Druidism.

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THE subject upon which I am honoured to address you to-night carries us back to the first civilized inhabitants of this island, among whom Druidism played a great part, and even to-day among the lineal descendants of the ancient British the druid and the bard linger on as objects of interest. Druidism is no exact science. The druidical bibliography may be divided into two classes. The earliest and therefore the original authorities on the history of Druidism represent, all told, barely 100 pages, and these form what I call the first class. Then follows the class of comment, criticism, and amplification upon these original records. In this extensive literature sober criticism and a roaming imagination alternately appear. I was most kindly asked whether I was coming with a syllabus and with slides. I almost fainted at the suggestion of anything so scientific as a syllabus. Slides would have been products of imagination.

This history of Druidism may be compared to that of the stained glass in the oldest churches in the Province of Wales. There are, for example, undamaged Jesse windows that fill an authentic and illuminating place in the history of the Art. In some ancient churches intelligible and valuable fragments of ancient glass are placed in the restored windows. More often small fragments appear that the glazier cannot piece together or the expert always date. In the history of Druidism there are, as it will be seen, a few coherent records and

several fragments that yield clues. To the student of the history of Druidism the philologist comes first. The late Professor Bury seemed inclined to derive " druid" from the root " dru " seen in " druidecht," meaning magic, and so druid would mean " a wise man" or wizard. The older philologists—Professor Rhys among them—connect "druid" with the Greek word " drus," an oak. All that we know of the cult favours this derivation. Certainly the oak was the tree most closely allied with the god of the Aryans, and in Greece was regarded as a symbol of Zeus. An explanation of the druidical reverence for the oak and the mistletoe can best be sought for far back in the history of their Aryan forefathers. Zeus, or Jupiter, was the supreme god of the Aryan race, the fathers of which gathered together in the great temple of nature like brothers of the same house, looked up in adoration to the sky as the emblem of what they looked for—a father and a god. The name they gave him expressed the brightness of the sky. When the Aryan race spread and broke up into its Germanic, Slav, Greek, Latin and Celtic families, this conception of the sky father took a local and a family colouring. Widely and closely allied with the worship of Zeus was the oak. Probably the first homes of the Aryan race were in lands abounding in oak forests, which supplied not only the material for shelter, food and fire, but formed natural sanctuaries.

The Latin word " templum " means a cutting or a clearing, and was first used in augury to express an open space for observation, and the related Greek word (τέμενος) is similarly used for a parcel of land separated from common uses and dedicated to a god. A parallel is found in the use of the Welsh word " llan," which means a cleared and marked off space, and finally a sacred enclosure wherein the house or church stands. To a primitive people this would be the best, as it would be the most obvious symbol of power and permanence.

This reverence for the oak appears early and universally among the Aryans. In Homer the wounded Sarpedon is laid beneath the oak of ægis-bearing Zeus, and at Rome,

Romulus, after his victory, laid the spoil of battle on the sacred oak of the Capitol, the first and then the only image to his pastoral followers of Jupiter. To Herodotus we owe the story of the black dove which, flying from Egyptian Thebes, settled in an oak at Dodona and declared in a human voice that an oracle of Jove should be founded there. Thenceforward the voice of the god was heard in the rustling of the leaves and branches of the oak. Later generations regarded the god as immanent in the oak tree, or, as a Latin poet expressed it, " the tree enshrines the godhead." To the early Aryans the oak forests were home and altar. Virgil describes the men of the golden age as feeding on acorns, and what was regarded as the wild fancy of the poet has received unexpected corroboration from the pile-villages discovered in Northern Italy. In these villages, built from the oak forests which clothed the banks of the Po, large stores of acorns were found. Even in our day, in the Iberian Peninsula, the acorn is eaten by the peasant, and sacks of the sweet acorn known as *belota doce* were sent as a delicacy to the royal household from districts south of the Tagus. The oak was probably used in kindling a fire by friction, and Sophocles makes Heracles order that his funeral-pyre should be made of oak and olive. The explanation of this may be not merely that the prediction of his death came from the oak at Dodona, and that the wild olive was sacred to him, but there may be in the passage an echo of the tradition that the sacred fire or the need-fire was kindled by friction of oak and wild olive wood. Another consideration may show the importance of the oak in this connection. The pygmies in Africa will fight to the death in order to prevent their fires being extinguished. To a primitive people the keeping up of their fires was a matter of supreme importance. An oak-wood fire smoulders longer than that of any other wood, and therefore the oak would be especially precious. In Pliny's description of the cutting of the mistletoe, three features arrest attention—the minute and formal ritual observed, the association of the mistletoe with the oak, and lastly the medicinal properties of the mistletoe. Abundant instances survive of the cutting of the

mistletoe at fixed seasons, whether on midsummer eve or at Christmas time. In districts where the sway of the Druids was most firmly established midsummer eve is still the time for cutting certain magic plants, and the injunction that they must be cut at midnight and in silence recalls the ritual of the cutting of the mistletoe. Various explanations have been offered of the close association between the mistletoe and the oak. It may be a survival of the Balder myth. Balder, an oak-spirit, could only be killed by the mistletoe, and the explanation of this is suggested in the fact that the mistletoe was regarded as the life of the oak and this theory of animism we shall see develop in the chief doctrines of the Druids.

I will not stop to discuss the question whether Druidism was of Iberian or Celtic origin (but, in passing, the most brilliant Welsh scholar of the day developed a theory that there were striking resemblances in idiom in the Berber and Celtic speech). Passing from metaphysics and theory, the first records of Druidism may be usefully recited. The diary of Pytheas, the navigator and geographer, whom the merchants of Marseilles fitted out in a vessel and sent to investigate the trade of Britain with the Carthaginians is the earliest record. He came to Britain somewhere between 330 and 320 B.C. Before we reach the most authentic and specific records, the diary of Pytheas, the navigator and geographer, may be mentioned. His diary was lost. But short passages that remain of it are given in Elton's *Origins of English History*. Opposite the mouth of the Loire, Pytheas visited an Island inhabited by women who practised orgiastic rites. No man might land on the sacred island, on which a temple stood which was unroofed once a year, the law requiring that the roof should be replaced in one day before the sun went down. In this story the French historian Martin considered that this temple and its ritual belonged to convents of Druidesses, and that these Druidesses belonged to the Armoric nation. Leaving the Loire, Pytheas visited another island apparently opposite Cape Finisterre, where nine Gaelic priestesses kept up a perpetual fire in honour of their god. These virgins were said to possess magical powers. If these two islands

in which Celtic ritual was practised really existed, the one was probably Ushant, and the other the Isle of the Saints.

Cæsar says that in Gaul there were two orders of men of any rank or dignity, the commonalty being slaves. Of the two orders one was that of the Druids and the other that of the knights. "The Druids are engaged in things sacred, they conduct the public and the private sacrifices, and interpret in all matters of religion. To them a large number of the young men resort for the purpose of instruction, and they (the Druids) are in great honour among them. For they determine respecting almost all controversies public and private; and if any crime has been perpetrated, if murder has been committed, if there be any dispute about an inheritance, or about boundaries, these same persons decide it; they decree rewards and punishments; if any one, either in a private or public capacity, has not submitted to their decision, they interdict him from the sacrifices. They regard this as the most heavy punishment. Those who have been thus interdicted are esteemed in the number of the impious and the criminal: all shun them, and avoid their society and conversation, lest they receive some evil from their contact; nor is justice administered to them when seeking it, nor is any dignity bestowed on them. Over all these Druids, one presides, who possesses supreme authority among them. Upon his death, if any individual among the rest is pre-eminent in dignity, he succeeds; but, if there are many equal, the election is made by the suffrages of the Druids; sometimes they even contend for the presidency with arms. They assemble at a fixed period of the year in a consecrated place in the territories of the Carnutes, which is reckoned the central region of the whole of Gaul. Hither all, who have disputes, assemble from every part, and submit to their decrees and determinations. This institution is supposed to have been devised in Britain, and to have been brought over from it into Gaul; and now those who desire to gain a more accurate knowledge of that system generally proceed thither for the purpose of studying it. Druids do not go to war, nor pay tribute like the rest; they have an exemption from

military service and a dispensation in all matters. Induced by such great advantages, many embrace this profession of their own accord and (many) are sent to it by their parents and relations. They are said there to learn by heart a great number of verses; accordingly some remain in the course of training twenty years. Nor do they regard it lawful to commit these to writing, though in almost all other matters, in their public and private transactions, they use Greek characters. That practice they seem to me to have adopted for two reasons: because they neither desire their doctrines to be divulged among the mass of the people; nor those who learn to devote themselves the less to the efforts of memory, relying on writing, since it generally occurs to most men, that, in their dependence on writing, they relax their diligence in learning thoroughly, and their employment of the memory. They wish to inculcate this as one of their leading tenets, that souls do not become extinct, but pass after death from one body to another, and they think that men by this tenet are in a great degree excited to valour, the fear of death being disregarded. They likewise discuss and impart to the youth many things respecting the stars and their motion, respecting the extent of the world and of our earth, respecting the nature of things, respecting the power and the majesty of the immortal gods."

"The Gauls assert that they are descended from the god Dispater, a tradition handed down by the Druids. For this reason they reckon time not by the number of days but of nights." With this compare the English sennight and fortnight and the Welsh wythnos and pythefnos. Cæsar's account of the Druids was probably about 50 B.C. From his practical defeat and retirement in 54 B.C. Britain enjoyed comparative peace until conquered in 43 A.D. by the Emperor Claudius.

Two attacks were made by the Romans upon Anglesey, which was regarded as the Druid sanctuary—the first was made in 59 A.D. by Suetonius Paulinus, the second by Agricola. The record for both is given by Tacitus. In the *Annals*, book 14, Tacitus thus describes the first attack:—

" Suetonius prepared to attack the Isle of Mona, remarkable for the valour of its inhabitants, and a common receptacle for fugitives; he built for that end, boats with flat bottoms, to meet the difficulties of a sea abounding in shallows and subject to variations; in these the foot were embarked, the horse followed, partly by fording and partly swimming by the side of their horses, where the water was deep. On the shore stood the forces of the enemy, a dense array of arms and men, with women dashing through the ranks like furies, their dress funereal, their hair dishevelled, and carrying torches in their hands. The druids around the host, pouring forth dire imprecations, with their hands uplifted towards the heavens, struck terror into the soldiers by the strangeness of the sight; insomuch that, as if their limbs were paralysed, they exposed their bodies to the weapons of the enemy, without an effort to move. Afterwards, at the earnest exhortations of the general, and from the effect of their own mutual importunities that they would not be scared by a rabble of women and fanatics, they bore down upon them, smote all that opposed them to the earth, and wrapped them in the flames themselves had kindled. A garrison was then established to overawe the vanquished, and the groves dedicated to sanguinary superstitions destroyed; for they deemed it acceptable to their deities to make their altars fume with the blood of captives, and to seek the will of the gods in the entrails of men. While Suetonius was thus employed, tidings were brought him of the sudden revolt of the province."[1]

Tacitus records the second attack. Agricola, nineteen years later, came as Governor to Britain in 78 A.D. Having almost annihilated the Ordovices and conscious that this success must be followed up, he had it in his mind to make an attack upon the island Mona, from the occupation of which Suetonius had been summoned by the general rebellion of Britain, and to reduce it to submission to the Roman power. A select body of (Batavian) auxiliaries, dis-

[1] Mommsen makes this comment upon the record as given by Tacitus: " A worse narrative than that of Tacitus concerning this war is hardly to be found even in the most unmilitary of all authors " (*Annals*, Book 14, c. 31, 39),

encumbered, skilfully directed their horses into the channel and struck the inhabitants with terror and astonishment, who were induced to sue for peace and to surrender the island.

It is important to note that the foundations for any history of Druidism were laid by Cæsar and Tacitus. They were fortified by brief and incidental references from other sources. Timagenes was historian, rhetorician, private school-master and a Syrian. Taken prisoner to Rome by Gabinius in 56 B.C., he rose from slave to cook, and from cook to courtier, became a favourite of Augustus, whose favour he lost by making fun of his family. He wrote several volumes of history, and from one of these, Ammianus Marcellinus, whom Gibbon described as an accurate and faithful guide, quoted important passages. " The Druids affirm that a portion of the people was really indigenous to the soil and gradually becoming civilised, the study of liberal accomplishments flourished, having been first introduced by the Bards, the Eupages, and the Druids. The Bards were accustomed to employ themselves in celebrating the brave achievements of their illustrious men, in epic verse, accompanied with sweet airs on the lyre. The Eupages (called a tribe of priests) investigated the system and sublime secrets of nature, and sought to explain them to their followers. Between these two came the Druids, men of loftier genius, bound in brotherhoods according to the precepts and example of Pythagoras; and their minds were elevated by investigations into secret and sublime matters, and from the contempt which they entertained for human affairs they pronounced the soul immortal." Pomponius Mela, the first Roman geographer, a Spaniard by birth, describes the Druids as masters of eloquence and teachers of wisdom, and they taught many things to the highest nobles of Gaul, their course of teaching lasting as long as twenty years and secretly given in caves or hidden glades. The one doctrine which they allowed to pour out upon the common herd in order to make them more fitted for war, was the doctrine that souls are immortal, and that there is a second

life in the shades. Hence they burnt or buried with the dead, things fitted for the living. Once upon a time the transaction of business and the payment of debts was postponed to another world." Lucan of Cordova, apparently a kinsman of Mela, repeats in a noble passage in the *Pharsalia,* the teaching of immortality ascribed to the Druids. Valerius Maximus, the author of *Famous Words and Deeds,* who flourished under Tiberius, said that " so strong was the doctrine of immortality among the Gauls, that they were in the habit of lending each other money on condition that it was repaid in the next world. I should call them fools," said Valerius " if these trousered barbarians did not hold the same belief as that of Pythagoras in his philosopher's gown."

All these quotations, which cover five or six hundred years, give a consistent picture of the Druids, and confirm in turn that minute record in the Gallic War. Cæsar's account was no doubt taken from his diaries, and inspired by the Druid Divitiacus (the friend of Cicero and Cæsar) Cæsar's narrative reads like a well-selected interpolation, well-sifted, compressed, self-contained, and presents a fine picture full of arresting detail, not not overcrowded. Not an unusual society. The knights were the fighters, the Druids the thinkers, and the common people the slaves. The druids ruled the roost. Well-trained themselves, they taught the nobles as much as it was good for them to know. They were an aristocratic order, and a close and dominant priesthood, and that account of their annual parliaments in the boundaries of the Carnutes reveals them as supreme in their religious rites, in the administration of the law, in the education of the people, and in the whole internal administration in Gaul and Britain.

The power of the Druid was politically great enough to attract the notice and to arouse the fears of the Roman government. On the 1st of August, 74 B.C., Drusus, Roman Governor in Gaul and imperial Prince, consecrated at Lugdunum (the capital of Celtic Gaul) to " Roma and to the genius of the ruler " the altar at which for the future every year on this day the festival of these deities was to be

celebrated by the Gauls. Every year " the priest of the three Gauls " was chosen and presented sacrifice to the Emperor and conducted the festal games. This festival was in its character and purpose planned as a counter-move to the Druidical assembly held at Chartres. There were good reasons for this action by the Roman government. The general attitude of the Romans was one of non-interference with local religions. The Druids aroused alarm. They were ubiquitous and organised. They were intense nationalists, and as a consequence intensely hostile to the Roman government. Cæsar realised that the peaceful government of Gaul was imperilled by the attitude of the Druids. He was careful to avoid anything that would kindle into a flame their latent hatred, and he realised that the druid-power must be crippled if the Romans were to be masters in Gaul. From Britain the Gauls imbibed and replenished their druidism. The true purpose of his invasions of Britain was not to search for mines or pearls, but to deal druidism a fatal blow at its home and centre. The failure of both his invasions taught Cæsar the nature of the power that lay behind and directed the defence of Britain. The reality of that power was patent to the Roman government. Augustus by rescript forbade druidical rites. Tiberius, by a decree of the Senate, endeavoured to suppress the druids. This decree was renewed by the Emperor Claudius in 54 A.D. The attack upon Anglesey by Suetonius and by Agricola proved that rescripts and decrees were not enough. The hidden but directing mind and energy must be crushed politically. Agricola did this. After 78 A.D. the druids as a political force are no longer heard of. Agricola achieved his end less by force than by clemency, less by war than by removing the causes of war. The Briton, more quick-witted than the Gaul, thronged the schools Agricola established, and they who had recently looked disdainfully upon the Roman language were now proud to be eloquent in it. Before indicating survivals of the influence of the druids, their writing and language invite notice. Their essential lessons were not taken down in writing, but learnt by

heart. Many of us remember of old that repetition lesson with which the morning started. Some of the Druid pupils were kept at it for twenty years. Why repetition should be more secret than writing, the druids must explain. They used in nearly all private and confidential transactions or affairs Greek letters. This seems a clue to much else. Greek was the language of trade. The great commercial community at Marseilles who sent Pytheas to Britain, did their business in Greek and Hellenised the valley of the Rhone. Not only Pytheas but his competitors for the tin-trade with Britain used Greek as their means of communication. It has been said that the Greeks were the intellectual masters of the Empire, and divided much of its trade with the Jews (Latin had no foot-hold in Britain until the conquest of Claudius (45) and Britain was not fully Latinised even when the Romans abandoned it in 412). The main foreign trade of the Britons was the tin-trade. The tin was taken first to Corbilo at the mouth of the Loire, then on pack-horses to the Rhone and Marseilles. From Marseilles came the earliest coinage used in Britain, and that was the " Philippos," a Greek coin badly but clearly imitated. From La Téne, in Switzerland (probably also under Greek influence) came pottery and designs discovered in the Glastonbury Lake Village. These points must not be over-stressed, but British foreign trade, British coinage, British designs and pottery were Greek in origin. Timagenes, quoted by Ammianus of Marseilles, describes the Druids as members of the Pythagorean order, and says that, bound by its fellowship, they penetrated into occult and lofty subjects. Druids and Pythagoreans alike worked upon a monastic system; both were exclusive and aristocratic, both studied music, the stars and geometry, both believed in immortality, both maintained secrecy in their teaching and both avoided committing their doctrine to writing, both maintained a close fellowship of adherents belonging to the wealthy and powerful classes. Pythagoras and his followers were great travellers and it is not fantastic to suggest the possibility that these similarities lend some confirmation to the statement of Timagenes that

there was a binding fellowship between the Druids and Pythagoreans. The writing and language used are interesting. There was the ogham alphabet formed by short strokes cut on stones. There are bi-lingual stones which had the name in ogham on the edge of the slab and in Roman letters (Breconshire) down the centre. The ogham letters could obviously not have been used for any lengthy communications. This was not a cryptic alphabet, but an uncouth short-hand. The mythical origin need not be discussed. The Druids used the Greek alphabet, but their own language. The predominance of Greek I have already indicated. Latin had no foothold in Britain until the time of Claudius, but Britain was not fully Latinised even when the Romans left. The Romans kept aloof from the native population, and while they spoke Latin, their servants spoke the native speech. In the first century the Celts in Britain and Gaul spoke practically the same language, and it is said that St. Patrick, speaking the Celtic of Bannaventa, was understood by the Irish. When the Druids and Patrick met in the contest before King Loigaire, they began to converse and argue in a language that was mutually intelligible. Druidism profound and powerful in Ireland, opens a door to large controversies—the Druidical monasteries, the three tonsures, the passage from Druidism to Christianity.

I would hope that our subject has not been without interest or even inspiration. I have deliberately passed by the tales of savagery that haunt the cradle of every faith. In a philosophy of emergence or a philosophy of values, druidism has had a place. There is a noble passage in the work of the Platonist Maximus of Tyre, " The most perfect symbol is only a faint adumbration of the Father and Creator of all. Whatever we have of fairest we call by His name. I quarrel not with divers imagery, if we seek to know, to love, to remember Him." The Druids were possessed by one upholding doctrine, and in this lay their spiritual insight and influence—however crude their doctrine was.