

THE IRISH NATIONAL COSTUME

A short time ago we were asked by a Wanganui correspondent to define the Irish national costume; and as the query raised a question of considerable general interest we decided to treat the matter at some length



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and to give our readers the best that could be got on the subject. For this purpose we enlisted the services of the Very Rev. Mr. O'Leary, of Lawrence, well known throughout the South Island as an accomplished Gaelic scholar and keen Gaelic enthusiast, and as a high authority on all questions pertaining to the national history of Ireland. Mr. O'Leary has kindly supplied us with the following notes on the subject.

What is the Irish national costume? Lord Ashbourne, in a discussion in the Irish paper some years ago, said he had studied the subject of the Irish national costume thoroughly, and his own dress in the picture is as he appeared in the House of Lords. He is a distinguished advocate of the revival of the Gaelic language, dress, music, sports, dancing, etc. His father was the late Lord Chancellor, and he is a convert to the Catholic Church. There is an elaborate series of drawings of the various fashions in Irish national dress in the *Social History of Ancient Ireland*, by P. W. Joyce, honorary President of the Royal Society of Antiquaries, Ireland. Some of the figures are taken from ancient engraved book-covers of bone (14th century), others from the face of the shrine of St. Manchem (11th century), one showing the tight trows or trousers with fallain or short cloak, dyed olive-green, is from a copy of Giraldus (A.D. 1200), Irish costumes (A.D. 1600) of gentleman and lady of high classes, persons of middle rank, and peasants (page 393).

The following is a summary of Joyce's description of Irish dress:—Woollen and linen clothes formed the

dress of the great mass of the people. Both were home-made. Imported silk and satin were much worn among the higher classes. Both are constantly noticed in our literature. Furs of seals, otters, badgers, and foxes were much used for capes and for the edgings of garments. The Scotch tartan, the Gaelic *tuartan* of which both the material and name originated in Ireland, is defined in the *Senchus Mor* to be a material 'containing cloth of every color.' The ancient Irish loved bright colors, and they well understood the art of dyeing. Here is a description of an army in the epic called the 'Tain':—'Some with red cloaks, others with light blue cloaks, others with deep blue cloaks, others with green, or blay, or white, or yellow cloaks, bright and fluttering about them; and a young, red-freckled lad, with a crimson cloak, in their midst.' The several articles of dress were usually colored differently, like Joseph's coat. The regulations of Teerumas, an old pagan king, ordered a slave to be dressed in clothes of one color, and a peasant or farmer in two. The king, queen, and ollave were privileged to wear six. Green, which is regarded to-day as the national color, is very modern. The ancient Irish had no national color.

Here is a classification of the upper garments:—(1) A large cloak without sleeves, varying in length, commonly covering the whole person from the shoulders down. (2) A tight-fitting coat or jacket with sleeves but no collar. (3) A cape, not always hooded. (4) A sort of petticoat like the present Highland kilt, and no waistcoat. The material of the cloak was according to the rank or means of the wearer. Among the higher classes it was of fine cloth, edged with silk or satin. It was commonly dyed, striped or spotted. Sometimes it only reached the knees or middle thigh, according to the figures in the *Book of Kells* (7th century). It was called *brath*, which was, and is still, a general term for any outer garment. The *talbain* (felling) was applied to a loose mantle reaching above the knees. A coarse horse wrap, either dyed or the natural color of wool, was called *lantern*. Women had similar cloaks called by the same names. The cloak worn by women had a



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hood at the top, which could be turned up to cover the head. This is still in use. A garment distinct from the preceding over-mantles, worn over all, and usually of linen, dyed saffron, called *leine* (two syllables), was