

Lord Charlemont and learning

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James Caulfeild (1728–99), first earl of Charlemont (Pl. I) and first president of the Royal Irish Academy, was one of the most interesting members of the Irish peerage in the eighteenth century when members of that elite were at their most imposing politically and influential culturally. Charlemont was popularly known as the ‘volunteer earl’ because of the care and attention with which he filled the honorary office of commander-in-chief of the volunteers.¹ The high esteem in which this appellation suggests he was held is corroborated by the fact that he was long considered the leading patriot peer in the House of Lords and, in his capacity of *éminence grise* of the patriot political interest, the friend and patron respectively of Henry Flood and Henry Grattan.² He was a self-described ‘constitutional royalist’,³ whose finely-honed Whig political convictions were shaped by his reverence for the constitutional monarchy brought into being by the Glorious Revolution of 1688. His political career was defined by his commitment to the achievement of full



PL. I—Portrait of James Caulfeild, earl of Charlemont (1728–99), PRIA, 1785–99. © Royal Irish Academy.

¹ M.J. Craig, *The volunteer earl, being the life and times of James Caulfeild, first earl of Charlemont* (London, 1948).

² James Kelly, *Henry Flood: patriots and politics in eighteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 1998); James Kelly, *Henry Grattan* (Dublin, 1993).

³ Historical Manuscripts Commission (HMC), *The manuscripts and correspondence of James, first earl of Charlemont*, Charlemont to Malone, 9 October 1797 (2 vols, London, 1891), ii, 309.

constitutional rights for Ireland commensurate with its status as a kingdom of the British crown.⁴

In keeping with his efforts to advance the agenda of political patriotism, brought close to realisation by the attainment of legislative independence in 1782 to which he made a significant contribution,⁵ Charlemont aspired also to enhance the social and economic fabric of the kingdom, and the well-being of its population by promoting improvement and economic development. He was not an improving landlord in the conventional sense since agricultural matters held little appeal, but he contrived to create an improved environment by his commitment to the finest standards in art and architecture. Thus his recruitment of the architect William Chambers to design and oversee the construction of his suburban villa at Marino, on the outskirts of Dublin, set a standard for architectural sophistication that had few peers in Britain or Ireland. While Charlemont House, which served as his primary residence, provided him with a bespoke area in which he could live, entertain and, not least, display in a refined setting the medals, paintings, sculpture and rare books, which he purchased at considerable expense and imported from all over Europe.⁶ Significantly, Charlemont was ill at ease with the code of honour—that emblematic feature of the *ancien régime* aristocratic elite—for though the courtesy and politeness that were hallmarks of his conduct ensured he did not issue or receive challenges, he was unwilling to criticise duelling and he served as a precise, if reluctant, second when called upon to perform that function.⁷

As the description of his character thus far suggests, Charlemont was a complex, sensitive figure. This is well illustrated by the attack of ‘nervous diffidence’ that ‘totally disabled’ him for some years, and that dissuaded him from making a formal political speech thereafter, when he sought to advance a programme of political reform in the 1750s. This diminished his political effectiveness, but it also encouraged his engagement in intellectual pursuits—an engagement which achieved a notable peak when, having played an important part, including hosting the initial meeting, in the foundation of the Royal Irish Academy, he was an attentive first president.⁸ Charlemont’s intellectual activity is perhaps the least well-known aspect of his biography, for though his contribution to the establishment of the Royal Irish Academy has

⁴ James Kelly, ‘A genuine Whig and patriot: Lord Charlemont’s political career’, in M. McCarthy (ed.), *Lord Charlemont and his circle* (Dublin, 2001), 7–38.

⁵ James Kelly, *Prelude to union: Anglo-Irish politics in the 1780s* (Cork, 1992).

⁶ Jane Meredith, ‘Letters between friends: Lord Charlemont’s library and other matters’, *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies* 4 (2001), 53–77.

⁷ See HMC, *Charlemont*, Charlemont to Flood, 30 December 1772, i, 313 in which he relates his experience as Lord Bellamont’s second; James Kelly, *That damn’d thing called honour: duelling in Ireland, 1570–1860* (Cork, 1995), 109, 280.

⁸ See R.B. McDowell, ‘The main narrative’, in T. Ó Raifeartaigh (ed.), *The Royal Irish Academy: a bicentennial history, 1785–1985* (Dublin, 1985), 9–11, 15–16.

been amply chronicled, it constitutes but the most public part of an intellectual odyssey that was lifelong but was primarily for private edification. The most obvious indication of this is provided by the fact that he left more in the way of unpublished manuscripts than published texts.

Charlemont's love of learning was a product, first and foremost, of an extended grand tour. Prior to his embarkation for Europe in 1746, aged eighteen, Charlemont had succumbed to the temptation of 'cards and late hours'. As a result, his guardians set aside 'all thoughts' of his proceeding to university,⁹ and he was sent instead on a grand tour in the company of Edward Murphy, his tutor. Murphy's positive influence can be suggested by the fact that it was from him that Charlemont obtained a 'masterly' set of '78 busts and 22 statues ... modelled ... at Rome from the true antique originals' by Simon Vierpyl, which were bequeathed in 1868 by the third earl of Charlemont to the Royal Irish Academy.¹⁰ Charlemont's own interest in and knowledge of art and architecture were profoundly shaped by his extended stay in Italy, but while he had this in common with many grand tourists from Britain as well as Ireland, he was unusual in that, in addition to classics, he embraced a lifelong love of Italy and of Italian literature. The foundation for this was provided by his linguistic ability. While abroad, Charlemont achieved fluency in French and Italian, which, when added to his competence in Greek and Latin, provided him with a range of linguistic knowledge that permitted him to pursue his essentially amateur involvement in intellectual pursuits to a level that few of his peers could equal. It also allowed him to contemplate publishing the results of his findings. In keeping with the caution that was a crucial aspect of his character, he published no major work during his lifetime, but he did contribute four papers to the early *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy*. It can also be said of Charlemont's efforts, as of those of others among the early contributors, that 'the papers published in the *Transactions* by the Royal Irish Academy were polite rather than professional'. Yet his was not vanity publication.¹¹ Charlemont possesses a strong claim to be regarded as a scholar of some competence, and the four papers—two on classical antiquities¹² and two founded in his interest in Italian literature¹³—that were committed to print are either extracted from or based on larger studies that have

⁹ HMC, *Charlemont*, i, 178–9.

¹⁰ HMC, *Charlemont*, Murphy to Vierpyl, 25 July 1774, i, 322–3.

¹¹ W.B. Stanford, 'Polite literature', in T. Ó Raifeartaigh (ed.), *The Royal Irish Academy: a bicentennial history, 1785–1985* (Dublin, 1985), 188.

¹² Lord Charlemont, 'Account of a singular custom at Metalin, with some conjectures on the antiquity of its origin' *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy* 3 (1790), 3–20, and Lord Charlemont 'Some considerations on a controverted passage of Heroditus', *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy* 5 (1791–4), 3–52.

¹³ Lord Charlemont 'Some hints concerning the state of science at the revival of letters, grounded on a passage of Dante in his *Inferno*, canto iv, v, 130', *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy* 6 (1797), 3–12.

been deemed of sufficient interest to merit publication in more recent times.¹⁴ It may well be the case that his paper on the antiquity of the woollen manufacture in Ireland published in the first issue of the *Transactions* would not have been composed had Charlemont not sought to set an example he hoped that other members might follow. It was worthwhile for all that, because it demonstrated how an ostensibly arcane source such as Fazio delgi Uberti's *Dittamondo* could throw unexpected light on an aspect of Irish history not otherwise amenable to reconstruction, through the use of an academically rigorous method, which was, of course, what the Royal Irish Academy sought to promote.

Based on his surviving papers, it is apparent that Charlemont's enthusiasm for intellectual activity was generated initially by his visit to Greece and Turkey in 1749, when among other notable achievements, he made the first rubbing of a fifth-century inscription at Halicarnassus. Had he published this promptly, it might well, as W.B. Stanford has observed, 'have made a considerable stir' and established Charlemont's reputation as a scholar, but the transcription lay long unreported in his papers.¹⁵ Instead, Charlemont chose to focus on the more ambitious plan of transforming the journal record he made of his observations in Greece and Turkey into a polished narrative that combined a sociological with an antiquarian approach. This would, had he published it, have been a pioneering essay in travel writing, but though Charlemont prepared a text (which he revisited and revised at different points during his lifetime) and amply demonstrated that he was by 'no means uncritical' in his use of an extensive corpus of primary sources, other than an extract on Herodotus published in the Royal Irish Academy's *Transactions*, it remained unknown during his lifetime.¹⁶

Charlemont's failure to publish an account of his travels in Greece and Turkey can be attributed, at least in part, to his lack of confidence in the merits of his own scholarship, as well as by the fact that he engaged in scholarly pursuits as a private pleasure. He was, he readily observed, at his happiest in his library, reading and writing, and as he passed into secure middle age it became an increasingly welcome refuge from the hurly burly of politics, the temptations of travel and the implications of his financial extravagance that caused him to build up a level of debt that was at times beyond his capacity of pay.¹⁷ This did not mean that he was an intellectual dilettante, for whom books were mere baubles

¹⁴ W.B. Stanford and E.J. Finopoulos (eds), *The travels of Lord Charlemont in Greece and Turkey* (London, 1984); George Talbot (ed.), *Lord Charlemont's history of Italian poetry from Dante to Metastasio: a critical edition from the autograph manuscript* (3 vols, Ceredigion, 2000).

¹⁵ W.B. Stanford, 'The manuscripts of Lord Charlemont's eastern travels', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 80C (1980), 79–80.

¹⁶ Stanford, 'Manuscripts of Lord Charlemont', 70, 76–7; Stanford and Finopoulos, *Travels of Lord Charlemont in Greece and Turkey*, 1–12.

¹⁷ Note of a letter by Charlemont, 1790s in Gratz Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. This letter was missing when the author sought to consult it in 1999.

to be enjoyed. He bought books avidly, but with purpose, and the deliberate and discriminating manner in which he commissioned Edmund Malone, the great Shakespearean scholar and bibliophile, to scour the auctions rooms of London enabled him to build up an extensive collection of plays from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁸ Moreover, this was not done for aesthetic effect, for though he was attentive to the quality of the bindings of his books, he knew Shakespeare's works intimately and was capable of discussing them at length. This did not save him from error when it came to defining the Shakespearean canon; he was convinced, for instance, that *Pericles* belonged 'among the genuine productions' and *Titus Andronicus*, in which 'I cannot discover a spark of his genius', among the 'pseudos'.¹⁹ Yet he proved of some assistance to Malone as he sought to construct a definitive edition of the works of Shakespeare.

Charlemont was still more forthcoming with his opinions with regard to poetry, in which he maintained an abiding interest. Commenting on Richard Payne Knight's *The Landscape: a Didactic Poem in Three Books* published in London in 1794, he applauded the fact that it was 'perfectly free from that fashionable verbiage by which our poetry has for some time past been so sadly infected—words and not thoughts seem of late to have been supposed to constitute the essence of poetry'.²⁰ This reflected the attitude of Charlemont, the old man, to the emergence of romanticism, but it was his expectation that poetry should be comprehensible:

My first wish is, I must confess, to understand what I read, and that too without being compelled to spend too much time and trouble in labouring to develop and disentangle from the bewildering heap of high flown expression, a thought, which, when found, seldom appears to have been worthy the seeking.²¹

Charlemont perceived the qualities he deemed intrinsic to good poetry in Italian Renaissance poetry, beginning with Dante, and it is a measure both of his enthusiasm for this subject and of his extensive knowledge that he not only prepared an extensive annotated anthology but also chose Fazio degli Uberti's *Dittamondo* as the point of departure for his first published paper. Charlemont left Italy in 1754, having spent five glorious years in Rome, with a very high opinion both of classical Rome and of Renaissance Italy. 'Italy must with justice always claim a great share of my regard and affection; many of the best years of my life most agreeably spent in that delicious country render it by one degree only less dear to me than my native soil', he recalled over a decade later.²²

¹⁸ HMC, *Charlemont*, ii, passim.

¹⁹ HMC, *Charlemont*, Charlemont to Malone, 28 November 1786, 18 July 1795, ii, 45, 262.

²⁰ HMC, *Charlemont*, Charlemont to Malone, 4 June 1794, ii, 241.

²¹ HMC, *Charlemont*, Charlemont to Malone, 18 July 1795, ii, 263.

²² HMC, *Charlemont*, Charlemont to Baretti, [March 1769], i, 293.

Encouraged by his positive experiences and fond memories, Charlemont chose at some point to prepare an annotated anthology, with parallel English translation, of Italian poetry beginning with Dante. Significantly, he pursued this in the same intermittent fashion that he did his preparation of an account of his travels in Greece and Turkey, but it is apparent from his continuous purchase of Italian books that it was not an intermittent pleasure. Moreover, it was a pleasure he shared with his closest friends.²³ These included Henry Flood, who in 1778 applauded the quality of Charlemont's translation of sonnets by Petrarch.²⁴ Based on his manuscript, it is clear that Charlemont regarded Dante and Petrarch as the outstanding poets of the Italian Renaissance; this is demonstrated visibly by the prominence they are accorded in his text (almost twenty per cent of the total manuscript of some 1,600 pages is allocated to Dante's *Divine Comedy*), but what gives the anthology authority is the inclusion of often substantial extracts from 44 other poets. It is one of the most ambitious and earliest compilations of its kind, and the time, effort and judgment involved in choosing, translating and annotating the many texts makes it a truly notable achievement.²⁵

Though Charlemont's awareness of his limitations as an Italian scholar ensured that his large manuscript remained unpublished during his lifetime, those who were knowledgeable of these matters respected his assessment of the respective merits of Dante and Fazio degli Uberti, whom he categorised as an 'imitator' of the former. This is true only in so far as Uberti and Dante both employed *terza rima*; their subjects and approaches were quite different. Charlemont was able to reach such judgements in the comfort of his library because years of discriminating and persistent collection had equipped him with a library that was strongest in precisely those areas in which he was most interested.²⁶ It was, John Murray, the publisher, who observed following a visit in 1775, of such beauty and quality that 'the spectator must be destitute of feeling if he is not delighted'.²⁷ For his part, Charlemont found the space so congenial it pained him 'to give up my library' even for short periods.²⁸

Among the rare Italian books in Charlemont's possession was a first edition of Fazio degli Uberti *Dittamondo* published in Venice in 1474.²⁹ Since

²³ HMC, *Charlemont*, i, 343, 422–3, ii, 42.

²⁴ HMC, *Charlemont*, Griffith to Charlemont, 19 May 1778, i, 340.

²⁵ George Talbot, *Lord Charlemont's history of Italian poetry*.

²⁶ It is notable in this context that he was still acquiring particular texts in the late 1780s. In 1787, he obtained the 1620 'first folio translation' of Boccaccio's *Decameron* (HMC, *Charlemont*, ii, 61).

²⁷ William Zachs, *The first John Murray and the late eighteenth-century London book trade* (Oxford, 1998), 137; see also Toby Barnard, 'Libraries and collectors, 1700–1800' in R. Gillespie and A. Hadfield (eds), *The Oxford history of the Irish book, volume III: the Irish book in English, 1550–1800* (Oxford, 2005), 124.

²⁸ HMC, *Charlemont*, Charlemont to Haliday, 27 April 1791, ii, 138.

²⁹ Stanford, 'Manuscripts of Lord Charlemont', 87.

he included an extract from Liber IV cap 26 in his anthology, Charlemont was clearly familiar with the work, and thus well prepared when he chose to present a paper based on the text of the poem to the Royal Irish Academy. Significantly, the style and approach employed are consistent with that of the careful, even diffident scholar suggested by his larger scholarly endeavours. However, his invocation of clues in the text to establish its date of composition, his translation of the cited extracts and his characterisation of the work demonstrates that his was the approach of a serious scholar. It so happens that his ascription to the text of a date *ante* 1360 was some years removed from 1346–7 to which it has been ascribed by Corsi in his definitive edition published in 1952,³⁰ but it does not weaken the point of Charlemont's article, which is to show that Uberti's reference to quality Irish serges proves that Ireland 'was possessed of an extensive trade in woollens ... long before that commodity was an article of English export'.³¹ Charlemont sustains this claim with supportive quotations from a variety of standard English sources, but the truth is that his account exaggerates both how developed the woollen sector was in Ireland and how weak it was in England. Ireland did a brisk trade in wool with Italy from at least the early thirteenth century, but it was ancillary to and of lower quality than that of England.³² It is hardly surprising that Charlemont should reach the opposite conclusion, because the reflexive response of Irish Protestants was to perceive Ireland as economically backward and underdeveloped prior to the arrival of the New English in the sixteenth century. Charlemont's preparedness to question this received view was thus noteworthy, though the actual historical basis for his conclusion was weak. Be that as it may, the inclusion of his paper in the first number of the *Transactions* was a significant moment in the life of the Royal Irish Academy and of Lord Charlemont, though the latter was characteristically self-effacing when it came to discussing the volume and its contents, merely expressing the hope that it 'will do us credit'.³³ In fact the response was warm. Samuel Haliday of Belfast pronounced himself 'charmed'. His friendship with Charlemont means that his remarks must be taken at a discount, but the tone and content of his subsequent comment illustrate why the paper was highly regarded at the time:

Most folks here swear the paper on the woollen trade is worth all the rest of the volume, but you know what patriots we are—it is merely because that paper does honour to Ireland.³⁴

³⁰ Fazio degli Uberti, *Dittamondo* in G. Corsi (ed.), *Il Dittamondo e le rime* (2 vols, Bari, 1952).

³¹ Lord Charlemont, 'The antiquity of the woollen manufacture in Ireland, proved from a passage of an antient Florentine poet', *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy* 1 (1787), 3.

³² See Mary Donovan O'Sullivan, *Italian merchant bankers in Ireland in the thirteenth century* (Dublin, 1962), 122–6.

³³ HMC, *Charlemont*, Charlemont to Malone, 21 June 1787, ii, 54–5.

³⁴ HMC, *Charlemont*, Haliday to Charlemont, 21 June 1788, ii, 75–6.

Some years later, Lady Sydney Morgan (née Owenson) cited an extract from Uberti's *Dittamondo* as produced and translated by Lord Charlemont, though he was not acknowledged as the source, as the preliminary epigram to her famous story *The Wild Irish Girl*.³⁵ Her plagiarism has passed unnoticed until now, but it offers a further pointer to the fact that Charlemont's short paper had an impact and significance greater than its ostensibly narrow theme might suggest.

Paradoxically, while Charlemont's paper remains of interest for its political sub-text, it is still more interesting today for what it says about Lord Charlemont's intellectual interests. He was not (as he was fully aware) a towering intellect, but he was still capable of interesting work, and his account of his travels in Greece and Turkey, his anthology of Italian poetry and the papers derived therefrom are of more than biographical and bibliographical interest. They provide an *entrée* into scholarship and the world of books, and a rich and cosmopolitan cultural life in which Charlemont was a minor but always interesting participant. It is perhaps time for a more sustained consideration of the intellectual projects that were as important to him as his political and architectural undertakings, about which we are so much better informed.

³⁵ Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan, *The wild Irish girl* (1806, Reprint Oxford, 1999).

The ANTIQUITY of the WOOLLEN MANUFACTURE

in IRELAND, proved from a Passage of an antient Florentine

Poet. By the Earl of CHARLEMONT, P. R. I. A.

Read February 20, 1786.

THE following lines are taken from an old Italian poem, entitled *Dittamondi*,* and written by Fazio Delli Uberti, a nobleman of Florence, who, though certainly not, as some suppose, contemporary with Dante, flourished not long after the death of that poet; but, as the value of the information contained in these lines principally depends upon the antiquity of the work, it may not be superfluous, as far as I am able, to ascertain its date.

IN the nineteenth chapter of the fourth book, the author concludes a genealogical account of the kings of France with these lines:

Philippo di Valifo Signor poi
Et Giovan el Figliol, del qual conchiudo
Che con gran' guerra tiene el Regno ancoi.†

FROM hence it appears certain, that, as John the son of Philip of Valois is mentioned as the monarch then reigning, the poem must have been composed before the year 1364, in which year that Prince died; and since we are farther informed that he still holds the Kingdom with a mighty war, we may thence fairly conclude that the publication was previous to the treaty of Bretigny in the year 1360.‡

THIS whimsical poem, which in point of language is of such authority as to be cited by the authors of the *Dictionary della Crusca*, and is written in Terza Rima, a species of versification which Dante had then made fashionable,

* We are told by Quadrio, della Storia e della Ragione d'ogni Poesia, vol. iv. p. 47, that the true title of this poem. was *Dieta Mundi*, which was afterwards, by corruption, written Dittamondi, and Dittamondo.

† *Philip of Valois afterward was Lord,
And John his son, with whom I now conclude,
Who with a mighty war still holds the realm.*

‡ From a passage in the beginning of the 13th chap. of the 2d book, the date of the poem seems to be ascertained to the year 1357. The passage, however, with a flight and warrantable alteration, may receive an easier construction, so as to bring the date down to 1363, in which case the war alluded to by the poet may possibly mean those civil commotions in which John was involved even after the conclusion of the peace with England.

contains an historical and geographical account of all the nations of the world. The author, having travelled through England and Scotland, passes into Ireland, a description of which country, and of its inhabitants, he begins as follows:

Cap. xxvi. lib. iv.
Similmente passamo en Irlanda,
La qual fra noi e degna de Fama
Per le nobile SAIE che ci manda.*

THESE lines appear to me to contain a full proof of a most extraordinary fact—That Ireland should have been already famous for her woollen manufactures so early as in the middle of the fourteenth century, and should at that period have imported them into Italy, where the vent of these commodities was even then so fully established, and the superiority of their fabric so universally acknowledged, as to render the country from whence they came ‘degnà de Fama’, and to entitle them to the epithet ‘nobile’, is a fact which, without a proof so incontrovertible as the testimony of our author, would never have been credited; especially when we reflect that England was not then in possession of any such commerce, since we know, to a certainty, that Edward III during whose reign, many years before his death, the poem was undoubtedly written, was the first of our kings who effectually encouraged the English to apply themselves to the woollen manufacture. For, though there is no doubt that wool was wrought in England so early as in the time of Richard I and even earlier, yet is it more than probable that such manufacture was principally, if not wholly, for home consumption, as raw wool was at that time, and long after, the principal article of English export, and all our historians agree in fixing the date of the woollen manufacture in England, as an object of importance, to the year 1331, fifth of Edward III in which year that wife monarch brought over from Flanders John Kemp, and several other Flemish woollen weavers. Yet is it clear, from the above lines, that at this very period Ireland was already in possession of this branch of commerce, and famous for her woollens, which she exported to distant regions, and sent even into Italy, at that time the most polished of all European countries, and the most eminent for trade and manufactures.†

* In like manner we pass into Ireland, which among us is worthy of renown for the excellent ferges that she sends us.

† The city of Florence, to which probably our *Florentine* author more particularly ascribes the consumption of Irish ferges, was not only eminent for her manufactures, but in an high degree remarkable for her luxury in dress, as may be seen by consulting the History of Giovanni Villani, lib. x. cap. 152, where that good old chronicler, in his account of a sumptuary law enacted in the year 1330, circumstantially details the enormous profusion of his countrymen, and more especially of his countrywomen, in that article. Villani farther informs us, that this sumptuary ordinance was not only applauded, but adopted by many other states of Italy; and that the ladies, whom this law had extremely offended, when forbidden the exorbitant use of Italian finery, revenged themselves by the importation of foreign wares.

SAIA* is, in the *Dictionary della Crusca*, explained to be Spezie di Panno lano fottile e leggeri—A description which answers to our serge. And the epithet nobile strongly expresses the excellence of the commodity, and the high repute in which it was held. It is remarkable that Irish wool is still found to be better adapted to the construction of serges, and the other articles of what is called new drapery, than to broad cloth.

THE following quotation from a very antient Florentine account book, in the *Dictionary della Crusca*, Article Saia, is a further proof of the above-mentioned extraordinary fact—‘Per un Pezza di Saia d’Irlanda per vestir della Moglie d’Andrea†.’ From hence also it appears, that Irish serge was among the Italians an article of female dress, a circumstance which might induce us to suppose that the fabric was then of a finer‡ and more delicate texture than what is now made under that denomination.

THE remarkable information conveyed in the lines above cited having induced me to examine; into the state of the fact, I find that in times, very early indeed, Ireland was noted for her woollens, which were freely imported into England.

IN the reign of Henry III who reigned from 1216 to 1271, a duel was awarded and fought between Walter Blowberme, an approver, and Hamon le Stare; the former having accused the latter of having been partner with him in stealing clothes and other goods at Winchester, whereof Hamon had for his share two coats, to wit, one of *Irish cloth*, and the other a party coat cloth of Abendon and Burrel of London.—*Vid. Madox’s History of the Exchequer*, vol. i. page 550.

THAT in the time of Edward III Irish frizes were freely imported into England, and even encouraged there, we learn from the eighth and last statute of his reign, whereby it is enacted that no subsidy nor aulnage duty shall be paid on cloths called frize ware, which be made in Ireland, or in England of Irish wool; because those cloths did not contain the length nor breadth ordained by the statute.—*Anderson’s Commerce*, vol. i. page 204.

*Saia, which, as the commodity was foreign, is probably a word not originally Italian, may perhaps have been altered and italianized from serge, which, according to Skinner, is derived from the German serge, a mat. The French and the Spaniards have adopted the same appellation—serge, French—xerga, Spanish. But as this kind of stuff is also called in English fay—Shakespeare, Henry VI second part—‘Ah, thou fay, thou serge, thou buckram Lord!’ which Skinner derives from *fagum*, ‘*tunica militaris, quoniam iste pannus sagis conficiendis valde commodus est,*’ it is still more probable that the Italian word saia was formed from this.

† *For a piece of serge of Ireland for clothing the wife of Andrew.*

‡ From a line in the *Fairy Queen*, book iii. cant. 12, stanza 8, we might perhaps be induced to suppose that in England also serge was formerly of a finer texture, or at least more fashionable, than it now is—

‘His garment neither was of filk nor jay.’

Here the Poet seems to put serge upon a level with filk, at that time a very costly article of dress.

IN a license granted to the Pope's agent, AD 1482, An. 5. Ric. II. for exporting into Italy certain commodities custom-free, we find the following articles of Irish woollen, viz. five mantles of *Irish cloth*, one lined with green—one ruffet garment lined with *Irish cloth*.—*Rim. Foedera*, vol. vii. page 136.

BY an act of parliament, fourth of Edward IV it is enacted that no cloth of any other region but Wales and Ireland shall be imported into England, excepting cloth taken at sea.—*Anderfon*, vol. i. page 280.

FROM all these several facts, and particularly from the passage of our author, we may fairly conclude that Ireland was possessed of an extensive trade in woollens at a very early period, and long before that commodity was an article of English export. Manufactures are now in being brought to that degree of perfection which may render them an object coveted by distant countries, especially where the people of those countries have arrived at a high degree of polish; and if in the middle of the fourteenth century the serges of Ireland were eagerly fought after,* and worn with a preference by the polished Italians, there can be no doubt that the fabric had been established for a very long time before that period. Nay, we may perhaps be allowed to hazard a conjecture, which, however whimsical it may appear, is by no means impossible, that the wife Edward might have laboured to establish the woollen manufacture among his English subjects, in imitation of the Irish, and in competition with the trade extensively carried on by a people, who, however erroneously, we are taught to believe were at that period little removed from a state of absolute barbarity. For the native Irish, upon whom the aspersions principally falls, must have had a share ill this traffic, the English settlers being too few, and too much occupied by perpetual broils, to be alone equal to an extensive manufacture. Our author indeed himself in a great measure contradicts this calumny, and the character which he gives of the Irish in his time tends greatly to diminish that idea of barbarity which is usually objected to them:

* If the serges of Ireland were eagerly fought after by the Italians, and particularly by the Florentines, it must have been for the peculiar excellence of their quality, and not by any means from the want of home-made woollens, since we may clearly infer from a passage in Machiavel's *Florentine History*, that about the year 1380 the woollen manufacture was, and had long been, established at Florence. The historian, speaking of the trades or guilds of that city, has these words—'E di tutte l'arti che haveva, e ha, più di questi fottoposti, era, ed è, *quella della Lana*, laquale per essere potentissima, e la prima per autorità de tutte, con l'industria sua la maggior parte della plebe e popolo minuto palceva e palce.'— '*And of all the guilds that had, and have, the most of these (subordinate trades) under their jurisdiction, was, and is, that of the WOOLLEN WEAVERS, which, as being the most powerful, and the first of all in authority, by its industry fed, and still feeds, the greater part of the populace, and lowest class of the people.*' Now, if in the year 1380 the corporation of woollen weavers was the greatest and most powerful in Florence, containing in it, 2nd presiding over many subordinate and ancillary trades, such as carders, dyers, &c. we may fairly conclude that the manufacture must have been established in that city long before 1360, about which time the *Dittamondi* was written.

Questa Gente, benche mostra selvagia,
E per gli Monti la Contrada accierba,
Nondimeno l'è dolcie ad cui l'afaggia.*

FAZIO, or Bonifazio, delli Uberti, grandson to the celebrated Farinata†, is supposed to have visited in person most of the countries he describes. His family‡, one of the most illustrious of Florence, and head of the Ghibellines, having been driven into banishment by the opposite faction, he is said to have taken advantage of this opportunity to indulge his taste for travelling, and the *Dittamondi* is in effect no other than an account of his extensive travels, together with a sketch of the history of the countries through which he passed. Neither is there any reason to doubt that the author was actually in Ireland; his personal acquaintance with that island appears not only from the accurate manner of his description, but more especially from his expressly telling us that he had himself seen there certain lakes, the peculiar qualities of which he minutely details—*Qui vid' io di piu natura Laghi*.§ This last circumstance I mention, as it serves to shew that Ireland was then of sufficient note to induce a learned and illustrious Italian, notwithstanding the dangers of the navigation, which he feelingly describes,** to visit its remote shores.

THE book from which these quotations are taken is extremely scarce, being the first printed edition of the *Dittamondi*, printed at Vicenza in the year 1474.

* *This race of men, tho' savage they may seem,
The country too with many a mountain rough,
Yet are they sweet to him who tries and tastes them.*

† For some account of this Tuscan hero, vid. *Istorie di Giovanni Villani*, lib. vi. cap. 82—Machiavelli, *Istorie Florentine*, lib. ii. page 45.—Alfo, Dante, *Inferno*. canto x.

‡ Vid. Crescimboni, *Historia della volgar Poesia*, vol. iv. part ii. page 160.—Quadrio, *della Storia e della Ragione d'ogni Poesia*, vol. iv. page 47. Both these authors expressly mention the travels of Fazio.

§ *Here I saw lakes of various natures.*

** *Diversi Venti con mugli et con fisco
Sofriavan per quel Mare andando a piagia,
El qual de Scogli e de gran Saffi e mischio.*

*Still varying winds with his and hideous roar
Blow thro' that sea, coasting the dangerous shoal,
Of ifles and monstrous rocks a mass confused.*

