain names are concerned, rests on a Celtic basis, and is unintelligible, unless from Celtic roots, even in regions from which the Celtic race has long retired. But without claiming for them a wider area than from the Adriatic to the Hebrides, from Gallia Cisalpina to our own Western Isles, we meet with this strange phenomenon, that, unlike the other Aryan races of Europe, the Celts, when first historically discernible, are seen to be flowing eastward, and, as it were, backward, instead of westward. One of these eastward eruptions poured down into the valley of the Po, whence we know that basin in Cæsar's time as bearing the name of Cisalpine Gaul. Another and later eruption was deflected round the head of the Adriatic, poured down into Greece as far as

Delphi, crossed the Hellespont, and ultimately became quiescent in the heart of Asia Minor about 270 B.C. The name Galatia enshrined for us in the N.T., in the great epistle of St Paul, is the monument that marks the Celtic race in its furthest eastern extension as a returning tide.

That is the limit in space: the limit in time, beyond which we cannot trace them chronologically, is the well-marked date of 600 B.C., the founding of Massilia, now Marseilles, a Greek colony upon Gallic soil. This well-ascertained event is important in another respect, that it brought the Celts into contact with the Greek race, and gave them early access to the arts and culture of the authors of European civilisation. Hence Cæsar tells us that in the camp of the Helvetians, and, therefore, in the interior of Gaul, he found camp rolls kept in Greek characters, the knowledge of the Greek alphabet having been propagated from Massilia as a centre far into the interior of ancient Gaul. There is, therefore, evidence obtainable regarding the Celtic race six centuries before the Germanic race comes, through Cæsar and Tacitus, into distinct regard, and ten centuries "before history has much to say of the Anglo-Saxon portion of the Germanic race. Moreover, it is something to know among the honours of your pedigree that the Celtic language assumed a written form earlier than any non-classic speech. This we could gather from Cæsar as regards the *Continental* Gauls; and as regards the *insular* Celts, we may accept the verdict of John Hill Burton, who, though far from Philo-Celtic in his leanings, states the matter thus:—"The Irish (or

Gaelic) was a language not only calculated for the public and domestic uses of civilisation, but it became a literary language earlier than any of the Teutonic tongues". So Father Innes avers that the "Letters" and "Confession" of St. Patrick are "the most ancient writings of any *native* of the British Isles that now remain".

The date 600 B.C. was mentioned as our earliest, but I now come to another, the most notable date in the ancient Gallic history, that of 390 B.C., marking the greatest exploit in ancient times of the Gallic race, the capture of Rome by the Gauls. Among the confusions and the suspected figments of the Roman historians, we can discern this much, that the Roman Commonwealth was never so near extinction, and that it never received so staggering a blow as in the "Dies Alliensis". The Gauls came as an avalanche, and as suddenly departed, after being masters of Rome all except the capitol, until fever and pestilence compelled them to relax their hold, and they withdrew after exacting ransom, ignominious to the Roman remembrance, an indignity which was hushed up by various falsifications. But it may be said. Was not Cannae a severer blow than Allia? Not so, for the *dies Cannensis* brought no invasion of the *Urbs*, Hannibal never had a foot within the sacred Pomoerium: neither Carthaginian, nor Greek, nor Samnite ever penetrated to the Forum, nor any other enemy, save only the Gaul with his claymore. Before that terrible weapon, even the Roman Gods had to retire; they went away for shelter to an Etruscan city. Vestals and Augurs once, and only once,

had to seek a refuge: it was before the Celtic avalanche thundering downward from the Alps. For any commotion among the Gauls the Romans had a special name:—they called it a *Tumultus*; and we are told that the Romans felt they had always a special business on hand when they had to deal with Gauls: in the words of Sallust—"*Cum Gallis pro salute, non pro gloria certari*"—that a war with the Gauls was for existence, not for glory. Therefore we need not wonder that the catastrophe of 390 B.C. was burnt deep into the Roman remembrance, as shown by the hesitation as to rebuilding the city and by the temporary paralysis which made them think of huddling into the ruined Veii.

In the minuter touches of the historian, much of interest reveals itself regarding this event. The suddenness with which the Gauls took fire at an insult, the impetuosity of their march, are features to be noted. "*Flagrantes ira*" says Livy; "*cujus impotens est gens*"—"Burning with indignation, a passion which nationally they are unable to restrain." May we not see in this little touch a spark of that *Esprit* which we know, or did know of in ourselves as the perfervid temperament of the Scots? So with Buchanan, whose "Scoti" are properly the Gaels, our forefathers are characterised as a race "*ad iram natura paullo propensiores*".

Let us not forget also the splendid picture of this scene in the Virgilian Shield of Æneas.

Galli per dumos aderant arcemque tenebant,
Defensi tenebris et dono noctis opacæ;
Aurea cæsaries ollis atque aurea vestis;
Virgatis lucent Sagulis; turn lactea colla
Auro innectuntur; duo quisque Alpina coruscant
Gaesa manu, scutis protecti corpora longis.

"The Gauls were at hand marching among the brushwood, and had gained the summit sheltered by the darkness and the kindly grace of dusky night. Golden is their hair and golden their raiment; striped cloaks gleam on their shoulders; their milk-white necks are twined with gold: each brandishes two Alpine javelins, his body guarded by the long oval of his shield." (Conington). A very Turner or Gainsborough in verse, radiant in colour.

Virgatis lucent sagulis—This can be no other than the Tartan, and the heart warms to the gleam of it, discerned even at a distance of two thousand years. Buchanan must have recognised this, when he writes regarding the dress of the Scottish Highlanders—"*Veste gaudent varia ac maxime virgata*"—no doubt a Virgilian reminiscence.

Our next glimpse of the ancient Celt is half a century later, when they come for a moment within touch of the Macedonian Alexander. The story told by more than one authority is that in his preliminary raid round by his northern frontier to make matters safe before he should

leave for the East, he came in contact with a tribe called Κελτοί. Conversing with their ambassadors, he asked them whether they feared anything in the world. Nothing, they replied, unless the sky should fall. That, I suppose, was another way of saying that they were not afraid of anything human, though they might be of things superhuman. At all events, Alexander thought he had enough of them, for he turned round with the remark, "These Κελτοί are proud, blustering fellows". He passed on to his Eastern expedition, leaving them alone, and so we hear no more of the Κελτοί in the time of Alexander. The story is sometimes told to the disadvantage of the Celts, but, if closely examined, it will be found to be capable of another interpretation. The probability is that Alexander expected them to say that they were terribly afraid of *him* in particular; and, so fishing for a compliment, as fishers of that kind occasionally do, he caught a Tartar. The Celt, seemingly a gentleman then as now, wrapt himself up in his own dignity, and so Alexander fared at his hands much as he did afterwards at the tub of Diogenes, a proud gentleman also in his own way.

The next great event in the history of the Gauls is that already alluded to—the eruption which ultimately settled down into Galatia, in the heart of Asia Minor. I shall only refer to two points bearing on these eastern Gauls: that they also were tremendous warriors, for not only does Polybius (in II. 19) speak of the terror inspired by the Gauls as a unique experience; but we have an artistic monument of a Gaulish warrior which represents to all time the Greek idea

of Gallic fortitude. The wonderful and pathetic statue known as the Dying Gladiator is now known to have come from Pergamus in Asia, and to represent an Asiatic Gaul bearing his death-wound: the tore or *torquis* around his neck, a Celtic ornament, marks him as a Celt; and so Lord Byron has fallen into a slight mistake when he says, "Arise, ye *Goths*, and glut your ire". It ought to have been, in strict historical accuracy, "Arise, ye Gauls".

Along with the bravery, these eastern Gauls seem to have carried "with them a full measure of the impulsiveness of the western Celt. Their descendants, as we know, came in contact with the Apostle Paul, and though by his time largely Grecised, they seem to have retained somewhat of the Celtic enthusiasm, showing itself in fitful outbursts in a way very memorable. In the presence of this emotional race, the apostle is himself swayed by emotions such as he feels or expresses nowhere else. While he censures them for being so soon turned away to false teachers, he speaks of the emotion with which they received him: they received him, he says, as an angel of God, and in their enthusiasm, "if it had been possible, they would have plucked out their own eyes and given them to him". Does St. Paul use language like this of any other race? Has he expressed himself so regarding any other people? We feel in such a case the pulse of a peculiar enthusiasm there throbbing, a true indication of the Celtic origin of the Galatian people.

We have seen how the Gauls just brushed the wings of the victorious Alexander: we all know how they came under the chariot of Imperial Cæsar, but we are apt to forget that they came into association with the third great warrior of antiquity, whose name alone can be matched with these—the Punic Hannibal. The Gauls were largely confederate with the Carthaginians, and it was the levies in Cisalpine Gaul that reinforced the depleted ranks of the Punic army. Again the claymore, or, as Livy calls it, the *gladius prælongus Gallorum*, wielded *cæsim magis quam punctim* (with slash rather than stab), did terrible service on the side of Hannibal, not without disaster to themselves. At Cannæ, we are told, he had to lament the loss of 4000 Gauls, two-thirds of the loss by which he purchased his most brilliant victory. Unfortunately for his ultimate success he had shifted his base too far away from his recruiting ground in Cisalpine Gaul; if he had leant more on Gaul and less on Magna Græcia and Carthage, as his base of operations, the odds are that Rome might not have been the capital of the ancient world, and, perhaps, that instead of Latin you might now be studying Punic or Celtic, as the classic language in the schools of the Western World.

After Hannibal, the next gleam of light upon the Gauls is the incident connected with a Roman consul about 122 B.C. in the valley of the Rhone. It is a delicious story, told by Appian, and bears internal marks, as we shall see, of being true to the letter. The Gallic tribe, the Allobroges, whom we know, had given offence to the Romans by receiving the

refugee chiefs of another tribe, the Salyes, whom the consul was reducing and subduing. Domitius, the consul, is angry, but the chief, or king, as he is styled, of the Allobroges, sends an ambassador in great state and formality to deprecate his anger. The interview is amusing, and the contrast very notable, as between the poetical and romantic Gaul and the cold, matter-of-fact Roman. Out of politeness to the Roman general, the Gaul arrives richly dressed, and having with him a brilliant train, also a number of fine dogs, the sign of an ancient as of a modern gentleman. But what he trusted to most to make an impression was, would you believe it?—his Bard, whom he brings with him, much as the Highland Chieftain would be incomplete without his piper (*Piobair-mor*), and he sings the glories of all concerned, μουσικός τε ἀνὴρ εἶπετο ὕμνων τὸν βασιλέυ, κ. τ. λ..

It is a scene in ancient times much like that where the impulsive Frenchman Jules Favre tried in recent days to touch the heart of Bismarck by an epigram. Domitius, we are told, was not moved any more than Bismarck by this picturesque politeness, for the ambassador was told to withdraw, having failed in his purpose. That is the comic side of the picture. Here is the tragic. These same Allobroges, at a later time, came in contact with the terrible tragedy that we know as the Catilinarian conspiracy. They were the unconscious occasion of the bursting out of that terrible social gangrene. Much of the story, in so far as the Allobroges are concerned, reads like a bit of contemporary

history; the crofter population, of which we hear so much, are now suffering exactly as did the Allobroges in the ancient days, when they felt the pressure of remorseless economical laws, and listened for a time to the overtures of revolutionists like Catiline. The story I prefer to tell in the words of George Long, from which you will see that the Gauls of ancient times got into impecunious and over-peopled conditions. "In Gaul," says Strabo (p. 178), "no part of it remains unproductive except where there are swamps or forests, and even these parts are inhabited, yet rather on account of the populousness than by reason of the industry of the people; for the women are good breeders and careful mothers, but the men are better warriors than husbandmen, οἱ δ' ἄνδρες μᾶλλον μαχηταὶ ἢ γεωργοί."."

Thus far Strabo, and now comes George Long's comment on the social state resulting, indebtedness and poverty:—

"Cæsar does not explain how the poorer sort got into debt, nor how the land was divided. The rich had doubtless large tracts. There is no evidence that the poor had any land in full ownership. They were probably in the condition of tenants who paid their rent in kind, or partly in money and partly in kind; and their debts might either arise from arrears of rent or from borrowing to supply their wants. There is no difficulty in seeing where they might borrow; the towns would contain the traders, and the markets would be in the towns. Arms, agricultural implements, and clothing must be bought with corn, cattle, and hogs. The

poor cultivator, whether a kind of proprietor or a tenant, would soon find himself in bad plight between his lord, the shopkeeper, and the "mercator" who travelled the country with his cart loaded with the tempting liquor that he could not resist. (Diod., v. 26.) The enormous waste of life in the Gallic domestic quarrels, their foreign expeditions, and in their wars with the Romans, was easily supplied. A poor agricultural nation, with such robust women as the Galli had (Diod., v. 32) is exactly the people to produce soldiers. Among such a people more male children are born than the land requires: and those who are not wanted for the plough, the spade, or to watch the cattle, are only fit to handle the sword."

Again, as to the Allobroges, the following was the state of matters, revealing how they came into relation with the Catiline tragedy of 63 B.C.:—

"They were overwhelmed with debt, both the state and individuals; a common complaint of the provincial subjects of Rome. The Romans levied heavy contributions on the people who had made most resistance, and both communities and individuals felt it. Besides this, the Gallic cultivator seems to have been always in debt. He borrowed money from the Roman negotiatores at a high rate, and his profits would be hardly sufficient to pay the interest of the money. The profitable business of feeding sheep and cattle was in the hands of the Romans, who probably got the exclusive use of much of the pasture land. As the

Allobroges were a conquered people, we may conjecture that their waste lands had been seized by the Roman State, and were covered with the flocks of Romans, who paid to the Roman treasury a small sum for the right of pasture. P. Quinctius, for whom Cicero made a speech which is still extant, had a good business in Gallia as a flockmaster ("*Pecuararia res satis ampla*," pro P. Quinctio, c. 3). A Roman named Umbrenus, who had been a "negotiator" in Gallia, undertook to open the conspiracy of Catiline to the Allobroges, and he promised them great things if their nation would join in the rising. From fear, however, or some other cause, the Allobroges betrayed the conspirators to the consul Cicero. (Sallust Cat. 40; Appian B. Civ. ii, 4.) It does not appear that the ambassadors got anything for their pains, though they well deserved it. There were signs of insurrection in Southern Italy as well as in Gallia, citerior and ulterior, and the revelations of the ambassadors saved Rome at least from a civil war." (Smith's Dict. of Geo.: in *Gallia*.)

In reading the above, and comparing it with what we hear around us, we feel as if History were now well-nigh repeating itself, and the wheel of Time coming round full circle, with the same social difficulties and dilemmas recurring after two thousand years.

But we must hasten on to the consummation which overtook the Gallic race in ancient times. Julius Cæsar appeared, and the Celt was absorbed in the Empire of

Rome. How that warrior entered Gaul, and crushed tribe after tribe in one cruel but resistless progress, is known to every schoolboy—belongs to the tragedies of ancient history. The clemency of Caesar, of which we hear much, has no existence toward Gauls: and the name of Vercingetorix may be coupled with that of our own Wallace as the type of the brave and unselfish, but ill-fated, patriot. Yet it was no easy task to subdue the warlike Gauls; this foremost man of all time, as some style him, Julius Caesar, took eight years to do it, and it remains his biggest achievement.

There is no lack of evidence in his own pages as to the prowess of his foe; but it may be well to notice one or two of his testimonies as to their talents and ingenuity. In one place he compliments them on their *sollertia* or ingenious inventiveness,

Singulari militum nostrorum virtuti consilia cujusque modi Gallorum occurrebant, ut est summæ genus sollertiæ atque ad omnia imitanda et efficienda quæ ab q̄ttoque tradantur aptissimum. (B.G. vii. 22.) Further, the Bituriges who gave him trouble at a siege by their countermines have learned that art as workers in metal mines. This interesting tribe seems to have borne a rather high-sounding name, as if conscious of their cleverness; the word is believed to mean "Kings of Creation" [Bith (existence) and righ (King)].

Another important fact mentioned quite incidentally by Cæsar is that regarding the Yeneti, in what we now know as Brittany. He mentions that they had ships moored, not by hempen cables, but by iron chains (*ferreis catenis*), an invention only recently introduced in the British marine. Evidently the art of metallurgy was well practised, and a certain Gaul bears the name of *Gobannitio*, which can be no other than "Gow" in some form, *i.e.*, a son of Vulcan, or blacksmith.

But the Gauls, with all their skill and bravery, have to succumb. Immediately thereafter, however, we hear of Cæsar himself, who knew the quality of the material, enlisting them in his armies, and the Gallic legions at Pharsalia find a melancholy revenge over one-half at least of their Roman oppressors. This utilising of the Gaul reminds one of the enlisting of the Highland clans by Chatham in the generation subsequent to Culloden, when that statesman found a field for their energies abroad as the mainstay of the infantry in the British army.

With Julius Cæsar, therefore, and his conquest, the Continental portion of the Celtic race ceases to occupy an independent position. It becomes absorbed in the Roman Empire, and follows its fortunes. The insular Celts, however, are only partially absorbed; for while the ancient Britons, in what is now England, become for a time Romanised, the Gaels of Ireland and the Caledonians of Scotland never came under the Roman eagle. The former

were never invaded by the Romans; the latter were invaded, but were eventually left alone, and remained unsubdued. Even in those times the native dignity of the Celtic race is discernible; and, whatever may be its authenticity, the speech of Galgacus at the battle of Mons Grampius is ideally, if not literally, true, as the indignant outburst of Caledonian fire, a "Brosnachadh Cath" on the eve of a battle. It almost looks as if Tacitus felt a moral grandeur in the simple manners and proud sentiments of the Caledonian Celts, which he looked for in vain among his own degenerate countrymen; and there is no more striking fact in ancient history than the circumstance that Tacitus, with an eye of almost prophetic vision, looked away over the Alps from Italy and the enervated nations of the south to the Celtic and Germanic races of the north as containing, under the rough shell of barbarian manners, and amid the northern snows, the future hope of the world. The Germania and Agricola of that historian are thus of a singular importance in the development of the ages, leading out the old and preparing the way for leading in the new civilisation; and, to you, therefore, the Agricola which tells of the brave resistance of the Caledonians, ought to possess a special interest, as it forms a splendid literary monument to the virtues and patriotism of the Celtic race.

Into the later fortunes of the Celtic family time and space forbid us to enter with any minuteness. We can only glance at one or two of the most prominent points among the many tempting themes that would present themselves in a

complete survey. Foremost among these, we might name the peculiar Celtic influence diffused from the mysterious lays of Ossian as well as from the Irish melodies of Tom Moore, a proud pathetic melancholy of which all Europe has felt the power. That constitutes the literary honour of the Scoto-Irish or family of the Gael. But hardly less important has been the influence of the other branch of the Celtic stock which we know as the Welsh, or, as they style themselves, Cymric, a race which looks as if it were to preserve its speech and nationality longest among all the Celtic peoples. The Welsh still cling to their language with an almost Jewish tenacity. That speech is an anvil that has worn out many hammers; it has survived three conquests—the Roman, the Saxon, the Norman—and they can claim a continuous national existence up to the Roman times of Cassivelaunus and Caractacus. Our Queen Victoria, will it be believed? is with them only Victoria the Second; they claim an older one, the Queen of the Iceni, the same of whom the poet tells as

"The British warrior queen
Bleeding from the Roman rods."

Boadicea (Gaelic Buaidh, victory) is their Victoria the First, and our present queen is in Welsh, "*Buddug yr Ail*" i.e., Boadicea Altera or Secunda.

It was from the legends of this people that the romance of chivalry proceeded, and all the associations that cling around the Knights of the Round Table. That was a fascination that went the round of Western Europe, subduing, as in Spenser's *Faery Queen*, even the Saxon genius; and though Cervantes in *Don Quixote* smiled the last breath of it away, extinguishing also the national *esprit* of his own country, the spell has since revived in the legends of Arthur under the muse of Tennyson. Those legends attracted Milton, himself also of Welsh blood on the mother's side, and for a time it was doubtful whether the author of "*Comus*" was to choose between Arthur and the patriarch Adam as the hero of his crowning poem. And here we may remark regarding the Cymric people how notably the great Saxon dramatist, growing up and flourishing on the Welsh border, has paid them a certain respectful and most honourable homage. Not only has he founded two of his noblest plays on legends of the ancient British foretime—*King Lear*, perhaps the most perfect of (his tragedies, and also *Cymbeline*—but he has portrayed the Welsh character with the interest of a discoverer who lights upon a special vein of sentiment and feeling. Shakspeare has seized for us the strong as well as the weak points of that character—Bravery and Sentiment — Bravery to the edge of rashness, and high-soaring Sentiment, disdaining the fetters of pedestrian logic. He makes us laugh, no doubt, at the gallant Fluellen (who is only Llewellyn in another form), and endless has been the mirth over that soldier's resolute determination to make of Henry V. another Alexander the

Great, or, as he calls him, "Alexander the Pig"; reasoning from Macedon to Monmouth, because both begin with an M; but for all that, Shakspeare has a genuine respect for the choleric Fluellen, and though he makes mirth of his words and his utterance, he compliments him by the mouth of the king, who has these words regarding him—

"Though it appear a little out of fashion,
There is much care and valour in this Welshman."

With what fine insight likewise have we portrayed to us the companion picture of the Welsh chief, Owen Glendower. He comes before us as the victim of sentiment, puffed up with portents at his own nativity, importing the creations of imagination from the airy hall of the poet into the domain of actual life, into the tented camp of the warrior. How much of meaning lies in that line in which Owen Glendower magnifies the resources at his command —

"I can call spirits from the vasty deep" —

There speaks the imaginative and romantic Welshman.

"But will they come, when you do call for them?"

asks the Percy, in reply, mocking the pretension.

In point of fact, it is in the Celtic area, either of Wales or of Scotland) that Shakspeare finds his favourite material for the darker forms of the supernatural; and we cannot forget that it is the Celtic Macbeth whom he makes the central figure of that drama, in which he deals with the invisible Powers of Evil—another testimony to the affinity of the Celtic mind toward the Night-side of Nature, towards the weird and the "eerie" and the supernatural.

This brings us to say a word on the kindred theme of the religious sentiment of the Celtic race, their inborn reverential feeling, one of their most prominent and honourable characteristics. Like the romantic sentiment we have just been considering, which has drawn the Celtic mind toward the mystery of Nature, it is a plant rooted and grounded in the same soil, nurtured by the dews of the same Idealism. The blossoms of it may, in ancient and in modern times, not unfrequently resemble those of Superstition; yet it forms an inherent and characteristic product of the Celtic mind. Regarding this feature, we have the evidence of Ernest Rénan, who is himself a Breton: how long that feeling may survive under his and other influences at work may be doubtful, but that it has lived all along the course of the Celtic history is both clear and certain. Says Rénan: —

"The characteristic trait of the Breton race in all its ranks is Idealism; the pursuit of an end, moral or intellectual, often erroneous, but always disinterested."

This character he portrays in minute detail, showing how it produces simplicity, unselfishness, devoutness; how it has almost extinguished suicide, so that such an exit from life, just as among our own Celtic race, is recoiled from with horror; and various other salutary fruits he traces to this source. In point of fact, one might almost affirm that the religious feeling of the Celts, strong under the Druids, strong under the Christian Faith, is, next to the Jewish, the most intense that Europe has known. It is a singular corroboration of this position that the great historian of the "Decline and Fall" has coupled the Celts and the Jews in one category in this regard. These, according to Gibbon, are the only races who had a national faith against which the Romans made war, not on political grounds, but as a religious belief. The capture of Jerusalem by Titus, and the extirpation of the Druids by fire and sword from the groves of Anglesea, are therefore parallel events at the two extremities of the Roman world; and you will read the *Agricola* with fresher interest when you discern the evidence thus supplied as to the characteristics of the Celtic race.

Leaving this loftier theme, I must now descend to a lower level, into the region of manners, to say a word as to a more lowly and mundane characteristic—politeness of demeanour. This is a feature of character universally conceded to you—a courteous politeness; there is confessedly nothing boorish or vulgar about the true Celt; there is, on the contrary, an aversion to everything mean or

base. It is often remarked, even by the Englishman, that the Celt has the air and spirit of a gentleman, as if he were come of good blood in the economy of the world. One of his names for the Evil One signifies the mean or base one (*Muisean*, see [Nicolson's](#) Gaelic Proverbs), and we can easily understand how Sir Walter Scott found a magnet of attraction in the chivalry of the Highlands, whence have flowed creations like the *Lady of the Lake*, or *Waverley* and *Rob Roy*. Nearly 300 years ago this nobility of the Highland people in their games struck an old poet of the Elizabethan time, who has left us his impressions of a hunt which he saw in the Brae of Mar as far back as the beginning of the 17th century:—

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"Through heather, moss, 'mong frogs and bogs and fogs,
'Mongst craggy cliffs and thunder-battered hills,
Hares, hinds, bucks, roes are chased by men and dogs,
Where two hours' hunting four score fat deer kills;

Lowland, your sports are low; as is your seat;
The Highland games and minds are high and great"

—[John Taylor \(Water Poet\)](#).

The same note is struck here as in—

"England, thy beauties are tame and domestic,
To one who has roamed o'er the mountains afar."

So that it is as it were only re-echoed from [Byron's](#) Lochnagar. In keeping, therefore, with the character of the scenery is the bearing and demeanour of the people. Among his bleak, but majestic, hills, the Celt can still say—Ged tha mi bochd, tha mi uasal, buidheachad do Dhia—"Though I am poor, I am respectable, God be thanked." And travellers among them who have seen all Europe, place the Highlander and the Irishman high in natural politeness. John Wesley, who knew both sides of the Atlantic, says he found as real courtesy in the Irish cabins as could be found at St James's or the Louvre; and Campbell, in his Tales of the West Highlands, has the following, and much more than we can quote, to the same purport:

"There are few peasants that I think so highly of, none that I like so well. Scotch Highlanders have faults in plenty, but they have the bravery of Nature's own gentlemen, the delicate natural tact which discovers, and the good taste which avoids, all that would hurt or offend a guest."

No doubt the enemy will say, "All very easy this politeness of yours in those who lounge about and are inactive; we Saxons have not time to consider the feelings, much less the prejudices, of our neighbours around us; in the race and chase of modern life, it is not possible to maintain the

suavity and feel the courtesy which you exhibit. *Festina lente* is your motto, which may be translated—'Go on, but take plenty of time'; that is an antiquated maxim for us Saxons in this Darwinian Free Trade iron age of the world."

And herein lies our fear for the future of this and other virtues in the Celtic race, that in this high-pressure age, when under competitive friction everything of the tender, much also of the ideal, is to vanish, we shall have no time to feel, much less to study, anything like politeness. Leisure is essential to refinement, and where the leisure is to be found in the rising generation, when the motto of men who are taken as leaders is "Sacrifice, relentless sacrifice, and no mercy,"—that seems more difficult to discern every day.

Before concluding, I may just refer to one testimony emerging recently in an unexpected quarter, which gives me hope that the potentiality of the Celtic element may still survive, and the genius and sparkle also, which often accompany the Celtic fire.^[3] It is a voice from the Deanery of Westminster in the heart of Saxondom, for Dean Stanley is the speaker, as reported by Bishop Thirlwall. The Bishop tells us how the Dean, in a semi-jocular, but still serious vein, claimed to have Welsh blood in his veins.

"You heard," writes Thirlwall to a friend, "what Stanley said about his semi-Cymric origin. I do not know whether you were also told that he attributed all the energy and vivacity of his character to his Welsh blood. I believe your

theory is that the relation between the two great divisions of mankind—the Celtic and non-Celtic—is that of Mind to Matter; and that whenever the two elements are combined in an individual, the only use of the grosser is to serve as ballast to moderate the buoyancy of the more spiritual. Though the theory may not have needed confirmation to yourself, you will be able to cite Stanley's spontaneous confession for the conviction of gainsayers." ([Thirlwall's Letters to a Friend](#), p. 42.)

This is, no doubt, hyperbole to be taken *cum grano* although there is a large measure of truth in the statement and of sincerity in the exponent. Yet, without claiming such superlative potency for the Celtic intellect and character, we may feel confident that it has a distinctive *differentia* of its own which makes it worthy of our homage, worthy, therefore, of our efforts to preserve it, a peculiar aroma attaching to it, a sparkling, yet tender old-world weirdness which the world ought not willingly to let die. These title-deeds and memories of your race are no mean heritage; and when to the historical memories to which we have alluded we add the poetical and literary memories preserved for us in the Welsh legends of chivalry circling around King Arthur, and the Gaelic legends of Ossian circling around Fingal; when we find that twice in the ages the pulse of a new poetic emotion passed over Europe from the Celtic lyre, that Ossian threw his spell over both Goethe and Napoleon, the strongest spirits of the past age, and that the glamour of the Cymric Arthur has subdued the greatest poet

of the present, you may feel a just pride in the place which the Celtic intellect must occupy in the literary monuments of Europe. In such a thought and in such a fact lies the justification of your society, and great ought, therefore, to be the encouragement with which you should study the antiquities and lore of your race, and preserve and cultivate your knowledge of the language which keeps the key to these inspiring memories.

1. ↑ A large proportion of the Norman army of the Conqueror was from the Celtic Brittany.
2. ↑ The tribe-names have, it must be admitted, disappeared also in Scotland, for we look in vain for any existing trace of *Horestii*, *Tæzali*, &c.
3. ↑ Ferguson enlarges on the 'deductive brilliancy' of the Celtic Mind, in other words its Idealism. (*Handbook of Arch.*, pp. 514-8.)



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