

him, and while in Paris he was in that net. His position of strength was in America, and they intended to strike their blows for Irish independence where he was strong."

Irishmen have not lost faith in President Wilson. That some have we do not deny, but those who are best able to judge still defend him and plead for him, asking us to remember that he was playing a lone hand in Paris, where everybody else was fighting for plunder. De Valera has already pleaded for trust in the President, and here is what another Sinn Fein leader has to say of him:—"Mr Arthur Griffith, at Strabane, on Easter Monday, said if President Wilson's declaration at the tomb of Washington of the principle on which America entered the war was acted on everywhere, then the peace of the world was secure, but if the principles were violated by the annexation of territory and the grabbing of trade, the result would not be peace, but continual war. He believed President Wilson was sincere when he laid down that principle, and that he made, and was making, a fight to uphold it. However, he found himself in difficulties that he would not have experienced had he sat in Washington and dictated peace. The English newspaper reports that President Wilson was backing England or anybody he did not believe. America was the one nation that had fulfilled to the letter the principle laid down by the President for the freedom of oppressed peoples. In December the Irish people declared for absolute independence, and a Republican form of government. If President Wilson found it impossible in the circumstances to carry out the undertakings he gave, they in Ireland would, if needs be, appeal to America to stand by the words of the President."

"N.Z. TABLET" HISTORY OF IRELAND COMPETITION

First Prize Essay, by ISOBEL M. QUILTER, St. Catherine's College Invercargill

THE GOLDEN AGE OF PRE-CHRISTIAN IRELAND.

"Had I strength, had I skill the wide world to subdue,
Oh! the queen of that world should be Roisin Dubh."

As far back as history can carry us, we find that the whole of Western Europe, including the British Isles, was peopled by a race apparently of the same origin, and divided into an immense number of republics. These people were governed patriarchally in the form of clans and were called Celts. The Celts of Ireland were neither builders of cities, nor, to any great extent, sailors. The wealth of the country lay in

cattle, and the chief seats of sovereignty commanded some district of rich pasture. Tara, for example, the name of which appears with the beginnings of legendary history, was situated in the richest part of the rich province of Meath, then set apart for the High King of Ireland. Every father ruled his family, being both priest and master, his sons in their turn becoming heads of small estates. The family was succeeded by the tribe or clan, an agglomeration of men of the same blood, possessing a chief of the same race. The country was divided amongst the clans, each occupying a particular district, the head holding a special part in virtue of his office, while the clansmen held the remainder in common; so that, as far as land was concerned, there were neither rich nor poor. Over each province was a chieftain who was truly a patriarch, elected by the clansmen. His power was immense, for all under him were blood-relations, and affection was the main moving-power. Under his sway a primitive, patriarchal life was led—such a life as conduced to moderation in all things and to a solid sense of duty. Hence the Celtic tribes were strictly conscientious, and spiritual things were to them real and substantial.

The chief characteristic of the Celtic race was that, long before Christianity was introduced into Ireland, it possessed a peculiar literature and the arts of music and poetry wherein the very soul of the race was portrayed. With the Celts, literature was the perfect expression of the social state of the people and sprang naturally from the clan system. A system of writing was also in use. The highest learned men among the Celts formed a privileged order; but in order to be able to reach to the degree the candidates had to prove for themselves—

"Purity of hand, bright without wounding."

"Purity of mouth, without poisonous satire."

"Purity of learning, without reproach."

"Purity of husbandship, in marriage."

Besides all this, they must have the highest degree of historical learning and literary attainments and must be able to trace the genealogies of all the tribes of Erin up to the first man. They used books, but generally conformed themselves to oral instruction. These men were called "Ollamhs." Under them were the "Shanachies." The Ollamh was the historian of the monarch of the whole country, and the Shanachies had the care of provincial records. Each chieftain, even the humblest, had his Shanachy. Inferior in rank to the Shanachy, although anterior in time, came the Filé, who wrote in verse, most of the poetry being "ballad." The literature was realistic, not romantic, and concerned itself with all classes, trying to raise what was of itself common and undignified in human society. All the poetry is marked by an extraordinary fondness for facts and traditions. Poetry was found

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