The Dissimilarity of Ancient Irish Magic from That of the Anglo-Saxons
Author(s): Wilfrid Bonser
Source: *Folklore*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Sep. 30, 1926), pp. 271-288
Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. on behalf of Folklore Enterprises, Ltd.
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1256582
Accessed: 24/12/2013 19:44

THE DISSIMILARITY OF ANCIENT IRISH MAGIC FROM THAT OF THE ANGLO-SAXONS.

BY WILFRID BONSER, PH.D., HON. LIBRARIAN.

ONE would have expected, from the nearness of Ireland and of Scotland to England, that Celtic magic would be found to have had much influence on Anglo-Saxon magic, but, upon examination, this proves not to have been the case. Many parallels exist between both Irish and Welsh charms and magical practices on the one hand and Anglo-Saxon on the other, but the evidence points merely to a common source for these, and not to direct contact, for the two branches in themselves are entirely different.

This is to be accounted for partly, (*a*), by difference in the tone of Irish literature and culture,—for Anglo-Saxon magic never attained to such flights of imagination as did the Irish; (*b*), by the fact that in Ireland there was a highly organised class,—the druids,—who, among other vocations, were professional magicians, but who did not exist at all in Anglo-Saxon England; (*c*), by the fact that all previous magical practices had been stamped out during the Anglo-Saxon conquest; and, (*d*), by the extreme difference in language.

The Irish culture was wholly different from that of the Anglo-Saxons, and any influence, apart from isolated charms which have survived in a corrupt form (see below), that may have reached England with Columba and Aidan from the north, was no longer traceable when written records of Anglo-Saxon culture appear. "It is impossible,"

says A. G. van Hamel,[1] "to discover in Anglo-Saxon poetry any direct allusion to Irish poems: . . . in the same way there is no proof that the Anglo-Saxons were acquainted with the Irish prose-tales." The same is the case with history, and from a comparison of the Irish *Annals* with the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, "it appears that neither Bede and his precursors nor the scribes of the Chronicle . . . ever had a look at an Irish annalistic work." On the other hand, the same writer notes that "a still more important fact" for his argument "is that in all those Irish annals there also occurs a list of entries relating to Anglo-Saxon history." The same probably obtains with regard to magic.

The Irish druids formed a hierarchy for the performance, *inter alia*, of magical practices in heathen times, and the Christian church peaceably supplanted them. The Irish kings were often converted first (outwardly, at any rate), and their people followed suit; whence the saying that there were no martyr saints in Ireland. There are even instances of the conversion of druids to Christianity.[2] Bertrand[3] suggests that some at least of the schools and monasteries

[1] "The Foreign Notes in the Three Fragments of the Irish Annals," *Revue Celtique*, tom. xxxvi (1915), pp. 1-2. Bede, however, chronicles the mission of St. Columba (from Ireland) to the northern Picts in 565, and the conversion of the southern Picts by Ninian, (*Eccles. Hist.*, iii. 4), the building of a monastery in Ireland by Colman, A.D. 667, (*Eccles. Hist.*, iv. 4), and that St. Fursey (A.D. 633), came from Ireland to England, where his soul quitted his body (in true druidical fashion) for purposes of travel during sleep, (see below), (*Eccles. Hist.*, iii. 19). The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* under the year 891 says that "three Scots came to King Alfred in a boat without any oars . . . which was wrought of two hides and a half" from Ireland on a pilgrimage. Miss Hull tells me that "In this year [921] King Sihtric slew Niel" [*i.e.* Niall Glundubh] is also an Irish reference. The old Irish chronicles were written partly in Latin and partly in Irish; Bede and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* could have drawn from the Latin portions, but the Irish was unreadable by them.

[2] Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, vol. i, p. clxiv.

[3] *Religion des Gaulois*, pp. 388-9.

of Ireland were the direct successors of druidical schools and colleges.

In England the case was different. Roman polytheism was superimposed upon the older magical practices of this island,[4] and what may have survived of the combination was stamped out at the Saxon conquest,—which, as Gildas shows, was far from being a peaceable taking over of customs. "Between Roman Britain and Saxon England," says Haverfield, "there is a great gulf fixed."[5] The Saxons derived, broadly speaking, nothing from the previous inhabitants of this island, and the magical practices which are found among them were imported either with them or by them.

Anglo-Saxon magic and charms survive to-day with Christian veneer. The magical practices of druidical Ireland survived in miraculous acts of the various Christian saints. But these, which have been summarized and digested by Mr. Plummer,[6] are much more varied and fantastic than anything that remains of Anglo-Saxon magic,—here again the two have but little in common. For instance, Christian psalms and hymns act as charms for protection on a journey, "either making the protected persons wholly invisible, or causing them to appear in a different form to their enemies."[7] Such things are carried by the Anglo-Saxons for protection on a journey, but there is never any idea of invisibility for the wearer. There is a closer resemblance between Celtic and Finnish ideas in this particular than there is between Celtic and Anglo-Saxon. The Celtic goes much farther, and more far-reaching results are looked for. The Tuatha Dé Danann were accredited with great magical powers by their successors,

[4] F. Haverfield, *The Romanization of Roman Britain*, (1923), pp. 68-73.

[5] F. Haverfield and Macdonald, *The Roman Occupation of Britain*, (1924), p. 285.

[6] *Op. cit.*, vol. i, pp. cxxix-clxxxviii.

[7] *Ibid.*, vol. i, p. clxxviii.

and came to be looked upon as gods or fairies, who dwelt in the green howes which still remain all over Ireland. That of New Grange is perhaps the most familiar, and this was traditionally Brugh of the Boyne, the fairy-palace of Angus Oge, the son of the Dagda, "the wisest and most skilled in magic of all the Dedannan race." "The druids," says Joyce,[8] "were the intermediaries with the fairies and with the invisible world in general for good or evil; and they could protect people from the malice of evil-disposed spirits of every kind; which explains much of their influence with the people." There were no such folk among the Anglo-Saxons, although the written charms that remain show the tradition.

Druidism is now recognized as being pre-Aryan,—"part of that great magical system of thought which spread westwards from some eastern centre, possibly Babylonia." The Celts found druidism in Ireland when they arrived: presumably, therefore, the Tuatha Dé Danann represent a pre-Aryan people. An examination of druidical magic will show its difference from that of the Anglo-Saxons. Christianity, to a large extent, took over the magic of its predecessors, and the magical elements in the stories of the Christian saints do not differ very widely from the magical elements in the pagan myths. But in the contests which are told of between saint and druid, it is the druid who is usually worsted. An example of this occurs in the old Irish Passion of St. George. A magician named Anathais is summoned by the emperor to perform counter-magic to that of St. George. Anathais "presented himself before the king, who said to him in great welcome, 'What means hast thou of driving out this man's magic art?' Then Anathais in reply requested a bull to be brought to him, and when it was brought, he sang incantations in its ear, so that it burst into two fragments. So the king rejoiced at this and said: 'Of a truth thou can'st overturn

[8] *Social History of Ancient Ireland*, vol. i, p. 228.

this man's magic art.' 'Wait awhile,' said the magician 'and thou shalt see this wonder,' and he united again the pieces of the bull that had been burst asunder."[9] With this may be compared the contest in magic, told of by Ælfric, between Simon the magician and SS. Peter and Paul,[10] and also Columba's conflict with Broichan, King Brude's wizard,—a Pictish druid.[11]

The Christian church, however, was far from regarding the power of the druids as unreal.[12] Similarly, Ælfric represents the Emperor Decius,—though not a believer in Christianity,—as being much afraid of the *drȳcræft* of St. Lawrence,—this word being used to denote the faith of the saint whereby he was able to endure the sufferings inflicted upon him by the emperor.[13] It is on their malignant powers, naturally, that stress is mostly laid. An example of the infliction occurs in the story of the sick-bed of Cuculainn, where the women from the fairy hills struck him with little rods, which brought on an illness that nearly killed him.[14] Is it possible that this should be equated with the Teutonic elf-shot?

The legends of the beginnings of druidism in Ireland seem to point to its having a foreign origin. "The Tuatha Dé Danann," says the manuscript which describes the Second Battle of Moytura,[15] "were in the northern isles of the world, learning lore and magic and druidism and wizardry and cunning, until they surpassed the sages of the arts of heathendom." In a similar way the Esthonians

[9] *Passions and Homilies from Leabhar Breac*, trans. by R. Atkinson. Todd Lecture Series, 2, Roy. Irish Acad., (1887), xxx, Passion of St. George, pp. 316-7.

[10] Ælfric, *Homilies*, ed. Thorpe, vol. i, pp. 377-81.

[11] Reeves, *Adamnan*, lib. 2, cap. xxxiii-v, pp. 146 etc.

[12] Bertrand, *Religion des Gaulois*, p. 404.

[13] *Op. cit.*, vol. i, p. 426.

[14] "Sick-bed of Cuculainn," *Atlantis*, vol. i, p. 389.

[15] MS. Harl. 5280, fol. 63 r. W. Stokes, "Second Battle of Moytura," *Revue Celtique*, tom. 12 (1891), p. 57.

claimed to have learnt their magic from the more northerly Finns, and the Finns theirs from the yet more northerly Lapps. Elsewhere Armorica is spoken of as the place where one of the Tuatha Dé Danann learnt his craft.[16]

The following was the formula used of old in Orkney to acquire the power of witchcraft:—" Provided with five oval-shaped and two flat stones, the postulant went to the sea-shore at midnight, turning on his way three times against the course of the sun.[17] On arrival he lay down on his back, with arms and legs stretched out, his head to the south, and taking care that the place was situated between high and low water marks. He then placed one oval stone at either foot, a flat stone on his chest, another over his heart, and grasped an oval stone in either hand. Shutting his eyes, he repeated a long incantation devoting himself to the evil spirit of the locality, and remained silent and motionless for a prescribed period. Then opening his eyes, he turned on his left side, rose, and flung the stones one by one into the sea with certain stereotyped forms of maledictions and imprecations." [18]

How exactly the druid accomplished his magic rites is difficult to learn; the result is given in many stories and occasionally the process. It is said of a sorcerer that he practised his spell " on one foot, one hand [outstretched], and one eye [shut]," and that he chanted in a low voice. (He was in a state of ecstasy at the time.) Thus did Lugh, " as he went round the men of Erin," to hearten them before that second battle of Moytura.[19] Possibly, the awkward position was supposed to increase the magic, and also to impress the spectators. One magical practice,

[16] Plummer, *op. cit.*, vol. i, p. cxxxiv, *note*.

[17] Widdershins. Cf. below.

[18] W. A. Wood-Martin, *Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland*, vol. 2, (1902), p. 59.

[19] W. Stokes, " Second Battle of Moytura," *Revue Celtique*, tom. 12, p. 99.

(malignant), was the throwing of a handful, or wisp, of straw into a person's face, with the result that he became a lunatic.[20] It is probably the dread of supposed power that caused the result. The making of a *glám dicinn* or extempore curse against a king is described in the *Book of Ballymote*:—" (There was) fasting on the land of the king for whom the poem had been composed. . . . The poet himself had to go in a company of seven . . . at sunrise, to a hilltop which should be on the boundary of seven lands . . . and the backs of them all (turned) towards a hawthorn which should be on the top of the hill, and the wind from the north." Thus they would sing " each a stave. . . . And if they were in the wrong, the earth of the hill would swallow them up. But if it were the king that was in the wrong, the earth would swallow up him and his wife and his son and his horse and his arms and his dress and his hound," (the curse of each of the seven poets falling on one of the seven individuals mentioned).[21] Another druidical rite was employed for the identification of the dead. This was called *Teinm Laeghdha*,[22] or illumination of rhymes. To accomplish this Finn chews his thumb, which he thus makes his sacrifice to his gods. It is magic inspiration which produces the name of the dead, after the recitation of a rhyme. The *airbe druad*,[23] or druidical hedge, seems to have been a magical mist, produced to hide the druid's, and his friends', movements from observation by the enemy. Possibly this only shows a utilization of the mists caused not by the druid himself but by the humid climate of Ireland. Thus it is said that, when the Tuatha Dé Danann first invaded Ireland, " they burnt their barques . . . so that they should not think of retreating to

[20] E. O'Curry, *On the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*, vol. 2, (1873), p. 203.

[21] W. Stokes, *Revue Celtique*, tom. 12, pp. 119-20.

[22] E. O'Curry, *loc. cit.*, p. 208.

[23] Plummer, *op. cit.*, vol. i, p. clxi *n.*

them; and the smoke and the mist that came from the vessels filled the neighbouring lands and air. Therefore it was conceived that they had arrived in clouds of mist." It is said in the *Book of Leinster* that they also "for three days and three nights cast darkness on the sun." [24] With this may be compared the magic mist dissipated by Geraint on his sounding of a certain horn.[25] The *snaidm druad* [26] or druid's knot was apparently some magical defence of fortresses. The *faeth-fiadha* was a charm which rendered the user invisible. This was used by St. Patrick and his companions. It is the name given to St. Patrick's *Lorica*.[27] The word *bricht* signifies a charm which causes sleep,[28] (= Lat. *carmen*).

The druid, like the Finnish shaman, could cause the soul to go forth from the body during sleep, and to visit distant lands.[29] Bede relates in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* how St. Fursey came over from Ireland, and built himself a monastery at Crobheresburg in East Anglia. Here his soul, mindful of its Irish origin, "quitting his body from evening till cock-crow," paid a visit to heaven.[30] The druid, again like the Finnish magician, was said to be able to raise storms, and the same was the case with the Christian saints. Martin [31] speaks of a cross which was raised when rain was wanted and lowered when enough had fallen. The druid could also interpret omens and dreams, and declare auspicious and inauspicious times. Lucky days were fixed by scanning the sky. In the life of St. Columbcille is the

[24] W. Stokes, "Second Battle of Moytura," *Revue Celtique*, tom. 12, p. 59.

[25] *Mabinogion*, (Everyman edit.), pp. 260-2.

[26] Plummer, *loc. cit.*, vol. i, p. clxi *n*.

[27] E. Hull, "The Ancient Hymn-Charms of Ireland," *Folk-Lore*, vol. xxi. (1910), p. 442.

[28] Windisck, *Wörterbuch*.

[29] Plummer, *op. cit.*, vol. i, p. clxxii.

[30] Bede, *Eccl. Hist.*, iii. 19.

[31] Martin, *A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland*, (1716), p. 59.

passage,—"Now when the time for reading came to him [*i.e.* to Columbcille], the cleric went to a certain prophet who abode in the land, to ask him when the boy ought to begin. When the prophet had scanned the sky, he said: 'Write an alphabet for him, now.'"[32] An example of druidical divination occurs in the story of Ochy Airem and Etain; four yew rods are employed to find the fairy palace whither Midir had taken Etain. The druids were also accredited with the gift of prophecy. "They prophesy," says Plummer, "of Christ, and of Christian saints, foretelling their birth,[33] their coming, their eminence, their place of burial."[34] It is by means of *Frith Mhoire*, or augury, that the Virgin discovered where Jesus was when he stayed behind in the Temple.[35] Clairvoyance was practised by the druids, and known as "enlightenment"; by its aid they ascertained the will of the gods, and so prophesied.[35a].

It is probable, judging from the amount of initiation and education that the aspirant to druidism had to go through, that the druid was indeed the possessor of much knowledge; and superior knowledge tends always to be considered by the ignorant to be of a magical nature.

Many druidical accomplishments were also performed by Christian saints. For instance, the druidical hedge above mentioned could be produced by the saint by making the sign of the cross. The continuity of the practice of magic is not broken by the coming of Christianity. St. Columbcille, in a prayer, uses the expression "my druid, the Son of God," in speaking of Christ, since this would be understood more easily to show the powers he wished to ascribe to Him.[36]

[32] W. Stokes, "Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore," lines 812-8, *Anecdota Oxoniensia*, (1890), p. 172.

[33] For foretelling auspicious days for birth of saints, see below.

[34] Plummer, *loc. cit.*, vol. i, p. clxii.

[35] A. Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, vol. ii, p. 158.

[35a] Lady Wilde, *Ancient Cures, Charms, and Usages of Ireland*, p. 29.

[36] *Chronicon Scotorum* (Rolls series), p. 52.

The druid's magic was also often used for medical purposes,—for the druid was the equivalent of the medicine-man. *Cormac's Glossary* [37] tells us that "a fire was kindled in his name [*i.e.* that of the god Bil] at the beginning of summer always, and cattle were driven between the two fires," so that they would be free from disease throughout the coming year. Diancecht, the physician of the Tuatha Dé Danann, obtained victory for his people against the Fomorians at the second battle of Moytura by placing "one of every herb that grew in Erin" in a well called Sláne near the battlefield and singing spells over the well; into it all the mortally-wounded Tuatha Dé Danann were placed; from it they all came forth healed and ready once more to join in the battle.[38]

As is the case with Anglo-Saxon magic, the form in which many charms have been preserved is half-pagan and half-Christian, and many pagan practices have been recorded only by Christian writers. The following are enumerated by Whitley Stokes [39] as some of the superstitions which survived the introduction of Christianity:—

"1. The belief in elves, *aes* (or *dóine*) *sìde*, descendants according to Irish tradition of the vanquished Tuatha Dé Danann. 2. The belief in magic. The heathen magician (*drui*, *drai*) is often mentioned in the Lives of the Saints. He prophesies: he uses charms (*séna*), sings spells (*brichtu*), and can cause darkness, thunder and lightning, mist and storm. He can make a mist over which whoever passes dies. He can summon demons to help him. He deals in deadly poisons."

I add a number of instances of Christian magic, which are obviously survivals from a previous culture. Magical

[37] *Cormac's Glossary*, trans. O'Donovan, ed. W. Stokes, (1868), p. 23.

[38] W. Stokes, "Second Battle of Moytura," *Revue Celtique*, tom. 12, pp. 95-97.

[39] "Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore," *Anecdota Oxoniensia*, p. cix.

elements appear in the birth-stories of many Irish saints. For instance, before the birth of St. Molaisse, a certain *magus*, (the usual Latin rendering of druid), came to the mother and said,—"Si distuleris partem usque ad crastinum diem, filius, qui ex te nascitur, ab omnibus honorabitur." This is a pagan survival, since among the functions of the druids were augury and the foretelling of auspicious days. "Mulier," the narrative continues, "super saxum quoddam voluntatem Dei expectabat." The Christian narrator, however, hastens to add,—"Non tamen ideo Deus tempus pariendi puerum propter aliquam corporum celestium constellacionem expectavit, sed ut beneplacitum suum adimpleret." [40] There are many similar stories. The narrative of the birth of St. Senán also contains a mixture of the pagan and the Christian. "Now when the time came for the birth of that child, even Senán, his mother tarries alone in her garden, in autumn. An angel of God came to help her, so that the bringing forth of her son should not be difficult: and the angel blessed the child that was there born. *The stake of rowan that was in her hand when she was bringing forth her son* took the earth and burst at once into flower and leaf; and still that tree remains." [41] The story of the birth of Lugaid Red-stripe, given at the beginning of the life of St. Declan, is a gratuitous mention of a purely pagan episode.[42]

The pagan custom of fasting upon a person [43] in order to obtain a boon from him was still practised in Christian times. Thus Cormac the Red and his wife fast against the devil in order to obtain a child; Germanus fasts against Vortigern, and celestial vengeance falls upon the latter.

[40] "Vita Sancti Molaissi," Plummer, *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae*, vol. ii, pp. 131-2.

[41] W. Stokes, "Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore," lines 1884-9, *Anecdota Oxoniensia*, p. 204.

[42] Plummer, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 32.

[43] *Brehon Laws*, i. 113.

In the *Saltair-na-Rann*, Adam obtains forgiveness by fasting upon God. "Standing neck deep in Jordan, he induces the river with its tributaries to fast with him upon God till he obtains forgiveness." [44] It was evidently thought that the Almighty was especially impressed by the earnestness of those who stood in water up to the chin, for Ælfric relates that St. Cuthberht also "was wont to go at night to the sea, and stand in the salt ocean up to his neck singing his prayers." [45]

The following also is worth recording for the heathen feeling in it. St. Ciarán of Clonmacnois possessed a dun cow, "and he said, 'Every soul that shall go out of its body on the hide of the Dun will not be punished in hell.' " [46]

Some heathen deities were taken over by Christianity and became Christian saints. "The pagan deities," says Miss Hull,[47] "have been ousted, and their place and duties amply filled by certain all-powerful saints,—St. Michael, St. Columba, and St. Brigit. It is singular how often the names of these last two saints, the male and the female agencies, occur in Gaelic charms, Irish and Scottish. They are the great necromancers of the Gael, gifted with all the powers of poetry, of prophecy and of healing." In the Rennes Dindsenchas, St. Brigit is called a poetess and a druidess, (*ban-fili* and *ban-drui*).[48] The connection was probably one of name, for Brigit, daughter of the Dagda,

[44] W. Stokes, *Saltair-na Rann*, lines 1629, 9 *bis*. See also J. T. McNeill, "Celtic Penitentials," *Revue Celtique*, tom. 40 (1923), pp. 330 *et seq.*, for many references, and St. J. D. Seymour, "The Book of Adam and Eve in Ireland," *Proc. Royal Irish Acad.*, vol. xxxvi. c. No. 7 (1922), pp. 123, 128-9, for a discussion of the subject, as well as examples.

[45] Ælfric, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 139.

[46] W. Stokes, "Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore," lines 4261-2, *Anecdota Oxoniensia*, page 272.

[47] E. Hull, "The Ancient Hymn-Charms of Ireland," *Folk-Lore*, vol. xxi. (1910), p. 438.

[48] *Revue Celtique*, tom. xvi. (1895), p. 277.

was the goddess of poetry and wisdom. She had two sisters, also called Brigit, one a goddess of medicine ("woman of leechcraft ") and the other the goddess of smiths (" woman of smith work ").[49] Giraldus Cambrensis reports the common belief in his day that the sacred fire of St. Brigit of Kildare, which the druids had guarded long before the introduction of Christianity, had never been extinguished.[50] " Both in the ancient hymns and in the later runes and charms," says Miss Hull, " she has become everywhere confused with the Virgin Mary, and is represented as the Mother, or more generally the Foster-mother, of Our Lord." [51] She became thus naturally the guardian of the household and the hearth.

Hare,[52] in speaking of Chartres cathedral, says that " the Chapelle de Notre Dame sous Terre occupies the site of the cave where Druids are said to have venerated ' the Virgin who gave birth to a child.' " The image is also known as " la Vierge druidique," and the district around Chartres is said to have been the centre of druidical worship.

Another pagan practice which was not taken over was that of going widdershins (Irish *tuaithbel*), or contrary to the course of the sun. The Christian practice was to go *deiseil* (*deas*, right-hand, and *uil*, direction), or following the course of the sun. Similarly, the Icelandic *at sólu* signifies " prosperously." The word *wiðsines* occurs in Anglo-Saxon with the meaning " contrary to nature," but it does not appear to be especially connected with magic and ill-luck as is the case with the Celts. With the Anglo-Saxons, *sunn-ganges* is the equivalent of *deiseil*. In a leechdom for *þeorādle*, the patient is required " in the middle of the

[49] *Cormac's Glossary*, p. 23.

[50] Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topographia Hibernica*, ii. cap. 34 (Rolls Series).

[51] E. Hull, *loc. cit.*, p. 439. See also Bernard and Atkinson, *The Irish Liber Hymnorum*, vol. 2, p. 107, (Henry Bradshaw Society, vol. 14 (1898)).

[52] A. J. C. Hare, *North-Western France*, p. 178.

morning hours to stand towards the east, address himself to God earnestly, and sign himself [with the sign of the cross], and turn him round *sunganges*." [53] In an Anglo-Saxon ceremony for protecting one's acres from witchcraft, which has a mixture of Christian and pagan elements in it, one is directed to turn to the east, recite a given charm, and then turn *sunganges* three times.[54] With this may be compared the following Celtic custom :—Before putting his seed into the soil in Uist, " the person reciting the Consecration Hymn went sunwise (deiseil), and chanted, ' I go forth to sow the seed In the name of him who makes it grow. I will set my face to the wind, And throw a gracious handful on high." [55]

The Irish story of Bóand, wife of Nechtán, illustrates ill-luck caused by going widdershins. Whoever went to the secret well which was in the green of Nechtán's elf-mound, " would not come from it without his two eyes bursting." Bóand visited it to test this, " and thrice she walked widdershins round the well. Whereupon three waves from the well break over her, and deprive her of a thigh and one of her hands and one of her eyes." She fled and was drowned at the mouth of the Boyne.[56] Again, it is chronicled that the three triplet-sons of King Eochaid Feidlech " marched through Ireland widdershins " before they became the fathers of Lugaid Red-stripe.[57] The ill-effects of Burd Ellen going round the church widdershins in the story of Childe Roland is too well known to call for more than passing mention. There are many examples of

[53] *Leech-Book*, I. xlvii. 1.

[54] MS. Cotton Caligula, A vii fol 172 r. (Quoted in Cockayne's *Leech-doms*, etc., vol. i, p. 400, (Rolls Series)).

[55] A. Carmichael, " Uist Old Hymns," *Trans. Gaelic Soc. of Glasgow*, vol. i. (1887-91), p. 41.

[56] W. Stokes, " Prose Tales in the Rennes Dindsenchas," No. 14, *Revue Celtique*, tom. xv. (1894), pp. 315-6.

[57] *Ibid.*, No. 140, *Revue Celtique*, tom. xvi. (1895), p. 149.

the Christian practice of going *deiseil*. Going right-hand before a battle in order to secure victory, for instance, was practised. "Then Findchua marches in the van of that battalion, with . . . his crozier in his hand, and he strengthens the counsel and heartens the battalion, and comes right-handwise round the host, with his crozier in his hand." [58] Again, in the story of St. Senán, Raphael takes Senán to the island whence his resurrection,—and that of many other saints,—was to take place. They subdue the monster which guards it. "Now after that," says the Life, "Senán and the angels went right-handwise round the island till they came again to the Height of the Angels, after they had consecrated the island." [59] It is related in the *Saltair-na-Rann* that "when the Hosts of the Seven Heavens used to gather round their King the animals used to come and adore Adam and then return right-handwise." [60]

Although there are many parallels in individual charms, it may be seen from the foregoing examples that Celtic magical practices were of a very different nature to those found amongst the Anglo-Saxons. One learns, however, from the large number of penances attached to the practice of sorcery which occur in the Anglo-Saxon laws, both lay and ecclesiastical, that many heathen practices were still carried on, as indeed they were till the last witch was burnt a few centuries ago. One would judge that there were many individuals who performed black magic upon request. There are a great number of Anglo-Saxon words which denote magic and sorcery, with various slight variations of meaning. The only one, however, which shows any connection with the Celts is *drý*, *drýcræft*, which has been derived from *drui*. Presumably the reputation

[58] W. Stokes, "Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore," (Life of St. Findchua), *Anecdota Oxoniensia*, p. 240.

[59] W. Stokes, *loc. cit.*, (Life of St. Senán), p. 214.

[60] *Saltair-na-Rann*, Canto 8.

of the druids was such that their name came to signify magic in the sister island. Whitley Stokes says that *dṙý* is a loan word from the Celtic, but gives no evidence to support his statement.[61] *dhr* gives *dr* in both Anglo-Saxon and Celtic. There are no cognate words in other Teutonic languages. The first example in English of the word "druid" given by the *New English Dictionary* is of the year 1563, and it is derived from Latin, not old Celtic, sources.

There are three Anglo-Saxon charms which contain words of corrupt Irish. These, despite modern research, are nearly as unintelligible to us as they were to the Anglo-Saxons who transcribed them. Dr. Henry Bradley, in an unpublished letter to Dr. Whitley Stokes, says "some of the . . . charms contain sequences of Irish words of quite obvious meaning. For example the charm at III. p. 10[62], . . . "in case a man or beast drink an insect," begins with the obviously appropriate words *Gonomil orgomil marbumil*,[63] and at II. 54 there is a charm intended "to stop blood," which contains the unmistakable words *struth fola*." [64] The rest of the charm runs :—" +. œgryn thon struth fola argrenn tart struth ontria enn piath hathu morfana on hæl + ara carn lew groth weorn ffil crondi w | × | mro cron œrerio ermio aer leno." [65] Of this Prof. Gwynn says,—

[61] " Ags *dṙý*, magus, ist aus dem keltischen entlehnt," *Urkeltischer Sprachschatz*, (1894), p. 157.

[62] Cockayne, *Anglo-Saxon Leechdoms etc.*, (Rolls Series), vol. iii., *Lacnunga* 10.

[63] " I wound the animal, I strike the animal, I kill the animal." See R. Thurneysen, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, Bd. xiii, p. 106. The charm in full runs,—" Gonomil orgomil marbumil marbsai ramum tofeðtengo docuillo biran cuiðœr cæfmul scuiht cuillo scuiht cuib duill marbsiramum." Possibly some of my readers have some suggestions to make ?

[64] These two words, Prof. E. J. Gwynn tells me, are not Irish as they stand, but suggest *sruth fola*, " a stream of blood."

[65] *Leechbook*, i. 9.

" There are two other words that might be Irish : *argreinn* = " he pursues," tart = " thirst," (also = " across thee," " past thee "), and two or three more, but I see no collocation that suggests any meaning to me." Possibly, he thinks, there is an admixture of words from other languages, such as Hebrew.

The other charm I have referred to is as follows :—" For flying venom and every venomous swelling . . . sing . . . nine times this incantation. Acræ ærcræ ærnem nadre ærcuna hel ærnem niþærn ær asan buiþine adcrice ærnem meodre ærnem æþerm ærnem allú honor ucus idar adcert cunolari raticamo helæ icas X̄pita hæle tobœrt tera fueli cui robater plana uili." [66] On this collection of words H. Zimmer has many suggestions to make.[67] The first three words may signify " A charm against blood, against venom." *hel* signifies " a spell," if equated with the Old Irish *ele*, a loan-word from Old Norse (Neill, = augurium, also a health-giving spell). *raticamo helæ-icas X̄rita* (not Xpita) *hæle* may signify " may my spell heal thee : let the spell heal, O Christ, who healeth." *robarter slana* (not *plana*) *uili* may signify " all were healed." All is confused by the running on of words (through the ignorance of the Anglo-Saxon scribes), and the Latin terminations. Prof. Gwynn agrees with Zimmer's interpretation of a few of these words, such as *ar-chro*, " against blood," *ar reim*, " against poison," *ra-t-ica mo*, " may heal thee = my," *icas*, " which heals." He also says,—" The word *tobœrt* naturally suggests the Irish *dobert*, " put," which in the eighth century, or earlier, would be written *tobert*. If we read *tara súile* for *tera fueli* we get *tobert tara súili*, " put upon his eyes." *Xpita* looks as if it contained the usual contraction X̄r, " Christ." This suggests that there may be an allusion

[66] *Leechbook*, i. 45. 5.

[67] H. Zimmer, " Keltische Studien, 13, Ein altirischer Zauberspruch aus der Vikingerzeit," *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung*, Bd. xxxiii. (1895), pp. 141-53.

to Christ's healing the blind man, as in the spell which is printed in *Thesaurus hibernicus*, II. 250 (Latin text). If so, *hœle* will be a corruption of *saele*, "sputum," and perhaps *icas* may be for *ícais*, and be construed with $\overline{\text{Xr}}$.— "Christ healed [the blind man with his] spittle, which he put across his eyes, so that they were entirely whole," (reading *cu robartar slána uili*). This again would involve reading, instead of *īcas* $\overline{X}$*pita hœle*, something like *ícais* $\overline{X}$*r in dall dia snaele*. And even after so much conjecture, the obvious difficulty remains that this is a charm against venom, not against blindness."

In conclusion, I wish to acknowledge the most valuable help given to me by Prof. E. J. Gwynn in respect of the corrupt passages of Old Irish.

W. Bonser.