

CHAPTER I

Introduction

FIVE peoples in the world's history have made supreme contributions to civilization as we have it at the present time. They are the Hebrews, the Greeks, the Romans, the Irish and the Italians.¹ Still it is true, to reecho Gladstone, that all of the spiritual heritage of our race we owe to the Hebrews, while to quote Sir Henry Maine, "whatever lives and moves in the intellectual order is Greek in origin." The discount from the sweep- ingness of these expressions that some might deem necessary would not at its highest diminish materially the value of these claims. The Romans carried on the Greek contributions to civilization for "captive Greece took her captor captive," and while the Romans added only their own great gift of law and justice to the current of civilization, they saved Greek influences from disappearing and they provided the framework on which Hebrew influences erected the enduring structure of Christianity. When the Roman life of the spirit was waning and the torch of civilization was nearly out, the Irish in the distant west of Europe converted as a whole nation to Christianity, picked it up and carried it on adding their own magnificent contribution of great literature, melodious music, rhyme in poetry and fine