

Scéalaíocht in
Éirinn

le SEÁN Ó SÚILLEABHÁIN

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Storytelling in
Irish Tradition

by SEÁN Ó SÚILLEABHÁIN

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A folktale may be described as a fictional narrative which is traditional in the sense that it is usually handed down orally from one person to another. Sometimes, however, a tale may have been written down in manuscript from which it entered the oral stream and gained new life. Each tale is composed of a varying number of motifs which may change somewhat as they pass from one storyteller or area to another, while the tale itself remains essentially the same. Folktales are as nearly universal as any form of human literary expression can be. National hero tales (such as those about the Fianna, the Ulster heroes and others) are mainly found, however, only within the area of their origin.

Scientific interest in folktales is essentially a modern phenomenon and is largely derived from the Romantic Movement of the last century. Many theories have been put forward as to the origin of such tales: they were said by some scholars to be Aryan, by others Indian, still others regarded them as myths, and a few maintained that they could have come about even by polygenesis. After much controversy, the dust has now settled, and the following theory has been generally accepted: each rather elaborate tale like Cinderella, (*Cóitín Luachra*, in Irish) was composed by one person in one place at one time. In this, it resembles a modern novel to some degree. The only exception to the foregoing theory refers to animal tales, or others of a single

episode, which are short and have few motifs, and thus may have arisen independently in different countries.

Folktales are not all of equal antiquity. Some which have been studied in detail are deemed to have been composed as recently as medieval times or even later, while others are known by their historical (manuscript) variants, which are found embedded in ancient works of literature, to be at least thousands of years old.

Traditional tales were primarily designed to please and entertain those who heard them being told; this held true even in the case of serious themes. The point is that, while an able storyteller might endeavour to pretend that what he was narrating really happened, folktales were known to be fiction. The story was generally placed in a never-never land, and its characters held such names as 'the king of Ireland's son', 'the widow's son', or 'patient Móirín'. Almost anything could happen in a folktale; magical elements abounded in many of them; cruel stepmothers and talking animals cropped up on various occasions; but the hero (often the youngest son) and the heroine (a beautiful woman or even a princess) always ended the tale by marrying happily.

Each individual tale has its own origin, history and growth as a work of art. Once an ordinary folktale had been composed, it was passed on orally, first among the local people where it might (or might not) be accepted as worthy of being spread more widely. A good tale, if it was to survive and be further diffused, had to fit into the traditional mould of such narratives. By oral transmission, it would then start out over linguistic, cultural and geographical boundaries, always retaining its intrinsic character while adapting itself in minor ways to its ever-changing milieu, until it became part of the repertoire of storytellers thousands of miles away. Direct communication and, if possible, peacefui

intercourse seem to have been generally necessary for the dissemination of folktales.

Many studies of individual tales have been made by various scholars from the points of view of probable place of origin and direction of dissemination. They used the Finnish historic-geographic method (collecting all possible variants of the tale in question, breaking them down into their motifs, building up a probable prototype and finally trying to determine the place of origin of the tale and the pathways of its distribution on the basis of their findings).

For the system of classification of international folktales, see p. 13.

As a form of entertainment, the narration of tales can lay claim to venerable antiquity all over the world and also in Ireland, from the time when the official *seanchaíthe* told tales to kings and nobles assembled at the *oenuchs* at Teltown and Carman down to the old people in the Gaeltacht, who still have a large repertoire of traditional stories but lack an audience in our own day.

In the years when printed books, magazines and newspapers were rare or altogether unobtainable and when neither radio nor television had as yet been invented, the people of Ireland, like those in other lands, had to provide their own entertainment. Conversation, music, singing, dancing and sports formed part of this widespread pattern, but, especially in areas where the Irish language was still spoken, storytelling was extremely popular. The good storyteller, who had a large repertoire stored in his memory, seated by his own fireside, in an honoured place in the house of a neighbour or at a wake, was assured of an attentive audience on winter nights. Nor was it only adults who wished to hear tales. My father described to me how himself and other children of eight years of age would spend hours, night after night, listening to an old woman storyteller in South Kerry; and an old man in the same area told me that, as a youth, he and his companions used to do all the household chores for an elderly neighbour each

winter evening in order that he might be free to spend the night telling them long folktales. One old storyteller told me that he, as a boy, had hidden himself in the loft, as well as under the table of a wake-house, and had learned some stories which came to him through the chinks of the floor from the kitchen below or through the assembled crowd. In general, women storytellers were less numerous than men.

The main venue for storytelling was the fireside during the long winter nights. The proverb, '*Ar fhear an tí a théann an chéad scéal*', gave the man of the house the right and duty to tell the first story, and he would be followed by one or more other narrators. *Fiannaíocht sa ló* (storytelling in the daytime) was said to be unlucky, yet men have described how they learned their tales while hay-making or digging potatoes. Stories were told also by fishermen at sea at night, as they waited for the time to draw in their nets; so too, men and women passed the night, while making fishing-nets, by telling folktales to one another. In crowded wake-houses, tales were often told to attentive groups in quiet corners, or to the smaller general audience later on when most of those who had attended earlier had left for home. Lodging houses, where men taking butter in firkins long distances by road to the Cork butter market rested by night, were great centres for storytelling, and the new tales brought home by these carters were awaited almost as eagerly as was the money received for the butter! Travelling seasonal labourers (*spailpíni*) also helped to spread folktales from one area to another.

After the Famine of 1845-47, thousands of homeless persons had to take to the roads seeking food and shelter, and even in the early decades of the present century individual remnants of these wanderers were still to be met with in rural areas in Ireland. If one

of them had the reputation of being a good storyteller, he was assured of a hearty welcome at the 'stage-house' where he was wont to stay for a night or two, and such houses became crowded quickly when the news had spread that he had arrived. The night would then be passed listening to the tales which the traveller had brought from other areas, and they would be learned almost as quickly as they were told. He would even be followed to the next parish to hear him tell the same stories there.

Relatively few of the impressive hero tales, which had been told in Irish, passed over into English when that language came into common use. This resulted in the loss of their 'runs' and colourful language in the new medium. Some ordinary folktales did pass through the language mesh, however, but these were but faint echoes of the former glories of Irish storytelling.

And now, as I have said, while some storytellers still remain in the Gaeltacht, they lack an audience and rarely tell a story except for purposes of recording. The situation is aptly summed up by the story about an old man who had told a tale in the traditional fashion, while those who were present had paid no heed to him, nor was he thanked at the end. Then a voice was heard to speak three times from the chimney: '*Faid saoil chugat, a fhiannai!*' (Long life to you, storyteller!) as if some dead narrator had returned to pay him due tribute.

As there are thousands of tales of various kinds in the world (ordinary, romantic, religious, humorous, animal, legendary, anecdotal, national and so on), it became necessary to regiment and discipline them for scholarly study. Antti Aarne, a Finn, published in Helsinki in 1910 a list of international tales (*Verzeichnis der Märchentypen*), and proposed a definite ordinal number and a title as a label on each Type. In 1929, Aarne and an American scholar, Stith Thompson, brought out an expanded edition of that work in English (*The Types of the Folktale*) and Thompson edited a more extensive edition of it, under the same title, in 1961, retaining most of the original numbers and titles and adding new ones. This register is usually referred to as Aarne-Thompson. Several countries have now issued catalogues of the international folktales found within their boundaries; the Irish one, entitled *The Types of the Irish Folktale* (Ó Súilleabháin and Christiansen) was published in Helsinki in 1963. The Irish catalogue listed about 43,000 versions of seven hundred or so international tale-Types (about one-third of all international Types), which had been found in oral currency or in print in Ireland up to the end of 1956. Since that time, this large number of versions has been added to considerably, and other tales of an international variety, as yet uncatalogued, may also have been recorded.

The Aarne-Thompson classification of international tales falls into five main categories: I. *Animal Tales* (Wild Animals, Wild Animals and Domestic Animals, Man and Wild Animals, Domestic Animals, Birds, Fish, and Other Animals and Objects). An individual number, ranging between 1-299, and a title are assigned to each tale-Type in this category. II. *Ordinary Folk-tales* (Types 300-1199), subdivided into A. Tales of Magic (Supernatural Adversaries, Supernatural or Enchanted Husband, Wife or Other Relatives, Supernatural Tasks, Supernatural Helpers, Magic Objects, Supernatural Power or Knowledge, Other Tales of the Supernatural), B. Religious Tales, C. Novelle (Romantic Tales), and D. Tales of the Stupid Ogre. III. *Jokes and Anecdotes* (Types 1200-1999) embraces Numskull Stories, Stories about Married Couples, Stories about a Woman (Girl), Stories about a Man (Boy), The Clever Man, Lucky Accidents, the Stupid Man, Jokes about Parsons and Religious Orders, Anecdotes about Other Groups of People, and Tales of Lying. IV. *Formula Tales* (Types 2000-2399) comprise Cumulative Tales, Catch Tales and other Formula Tales. V. *Unclassified Tales* (Types 2400-2499). An account of some of the international tales in the foregoing categories, as found in Ireland, follows.

A Animal Tales

The animal tale is one of the oldest Types in oral tradition and is to be found in all countries at various levels of culture. As already stated, such tales are short, usually consisting of only one or two episodes or motifs, and are thus capable of arising independently in more than one place. They are very numerous among so-called 'primitive' peoples, who are quite as

capable of inventing them as are civilised people (perhaps more so).

In primitive animal tales, the purpose is sometimes aetiological, explaining, as it were, the origin of certain animal characteristics (why the sheep has wool while the goat has only hair; why the dog is generally out of doors while the cat can enjoy the comfort of the home; why the plaice has a crooked mouth; and so on). Other tales about animals serve to point a moral based on a crude kind of commonsense; these are known as fables and arose in ancient times in India and Greece.

In many tales, the animals are given human characteristics (speech, behaviour, mental powers and so on), and the general purpose here is to show the stupidity of one animal or bird against the cleverness of another. The interest of these tales lies in the humour of the deceptions or in the awkward predicaments into which an animal's stupidity may lead him.

Although relatively rare as a genre, over one hundred international Types involving animals have been recorded in Ireland. Among the wild animals mentioned in them, the fox easily takes the palm as the cleverest and most deceitful of all. He usually outwits the unimaginative wolf (*madra allta*) and occasionally even his human opponent, but may in turn be duped to allow a bird, which he desires to eat, to escape. Rivalry and the interplay of wits thus lead to humorous situations, and variety is provided by the many actors who figure in the tales: the cat, mouse, dog, ass, bullock, hare, wren, eagle, goose, crow, cuckoo, thrush, sparrow, magpie, scaldcrow, crane, duck and seagull. Fishes too, and even insects (the louse or flea), have occasionally a part to play, as has man himself, who often, but not always, wins in the encounter.

The most common international animal Types re-

corded in Ireland are: Type 33 (The Fox Plays Dead and is Thrown out of the Pit and Escapes); Type 63 (The Fox Rids Himself of Fleas—by lowering his body into water); Type 67** (The Fox, Caught by the Butcher, escapes by setting the house afire or burning a garment belonging to the butcher); Type 113A (King of the Cats is Dead—basically a mythological tale), and Type 221 (The Election of the Bird-king: wren on eagle's back flies highest).

B Ordinary Folktales

1. *Tales of Magic.* About one-third of the four hundred and fifty Types listed by Aarne-Thompson in this category have been recorded in Ireland. So far as is known, they were composed outside of this country and infiltrated into it in various ways.

Type 300 (The Dragon-Slayer) is the folk-version of the classical tale of Perseus. More than six hundred and fifty individual recorded narrations of this tale bear witness to the fact that it was one of the most popular oral folktales in this country. It is usually introduced by the successive slaying of three giants by the hero (possibly a purely Irish motif) before he goes on to rescue a princess from a sea-monster. Type 313 (The Girl as Helper in the Hero's Flight), a fine tale, studied by Sven Liljeblad of Uppsala, was almost as popular; in Ireland, a common introduction to it was the pre-tale of the 'battle of the birds and animals'. Type 326 (The Youth Who Wanted to Learn What Fear Is) came next in popularity, having been recorded six hundred and sixteen times; it often developed into Type 325A* (Soul Released from Torment)—the eerie atmosphere of this tale-Type seems to have added to its widespread diffusion in Ireland, where tales of ghosts and

the otherworld held great attraction for audiences.

Next in popularity came Type 330 (The Smith Outwits the Devil), which resembles the story of Faust and the Irish Séadhna. This tale was often told in association with Type 332 (Godfather Death). The superhuman powers of the hero in Type 650 (Strong John) must often have amused and amazed its hearers, to judge by the many versions of it which have been recorded throughout Ireland. So also did the actions of Cos fé Chrios, Cluas le hÉisteacht and Tón Iarainn in Type 513 (The Helpers), which resemble somewhat Type 653 (The Four Skilful Brothers). Types 505-508 (The Grateful Dead) attracted both storytellers and audience by its theme in which a dead man, whose body would not be allowed to be buried until a ransom had been paid, later returned to life and helped the hero. Types 302 (The Ogre's, Devil's Heart in the Egg) and 303 (The Twins or Blood-Brothers) were also often told in combination. Other tales which were told as favourites included Type 503 (The Gifts of the Little People: hunchbacks sing Dé Luain, Dé Máirt, etc.); Types 510 (Cinderella and the Cap o' Rushes) and its associated 511 (One-Eye, Two-Eyes, Three-Eyes); Types 531 (The Clever Horse) and 550 (The Bird, the Horse and the Princess); Types 400 (The Man on a Quest for his Lost Wife) and 425 (The Search for the Lost Husband)—this latter tale has a fine Irish ecotype (by-form) of a religious nature; Type 461 (Three Hairs from the Devil's Beard); Types 470 (Friends in Life and Death) with which is related Type 470* (Oisín in Tír na n-Óg) and 471 (The Bridge to the Other World), which again reminds us of Type 471A (The Monk and the Bird); and finally, from a profusion of the most popular international tales in this category, Type 726* (The Dream Visit), told in this country of the visit to Lochlann by an Irishman and his quest in Ireland for 'Danish' treasure).

These are but a few of the large number of international tales of magic which provided amusement for our forefathers in years gone by, before modern media ousted them from popular favour.

2. *Religious Tales*. Stories with a religious flavour held a great attraction for Irish audiences, and it will not cause any surprise to us to learn that of the hundred or so Types (750-849) listed in this category by Aarne-Thompson, more than one-half have been recorded in Ireland. Some of them follow the international pattern, while many appear as Irish ecotypes. All have a distinct medieval flavour, with a mixture of prechristian and christian motifs. Some are of the *exempla* type (tales told in church by the clergy to drive home a moral, like the parables of the Gospels), which later entered the stream of oral storytelling.

The most popular international religious tales centred around severe penances (Type 756 and its by-forms), either self-imposed or else undergone because of external pressure. Titles such as *The Three Green Twigs* (which grow on the robber's withered staff), *the Self-righteous Hermit*, *the Devil's Contract* (the fiery bed in Hell), *The Greater Sinner*, *Receipt from Hell* (for rent paid to a deceased landlord) and others give an indication of tales which belong to this Type. Type 810 (*The Snares of the Evil One*) described how a man who had been promised to the Devil was rescued by the device of drawing a ring of holy water around him. The power of innocence formed the core of some other popular religious tales, as in Type 759B (*Holy Man Has his own Mass*), which described how a sunbeam in church held up the coat of a poor shepherd until he listened to women's gossip, and Type 767 (*Food for the Crucifix*), which told of a simple boy who took literally the priest's advice to follow the 'straight road' and who later offered food to a crucifix or holy picture

of the Saviour with whom he conversed. Hospitality and greed, with their respective rewards or punishments, are the centre of Type 750A (*The Wishes*) and its related tales. Another popular form of Type 759 (*God's Justice Vindicated*) was Type 759A (*The Sinful Priest*), which is an *exemplum* about a man who had ceased to attend Mass because he had quarrelled with the priest, but was shown that even water which had flowed through the carcase of a dog could still taste sweet. Type 780 (*The Singing Bone*) was popular also, dealing as it did, with the unexpected way in which murder could be brought to light, as was Type 759** (*How God's Wheel Turns*), showing that God's justice finally prevails.

Three other popular religious tales remain to be mentioned: Type 756* (*The Father Who Wanted to Kill his Children*), which is found in the form of a legend in Ireland and tells how the seven rescued children became seven bishops; Type 816* (*Devils Tempt the Pope*) describes how a holy man arrives in Rome in time to save the Pope from the wiles of a temptress; and Type 764 (*The Devil's Son as Priest*)—cf. Type 811 (*The Man Promised to the Devil Becomes a Priest*) in *The Types of the Irish Folktales*, and the story known as *Echtra Nerai* in Irish literature.

The foregoing tales, mentioned because of their popularity in Ireland, by no means exhaust the large stock of international religious tale-Types in this country.

3. *Novelle (Romantic) Tales*. In these tales, although marvels do occur, magic is largely absent, and the action takes place in a real world with definite time and place. They were, still are, very popular among the peoples of the Near East. In the Aarne-Thompson catalogue, the Types are listed as follows: 850-869 (*The Princess's Hand is Won*), 870-879 (*The Heroine Marries*

the Prince), 880-899 (Fidelity and Innocence), 900-904 (The Shrewish Wife is Reformed), 910-915 (The Good Precepts), 920-929 (Clever Acts and Words), 930-949 (Tales of Fate), 950-969 (Robbers and Murderers), and 970-999 (Other Romantic Tales).

Only the more popular tales in each category, so far as Ireland is concerned, can be mentioned here. Type 851 (The Princess who Cannot Solve the Riddle) was fairly well-known, but still more commonly told was Type 852 (The Hero Forces the Princess to Say, 'That is a Lie'), a humorous tale in which the fantastic claims of the hero forced the incredulous princess (or her father) to utter the forbidden words. The leading character in Irish versions of Type 873 (The King Discovers his Unknown Son) are either Cú Chulainn, who fights and slays his unknown son, Conlaoch, or else Oisín, who does not recognise his son, Oscar. Type 873 (The Clever Peasant Girl) was one of the most popular tales in Irish storytelling, in which the girl was generally the unrecognised daughter of the master-builder, Gobán Saor, who would have preferred a son.

Types 882 (The Wager on the Wife's Chastity), recorded among other tales by Synge on Aran, 888A* (The Basket-maker)—an Irish ecotype, which tells how the hero's wife, abducted by a sea-captain, is reunited to her husband by her recognition of his handiwork—and 890 (A Pound of Flesh), used by Shakespeare in *The Merchant of Venice*, were widely known to Irish fireside audiences. So too was Type 901 (The Taming of the Shrew), the theme of another of Shakespeare's plays known in Ireland as *Smachtú na Mná Mínáirí*. Almost four hundred versions of Types 910-914 (The Good Precepts) have been recorded in this country, mainly of Type 910A (Wise Through Experience), which told of the wisdom of a spalpeen (travelling labourer) who had accepted three counsels instead of wages.

Most popular in the Clever Acts or Words category were Type 921 (The King and the Peasant's Son) in which either Dean Swift's servant gives pert answers to his master or An Gárlach Coileánach gives rude replies to his mother; Type 922 (The Shepherd Substituting for the Priest Answers the King's Questions); and Type 925 (Tidings Brought to the King: You Said it, not I), in which the person who had to convey news of his mother's death to a tyrant did so in cryptic fashion and thus escaped with his life. Stories of prophecies and escapes from predestined fates (Types 930-949) seem to have had a kind of morbid attraction for audiences too, among which may be mentioned here 931 (Oedipus), 934 (The Prince and the Storm), 934A* (Youth to Drown at a Certain Age), 934C* (Man will Die if he ever Sees his Daughter's Son—this is the story of Balor) and 947B* (Goddess of Fate Allots Fate to People), told about the Queen of the Planets (Bairríon na bPláinéad).

Stories about robbers and murderers had great interest for audiences too, the most popular in Ireland being Type 950 (Rhampsinitus), an eastern tale in which the three sons of the Barrscólóg, Aristotle's supposed brother, play a part; Type 953 (The Old Robber Relates Three Adventures), known in Ireland as the Knight of Glin (Ridire an Ghleanna); and Type 956B (The Clever Maiden Alone at Home Kills the Robbers). Among the Other Romantic Tales listed by Arne-Thompson, the most popular in Ireland were Type 970 (The Twining Branches—two trees growing on the graves of lovers entwine, told about Naoise and Déirdre among others) and Type 990* (A Merchant's Son Finds the Princess Wounded in a Coffin), told in ecotype form in Ireland about a man, who rescued a dumb girl from being abducted in a coffin by fairies, and married her.

4. *Tales of the Stupid Ogre*. As the title suggests,

tales in this category describe the manner in which the ogre (usually a giant in Irish versions) was duped and outwitted by his diminutive human opponent. This happened as a result of a labour contract or a partnership between them, or else of a contest in strength (squeezing a supposed stone, throwing a hammer, or mowing) or in racing or eating (which the hero wins by using a sack as a false stomach). Again, the hero escapes from an attempt to murder him (by placing an object in his bed) and causes his opponent to kill his own children in bed, in error, or to burn his own wife in an oven instead of the hero. The well-known classical story of Polyphemus, in which the one-eyed giant is blinded (Type 1137), occurs independently or as an in-tale in longer tales. Type 1149 (Children Desire Ogre's Flesh) takes the form in Ireland of Fionn mac Cumhail, pretending to be a child in a cradle, frightens the giant by biting his finger. Other characters too are featured in these tales; animals (where the hedgehog beats the hare in a race with the aid of other hedgehogs); the Devil (who, in Type 1187: Meleager: Till the Candle Burns Out, is outwitted by his human opponent); and even a bailiff (Type 1186) who is given to the Devil by a tenant 'with his whole heart'. Many of these tales were joined together as successive episodes in a single story, and about five hundred versions of them have been recorded in Ireland.

C

Jokes and Anecdotes

Aarne-Thompson, in *The Types of the Folktale*, lists eight hundred different tales under the various sections of this category. As humorous stories have been, and still are, very popular among all peoples, it does not

surprise us to learn that several hundred of these international Types have been recorded in Ireland. Only a summary account of some of the themes of these tales can be given here, on account of their variety and numbers. They may tell of the foolish acts of individuals of either sex, of married couples, or of the manner in which a clever man or boy makes fools of others by deceit or gains his ends through lucky accidents. The stupid individual always suffers at the hands of his more able opponent. In international collections are also included many so-called humorous tales about parsons (or priests) and religious orders, and some of these had currency in Ireland also. Tales of lying (known as tall stories, especially in America) had only small vogue in this country, and were occasionally told as in-tales in longer narratives.

It must suffice here to mention the ten most popular tales of this category in Ireland: Type 1525 (The Master Thief), best-known of all; Type 1321 (Fools Frightened); Type 1920 (Contest in Lying); Type 1645 (The Treasure at Home), in which a man dreams of treasure hidden at a certain bridge and fails to find it, but finally does so near his own home; Type 1792A (The Priest's Pig)—confusion at night when a pig is being taken to the priest's house in lieu of a marriage-fee; Type 1652 (The Robbers under the Tree), on the branches of which a man and his foolish wife are holding the door of their home; Type 1535 (The Rich and the Poor Peasant) and the associated Type 1536A (The Woman in the Chest), in which the richer brother is always outwitted; the foolish answers of deaf persons (Type 1698) and of those who misunderstood a strange language (Type 1699); Type 1544 (The Man Who Got a Night's Lodging), a hilarious tale of misadventure in a darkened house; and finally, Type 1640 (The Brave Tailor), in which the hero kills many flies at one blow,

while his opponents think that he has killed hundreds in battle.

'Humorous Tales' would, perhaps, be a more suitable title for this section, but I have followed that given by Aarne-Thompson.

D

Formula Tales

These are usually told to (or by) children. They were cumulative and repetitive in composition, like Type 2030 (The Old Woman and her Pig), Type 2025 (The Fleeting Pancake), and Type 2044 (Pulling up the Turnip), told about Aonmhar, Dómhar, Tríomhar etc. in Ireland. Also included in this category were Catch Tales, in which the narrator induces the hearer to ask a particular question to which he receives a disconcerting reply. Unfinished Tales and Endless Tales also belong here, as does such an Unclassified Tale as Type 2400 (The Ground is Measured with a Horse's Skin or Ox-hide), which is told in Ireland about the manner in which St. Brigid obtained land for her church in Co. Kildare from King Labhraidh Loingseach, who had horse's ears (Type 782); compare the Midas (ass's ears) story.

IV

THE ULSTER CYCLE

This is the name usually applied to tales, romances and legends in which Conchobhar, king of Ulster, Cú Chulainn and his son (Conlaoch), Conall Cearnach, Déirdre, the sons of Uisneach and others play prominent parts. It is the oldest cycle of tales in Irish literature, with its scene laid in the very early days of the christian era. As was usual in the general world of folktales, and more especially in regard to the Ulster and Fenian cycles, constant inter-borrowing between oral and manuscript sources has gone on over the centuries since they were first composed.

Only a few of the Ulster tales, which have been popular in the oral tradition of that province, as well as in other parts of Ireland and Scotland, can be summarised here; it must be stated, however, that few of them have survived either orally or in manuscript as compared with the later Fenian tales.

A merchant, attending a horse-race, boasts that his wife, though pregnant, can run faster than the horses engaged. When this is put to the test, she gives birth to a son either during the race or immediately after it, and the child is adopted by the gentleman who had laid a bet with the merchant. When the boy grows up, he is taunted by his foster-brothers about his low birth. In the company of his foster-father, he goes one evening to the house of a smith named Culann, and wins his name, Cú Chulainn (the hound of Culann), by killing

the smith's watch-hound, which attacks him, and offering to guard the house in its stead. Later, the hero follows a deer to an island; the deer changes into a woman, who helps him to survive a plank-walking ordeal arranged by her wicked mother. The woman bears a son named Conlaoch to Cú Chulainn. Conlaoch later sets out for Ireland to find his father, but may not tell his name, if asked who he is. Finally, his father, Cú Chulainn, who is with the Fianna and does not recognise his son, fights with him and slays him. Fionn reveals the identity of the dead youth to Cú Chulainn, who ever after hates all women. Later a smith is forging a new sword for Cú Chulainn on condition that the hero will tell him a story (how a giant warrior had, during a fight with an opponent, thrown the narrator aside so that he fell into a discarded cow's horn); when the hero has arrived at this stage of his tale, the smith's wife, who had been concealed in the forge, interrupts him to say: 'So that's why you are nicknamed Cú na hAdhairce (the hound of the horn)!' Thereupon Cú Chulainn slays the woman, her husband and his helper, and the remainder of the tale remains untold.

Another version of the foregoing story makes the daughter of Scáthach of Skye (a woman who taught champions how to fight) the mother of his son, Conlaoch. The theme of the father and unknown son fighting each other reminds one of the Persian Sohrab and Rustem story, and belongs to Type 873 variants in the Aarne-Thompson international catalogue of folktales.

The best-known tale from the Ulster cycle is probably that of Déirdre (*Oidheadh Chloinne Uisneach*: the sorrowful Tale of the Sons of Uisneach). In theme it resembles the story of Diarmaid and Gráinne of the Fenian cycle and that of Tristan and Isolde. When a baby daughter is born to the wife of Manannán, it is prophesied that she will be the cause of the deaths of

many men in both Ireland and Scotland. Conchobhar, king of Ulster, rears her in confinement, but one day she catches sight of Naoise (one of the three sons of Uisneach who are in the king's army), and falls in love with him. The lovers flee to Scotland, where many men who fall in love with her are slain by Naoise and his brothers. They return to Ireland when Conchobhar promises to pardon them, but are confined as prisoners in a house when they arrive. Later the house is attacked and set afire; the brothers protect Déirdre from the molten lead which falls from the roof, and finally die. In some oral versions, Déirdre kills herself by throwing her body on the point of a sword, and two trees, whose branches entwine, grow from the adjacent graves of Déirdre and Naoise (Type 970). Both oral and manuscript versions of this famous tale vary in detail, as may be expected, but the main theme remains constant throughout.

In the Ulster cycle, there are accounts of how Cú Chulainn and Conall Cearnach were present at Calvary when Christ was crucified. King Conchobhar is also associated in the oral tales with the crucifixion, though not by his physical presence at the scene. One version tells how Conchobhar suffered a head-wound in the strife that had followed the deaths of the sons of Uisneach, and doctors saved his life by inserting a brain-ball (made of lime and brain-matter) into a hollow in his head. In later years, when a day became very dark, Conchobhar enquired the reason and was told by a druid that an innocent man, who ruled the whole world, was being put to death at that very time. 'If I were there,' shouted Conchobhar, 'I would not allow them to kill him.' In anger he seized his sword and started to hew down the trees that stood nearby, causing the brain-ball to start from his head. Thus he died. His soul went into a clump of rushes that grew near the

place, and there it remained until St Patrick came to Ireland over four hundred years later. As he happened to pass by the clump, the saint noticed the soul within it and asked the reason. Having heard Conchobhar's story, St. Patrick said that he would reunite the dead king's body to his soul in life in order to baptise them. Conchobhar asked did that mean that he would have to undergo death again. 'You will, of course!' replied the saint. 'Then leave me as I am, rather than that I must die a second time', said Conchobhar. In pity for the soul, tears fell from Patrick's eyes. Thus was Conchobhar baptised, and his soul rose up to heaven in the saint's sight.

Other oral tales belonging to the Ulster cycle include *Fled Bricrenn* (the feast of Bricriu), *Táin Bó Flidais* (the cattle-drive of Flidas), told mainly in Mayo, and *Tóraidheacht Ghruaidhe Griansholuis* (the pursuit of Gruadh Ghriansholuis), but they are too long to be summarised here.

There are also, in oral tradition, onomastic legends, which purport to explain the origin of certain Irish placenames (Cathair Chonraoi and Loch an Scáil in Kerry, Léim Chon Culainn in Clare, Loch Cuilinn in Connemara, Ballyconnell in Cavan and others) by associating them with personages mentioned in the Ulster cycle.

The tales of this cycle are of later composition than those of the Ulster one. They centre around Fionn mac Cumhail, the leader, and his band of warriors, the Fianna, who were involved both in fighting and in the chase. The main characters who figure in the Fenian tales are, apart from Fionn, Oisín, his son, Oscar, his grandson, Goll mac Mórna and his brother, Conán Maol, and Diarmaid Ó Duibhne.

This tale-cycle was far more popular with the storytelling public than the more heroic Ulster cycle, and the large body of tales which has survived, either orally or in manuscript, bears witness to their having been composed from century to century over perhaps a thousand years. The exploits of Fionn and his men seem to have had a greater interest for storytellers, because, despite the magical content of many of the tales, they belonged to a fairly recognisable world. Fionn, as a hero, never reached the individual stature of Cú Chulainn, but shared in most of the trials, adventures and triumphs of his men.

Mac-ghníomhartha Fhinn mhic Cumhail (The Youthful Exploits of Fionn) describe, in many varying oral versions, how Fionn's mother had to hide her child in a hollowed tree-trunk to save him from enemies; she killed the carpenter who had made the hiding-place to prevent possible discovery; Fionn, as yet un-named, played a game with king Bóirne's sons, and was un-

wittingly named Fionn (fair-haired) by the king; to escape capture, Fionn took his mother (or nurse) on his back and ran off, but had only her legs finally left in his grasp; he performed many deeds of valour with the Fianna, and gained the gift of knowledge by chewing this thumb, which had touched a roasting salmon (cf. Type 673). Among the many other tales told about Fionn may be mentioned his hiding in a cradle in fear of a giant (cf. Type 1149), the birth of his son, Oisín (little deer), from a deer-mother, and later of his grandson, Oscar, and how he became leader of the Fianna. Many Irish place names are said to have been derived from the adventures of Fionn and his men.

Tóraidheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne (The Pursuit of Diarmaid and Gráinne) was a very popular Fenian tale, which has left its traces on many Irish and Scottish placenames. It describes how Fionn, after the death of his first wife, wished to marry Gráinne, daughter of King Cormac. She, however, fell in love with the more youthful Diarmaid Ó Duibhne, who was endowed with a love-spot (*ball seirce*), and eloped with him, rather against Diarmaid's wishes. For seven years they avoided capture by the pursuing Fionn and his men, until Diarmaid was finally wounded by a wild boar. Fionn could have saved his life by giving him a palmful of water, but spilled it twice when he remembered Diarmaid's treachery; on returning a third time with water, he found that Diarmaid had died.

The story of *Céadach* was very popular with storytellers in both Ireland and Scotland. The hero, *Céadach*, was being trained in various deeds of valour by Manannán; he and his fellow-pupil, sometimes named Londubh, became rivals for the hand of Manannán's daughter, who showed her preference for *Céadach* by following him through a door. *Céadach* joined the Fianna and, against the wishes of his wife, was sent on

various quests, in the course of one of which he was killed by an undefended blow from his rival. Fearing the anger of *Céadach's* wife, Fionn did not hoist black sails on his return to signify the hero's death, but she took his body in charge and finally revived him by imitating birds performing a similar act. The motif of the Everlasting Fight (p. 36) follows, and the tale ends when *Céadach* has slain his rival in single combat. There are, in Ireland, two redactions of this fine tale, in one of which Fionn is friendly to the hero, in the other hostile.

In a number of tales, the Fianna, either hunting or in search of a kidnapped woman (*Tóraidheacht Shaidhbhe; Fuadach Mná Ghlais mic Conaill etc.*: The Pursuit of Sathbh; The Abduction of the Wife of Glas mac Conaill), find themselves in a *bruidhean* (enchanted house) in which they are stuck to the seats until finally released. *An Bhruidhean Chaorthainn* (The Enchanted House of the Quicken-tree) is an example of this tale-type.

An interesting allegorical tale, related to *Feis Tighe Chonáin* (The Hosting at Conan's House), is often popularly known as *Fionn ag Lorg na hÓige* (Fionn in Search of his Youth). It tells how the Fianna spend a night in a house in which lives a decrepit old man; a girl prepares food for the hungry visitors, but when they sit down to eat it, a ram or wether which is tied by the wall, breaks loose and upturns the table, strewing the food on the floor; some of the Fianna try to tie up the animal but fail, and finally the old man does so easily; during the night or next morning, Fionn asks the old man for the girl, but is told that he had had her already and may not have her a second time; the old man then explains that the animal is the World, which can be subdued only by himself (Death), and that the girl is Youth. Before they leave the house next day, the old

man gives some of them individual gifts: Fionn (forgiveness and the removal of the smell of clay for a sin which he had committed with a dead woman), Oscar (an unbreakable flail-thong), Diarmaid Ó Duibhne (a love-spot), Conán (power to slay hundreds while remaining unharmed) and Oisín (the grace of God).

An interesting tale of the Fianna (*Bruidhean Chéise Corainn*: The Fairy Palace of Keshcorann), describes how they were rescued by Goll mac Mórna from the magic toils of the daughters of Crónán mac Imlit; how Goll, as a reward, was given Fionn's daughter in marriage; how a woman from Greece bore a son to Oisín whom she visited in Ireland; how the son, later named Oscar by Fionn, came to Ireland in search of his father, Oisín, and won the bone-marrow and the highest placing of his shield from Goll, thereby being acknowledged as the greatest warrior among the Fianna. Inset into this tale in some versions is the story of *An Ridire Dubhach gan Gháire* (The Sad Knight Without a Laugh), p. 37.

Another tale describes how the youngest daughter of Cormac, king of Ireland, was made pregnant by an otter while bathing and bore a son (Conn), who later joined the Fianna and, in payment, demanded that they slay Cormac and place himself on the throne. Before Cormac died he had taken as wife the daughter of a smith, who, in due course, gave birth to a son who was thus the legitimate heir to the throne. The child, hidden from Conn, was taken off and reared by a she-wolf, while wearing a royal belt to show who he really was. The story ends by the confrontation of Conn who could not sleep (being the offspring of an otter—in Irish folklore, one of the three who never sleep) and the true heir to the throne. Conn is finally advised to lie on a pallet on the surface of the river Boyne, whereupon his parent, the otter, snatches him from below, and the legitimate heir ascends the throne.

Other Fianna tales which were common in oral literature include (a) how Fionn, while searching in a lake for a lost ring, is turned into an old man by a woman, and is finally rescued by his men; (b) how Fionn arranged his own men and his enemies in a circle in such a way that every ninth man in the circle is eliminated and only the Fianna survive (this tale, known as *Ludus Sancti Petri* or *Gadaíocht Inis Dhubháin*: The Theft of Inis Dhubháin, has been studied by Gerard Murphy *Béaloidéas* XII, 3-28, 1942); (c) how An Dearg Mór of Greece tests his hound (whose name may not be mentioned) against Bran, Fionn's hound; Fionn, by sucking his thumb, reveals the foreign hound's name, and changes his own wife into a deer, suspecting her of being in love with An Dearg Mór—she is finally restored to human form and rejoins Fionn through the intervention of his son; (d) how the Fianna fought a huge warrior named An Giolla Deacair; (e) how Conán Maol, Diarmaid and Goll recovered Scian na mBuadh (a magic knife), which had been stolen from them; (f) how a small man, Cab an Dosáin, cut corn so swiftly for the Fianna to bind that many of them were killed by the sheaves as they worked (*Cath na bPunann*: The Battle of the Sheaves); (g) how the Fianna at Ventry in Kerry defended Ireland against Dáire Donn, King of the World (*Cath Fionntrá*: The Battle of Ventry); (h) how Fionn rescued from a dragon the sister of three warriors whom fire could not burn or water drown or sword wound; (i) how a king's three sons, Cod, Cead and Mí-head found, with the aid of the Fianna, the Ring of Youth (*Fáinne na hÓige*), in fulfilment of a task imposed on them by a hag; (j) how a brave youth, An Feardhamhan, killed a wild pig with the aid of his dogs and how his sister, hastening to help him, was drowned in Loch Finne in Donegal; (k) how the Fianna were rescued several times from *tigh na n-amhas* (the

house of the mercenaries) where they were being tormented; (l) how Fionn prevented a child being carried off by a hand which reached down through the chimney; (m) how Fionn, under *geasa*, obtained the Discovery of the Cause of the Only Story (in which a man is turned successively into a mare, a she-wolf and a vixen by his evil wife) and the Sword of Light (*Fios Fátha an Aon-Scéil agus an Claidheamh Solais*): The Truth of the One Story and the Sword of Light; (n) how Fionn was helped by Lorcan mac Loirc or Léithín to perform certain difficult tasks; (o) how the Fianna were bound by a giantess when Fionn had refused to marry her (*Eachtra na Mná Móire thar Lear*: The Story of the Giantess from across the Sea).

The tale of Oisín's sojourn with Niamh in the Land of Youth (Tír na n-Óg), where time passes quickly, and of his return to Ireland after hundreds of years to find that the Fianna have been long since dead, enables him, by a literary device, to meet Saint Patrick; Oisín falls from his horse and becomes an old man; he is baptised by the saint and the poetic conversation (*Acallam na Senórach*: The Colloquy of the Ancients) of Oisín and Caoilte with Patrick about the opposing qualities of pagan life and Christianity is handled with humour and delicacy.

It must be mentioned that many of the tales about the Fianna have come down to us in both prose and verse form (*Laoithe Fiannaíochta*: Fenian Lays) in oral and manuscript versions.

When Stith Thompson was preparing the latest edition (1961) of *The Types of the Folktale* I supplied him with summaries of hundreds of tales, found in Ireland, but not included in the earlier lists of international tales. He accepted some, which were to be found, possibly, in other countries also, but excluded a large number as being probably of Irish origin and provenance. In a booklet of the present size, it would not be feasible to summarise or list in some useful way all of these excluded tales, most of which have no standard title. I have, therefore, thought it best to divide them into relevant categories. I may add that it is quite possible, of course, that some of these tales may later be found in other countries also. The motifs of which they are composed are widely known in many countries, but the manner in which they are strung together in Ireland to form coherent tales makes them matter for further study and comparison.

Irish Hero Tales. Side by side with the tales of the Ulster and the Fenian Cycles, a third type of heroic romantic tale had great vogue among traditional storytellers in both Gaelic-speaking Ireland and Scotland. Not all narrators included them in their repertoire, however; they were rather the speciality of a relatively small number of storytellers, involving, as they did, the use of difficult rhetorics or 'runs', as well as of motifs of a magical nature. The composers of these hero tales

drew on the stock of both national and international motifs, but, while a few of them are rather similar to some international Types and are occasionally tied up with some other heroic genres, such as the Fianna tales, they generally form an independent class. It may be said that they hardly went over at all into English when that language spread over the greater part of Ireland. Of the few scores of these heroic tales, only a small number can be summarised here.

A king, seeing a duck drive away the youngest (twelfth or tenth) of its offspring, similarly banishes the youngest of his own sons for the *deachú* (tithe). The youth sets out in quest of a girl ('The White Swan', 'The Red Duck', 'The White-tipped Palm', etc.) about whom he has dreamed or heard, and is aided and guided by his three uncles whom he visits in turn. He finally arrives at the girl's dwelling, only to find that she has mysteriously disappeared. He has many adventures before finally meeting her and winning her hand in a contest. This tale is generally known as *Mac Rí an Deachaoin* ('The Prince of the Tithe').

The undertaking of either self-imposed quests or of those enjoined under *geasa* (magical injunctions) forms a recurring theme in these hero tales.

'The Everlasting Fight' is a good example of this and was a very popular tale with Irish storytellers. The hero arrives at an island and falls in love with the sister of three brothers who are vainly trying to keep possession of their land against their enemies, who, although slain in battle each day, are again alive to renew the fight next morning. He lies among the dead bodies at night and slays a hag who revives the dead with magic balm. The dying hag imposes a task on him under *geasa* to convey the news of her death to a certain bull, and he must in turn fight and kill the bull, a dog and a cat to whom he bears the fatal message. The hero and the cat

both die in the encounter. When discovered, the rescuers inadvertently put the heart and lungs of the cat into the hero's disemboweled body, and he is rid of his feline character only by the restoration of his original organs. He then marries the heroine. This is sometimes told as an in-tale in other stories.

Another very common tale was known as *An Ridire Dubhach gan Gháire* or *Gruagach an Aon-Ribe* (The Sad Knight Without a Laugh or the Warrior with a Single Hair). The tale is also usually an episode inset into a longer story. It describes how the hero (sometimes Fionn or Oscar or somebody else) sets out to discover the cause of the knight's predicament or else meets him accidentally. The knight describes how himself and his three sons had pursued a hare which had decoyed them to a house in which lived an old man and twelve *gruagaigh* (ogres), who submitted the knight and his sons to many indignities (rope-pulling, pig-cleaning, over-eating of the swine-flesh), and finally choked the three sons with bones. When the magic hare reappears on Christmas Day, the hero accompanies the knight to the abode of the old man and his *gruagaigh*, forces them to undergo the same ordeals to which they had submitted the others and finally has the dead sons resurrected.

The story entitled *Conall Gulban* was very well-known among Irish storytellers and was possibly the most popular of all the hero tales. It describes how Conall, the youngest son of the king of Leinster, remained behind to guard the kingdom when his father and two brothers set out to defend a foreign country against attack. Conall, against his father's advice to choose a wife within his own kingdom, set out to meet the beautiful daughter of the king of Ulster and won her hand by a display of valour. On his way home to Leinster with his wife, Conall was overcome by 'war-

rior's sleep', from which his wife was unable to rouse him when she was being carried off in a basket by a huge warrior who waded in through the sea. Conall awoke after seven days, learned from some cow-herds what had happened to his wife and sailed over the sea to find her. On reaching a strange country, he defeated in a hurling-game the three sons of the king and was recognised by an old Irishman who had been taken off by a griffin and dropped on the king's land. While Conall was being entertained at the palace, a huge warrior arrived and snatched the food from the royal table. Conall overpowered him and, in an in-tale, the Short Grey Warrior (the newcomer) described how he had suffered at the hands of a warrior, bigger than himself, whom he had met carrying a woman in a basket on his back through the sea (this was Conall's wife); he had also barely escaped with his life from the nest of a griffin. Next day, Conall set out in the company of the reluctant Short Grey Warrior and the king's sons for the Eastern World, where the story ends by Conall overcoming the abductor of his wife in single combat and meeting his father and brothers once more.

Alan Bruford has speculated that the story of Conall Gulban may have been composed in Donegal in the sixteenth century and by the end of the eighteenth was evidently known throughout the Gaelic-speaking parts of Ireland and Scotland.

Eachtra Iollainn Airmdheirg (The Adventure of Red-armed Iollann) was a very well-known Irish hero tale, which was similar in its central episode to the international Type 301. Iollann and his two brothers set out to recover three teeth which have been knocked out of their father's mouth by a strange warrior; Iollann alone has the courage to descend by a basket and rope to an underground kingdom, where he wins both treasure and a princess by his valour; his treacherous

brothers haul up the princess, but Iollann is left below and has to undergo many adventures before arriving home to prove that it is he who has succeeded in the quest and who alone is legitimate heir to his father. The 'Everlasting Fight' and 'The Sad Knight Without a Laugh' are sometimes found as in-tales in this story also.

There remains here only to state that several other fine hero tales were also told in Ireland, including *Cod*, *Cead agus Mí-chead*, *Loinnir mac Leabhair*, *Giolla an Fhiugha*, *Madra na Seacht gCos*, *Maonas na Loinge Luaithe* and *Balor*. Versions of most, if not all, were to be found in both oral currency and in manuscript tradition in Ireland and Gaelic-speaking Scotland.

Tales of Magic. Irish storytellers had in their repertoire a large number of tales which had a flavour similar to those listed by Aarne-Thompson under Types 300-749. I refer here to some of those which cannot yet be placed under the numbers and titles allotted to Tales of Magic in the international register, so far as the recorded versions of them are concerned. As they do not fall into any particular sub-sections, all that can be done in the present instance is to give some idea of the general theme of a few.

(a) An Irish youth and a French maiden are brought together by fairies; they fall in love and marry; the young husband is sent on a quest to find a food-producing cloth and returns to find that his wife has disappeared; during his search for her, she recognises him by means of a basket which he has woven (ecotype of Type 888A*: The Basket-maker).

(b) A spurned suitor abducts a girl and changes her brother into a deer; a tailor aids the deer in overcoming a lion (the abductor) and restores the deer to human form.

(c) A youth offers to fight two giants who have killed

the king's soldiers; he succeeds in procuring a dog, a cock and a bee, each of which in turn causes the giants to fight and kill each other.

(d) A youth wins a king's daughter by means of a magic napkin which an old woman has given him; later, when he is about to be hanged, the napkin summons his dog which releases him and kills his captors.

(e) An evil woman throws an apple on to an island on which her stepson and stepdaughter are hidden by their father; the girl eats the apple and gives birth to a hen and a cock; her brother, on a quest imposed by the evil stepmother, is helped by a woman, marries her, and gets the spell removed from his sister, thus causing the death of the evil woman.

(f) A girl is sent to a graveyard at night on a quest for a skull; the man whose skull it had been orders her to make stirabout with some meal and the blood of her lover; she hides some of the food thus prepared and is later able to restore her lover to life by means of it.

(g) The youngest son of a king is disinherited; later he is befriended by a boar which advises him how to ride a wild stallion in a test; at the end of the tale, he is able to remove the spell from the helpful animal and marries his daughter.

(h) A young man wounds one of two swans which asks him to go to the Eastern World to cure a king's daughter who is ill; he does so, but is killed by a rival suitor; later, having been restored to life by means of a magic bottle, he kills his rival and marries the princess.

(i) A man sets out to find how the world is faring, visits in turn the masters of the Sun, the Wind, the Frost and the Summer, and returns to relate his adventures.

(j) A man who holds that the power of God is more

potent than magic is able to prove, after many adventures, that his opinion was correct.

The foregoing are but a few examples of the variety of such tales of magic, and further catalogued versions of them may prove at least some of them to be variants of international Types.

Religious Tales. Stories with religious themes seem, as I have said, to have been extremely popular with Irish storytellers and audiences, to judge by the large *corpus* of them which has been collected. In 1952, I selected and edited 135 examples of them, in the Irish language, for publication in *Béalóideas* (Journal of the Folklore of Ireland Society). So rich was the material that it was difficult to choose the best versions to illustrate the various categories and, at the same time, to represent the different areas of the Gaeltacht. A number of religious legends was included in that volume, but I shall refer to that genre of tales later on.

Strange though many of these tales may seem to the modern reader, they were listened to with deep interest by our forefathers, and the unusual happenings described in them were generally accepted as possible by an unsophisticated audience. Indeed, I have heard stories of this nature listened to with emotion by Gaeltacht audiences, as if they were believed to describe real happenings; I saw tears stream from the eyes of one old woman as she narrated a traditional religious tale.

Nothing more can be done in this booklet than to list the categories into which the stories fall and to give some hints of the character of some individual items. Motifs were taken from the medieval stock by the composers of the stories, and some of them recur again and again in different tales. There is, too, a blending of prechristian and christian elements, which often add to the rather weird atmosphere in which the events described were supposed to have taken place.

Traditional stories about (mostly un-named) priests abound. Severe penances imposed on a priest, either voluntarily (to save his parents from Hell, for example) or to prove his innocence and escape from the toils of an evil woman (devil-spirit), are mentioned again and again. The miraculous powers of various priests crop up in many stories: a church-door opens of its own accord to admit a slandered priest; a priest causes rain to fall in time of drought, changes into fish meat offered to him on Friday, banishes the Devil or evil spirits, restores the dead to life, recovers keys or pins from the belly of a fish, proves that an evil landlord is in Hell, or is welcomed into Rome by all the bells ringing automatically to prove his innocence.

The Devil, is, of course, a prominent character in traditional religious tales. He may appear as a tempter or temptress or as having some human being in his power. As already referred to in writing of international Types, his son may even become an ordained priest with an evil purpose, but in all cases the adversary is thwarted by either a priest or the innocence and trust in God of his victim, and is banished from the scene in a blaze of sulphurous fire. He may consume the body of his victim, but the soul is saved.

Journeys to the otherworld, where visions of Heaven, Purgatory or Hell are vouchsafed, are the setting for some very fine tales (Dante, in his classic poems, used material of this nature). Heaven is sometimes depicted as having beautiful gardens with fruit and flowers, as well as heavenly music or as a castle with fine food and beds. In Purgatory, a man who had defrauded his workman, is shown as an ass drawing heavy loads; or it may be that a suffering soul has to pass through a thin wall of fire before bathing in a curative well or partaking of healing fruits. Purgatory may be spent, according to some stories, seeking shelter in inclement

weather under bushes or in some cold, wet place, or in a narrow, confined space (between the froth and the water, between the bark of a tree and the wood, and so on). Rescues of souls from not only Purgatory, but also from Hell, are the theme of some religious tales. Hell is often described as having a room specially reserved for a certain person; otherwise, the Devil seems to live like any man-of-the-house and to have his own difficulties with his family and servants! Judgement scenes are occasionally described as being the weighing of the good against the bad deeds of somebody who has died; even a crumb given in alms may tip the scales in his favour. There are, of course, many tales too of the dead who return to give an account of how they have fared beyond the grave, either recounting some good deed which had won Heaven for them or else some sin, small or great, which had to be atoned for. The 'lost souls' may appear in the guise of animals, serpents or evil spirits, while those in Purgatory are described as having thin legs (as in the story of Cian na mBeann Óir).

The power of innocence and its ultimate reward are featured in several tales; the simple boy, rather than more exalted contenders, is chosen as bishop or Pope, by the miraculous movement of the episcopal or papal throne towards him; or he converses with the Saviour in a holy picture and is invited to a heavenly banquet; he alone is vouchsafed the supernatural sight of things which are hidden from other mortals; and, though fated to be hanged, he can undergo his death in symbolic form during sleep. There is also a tale about a simple girl, who knew only one prayer to say before retiring, and whose bed was later seen to be guarded by four angels. The power and value of prayer is the theme of other stories also. In this section too, mention must be made of the old woman whose simple trust in God

overcame the Devil (*'Dóchas na Caillí'*).

Miraculous occurrences abound in traditional religious tales: food is provided for starving families who have given their last remaining food in alms; a crop of oats grows from chaff; stones in a pot on the fire turn into potatoes; a green tree grows from the centre of a glowing fire; children who have died or have been burned in some way are found alive or healed. Charity and generosity are abundantly rewarded, while neglect of those virtues is punished.

Mention must finally be made of a tale which describes how the Twelve Apostles were born from twelve holy women. This is the *ignis divinus* theme of related medieval tales.

Romantic Tales (Novelle). These follow the same kind of pattern as that which is found in the Aarne-Thompson Types 850-999. Magic is generally absent and the situations are like those which may occur, with a certain amount of exaggeration, in normal life. This genre was very popular in literary compositions of medieval writers (Boccaccio, La Fontaine and others). A few of the romantic tales which were published in chap-books in recent centuries, such as Valentine and Orson and the Seven Sages of Rome, passed into oral currency in Ireland and other countries.

Many romantic tales were concerned with affairs of the heart and ended happily only after several difficulties had been overcome. An Irish ecotype of Type 611 (The Gifts of the Dwarfs) was very popular: the hero is betrothed at birth to the heroine, but when his parents become impoverished the contract is broken by the girl's parents; the girl, however, secretly provides the hero with successive ships which finally enable him to make good and marry her. Another tale describes the difficulty which a king's daughter has in avoiding marriage with her father, who had promised his dead

wife that he would marry only a woman who had the same type of hair and skin as she had (the daughter alone fulfilled these requirements). Other tales of a more amusing character describe how a man won a mayor's fiancée by a subterfuge; an Irish ecotype of Type 1455 (The Hard-hearted Fiancée) describes how the heroine, in disguise, visited her three suitors in turn to discover how they lived—this was a very popular tale; how three suitors watched a graveyard to win a girl's affections; also, how a suitor won the hand of a girl in marriage by feigning to be a cripple (her father, a cripple, would allow her to marry only a man similarly afflicted!).

A ship's captain is often featured in these tales as a somewhat sinister character: either a poor man sells his own wife to him under financial duress, or she is abducted by the captain and is finally reunited with her husband only after many adventures (an Irish ecotype of Type 888A*: The Basket-maker).

Thieves and robbers are often the central characters in tales of this genre: for example, the youngest brother recovers what the two eldest have been cheated of in card-games; a clever lawyer (pretending to be the Devil) recovers money stolen by the mayor of a city from an unsuspecting visitor; a very popular tale in Ireland was an ecotype of Type 950 (Rhampsinitus), which amusingly tells of the thieving adventures of one of the three sons of the Barrscólóg (Aristotle's brother). Other tales describe the predicament of the hero or heroine who happens to become involved with robbers or murderers; also—a common theme—how a fugitive from the law is saved by the daughter of a man who has informed on him, is later pardoned by the King of England, wins a contest there and marries the daughter of his betrayer.

Such themes as the foregoing, together with scores of

others which cannot be mentioned, as well as the international stories in the same category, formed a considerable body of oral literature, which provided our ancestors with entertainment in years gone by.

Humorous Tales. If the popularity of a particular genre of tales may be estimated by the numerous categories and individual examples of it, then there is no doubt that stories which cause people to laugh were the most widespread and best-loved of all. It is safe to say that, in numbers, they run into thousands in Ireland. For the present, space will allow only for their subdivision into Types, with occasional examples of some themes.

Tales with a religious background or atmosphere were very popular in this country—those about individuals (generally tricksters) trying to get into Heaven; tales about bishops, priests and ministers, about confession and penances (a rogue makes *turas na cruaiche* around his turf-rick instead of making the pilgrimage to Cruach Phádhraic, Croaghpatrick, in Mayo, assigned to him by the priest); tales about humorous sermons or repartee in Church; about the man who promises God that he will not trouble Him again if He allows him to be saved from drowning on a stormy day; about long-winded prayers and so on.

Stories about courtship, marriage and married couples run into hundreds, which are not mentioned in the Aarne-Thompson Type-list. So too do humorous tales about rogues, both as regards their witty replies and their acts. Side by side with clever remarks must be placed what is known in the Irish language as *deisbhéalai* (witty retorts, often including verse)—such seem to have been almost totally confined to the Irish language and, while puns are also to be found, a distinction must be made between the two genres. Wakes too—now solemn occasions—gave rise to such funny

stories as that about the man in whose house, in the old days, an unruly wake was held, who remarked that it would be a long time again before he would have a wake under his roof!

As in the case of individual partners among married couples, there was a profusion of stories about simpletons or foolish persons of both sexes, who by their speech or actions remind one of the Men of Gotham in England who were unable to count themselves; the reactions of such persons to seeing their own shadow in sunshine or their image reflected in a mirror form a common theme; so too, tales like that of the foolish boy who sits on eggs to hatch them or who is grateful that he had not his new boots on when he cut his foot with an axe, or the man who, having fallen out of his high bed, remarked that God had showed him the virtue of humility!

Many other categories may be also mentioned: vulgar prescriptions, foolish questions and answers, practical jokes, tales of eating and drinking (especially of drunken persons), of awkward predicaments, of mistakes and of mistaken identity, of money and misers, of strange adventures in the world of reality or in dreams, tall stories (boasting, etc.), of humour in court, of 'Paddy the Irishman', and others too numerous to mention.

Myths. These are traditional prose narratives, which, in the society in which they were told, were considered to be truthful accounts of what had happened in the remote past. They had a rather sacred character, dealing, as they did, with gods and demi-gods, and with the creation of the world and its inhabitants. Certain types of myth were to be found embedded in early Irish sagas and genealogies; some of them may still be detected in stories about such personages as Fionn mac Cumhail, Cailleach Bhéarra (The Hag of Beare) and Donn Fírinne (probably the god of Death). Folk stories found

in Ireland about the War in Heaven between Lucifer and the Almighty, the expulsion of the rebellious angels, who became the fairies and other beings, and the oral tales about the Deluge, Noah and his sons, and the Ark may also be termed myths.

Legends (German *Sagen*). The Latin word *legendum* from which the English term stems originally referred to an extract from a saint's 'life', which was usually read in monasteries. A folk legend, in so far as it has been defined, has been said to be a story or narrative, set in the recent or historical past, that is believed to be true by those by whom and to whom it is communicated. Such narratives may be divided into the following categories: (a) *religious legends*, which are very numerous in Irish oral literature and include apocryphal stories about Christ and the Blessed Virgin when they lived on earth, about the saints and religious objects, such as churches, monasteries, statues, holy books, holy wells, miracles and various other stories of that nature; (b) *supernatural legends*, which are told as true accounts of eerie experiences with fairies, spirits, ghosts, mermaids and such, as well as about wishes and dreams which came true, about death omens and warnings and other narratives which depend on folk belief for their origin and dissemination; (c) *anecdotes*, which are brief narratives which tell something unusual about a person, an event or a thing, and are still told by the thousand every day all over the world (they are often of a humorous or witty nature); (d) *local legends*, which are closely connected with particular places on account of their names, their geographical features or their histories; (e) *personal legends* were told about well-known individuals, such as Oliver Cromwell, Daniel O'Connell, national heroes, poets, priests, robbers (highwaymen), and other characters who attracted the popular attention for some reason; and

finally (f) *historical legends*, which are associated with important events (in Ireland, wars and such episodes, the Famine, emigration, tragedies, etc.).

It remains to be added that some legends may also become *migratory* (and *vice versa*): well-known legends of this kind include that about the Wandering Jew; Barbarossa (sleeping warriors will awake to free their country—told in Ireland about Gearóid Iarla); the Midas legend (well-known in Ireland in the story about Labhraidh Loingseach who had horse-ears); the Guntram legend (about how the soul of a sleeping man left his body in the guise of a butterfly or mouse and later returned, whereupon the sleeper awoke and told of a dream he had had); and the river which demands a human sacrifice at intervals by calling aloud '*Anois an t-am! Cá bhfuil an duine?*' (This is the time! Where is the person?).

The Cante Fable (*An Rann-scéal*). This type of story part-prose, part-verse, was very common in the Irish language, and was popular in many countries. In Ireland, it tells, in prose, the circumstances in which a particular poet (Eón Rua Ó Súilleabháin, Raftery or any other) composed a short stanza as a comment on the matter-in-hand, or else how two poets met and replied to each other in verse.

Animal Tales. Popular animal tales, which may be of Irish origin, include: the cat spends three half-pence on the purchase of three helpful attributes; the wolf presides over a court to determine whether the cat or the fox does more mischief—the cat does; the fox, in partnership with the wolf and ass to store food for the winter, gets the wolf to kill the ass and then, by a trick, rids himself of the wolf; the fox puts his tongue under the shell of a barnacle on the shore, is trapped and drowned by the tide; the fox or hare race against a hedgehog who wins by a trick; the wren, to avoid

paying a debt, hides among her brood, until her vanity leads to her identity being discovered; a louse argues with a flea as to whether strength is better than speed—it is not.

* * * * *

To sum up, it must be stated that a folktale is really 'alive' only when it is being told in a traditional way to an audience, not when it is being recorded mechanically. When it has been set down on disc or tape, in manuscript or in print, it resembles somewhat an object on display in a museum—life has gone out of it, and only the dead body remains. This booklet illustrates a further stage in the disintegration, when a general autopsy and dissection are performed to discover a tale's composition. It is to be hoped that, far removed from both narrators and audiences though the tales which I have mentioned are, something may still be learned about what their place and function were in the everyday life of our ancestors and in 'oral literature'.

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