

EPOCHS OF IRISH HISTORY

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Epochs of Irish History.—I.

# PAGAN IRELAND

BY

ELEANOR HULL

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11.12.52

Dublin

M. H. GILL AND SON, LTD.

50 UPPER O'CONNELL STREET :: 1923

DA  
920  
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1923



*Printed and Bound  
in Ireland by :: ::  
M. H. Gill & Son,  
:: :: Ltd. :: ::  
50 Upper O'Connell  
Street :: :: Dublin*

**C**OMHNAIM an Leabhar go fá comairce an  
doir óis do bíod as éirteacht liom is mé  
as múinead buídean Connartha na Saebitge  
Lunnodain, mar fúil go neartócad léigead na  
nAitearc go an spád atá 'n-a sgoiúe do  
feandar is do fean-uircéaltaib na héireann.

eiblín ní coil.





## FOREWORD.



THERE is an old tale told in Ireland of a loveable and bright and handsome youth named Donn-bó, who was the best singer of "songs of idleness," and the best teller of "King-stories" in the world. He could tell a tale of each King who reigned at Tara from the Tale of the Destruction of Dind Righ, when Cobthach Coelbreg was killed, down to the Kings who reigned in his own time.

One night before a battle, the warriors said : " Make minstrelsy for us, O Donn-bó." But Donn-bó said : " No word at all will come on my lips to-night; therefore, for this night let the King-buffoon of Ireland amuse you. But to-morrow at this hour, in whatever place they and I shall be, I will make minstrelsy for the fighting-men." For the warriors had said that unless Donn-bó went with them on that hosting, not one of them would go.

On the evening of the morrow Donn-bó lay dead, his fair young body stretched across the body of the King of Erin, for he had died in defending his chief. But his head had rolled away and lay amongst a wisp of growing rushes by the water-side.

At the feasting of the army on that night, a warrior said : " Where is Donn-bó, that he may make minstrelsy for us, and tell us the King-stories of Erin?"

A valiant champion of the men of Munster answered :

## FOREWORD.

"I will go over the battlefield and find him." He enquired among the living for Donn-bó, but he found him not, and then he searched hither and thither among the dead.

At last he came where the body of the King of Erin lay, and a young, fair corpse beside it. In all the air about was a low, sweet sound of minstrelsy, and the faint whisper of poets and bards reciting tales and poems, and the wild clear note of the *dord fiansa*, like the echo of an echo, in the clump of rushes hard by; and above them all a voice, very faint and still, that sang a tune that was sweeter than all the tunes of the whole world.

The voice that sang was the voice of the head of Donn-bó. The warrior stooped to pick up the head. "Do not touch me," said the head, "for we are commanded by the King of the Plains of Heaven to make music to-night for our lord, the King of Erin, the shining one who lies dead beside us; and though all of us are lying dead, no faintness or feebleness shall prevent us from obeying that command. Disturb me not." "The hosts of Leinster are asking for thee to make minstrelsy for them," said the messenger. "When my minstrelsy here is done, I will go with you," said the head, "but only if Christ, the Son of God, in whose presence I now am, go with me, and if you take me to my body again." "That shall be done, indeed," said the messenger, and he carried away the head.

## FOREWORD.

When the messenger came again amongst the warriors, they stopped their feasting and gathered round him. "Hast thou brought anything from the battle-field?" they cried. "I have brought the head of Donn-bó," said the man. "Set it up upon a pillar, that we may see and hear it," cried they all; and they said, "It is no luck for thee to be like that, Donn-bó, and thou the most beautiful minstrel and the best in Erin. Make music for the love of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Amuse the Leinstermen to-night, as thou didst amuse thy lord awhile ago."

Then Donn-bó turned his face to the wall, that the darkness might be around him, and he raised his melody in the quiet night; and the sound of that minstrelsy was so piteous and sad, that all the host sat weeping at the sound of it. Then was his head taken to his body, and the neck joined itself to the shoulders again, and Donn-bó was satisfied.

The old King-stories that Donn-bó loved have been forgotten by Erin's children. Even the few of them to whom the tales of Finn and of Cuchulain are not quite unknown, know little of the old romances of Cormac mac Airt, or of Niall of the Nine Hostages, or of Conn of the Hundred Fights; nor have they any remembrance how the House of Dá Derga was destroyed, nor why Tara fell, nor yet why men still say of an open-handed man "He is like Guaire the Hospitable." Yet from the tale of Dind Righ which Donn-bó knew, down to the times of the Northmen in Ireland, there is

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no great King of Erin but has his own romance, and some fine tale told of his doings. These stories I have told in this little book, and in the one that is to follow; not in a critical way for the learned or for wise people, but simply, as the old story-tellers told them at the kingly feasts, for the pleasure of the young folk of Ireland. It was for some young people of the Gaelic League I wrote these chapters, and it seemed to me that perhaps other Irish men or women and children might like to know them too. For if on the Plains of Heaven an Irish king wearied for the stories of his ancestors, why should not the children of Erin care to hear them in the Valleys of Earth? So we will set Donn-bó's head on the pillar again, and bid him tell us tales.

To make them easier to understand, I have tried, in the first part of this book, to explain what sort of place to live in Ireland was in those early days, and how people managed things, and how they thought, and talked and acted. Since these lessons were written, there is a book come out which tells all this much more fully than I have been able to do. It is called "Social Life in Ancient Ireland," and if anyone wants to know more than is in these little lessons, he will find it in Dr. Joyce's book. I have to thank Dr. Joyce for looking over my proofs, which has been a great help to me, and also to thank my cousin, Mr. Trevor J. D. Hull, for reading them also, and saving me from some errors.

And now we pray Donn-bó to make minstrelsy for us.



## CHRONOLOGY.

(THESE EARLY DATES ARE MYTHICAL).

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### AGE OF THE WORLD.

- 2242—This date is given by the IV. Masters as that of the coming of Cessair to Ireland—i.e., forty days before the Flood.
- 2520—Given as the date at which Partholan came to Ireland.
- 2530—The Fomorian defeated by Partholan at Magh Ithe, Co. Donegal.
- 2820—Partholan's people die of the Plague.
- 2850—Neimheadh came to Ireland.
- 3066—The Fomorian Tower of Conainn (on Tory Island) is destroyed by the race of Neimheadh; only 30 of the race of Neimheadh escape.
- 3266—Arrival of the Firbolg.
- 3303—The Tuatha Dé Danann invade Ireland. Battle of Magh Tuireadh (Moytura, Cong, Co. Mayo).
- 3304—Reign of Breas.
- 3310—Breas resigns the sovereignty to Nuada Airgeadlamh "of the Silver Hand."
- 3330—Second Battle of Magh-Tuireadh (Moytura, Co. Sligo). Nuada is slain by the Fomorians.
- 3331—Reign of Lugh Lamhfhada "Long-handed." He establishes the Fair of Tailte (Teltown, Co. Meath).
- 3370—Lugh is slain at Caendruim (Hill of Uisneach, Co. Westmeath).

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- 3371—Reign of the Dagda Mór.
- 3471—Joint reign of the last three Kings of the Tuatha Dé Danann—Mac Cuill, Mac Ceacht, and Mac Greine.
- 3500—Arrival of the Milesians. Battles of Sliabh Mis and Tailte fought, and the three Princes killed.
- 3501—Emher and Eremon (Heber and Heremon) divide Ireland between them. A battle is fought between them at Geisill (King's County), and Heber is slain. Heremon gives Tara to his wife, Tea, as her dowry and burial place. It is named from her Tea-mur (Tara)—i.e., the town or fort of Tea.
- 3580-3656—Reign of Tighernmas. He first smelts gold in Ireland. He introduces ornaments on dress. He is slain at Samhain when worshipping the Crom Cruach, or chief idol of Ireland.
- 3664-3667—Reign of Eochaid Eadgadhach. He requires each class to wear different colours in their dress.
- 3882-3922—Reign of Ollamh Fodhla (i.e., Fodhla the Learned). He first established the Feis of Tara. He appointed chieftains over fixed districts, and bruighfers, or farmers, over each townland, who acknowledged the central authority of Tara.
- 4532—Macha, a Princess, seizes the sovereignty from Dithorba and Cimbaoth, two brothers, who had reigned in turn. She marries Cimbaoth, and expels Dithorba to Con-naught. She forces the captive sons of Dithorba to build the fort of Emain Macha. It was under Cimbaoth that Emain Macha became the capital of Ulster.
- 4567-4607—Reign of Ugaine Mór. He exacted oaths by all the elements, visible and invisible, that the men of Ireland would never contend with his race for the sovereignty.



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- 4607-4608—Reign of Laegaire Lorc, the "Murderer," son of Ugaine Mór: murdered by his brother, Cobthach, at Carmen (in Wexford).
- 4658—Cobthach is murdered by Labraid Maen, with 30 chiefs, at Dind Righ, on the Barrow.
- 5017-5031—Reign of Congal Claringnech, son of Rudraighe (Rury).
- 5042-5047—Reign of Fachtna Fathach, the "Wise," son of Ross, son of Rury. He is, in some of the stories of the Ulster champions, supposed to be the father of King Conchobhar (Conor) and the deeds of Cuchulain and the Red Branch champions take place about this time.
- 5058-5063—Reign of Eochaid Feidlech, the "Constant Sighing." He divided Ireland into five provinces.
- 5070-5084—Reign of Eochaid Aireamh, "the Grave-digger." He first had graves dug in Ireland. He was burned at Freamhain (Co. Westmeath).
- 5085-5089—Reign of Eterscel. He is slain at Allen (Co. Kildare) by Nuadha Neacht, who reigns half a year.
- 5091-5160—Reign of Conaire Mór, son of Eterscel. He is slain by his pirate foster brothers at Bruighen Dá Derga.
- 5166-5191—Reign of Lugaidh Sriabh-na-Dearg, "of the Red Stripes." He dies of grief for the death of his wife, Dervorgil.
- 5192-5193—Conchobhar Abhradhruadh, Conor "of the Red Eyebrows." Slain by Crimthann.
5193. to A.D. 9—Reign of Crimthann. He dies on Howth Hill after returning from a foreign expedition with great spoils.

## CHRONOLOGY.

### AGE OF CHRIST.

- 10—Reign of Cairbre Cinncait, "Cat-headed," the leader of the insurrection of the Aithech Tuatha, in which nearly all the nobility of Ireland were killed. An evil reign for Ireland. Morann the Wise lived at this time and was chief counsellor.
- 15-36—Reign of Fearadhach Finnfeachnach "the Righteous," son of Crimthann; he oppressed the Aithech, who, however, were troublesome for some time afterwards and incited rebellion against the succeeding monarchs.
- 76-106—Reign of Tuathal Teachtmar "the Legitimate." He fought many battles against the Aithech and reduced them to obedience. He preserved the province of Meath for the support of the High-King and celebrated the Feis of Tara, at which he caused all his chieftains to swear that they would never contest the sovereignty of Ireland with him or his descendants. In his reign the Boromha was first imposed on Leinster.
- 111-119—Reign of Feidhlimid Reachtmhar, "Phelim the Legal." Great wars between Leinster and Munster.
- 120-123—Reign of Cathaire Mór. He was slain by Conn Cedcathach.
- 123-157—Reign of Conn Cedcathach "of the Hundred Battles," son of Feidhlimid Reachtmhar. In his time Ireland was divided into two parts, Leth Cuinn (Conn's half) and Leth Mogha (Mogh's half). Battle of Magh Lena (Moylena) between Conn and Eoghan Mór (Owen the Great), King of Munster. Establishment of the Fianna Eirinn.
- 166-196—Reign of Art the Solitary, son of Conn of the Hundred Battles. Olioll Olum King of Munster.

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Battle of Ceannfeabhrat, in which Maccon is defeated by his step-father, Olioll Olum. Maccon flees to Britain for help, and returns after some time to Galway with auxiliaries. Art meets him and is killed in the Battle of Magh Mucramha. Maccon usurps the throne of Tara.

227—Reign of Cormac mac Airt. Battle of Crinna. Death of Olioll Olum. Cormac wars in Ulster, Connaught, Meath, and Munster. Expulsion of Cormac across the sea.

265—Cormac's eye put out, and his lawgiver and son mortally wounded by the thrust of a lance by Angus of the Terrible Spear (Gaibhuaibhthach). Cormac fought and gained seven battles over the Deisi in revenge, and he expelled them to Munster, where Olioll Olum gave them a district to settle on. They were descended from the brother of Conn of the Hundred Battles.

266—Cormac died at Cleiteach (Cletty) on the Boyne from a salmon-bone sticking in his throat.

268-284—Cairbre Liffeachair "of the Liffey," son of Cormac mac Airt, King of Ireland.

271-276—Seven battles fought against Munster and Angus of the Terrible Spear killed.

283—Finn, son of Cumhall (Finn MacCool) was killed by Aichleach, a fisherman, with his fishing-gaff, at Ath-Brea on the Boyne. Caoilte mac Ronain, a follower of Finn, revenged his death on Aichleach.

284—Cairbre Liffeachair fell at the Battle of Gabhra-Aichle (Gaura), near Tara. This battle was fought by Moghcorb, son of Cormac Cas, King of Munster, who came to avenge the death of Mogh Nuadhat, his

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grandfather, who had been murdered in his tent by Goll, leader of the Clanna-Morna or Fianna of Connaught. With Moghcorb were the Clanna-Baoisgne or Fianna of Leinster, who had taken refuge in Munster. In this battle Osgur, son of Oisín (Ossian) also fell.

323-326 (9)—Reign of Colla Uais, who was expelled into Alba (Scotland) by Muiredhach Tireach.

327-356—Reign of Muiredhach Tireach.

327—The three Collas return to Ireland from Alba. They enter into a friendly treaty with Muiredhach.

331—The three Collas conquer large territories in Ulster, from L. Neagh and the Newry River westwards, and destroy its capital, Emain Macha.

358-365—Reign of Eochaid Mughmheadhoin, son of Muiredhach, who had two wives, Mongfind of Munster and Cairenn, mother of Niall of the Nine Hostages.

366-378—Reign of Crimthan, brother of Mongfind. He was poisoned by his sister in the hope that her son Brian would succeed, but he did not do so. Crimthan wars in foreign lands

379-405—Reign of Niall of the Nine Hostages. He carried on foreign wars and made incursions into Britain. Stilicho, the General of the Emperor Claudian, sent against him.

Niall had fourteen sons, some of whom settled in Meath and others in Ulster. It was in his reign and by one of his legions that St. Patrick was carried off to Ireland as a slave.

Niall treacherously killed by the son of the King of Leinster at the R. Loire in Gaul.

405-428—Reign of Dathi, son of Eochaid Mughmheadhoin. He was killed by a flash of lightning on the Alps. His body is said to have been brought home to Ireland and buried at Rathcroghan, in Connaught.



## PART I.

# SOCIAL LIFE IN PAGAN IRELAND.



## CHAPTER I.

### EARLY LEGENDS OF THE RACE.

Authorities:—Keating's *History of Ireland* (*Foras Feasa ar Eirinn*), Part i., edited by D. Comyn for the Irish Texts Society, 1902. Another edition, by Dr. P. W. Joyce, 1881. *Le Cycle Mythologique Irlandais*, by M. D'Arbois De Jubainville. (There is a recent translation published by R. I. Best). Fergusson, "Rule Stone Monuments." Dr. Whitley Stokes' edition of "The Battle of Moytura," *Rev. Celt.* xii. Prof. J. Rhys' "*Celtic Britain*," etc.

### Celt and Gael.

WITHOUT going too deeply into the question of the origin of the Gaelic race, which question has been a puzzle to many learned men, and is not yet fully cleared up, we may at the outset of our enquiries ask ourselves what is meant by the words Celt and Gael? We hear a great deal in Roman times about the Celts who lived on the continent of Europe. Cæsar and other Roman writers, who observed the habits and manners of the nations amongst

whom their wars brought them, tell us about the Celtæ or Celts of Gaul or Gallia, a region including both the France and Switzerland of the present day, and much territory besides. They were sometimes also called Galli, which is believed to mean "brave men," and from this their country was called Gaul. From time to time, parts of this Celtic race crossed over the Channel which divided them from Britain, and made settlements in the country we now call England. Of the races at that time inhabiting Britain, we know little with certainty, but probably the Picts, who were the inhabitants of Northern Scotland, and of whom there were settlements also on the north-east coast of Ireland, where they were called Cruithne, were a part of the original inhabitants. On this point there is, however, much uncertainty.

Of the foreigners who came to Britain, two great divisions may be traced, who are called respectively the Gaels (Gaedhils or Goidels) and the Britons or Brythons. Of these two, the first comers were the Gaels. They are at this day found in parts of Ireland, in the northern and western Highlands and in the Isle of Man; but there is proof that in early times they also inhabited parts of Wales and Cornwall, for the language of the earliest stone inscriptions found in these countries corresponds far more closely to Gaelic than to present-day Welsh or Cornish. Looking at the position of these districts, on the



northern and western coasts of these islands, it is natural to suppose that the Gaelic race, originally, perhaps, occupying large portions of Britain, were driven West and North by the arrival on the South and East of other tribes. At all events, we find that they were followed by another division of the Celtic race, whose language had similarities to their own, and who seem to have dispossessed them from the centre and south and east of England, and settled there in their stead. These were the Brythons, the inhabitants of Britain in Roman times, and the present inhabitants of Wales and Cornwall. They, in their turn, were dispossessed over a large part of the country, by the invasions of the Angles and Saxons, who gradually drove them west and shut them up behind the safe borderland of the Welsh and Cumbrian mountains. Some of them passed over to Armorica, to which they gave their own name, Brittany, where a form of their own language, called Breton, which is closely allied to Welsh, is spoken to the present day.

One of the most interesting facts which the early literature and history bring out is the close friendship that appears to have been kept up in very early times between the Gaels of Devon and Cornwall and the Gaels of Ireland, or, as they styled themselves, "the Gaedhils of the East of the Sea and the Gaedhils of the West," and much intercourse was held between them.

We may, then, look on the Britons, or Welsh and

Cornishmen, the Gaels of Ireland and Scotland and of the Isle of Man, and the continental Gauls, as first cousins; and many of the customs noticed by the Roman writers in Gaul are like those of ancient Ireland, and help at times to explain them. Only we must beware of thinking that if a thing is mentioned by a Roman writer as being the custom in Gaul or Britain, it was therefore of necessity just the same in Ireland. Forgetfulness of this has made the study of Irish antiquity often confusion worse confounded, and has introduced ideas that are quite erroneous when applied to Ireland about such matters, for example, as to the early beliefs, or the position and occupations of the druids. The Gaels of Ireland probably retained some older customs and older forms of belief which had become changed in Gaul before or during the Roman occupation; both in their customs and ideas there seem to have been differences. Moreover, the Romans, who conquered Gaul and Britain, never conquered or effected settlements in Ireland; hence they did not impose on Ireland their system of life and ways of thought, as they did elsewhere. We have, therefore, in Ireland an absolutely virgin soil so far as beliefs and customs are concerned, and it is well to study it without any preconceived ideas derived from what we know of other nations. It is the differences in a race and not the likenesses that are of the greatest interest to us,—those things wherein the Gael thought his

own thoughts, and constructed his own world,—those things in which he differed from the rest of humanity. It is because his ideas come down to us less overlaid than those of other lands by the ideas of other nations that they are especially interesting and instructive to study.

### Legends.

Though this is almost all we really know about the coming of the Gaels to Ireland, we shall see later on that the old Irish historians, who were very much interested in the early history of their race, invented a number of legends about the various settlements which they supposed were made in ancient times in Ireland; they thought that there were a number of successive conquests made by people of different races, who dispossessed each other. It is quite possible that there is some foundation of fact in these stories, for it is most likely that the inhabitants did not all come at once, but in separate detachments. But how much is fact and how much fiction we shall never know, and the legends are now chiefly interesting because they show us how our forefathers thought about these things, and what ideas they had concerning their own past history. The Greeks, the Romans, the Jews and many other nations preserved old stories telling how their ancestors came to settle in the lands which they afterwards possessed. Let us consider some of these early legends of the Irish race.

The Irish writers of mediæval times were anxious to make out that Ireland was inhabited at a very early period indeed; they liked to think that their race was as old as the Jewish nation, about whom they read in the Bible. So, after they became Christians, they made up a story to prove that even before the Flood the first inhabitants had arrived in Ireland. You will easily see that they could only have invented this story after they had learned Christianity, for if they had been heathens they would not have read the Old Testament, or known anything about the Flood.

It was said in this story that Noah had a granddaughter, whose name was Cessair, who however is not mentioned by Moses. She and her father sent a message to Noah asking him to keep an apartment for them in the Ark, but Noah replied that he had not room for them, and he advised them to go into the western part of the world, where no one yet lived, and therefore where sin had not been committed, as perhaps the Flood, which was sent as a punishment for sin, might not overtake them there. Some accounts say that Cessair was so angry, that she said that she and her people would forsake Noah's God, and take an idol with them to worship. Finally, she, with her father, brother and husband set out, with fifty maidens along with them, and came to Ireland. But alas! the Flood followed them even there, and they were all drowned.



This curious old story was firmly believed for many centuries, and we find some of the old historians putting it into their histories, which shows us how careful we have to be in accepting the legends from the old chronicles. Many otherwise sensible people have been confused by these stories, so that they seem to be unable to judge what part of them is fact and what part legend; and they think that it is for the honour of Ireland that they should accept all they find in the old books as sober truth.

But the old historians had not the means of distinguishing fact from fiction as we have to-day; moreover, as I said, they were so anxious to make Irish history correspond with the history they found in the Old Testament, that they were obliged to put in many things to lengthen out the period during which men were supposed to have lived in Ireland, in order that the dates might agree with those that are generally given in the Bible. But the later historians, such as Keating, did not believe all these old stories. Dr. Geoffrey Keating was, in his day, a learned and wise man, and he tells us that he only put down the legends as he found them, but he did not think that they could all be true. It is just in the same way that we propose to tell these legends here; they are interesting because they show us what our forefathers thought about their history, but they are not all to be accepted as facts.

After a time there was another legend added to the



story of Cessair. For the story-tellers began to think that if Cessair and all her companions had been drowned, it was hard to see how the knowledge of their coming had been preserved. So it was added that Fintan, the husband of Cessair, somehow escaped the Flood, and lived for many years afterwards, so that he was able to relate not only his own history, but that of all the races who afterwards took possession of Ireland. We find him called upon in the sixth century by the King, Dermot Mac Cearbhal (Karval), to give his opinion as to the original extent of the Province of Meath, because he was the oldest and wisest man in the kingdom. He was then an elderly man of some five thousand years.

### **The Five Settlements.**

We will now relate the coming of the other tribes whose arrival Fintan is supposed to have witnessed, and who are said to have settled in Ireland at different periods one after another; but you will remember that the story of these early races is not to be taken as certain history, though there is very likely a foundation of truth in it.

The old stories of Ireland tell us that there were five distinct invasions of the country. Of the first two, the invasion of Partholan and the invasion of Neimheadh (Névé) we know very little. Partholan is said to have had to fly from his own country because he

had murdered his father and mother, in endeavouring to obtain the kingdom from his brother. He and his followers lived chiefly in the pleasant country between Tallaght and Howth, near Dublin: a district which was called Magh n-Ealta, the "Plain of the Bird-Flocks," on account of the flocks of beautiful birds which used to congregate there.

Partholan was a man of passionate temper, and he only lived thirty years after his landing in Ireland. His people were all swept away by a terrible plague, which the old writers thought was sent by God as a punishment for the crimes of their leader. It is curious that the name Tallaght or Tamlacht, where they are said to have been buried, means a "plague-grave," and on the slope of the hill are still to be seen rude graves or burial-mounds, in which cinerary urns have been found.

### **Second Invasion.**

The second invader, Neimheadh (Névé), is said to have come from Scythia. His people were terribly harassed by fleets of pirates, called Fomorians, or sea-robbers, who descended upon the North coast, and endeavoured to subdue the new settlers. These troublesome marauders are said to have come from Africa, but it is more likely that they came from the North of Europe. Ever afterwards in Irish story, a cruel giant was called a Fomorian, so terrible were their descents and so frightened were the settlers of them.

The Neimhedians or Nevedians conquered them in three battles, but in spite of this they returned and avenged their defeats by enslaving the race of Neimheadh. They imposed on them a heavy tribute. Every year at Samhain (Sowan) or Hallowe'en, the unfortunate people had to give them two-thirds of their children and of their corn, and of their milch-kine, besides flour and cream and butter in abundance. This tax was collected by a female steward, named Liagh; and at the last this tax aroused so much indignation, that the oppressed people gathered together and besieged the Fomorians in Tory Island off the coast of Donegal, where they had built a fortress and where they kept their fleet. They destroyed the tower, but as fresh companies of robbers continued to arrive on the coasts, the children of Neimheadh finally decided to leave the country, and after long preparations they all scattered in different directions and settled in other lands, leaving only a small remnant behind.

### **The Firbolg.**

It is from one of these escaped chiefs of the second colony that the third body of settlers are supposed to be descended. Simeon Breac, son of Starn, went to Greece, and his descendants became so numerous that they were enslaved by the Greeks out of terror of their increasing power. They were called Firbolg, or "men of the bags" or leather wallets. This name

was given to them because the Greeks compelled them to carry bags of rich soil from the valleys up to the stony heights, in order to turn them into gardens. At last they could endure their slavery no longer, and it is said that they either made boats of the leather bags with which they had toiled, or stole some Greek ships and escaped. They turned towards the distant island from which their ancestor had come, and two hundred and seventeen years after he left Ireland, they set foot on its shores.

Their five leaders partitioned the kingdom into five provinces. The Firbolg did not bear a very good character in Ireland, for people who have been long enslaved often become degraded. One old writer says that every one who was "a tatter, guileful, tale-bearing, noisy, contemptible; every mean, wretched, unsteady, harsh and inhospitable person," was sure to be a Firbolg; but we must remember that this was the opinion of their enemies, who conquered and oppressed them, and there are proofs that this opinion was not a true one. Ferdiadh (Ferdia), the friend who was also the opponent of Cuchulain, and who was almost as great a warrior and quite as brave and noble a man as he, was a Firbolg; and in the great war of the Táin Bó Cuailnge, or "Cattle-raid of Cooley," this race was specially noted for its quickness and cleverness. They were then known as the three tribes of the Fir Domhnann, Fir Gaileon, and Fir Bolg, and they



formed part of the army of Leinster. It is specially noted that they had pitched their tents and lighted their fires before the rest of the troops had even reached the camping-ground.

### **Tuatha De Danann.**

The dominion of the Firbolg was not long in Ireland. For when thirty-six years were ended, a fresh enemy appeared to dispute the kingdom with them. This was the mysterious race called the Tuatha Dé Danann, who were supposed to possess all sorts of magical power, and who were afterwards looked upon as great gods, the deities of the pagan Irish. The people who came after them believed that they could invoke magic mists to bewilder the enemy; that they could raise the dead to life, and do all sorts of miraculous things. What really seems to have been true is that they were more learned and clever in all sorts of arts and in the knowledge of natural things than the races with whom they mingled, so that these more ignorant people thought that they possessed supernatural powers. They brought with them to Ireland the knowledge of medicine, of building, of making cups and weapons of brass and other metals; besides the skill in harp-playing for which the Irish afterwards became so famous.

There is a story told of one of their leaders, Lugh the Long-handed (who afterwards became the god of light or of the sun), which shows how accomplished



some of these people were. It is said that he came one day to the door of Tara, the Palace of the King, and asked admittance. The door-keeper replied, "What art dost thou practise? For no one who is not master of an art or trade can enter Tara." He said: "Question me, then: I am a wright." "We need thee not," said the door-keeper, "we have a wright already." He said again: "Question me: I am a smith." "We need thee not," said the door-keeper, "we have a smith who is perfect in three new processes." "I am also a champion in battle," said the visitor. "We need thee not," said the porter, "we have already a most famous warrior, a master in all the arts of war." And so the conversation went on, Lugh protesting that he was a skilled harper, a hero, a poet and historian, a magician, a doctor, a worker in brass, and a cupbearer. When he was refused on all these counts, he bade the porter go and demand of the king whether he had in his service anyone who was equal master of all these arts at once; if so, he would not ask to enter Tara.

The king said that he should be put to one test, namely, whether, in addition to all else, he was a good chess-player. The chess-boards were brought out, and Lugh won all the stakes, after which he could no longer be refused. This story is interesting, as it shows us not only what arts the early races practised, but how much importance was attached to the know-

ledge of a trade. No idler, it appears, was permitted to enter the king's palace.

These wise and clever people seem also to have come from Greece, and they landed on the North-West coast of Ireland in a thick mist, which lasted for three days, and which they are said to have raised to hide their advance from the Firbolg. They marched unseen to Sliabh-an-Iarainn, or the Iron Mountain, in Co. Leitrim. Then they sent an embassy to the chiefs of the Firbolg at Tara, demanding the kingdom, or challenging them to battle. The Firbolg chose to fight for their rights, and the two armies marched to a place called Southern Moytura, or Moytura Cong, in the Co. Mayo, near Cong and on the shore of Lough Mask. Here a furious battle was fought during four days, in which the Firbolg were utterly beaten, and an immense number were slain. Even at the present day, the district over which this great battle is said to have been fought is covered with memorials of it. It extends over about five or six miles of country opposite the village of Cong, and on this piece of ground there are five groups of stone circles, three of which are over 54 feet in diameter, besides six or seven large cairns of stone. One of these cairns has always been known as the "Cairn of the One Man"; it was opened some years ago, and in it was found a single urn, in which the bones of a man had been interred. The urn is now in the Royal Irish Academy's collection at Kildare Street,

Dublin. There is an incident in the old tale of the battle which exactly explains this. On the morning of the second day of the battle, the King of the Firbolg, King Eochaid, or Eochy, retired to the only well in the neighbourhood to refresh himself with a bath. The place is a well-known opening in the rock, beneath which the river channel runs from Lough Mask to Lough Corrib: the river here flowing nearly all the way underground. While he was bathing, three of the enemy passed by, saw the king, and demanded his surrender. They were still talking when a brave body-servant of the king came up behind, attacked the three men, and killed them all. He was, however, so covered with wounds that he died immediately after. The king had him interred with great honour in the cairn, which has been ever since called the "Cairn of the One Man." From agreements such as this, we may learn that the old tales are not all invention, while they frequently help to explain the monuments which we find scattered about the country. King Eochaid was killed on the last day of the fight. It was mid-summer day, hot and dusty, and after the defeat of his army, the king, with a guard of 100 faithful men, left the battle-field to go in search of water to allay their burning thirst. They reached the shore near Ballysadare, in Sligo, and here made a last stand against a large body of the enemy, who had followed them. The king was killed after a fierce conflict,

in which the three leaders of the enemy also fell. The King of the Tuatha Dé Danann lost his hand in this battle, and seven years afterwards his people made for him a silver hand, so that he was known as Nuada of the Silver Hand. After the battle, the Firbolg who escaped fled to the Western Isles of Aran, Rathlin, and the Hebrides, and here they are said to have built immense forts on the borders of the ocean, in which they defended themselves. Some of the forts ascribed to them remain to the present day, and are the most remarkable and stupendous relics we have of the pagan times.\* Afterwards some of them returned to Ireland, and the King of Leinster gave them lands. Others settled in Connaught. They remained quite distinct from the other inhabitants, and were remarkable for their activity and bravery. It is certain that there are still, on the west coast of Ireland, mixed with the ordinary population, a small, black-haired people, which corresponds exactly with the description given of the Firbolg by the old writers.

\*Dun Angus, in Aran, stands on the edge of the precipitous cliff and its walls are of immense thickness and strength. On the land side, from which an attack might be made, huge masses of stones are piled or stand out of the ground. This would render a sudden onrush of the enemy impossible.



## CHAPTER II.

### THE COMING OF THE MILESIA NS.

Authorities :—(As before).

AFTER the defeat and dispersion of the Firbolg race, the Tuatha Dé Danann possessed the land, but not in peace, for the Fomorians continued to haunt the northern and western coasts, just as their successors the Norsemen and Danes did long afterwards. The Tuatha Dé Danann were forced to meet them in a decisive battle in the north-west of Sligo. This fierce engagement, was known as the Battle of Northern Moytura, to distinguish it from the Battle of Southern Moytura, fought at Cong with the Firbolg, as we learned. The Fomorians were led by a terrible pirate called Balor of the Evil Eye, in league with one of the Dé Danann princes named Breas, who had been regent of Ireland for some years, but had so misgoverned that he had been driven out by his own people, and had taken refuge with the Fomorians, who were of kin to the Tuatha Dé Danann race, and closely related to them by marriage. In this battle both Balor of the Evil Eye and Nuada of the Silver Hand, King of the Dé Danann, were killed, and the Dagda Mór, or Great Dagda, succeeded Nuada as monarch of



Ireland. In after times, before the coming of Christianity, he became the great god of the Irish nation.

After the Battle of Northern Moytura, we do not hear much more of the Tuatha Dé Danann as human beings, though we hear of them frequently in Irish stories as gods and fairies and supernatural beings, who lived in invisible places beneath the mountains, but still took an interest in the affairs of men; they even fought for or against them at times, and appeared to them when they were in distress, just as in the Greek story of the Siege of Troy, Juno, Minerva, Mars, and other gods and goddesses, are made to take part in the wars, and side with one party or the other.

The names of some of these chiefs whom the people afterwards thought of as gods (though they do not appear to have worshipped them) are Dagda Mór, greatest of all the gods; Angus Og the Beautiful, who was thought of as ever young and fair, the god of Youth and Beauty; Lugh Lamhfada (Lávada), or "Long-handed," the god of Light and the Sun's Bright Rays, which seemed to them like long arms out-stretched; and Manannan mac Lir, the Ocean-god, who gave his name to the Isle of Man, called still in Irish, Isle of Manann. There were also goddesses, of whom the best remembered are Morrigan, the "Great Queen," and Macha and Badb (Bov), the three grim war-goddesses, who generally appeared

to foretell a battle, or to warn the hero what his fate would be; they had the power to change themselves into withered scald-crows.

Perhaps the reason that these people were so well remembered was that the chiefs of the Dé Danann race were buried in great tombs, like little hillocks, along the River Boyne, not far from Drogheda, and they remain there to this day, and are known in old stories as the fairy palaces of the Dagda Mór and Angus Og, etc. The people never believed that they really died, only that they went below the earth into these fairy palaces. But we know that these were their tombs, for skeletons have been found in them. In a future chapter we shall learn what these wonderful tombs are like.

### **The Milesians.**

We have now to consider what happened in Ireland before the close of the Dé Danann period, and this brings us to the fifth and last settlement of the country, the coming of the Milesians, who are the race from which the present Irish people, if they belong to the old Irish race, and not to the Norman or English settlers, who came over afterwards, are descended. If your family has one of the old Gaelic surnames, which generally have an "O" or a "Mac" before them, you are a Milesian yourself, so you should be interested to hear how your ancestors came to Ireland.

They are supposed to have come from Scythia by way of Egypt, Crete and Spain. Wherever they came from, they seem to have had long wanderings, and to have been very glad to reach the shores of Ireland, which they called Inisfail, or the "Island of Destiny," because one of their prophets had foretold that they should inhabit it. It is just possible, as some legends relate, that they came over from Spain, with which in early times Ireland had friendly communication. It is said in one story that there was a great famine in Spain, which forced the Milesians to leave; and they arrived in a large fleet of boats on the north coast of Ireland. But if the followers of Milesius really came from Spain, they would more likely have landed on the south coast, so that we cannot be sure if the old tradition of their origin is true. However this may be, they made inquiries about the rulers of the country to which they had come. They were told that three brothers ruled the land in turn, but that at present they were all gathered at Aileach, in Ulster, quarrelling over the division of a number of jewels which had belonged to their ancestors.

Ith, the Milesian leader, entered the room while the dispute was going on, and they were so much struck by his appearance that they referred the question to him, and asked him to settle the dispute. This he did by dividing the jewels equally between them, and then he told them that he could not think how anyone, and especially princes, could spend their time in wrangling

and quarrelling, when they were so happy as to live in such a beautiful island as Inisfail. He said that he had never visited such a delightful land before, where it was neither too hot nor too cold, where fruits and plenty abounded, where the grass was green and the trees luxuriant, and the hills and soft valleys made the landscape beautiful. In such a land, he said, the people should always live in friendliness and harmony together. When he had said this, the princes felt shame at their quarrelling, and Ith bade them a gentle farewell.

As soon as he was gone the brothers changed their minds. They agreed that if the stranger liked the land so well, he would probably try to conquer it for himself, and they immediately got together a force of armed men to follow Ith and try to take him prisoner. They pursued him to the shore, and though the Milesians made good their retreat, Ith was mortally wounded, and carried to the ships to die. His people were enraged at this treachery of the princes, and vowed revenge. Milesius had died meanwhile, but the whole of his followers set sail in their thirty ships, and coasted round Ireland till they came to Wexford Harbour, which used to be called Inver Slainge (the Mouth of the River Slaney). But the Tuatha Dé Danann exerted all their magical arts against them, and raised a thick, magic mist, so that they could not find the shore. Then they put to sea again, hoping to



find a better place to land. They sailed round the south coast westward, until they reached the Kerry shores. Here again they tried to land, but again the Dé Danann raised a thick, confusing mist against them, so that for a long time they failed to find a harbour. At last they succeeded in landing, and they made their way up into the country, intending to march right across Ireland, and attack the princes at Tara, their royal palace. On their way they were met by three beautiful ladies, princesses, who told the newcomers that they were the wives of the three princes who were reigning alternately at Tara. They said that their names were Banba, Fodla, and Eire, and that each of them had given her own name to the country; so that is how Ireland comes to have so many names—Banba, Fodia, and Eire, her poetic names, besides Inisfail, the “Land of Destiny,” which the Milesians called her; and Ireland, which we call her now, but which is not so beautiful a name as the others. Ireland is just a way of saying “Land of Eire,” or Erin. But in early times, the ordinary name of Ireland was Scotia.

When the Milesians arrived at Tara, Amergin, their bard, one of the sons of Milesius, challenged the princes to battle. The princes refused, but they said that if Amergin would decide between them, they would agree to whatever he determined. I suppose they had found that Ith was so just in his decision that they



were willing to put their trust in Amergin. If he decided unjustly, however, they said that they would use all their enchantments to destroy him. He resolved that his people should put to sea once more at Inver Sceine (the River Kenmare, in Co. Kerry), which was named after Sceine, the wife of Amergin, who died there, and sail out to a distance of nine waves from the shore; then, if the Tuatha Dé Danann could again prevent the Milesians from landing, they were to go away from Ireland, and return no more; but if they succeeded in getting a footing on shore, the country must be surrendered to them, and the Tuatha Dé Danann must depart. The Dé Danann joyfully accepted these terms, thinking that it would be an easy matter to them to prevent the Milesians from landing. While the ships were coasting down the shores of Ireland, close to the land, Amergin wrote a song about the country, describing the scenery of the coast. We still have this song, but it is written in very old Irish, and in a very difficult metre. It is a sort of incantation, and begins like this :—

“ I invoke thee, Erin,  
Fertile, fertile, hill,  
Wavy, wavy, wood,  
Flowing, flowing, stream,  
Fishy, fishy, lake, etc.” \*

This translation is taken from Dr. Hyde's "Essay on Irish

Then they put out nine waves from the shore, and the Tuatha Dé Danann raised against them by their magic arts such a terrible storm, that the ships were driven hither and thither, some of them dashing against each other, some driven on rocks, and others out to sea and round the south coast of Ireland. In the darkness caused by the magic mist, they could not see each other, and in that terrible storm no less than five of the sons of Milesius perished. The youngest had mounted to the topmast, hoping to get above the horrible fog, and the wind blew him off into the sea. Donn was lost off the Kerry coast, with all his crew, at a place often called in the old stories "The House of Donn"; Ir, another brother, was thrown up on the precipitous rocks of Scelig Michel. Only three of the brothers survived—Heber, Heremon, and Amergin the Poet.

### **Heber and Heremon.**

The two elder brothers afterwards divided the country between them. The descendants of Heber took the south, and dwelled in Munster; and the descendants of Heremon established themselves in the North. You will often hear in Irish stories of the children of Heber and Heremon, Poetry," published by the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, 1903; but a more beautiful form of the original poem is printed in Hardiman's "Irish Minstrelsy."

and this is what it means. Amergin needed no property of his own, for the poets were always given all that they required by the chiefs of the different tribes. Everyone was proud to help or entertain a bard. Heber and Heremon, however, did not get the country without fighting for it; they met the forces of the Tuatha Dé Danann at a place called Tailte, or Telltown, in Meath; and though the enemy fought bravely, their three princes were slain. Then the new settlers scattered themselves over the island, built dwelling-places, and began to sow and reap. A new palace was built at Tara, and all seemed to be prospering, until the wife of Heber, who was a greedy and covetous woman, and who, although her husband possessed the richest and most fertile part of Ireland, was never satisfied, said that as she owned two out of the three most beautiful valleys of Ireland, she must also have the third. She forced her husband to go to war with his brother about this, and in this battle Heber was killed, so that instead of gaining another valley, she lost all, for henceforward Heremon reigned as sole king.

These, then, are the old stories of the origin of their race, which the Irish historians loved to tell. Sometimes they thought of these people not as men at all, but as races of gods who in old times had inhabited Ireland. They especially thought in this way of the Tuatha Dé Danann, who were, you remember, a very

clever people with a great knowledge of the arts, and numbers of beautiful stories were invented about these early gods and their great deeds, and their power and beauty, and the magic arts they were able to exercise. Just as all that we see and do as children seems greater and more wonderful than what happens after we grow up, so to the people who lived in very early times, all that happened before their day seemed more than human. The poets and story-tellers took advantage of this way of looking at the past, and they wove wonderful and beautiful legends round these early times and made them into a sort of fairy-land, in which all strange things might happen and all marvellous things seem true.



## CHAPTER III.

### CONDITION OF THE COUNTRY IN EARLY TIMES.

Authorities:—Ancient Laws and Institutes of Ireland, commonly called the “Brehon Laws.” Sir Henry Maine’s “Lectures on the Early History of Institutions” (1875). “Etudes sur le droit Celtique” being Vol. vii. of M. D’Arbois de Jubainville’s “Cours de Littérature Celtique.” Two old law tracts on the Classes of Society among the Ancient Irish, edited O’Curry, *Mans. Custs.*, pp. 465-522 (Appendix), with O’Sullivan’s Introduction, Vol. i.

LET us try now to realise what the country was like before the coming of Christianity. What we learn about the early times of paganism will in the main remain true of the habits of the people for many centuries after; in fact, till the coming of the Northmen and Normans taught them other ways of life. For though with the introduction of Christianity a monastic system peculiar to these countries was introduced which profoundly modified the conditions of life, it took the form of an adaptation of the old system to new wants, so far as outward things were concerned, rather than of an entire re-organisation. Of native growth, the church organisation was formed on native lines, and adapted itself easily and naturally to the circumstances of the nation.

Ireland in early times, before the coming of the

Northmen, was very different in appearance to what it is at present. A large part of the country was covered with forest, and even many parts that are now chiefly bog-land were then dense woods. The cutting down of the forests has been a great misfortune to Ireland. The surface of the country consisted either of wood, bog, or pasture-land, with portions given up to cultivation. There were no towns with houses and streets; but only settlements in cleared places amongst the forests or on the sea-coast. Up to the time of the Northmen, Dublin was a mere group of huts on the banks of the Liffey, with a wooden bridge thrown across for travellers going North or South, whence the place was called Ath Cliath, or the "Ford of the Hurdles." Similar groups of simple huts or wooden buildings were at the same time to be found at the ports of Cork, Limerick and Waterford, and each of these afterwards formed a nucleus round which the towns grew up. It was the Northmen who first used stone in the construction of large buildings, and whose stone towers, keeps and churches laid the real foundation of the existing cities. At the time we speak of, the villages placed in clearings of the forests, or gathered round the dwellings of the large farmers, were mere collections of wattled huts of the most primitive kind.

### **Land Ownership.**

In the earliest times of which we know anything, the

whole face of the land was open, unbroken by landmarks or fences, and we hear of the chariots driving right across country. The pasture lands were not divided up into fields, for very little of the land, if any, at first belonged to private persons, or remained long in the hands of one family; it was constantly being re-distributed, so that it would have been useless to hedge it about in any way into separate farms. The country was divided up into tribes or clans, and the district on which a clan settled seems at first to have been the property of the whole clan, not of separate members of it. To each household was allotted a piece of ground, of which one part was wood, one bog, and one part fields or arable land, so that each might share the good and bad together. It was the duty of the family to cultivate the property and live upon it, but they might not part with it or sell it, except by consent of the tribe. The only land-property they were allowed to sell seems to have been what they acquired as a reward for some service or work of skill, or for some such reason; this, which came to them in a different way, it would seem they might part with if they wished. When a family settled down on a piece of land, the members generally cultivated it together for the first year; later, when the family increased, it was divided among them by lot; after a certain time, each chose his own portion, and the boundaries were fixed. It is uncertain whether even then they could look upon it as their own, in the

same way as a land-owner now thinks of his property, or whether it was still in part the property of the whole tribe. Even the chief does not seem to have actually owned any portion of the tribal-land, except the immediate pleasure-garden within the raths of his fort. Certain properties had in later times to be set apart for the support of the Kings of Tara, from which they drew the sustenance of the royal household, and there was at one time a dispute between them and a King of Ulster about some lands in Meath, which had formed the royal patrimony of the Kings of Ulster, so that probably the provincial chiefs followed the example of the High-King in appropriating special estates to their private purposes. The chiefs also had control over the waste lands belonging to the tribe, and these they could allot as they pleased.

Private property consisted not of land, but of cattle, goods and household effects; these were a man's own, and he could give them away or exchange them as he thought fit. In the famous scene in which Ailill and Maive, a King and Queen of Connaught in pre-historic days, count up their several possessions to see which of them could boast of having the most, there is no mention of landed property, only of swine and cattle, droves of sheep, horses, ornaments and jewels, garments, mugs, vats, and household appliances. Land, indeed, was not thought of as valuable: there was more than a sufficiency for the small population; it was easy to get,



and every family could have as much as it could cultivate. It was only when the households increased so much that land began to be sought after that they thought of fencing in their portions with walls or ditches and hedges. This, we are told, happened first in the reign of the sons of Aedh Slaine (658-694 A.D.), who lived well on in Christian times. After this time we may suppose that the cultivator's household had some definite ownership in his land.

When the Normans came to Ireland, they being quite ignorant of Irish methods of land-ownership, obliged the chiefs to take just such an oath of fealty for their tribe-lands as they would have exacted from their Norman nobles at home. Probably the Irish chief did not understand one word of the oath that was being administered to him in a foreign tongue, and so he quite cheerfully swore away his tribal estates to the Norman King, receiving them back on military tenure. Had he understood, he could not possibly have sworn away what did not belong to him, but to his tribe. This difference of system crops up again and again in the course of the history. At the time of the Norman invasions, probably both parties were equally ignorant that the other was thinking of something totally different to that which each had in his own mind.

Riches, then, in the early days consisted not in land, which could not be alienated, or in money, which did not exist, but in the possession of sheep and cattle, orna-

ments and household utensils, garments and weapons of war. It is necessary, if we would understand the importance attached to these things, to bear this in mind.

### Roads and Bridges.

At what time the first roads were made through the country we do not know; but the announcement in the annals, that on the day of the birth of Conn of the Hundred Battles (177 A.D.), a number of great main roads suddenly sprang into existence, leads us to conclude that there was a tradition that somewhere about his reign thoroughfares began to be made through the country. The old writings give us the names of quite a number of well-known and important main roads. The chief centres, especially Tara, had several roads leading up to them; so had the six Hospitable Houses of Ireland, of which we shall speak later; and probably there were roads leading to the places where the annual or triennial fairs were held.

Bridges, even of hurdles, like the one at Dublin, seem to have been scarce all through the ancient period; they apparently did not know how to build them. We read of large armies wading through the Boyne and the Shannon. The building of the first bridges for armies is noticed with great care in the Annals, and we do not hear of it till well on in the Norse period; even then, they were only light wooden struc-

tures, as is shown by the ease with which they were destroyed, and the necessity there was constantly to renew them.

The fords are often heard of in Irish story in connection with another purpose; namely, the combats of single warriors, which seem to have always taken place close to the rivers or in the shallows. Sometimes the combatants seem to have actually fought in the water.\*

### The Five Provinces.

The country was divided into five provinces, Leinster, Ulster, Connaught, Munster and Meath, which was called Royal Meath, because it formed the special estate of the Kings of Tara. These provinces were not at first fixed; Munster was at the beginning divided into two, and in fact, though afterwards considered one province only, North Munster or Thomond was practically independant of South Munster or Desmond through the greater part of the history.† The province of Meath was created later than the rest, by

\* The Icelanders and Northmen fought single combats on islands in a river or marsh, called the Holm. The rules of the duel or Holmgang are laid down in Kormak's Saga (Chaps. ix., x.). A recent translation of this saga has been published by W. G. Collingwood, M.A., and Dr. Jón Stefánsson; it contains a note on the Holmgang on pp. 69-71.

† It was first divided into East and West Munster, afterwards into North and South Munster.

a king called Tuathal (Toole) the " Legitimate " or the " Possessor," a monarch who restored the Milesian line in his person after its usurpation by some inferior tribes, about 130 A.D. A great stone, still called the " Stone of Divisions," stood, and still stands, at the place where the four provinces then met, and which was supposed to be the centre of Ireland; the new province was formed by taking an equal piece round the stone from each of the other divisions.

### **Tribes and Clans.**

But besides the five provinces, which had their own kings, of whom the Ard-Righ, or High-King of Tara, was chief, the country was further broken up into a multitude of clans or tribes, each having a chief of its own. This was a cause of perpetual warfare, for every powerful chief would aspire to add to his territories and possessions by making raids on his neighbours and carrying off cattle or booty. The largest part of an Irishman's life in early times was spent in such raids and petty wars. All the men were trained to war, and they were always ready to leave the more peaceful occupations of tilling the land and minding the cattle to join in a foray on a neighbour's lands. Especially between Ulster and Munster, and Ulster and Connaught, there was great jealousy, and consequently constant fighting and bloodshed. Many of the raids were undertaken simply



for the purpose of increasing the number of cattle possessed by the tribe. Some clans had not cattle enough to stock their lands, and the easiest way to get more was to steal it from another tribe; so that cattle raids were frequent.

These raids, or "Táins" as they were called, gave rise to a number of romantic tales which the old story-tellers loved to relate. The greatest story of Ireland is the raid made by a famous Queen of Connaught, named Maive, to carry off a wonderful bull called the "Donn" or Brown Bull of Cuailnge (Cooley, Co. Louth) which belonged to a chief of Leinster. In this raid all the hosts of Ireland were engaged for a whole winter, and they traversed all the North of the country from west to east. It was in this raid or "Táin" that the hero Cuchulain fought, standing alone against all the forces of Erin, although he was only a youth and beardless. This story shows how much importance was attached to the possession of cattle in those old days. The value of everything was reckoned by its worth in cows. A slave-woman was worth three cows or five head of horned cattle.

### **Tributes.**

Even the tributes to the chiefs were paid in cattle, sheep, hunting-dogs, pigs, and horses, and in bond-men and bond-women; for the Irish, like all other mediæval nations, practised slavery. The lowest

class of the community were slaves, and were bought and sold like cattle; the captives taken in war added to their numbers, as they seem to have been made slaves of as a matter of course by their conquerors. Ornaments, such as rings and necklets, drinking-horns, caldrons, swords and coats of mail, cloaks, and, near the sea-coast, boats and ships, were also given in tribute in later times, and perhaps also in the pagan period. As there was no money, all transactions had to be made by the gift or exchange of goods.

When a man had not enough cattle to stock his farm, it was the duty of the chief, who was generally rich in live stock, to loan or give him the animals he needed out of the cattle brought in tribute. These were paid to the chief's steward, who was called a Bruighfer and who lived in one of the " Hospitable Houses " of which we shall afterwards speak. He had large farms and out-houses, in which the live stock brought in tribute were kept; but as it was of no use to a chief to possess more cattle than he had land to put them upon, he loaned out these cattle to the small farmers, who generally possessed more land than stock.

### Vassalage.

But to receive stock in this way from the chief made the farmer the chief's man, and brought him under a sort of vassalage. He was then called a " Daer-

Ceile" and he was obliged, in return, not only to render military service to his chief, but to assist in harvesting and agricultural work on his land. He was obliged also to give a certain fixed supply of food and refreshment whenever the chief made a visitation into his neighbourhood, which the chiefs lost no opportunity of doing, for they and their followers were supported free from all charge during the time they remained, and it was a cheap way of living.

The farmer might take much or little stock from the chief. If he took little he was called a "Saer-Ceile" and remained a freeman, with all his tribal rights; at the end of seven years he ceased to be the chief's tenant, and the cattle became his own. He gave in return, milk and the young of the animals to the chief, besides homage and manual labour, *i.e.*, assistance in the building of his fort or reaping of his harvest; instead of which he seems, if he preferred it, to have been permitted to follow the chief to war. But the Daer stock tenant sank into a lower position, and his duties and tributes were very heavy. He became a farmer of a lower rank, and seems to have partly lost his freedom. The necessity for having cattle, nevertheless, induced large numbers to accept Daer stock, and this increased considerably the power of the chiefs. No man was permitted to take stock from any chief but his own, as in that case he would have become the vassal to a chief of another tribe.

Besides these vassals, the chief had even more power among another class of persons, who were called Fuidhirs, and who often owned no connection with the tribe, and no master but the chief himself. In those days, when disputes were frequent between the chief and his people, and between one member of the tribe and another, many persons or families were obliged to fly from their own tribe and people, and take refuge in another tribe. Sometimes they fled to escape from punishment, sometimes perhaps to escape their debts. In one way or another, they had broken the tribal bond and had to depart in order to make for themselves a home among a strange tribe. We read of whole septs or clans sometimes moving from their tribal lands and settling elsewhere. The family or sept of the Deisi, who originally belonged to Meath, were expelled by Cormac Mac Airt, and went into Munster, where they found a new home. But the Fuidhirs were generally criminals or broken men, and the chief of the territory in which they took refuge treated them with little respect or mercy. He generally allotted them portions of the waste lands belonging to the tribe, which were not allocated to any particular person, but were available for anyone who wished to use them, for it was to the chief's benefit to attract as many outlaws or wanderers as he could. The members of the tribe were almost independent of the chief, but the Fuidhir was his slave, whom he could rack-rent at pleasure and com



mand to do anything he chose. The more Fuidhirs the chief had under him the more independent was his position, and the greater his wealth and power. These wandering tenants were naturally hated by the tribesmen, and they were indeed often of a low and despised class; many of them were not even entitled, as were all other tribesmen, to compensation for injuries done to themselves or their families, while, on the other hand, any injury done by a Fuidhir was compensated by his lord and owner; he was himself an outlaw and of no account.

The highest classes of noble freemen next to the chief were the "Aires," some of whom were wealthy through the possession of land and others through the possession of cattle. Each of these ranks was distinguished, after the knowledge of dyeing had been acquired, by a difference in the colour of the dress; when they travelled, each rank was attended by a fixed number of servants or followers. Next to the chief, who had twelve, came the different grades of the "Aires" or land-owners, who had from three to nine. Their wives were allowed half the number, but they seem to have taken more than they were legally allowed. Queens ought, according to the rule, to have been satisfied with six, but Queen Maive never had less than nine. In this they only copied their lords, whose retinues became so large and burdensome, that they

had to be suppressed. It was an immense tax on their people to have constantly to receive and support such large companies, and this burden, which in later historic times was known as "coshering," or "coign and livery," was continued on into the seventeenth century or later.

## CHAPTER IV.

### CONDITION OF THE COUNTRY—*continued.*

Authorities:—As before, with Keating's History of Ireland.

#### **Kings and Chiefs.**

WE have spoken of the duties of the freemen and serfs to the chief; let us now think of the position and duties of the king himself.

In Ireland it was not always the eldest son of the chief who became his successor; the position of the eldest son was not recognised as it is at this day, and if a son succeeded, it might just as easily be one of the younger members of the family as the eldest. But more often it was the brother or cousin of the reigning chief who was chosen as his successor, especially if the sons were young. It was necessary in such wild times to have a strong man on the throne, one who could hold his kingdom against surrounding foes; and it was generally the nearest relation to the reigning chief who showed a fitness for the post who was selected, whether this were his son, brother, or cousin. This heir to the throne was called the Tanist; he was held in high esteem in the kingdom, and took a position next the reigning king.

The chief was the military leader of his people, and

much of his wealth was gathered from the spoils of war. A large number of his clansmen were, as we saw, bound to give him military service whenever he required it; but in times when it was the chief occupation of the people to fight, it can never have been difficult to raise a force. There were, besides, mercenary troops always to be had for payment: the Fianna Eirinn were forces of this sort, fighting independently under their own leaders, but attaching themselves for a time to whichever chief required their help. Maive had such mercenary troops in her army. These soldiers of fortune often came from a distance, from England and Scotland, to join the Irish forces for the duration of a war.

— The chief was generally the wealthiest man in the tribe, and had more slaves, cattle and sheep, than anyone else. It was to his advantage to have great possessions, in order to loan to his tribesmen, and so oblige them to render him Daer service. A man could rise to the chieftainship by merely acquiring great wealth, as we shall see in a later lesson that Finnachta the Festive did. For though there was always a Tanist, it did not by any means follow that the Tanist would come to the throne; few, indeed, of the chiefs died in the natural course in their beds to be succeeded peacefully by their heirs. The larger number were either killed in battle, or murdered by their subjects, and the throne forcibly taken possession of by the



murderer. The Annals of the Kings show us how seldom a peaceful succession took place; and even when the dynasty did pass on from father to son, as in the case of Conn, the Fighter of a Hundred, his son Art, and his grandson Cormac, we find that Art was killed in battle, and the throne was twice usurped, and held by outsiders, before the succession of the sons.

### Election of a King.

How irregular the election of the Ard-Righ or High-King of Tara might be, is shown by such stories as the appointment of Conaire Mór,\* or of Lugaid Reo-Derg,† neither of whom had any direct claim to the succession. For though the chief could appoint a Tanist, the election lay in the end with the tribe, or, in the case of the Ard-Righ, with the Under Kings of the Provinces. Now, the choice of the people, when there was any dispute, or a difficulty arose, was frequently, if not always, influenced by the prognostigation of a soothsayer, who was supposed to point out the right man. These curious rites were carried on by the Druids, who were believed to have a knowledge of the future. A white bull was killed, and a man ate of his flesh and drank from the broth. He was then put into

\* Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel, edited by Dr. Whitley Stokes, *Rev. Celt.* vol. xxii. p. 22.

† Sickbed of Cuchulain, edited by O'Curry, '*Atlantis*' Vols. i., pp. 370-392; ii., pp. 98-124.

a magic sleep by the incantation of the Druids; and he was supposed to see in a dream the person who was to be made king; out of his sleep he gave a description of the person whom he saw, who was then elected by the people. Keating is very angry that Gerald, the Welsh historian, repeats a story somewhat similar to this about the inauguration of the chiefs of the O'Donnell family, in Ulster, but it is quite likely that a custom in several respects like the old pagan custom, should have lingered on into later times; it is very difficult to change old-established customs connected with important public ceremonies. We keep up to this day at a coronation many old ceremonials the meaning of which has been forgotten and which appear to us ridiculous, merely because they have always, from time immemorial, been considered a necessary part of the functions of state; therefore we need not reject the statement of Gerald so hastily as Keating did, seeing that it corresponds very closely with a custom that was well-recognised in ancient days. Keating, however, adds an interesting account of the later method of inaugurating a Prince of the O'Donnells. He says that, being seated amongst his nobles and councillors, the chief of his nobles would stand before him with a straight white wand in his hand, and present it to the king, in token of authority over the country of his tribe, and to remind him by its straightness that his administration should be just, and by its whiteness that

his actions should be pure and upright. It was a symbol which had the same meaning as the sceptre of a modern king.\*

Another ceremony attending the election of the High-King of Tara was that of standing on the stone called the Lia Fail, or Stone of Destiny, which the Tuatha Dé Danann were supposed to have brought with them from the East. This stone was said to roar when the rightful king stood on it, and to be silent under a usurper. It must often have been silent at Tara. Some people suppose that the Lia Fail was carried over to Scotland in Christian times to crown the Scottish kings upon, because they were descended from the chiefs of the North of Ireland; and that it is the stone which is now under the Coronation Chair in Westminster Abbey, on which the English Sovereigns are crowned. This stone was certainly brought from Scotland to England in the reign of Edward I. However, I do not think it is likely that the Irish would have parted from their famous stone for this or any other purpose, and it is possible that a great pillar-stone which still stands on Tara Hill may be the Lia Fail. This pillar-stone, 5 ft. 3 in. high, now stands over the "Croppies' Grave" on the Forradh, but it originally occupied the site of the original Lia Fail on the N.E. side of Rath na Riogh, or the King's Rath. The Lia Fail is mentioned in two poems of the 10th century as

\* Keating's "*History of Ireland*," edited by David Comyn, Lond. 1902, vol. i., intro. pp. 22-23.

being still on Tara Hill, when the poems were written. It is difficult to see, however, how anyone could have stood upon this stone without falling off, but still more curious and impossible things are told of the election of chiefs in some primitive countries to this day.†

### Duties of a Prince.

The ideal formed by the ancient Irish of the duties and character of a prince was a high one, and there are several old accounts of the admonitions given to a young prince to guide him in his responsible position. One of these is supposed to contain the instructions given by the wise Cormac Mac Airt to his son Cairbre, who came to him for advice. "O Cormac, grandson of Conn," said Cairbre, "what is the right life for a king?" "That is plain," said Cormac. "A king must exercise patience and self-governance; he must be affable without haughtiness; he must strictly observe covenants and agreements; he must execute the laws with exactitude but with mercy. He must pay diligent attention to history, he must perform his promises, he must keep peace in his borders, and protect his frontiers. When he makes a hosting, let the cause be

\*Kineth O'Hartigan and Cuan O'Lochain, two poets in the 10th century, state that the Lia Fail was still at Tara when they wrote. Kineth says it was "under his two heels" as he wrote.

† For examples of Election by Divination in primitive communities, see a paper on "The Voice of the Stone of Destiny," by E. Sidney Hartland, *Folklore Journal*, vol. xiv., No. 1 March, 1903.



just; let him pay the lawful dues of his vassals, let him honour the nobles, respect the poets and historians, and adore the Great God." "It is his duty, too, to exercise boundless charity, to see to the prosperity of agriculture, and the condition of merchandise; to suppress falsehood and criminal deeds, to attend the sick and discipline his armies; above all things to speak truth always, for it is through the truth of a king that God gives prosperity and favorable seasons." Cairbre asks: "What is the chief of all his duties?" Cormac answers: "The lifting up of good men and the suppression of evil-doers, the giving of freedom to those who do well, and the restriction of the unjust." Then Cairbre asks: "What is for the welfare of a country?" and is told that frequent convocations of wise men to investigate its affairs and abolish unwise laws are good; that the government should be in the hands of the nobles, and that the chieftains should be upright; that the study of every art and language should be encouraged.

Then Cairbre asks: "What are the duties of a prince on public occasions?" "They are," said Cormac, "to light the lamps and welcome the guests with clapping of hands at Samhain, in the banqueting house; to prepare for them comfortable seats and have nimble cupbearers to serve them; to have moderate music, short stories, and a welcoming countenance, and to make cheerful and pleasant converse before the

learned." Cairbre then asks, for what qualities a king should be elected? "For his noble appearance and birth," answers Cormac, "for his experience and wisdom, his prudence and magnanimity, his eloquence, his bravery in battle, and the number of his friends. He must be without personal blemish of any sort, easy of access and affable, mild in peace and fierce in war, beloved by his people, discerning, faithful and patient; he is to support orphans, to be cheerful with his intimates, and to appear splendid as the sun at the Banquet of the Mead House of Tara." \*

— The condition that the king should be without personal blemish was an important one in Ireland, as it still is in many countries; for a king who had sustained any personal injury could no longer retain the crown. Cormac Mac Airt himself, though he was the wisest and most beloved of all the early kings, had to retire from the duties of his post because his eye had been put out by a spear in battle. It was while he was in retirement that Cairbre, his successor, is said to have come to ask his advice. Whether the instructions are actually those given by Cormac or not, they are no less important as showing us how highly the position and duties of a king were thought of in early days.

Every act of the king's life seems to have been regulated by law, even to the manner in which his days

\* This interesting piece is edited by Dr. J. O'Donovan in the *Dublin Penny Journal*, vol. i., pp. 214 and seq. (1832-3).

were to be spent. Sunday was given to feasting and ale-drinking; Monday, to legislation and the government of his tribe; Tuesday, to chess; Wednesday, to watching grey-hounds coursing; Thursday, to the pleasures of home; Friday, to horse-racing; Saturday, to administering judgment, that is, to arbitrating between disputants.\* This sounds as though a king had a very easy time of it; only two days out of the seven appear to have been devoted to duty against five given to pleasure; but perhaps there was more work connected with his enjoyments than appears on the surface, for we find that there were present at the ale-feasts persons concerned in assessing taxes, verifying contracts, settling boundaries, regulating disputes between chiefs, and otherwise carrying on the affairs of the kingdom. They were the King's Council of State, and doubtless these matters were discussed and arranged during the long feasts at which the king presided.

The monarch was always accompanied by four men as a bodyguard, or twelve when making an ordinary circuit of his territory; but we find the chiefs and kings on state progresses through their dominions travelling with their whole retinue. The bards did the same, and as in later times the bishops followed their example, and went about with companies of equal size with the king's, the unfortunate people were cruelly oppressed by

\* See Tract on "The Classes of Society among the Gaedhil," O'Curry, *Mans. Custs.*, vol. iii., pp. 502-512.

these visitations, which they dared not refuse to receive. It was just as dangerous to refuse a bard as to refuse a king, for he would certainly revenge himself by making a satire on the person who had declined to give him what he required, and a bardic satire was supposed to bring down all sorts of ill-luck on the person to whom it was addressed. All these things had to be regulated in later times. We shall see that it was St. Columcille who set a limit on the exactions of the bards.

The life of the king was naturally considered more valuable than that of any of his subjects. In Ireland in old times every person had his own fixed value according to his rank. That is to say, if a man injured or killed another out of malice, he was obliged to pay a certain fixed compensation either to the man himself, or in case of his death, to his relatives. The price of each wound or insult or murder was fixed by law. Besides the actual compensation for the injury done, there was what was called the "Honour-price" to be paid for each man; that is, a compensation according to the rank of the man injured. The honour-price of the chief of a large province was seven women-slaves or twenty-one cows, that of the Ard-Righ was eight slaves or twenty-four cows. Three cows or one slave was a fixed price and was called a "cumhall"; a "prime-sed" was one milch-cow. These were two standards of measurement among the old Irish.



## CHAPTER V.

### ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE.

Authorities :—Same as for Chapters III. and IV.

#### Hostages.

WE must now consider how justice was administered in early times in Ireland. As there were no police and no courts of law, except the occasional assemblies of convocation, it is difficult at first to understand how crime was punished. There were no gaols either, although certain prisoners were detained at the king's fortresses in separate huts, but these prisoners were not kept on account of crime, but as hostages for the obedience and fealty of tributary princes. They were often the sons or cousins of chiefs, and they do not always seem to have been very well treated. A young prince of Ossory, named Scannlan, who was retained as hostage by the King of Tara in Columcille's time, was kept in a wattled hut without window or door save a hole through which his meals, a little salt food and a scanty supply of ale, were handed in to him. Outside were fifty warriors always guarding him and he was heavily loaded with chains. Though apparently the young prince had done nothing against the king, and was only retained as hostage for his father, the King

of Tara intended to keep him in this misery till he died.\* He was released by St. Columcille, but the poor lad was so reduced that all he was able to utter was "A drink!" "Hast thou news?" asked Columcille. "A drink!" said Scannlan." "Hast thou brought a gift?" said Columcille. "A drink!" said Scannlan. "Tell me how thou didst escape?" said the Saint. "A drink!" cried the poor thirsty youth again, and this was all that for a long time the Saint could get from him. We are glad to hear that Columcille gave him a drink of ale sufficient for three, which the hostage took off at one draught, and after a huge dinner, he fell asleep and slept for three days without waking. But though Scannlan got free, his father, worn out with the anxiety he had suffered for him, died on the very day that he returned to his home; and Scannlan at once succeeded to the kingdom. We frequently read of hostages in historical times whose eyes were put out or who were maimed for life. There is one ghastly legend of a king who was returning from Munster with princely hostages. He died on the way, and the hostages were buried alive round his tomb as a menace to Munster.

\* See quotation from the Edinburgh MS. of a Life of Choluimchille quoted in the notes to the "*Lives of the Saints*" from the Book of Lismore, edited by Dr. Whitley Stokes, pp. 309-310, 313-314 (*Anec.: Oxon.*, 1890). Keating says that he was deposed by Aedh for refusing to pay a head-rent to Tara, and the King intended to set up another and more obedient prince in his stead.

**'Eric' or Fine for Injuries.**

But the ordinary criminal was never kept in gaol, or even, except in the last resort, brought before a tribunal; it was the business of the injured person, or his near kinsfolk, to carry out the punishment themselves, and unless they were unable to do so, there was no appeal made to the judges or to any outside authority. Let us take the case of one man killing another. In early times there was no idea that, in a general way, there was anything wrong in taking a man's life. When killing by war or revenge was the ordinary rule of existence, human beings were held cheap, and it was considered rather as a mark of valour to kill many enemies than as a disgrace to do so. But if a murder was committed secretly or treacherously, then it was culpable, and merited punishment. It was the duty of the near relations of the murdered man to avenge his death as soon as possible, by killing the murderer or by demanding "eric:" that is, a fine in cattle or goods to the extent to which they were entitled according to the status of the murdered man. The killing of the murderer was considered a "necessary murder," and was not punishable in any way: indeed, to have omitted to avenge the death of a relation, would have brought shame upon the family.

If the friends of the murderer gave up the culprit they had then done all that was expected of them; if for any reason he was not forthcoming, they were

obliged to pay the required "eric" in his place, or to get their chief to help them pay it, if it was so heavy that they could not raise it between them. This, of course, the chief would not do without getting an equivalent in their subjection to himself, and service of various kinds. The culprit often took to flight, and then his property was forfeited, and the remainder of the "eric" demanded was made up by his relations.

The amount of the "eric" was strictly fixed by law. If there was any doubt whether the accused man was really the murderer, he was often tried by ordeal. Among the forms of ordeal used in Ireland were the ordeal by boiling water, or the ordeal by fire, in which the culprit had to rub the tongue on a red-hot adze of bronze or lead, heated in a fire of blackthorn. This is said to have been a druidical ordeal.\*

A favourite penance in Christian times was to send the prisoner adrift on the ocean, with his hands and feet tied, and without food or water, in a coracle, or boat of bark and skins. If he came to an inhabited land or drifted back, he was allowed to live, but was treated as a miserable slave ever after. We hear of St. Patrick employing this form of penance with a wicked man named Macuil, who, being converted by the saint, submitted himself to whatever punishment he should order. "I will confess to you,

\* O'Curry, M. and C., ii., p. 216.



Holy Patrick," he said, "that I had determined to kill you: decide, therefore, what is due for so great a crime." Patrick said: "I cannot judge; but God will judge. Go forth unarmed to the sea, and pass quickly over from Ireland. Take none of your goods, but only one small and poor garment, tasting nothing, and drinking nothing, and bearing this token of your sin upon your head. When you have reached the sea, bind your feet fast with an iron fetter, and throw the key of it into the sea, and get into a boat of the thickness of one hide, without rudder or oar, and whithersoever the wind will drift you, dwell in the land to which the Divine Providence shall lead you, and keep there the Divine laws." Macuil eventually landed on the Isle of Man, and became the first teacher and bishop of that church.\*

Probably St. Patrick did not invent this cruel punishment; it seems to have been used in Pagan times in Ireland; but we find those early Irish Christians who were inclined to the ascetic life voluntarily adopting this perilous means of finding out the place on which they believed themselves divinely guided to settle, and adopt the lives of hermits. Many of them must have been cast away, and perished; others drifted on to almost uninhabitable islands and shores, and lived a mournful and desolate

\* Life of St. Patrick by Muirchu Maccu Macctheni, translated by Rev. A. Barry, pp. 36-37.

existence, supporting life by eating fish or birds' eggs. We hear of them being discovered by seafarers in these wild islands, with their beards grown to their feet, and long nails like birds' claws; sometimes as having forgotten how to speak, through their long severance from all human companionship. It was out of such a "pilgrimage," as it was called, that the strange half-Pagan, half-Christian story of the 'Voyage of Mael-duin' arose.\*

### **Rights of Sanctuary.**

Very often the murderer would try to escape justice by running away, and taking refuge with another tribe. His relatives were then responsible for paying his "eric," and he himself sank to the low position of a "Fuidhir," or chief's slave, in the clan to which he had fled for safety. But there was another means by which he could escape punishment, at least for a time, until his case was enquired into; this was, by taking refuge in certain spots or with certain persons, whose protection safe-guarded him from his avenger. The chief had this right of protection, and so had the "Filé," or poet; anywhere within the fort of the chief he was safe. It was not intended that the murderer should by this means escape his just punishment; it only protected him for a time, and gave him a chance of proving him-

\* See *Lives of the Saints from the Book of Lismore*. Ed. by Dr. W. Stokes, Preface, pp. viii.-ix., and 3792-3842, pp. 258-9., *Voyage of Mael Duin*, *Rev.Celt.* x. xi.

self guiltless if there was a doubt about the matter. But this privilege became greatly abused, especially in Christian times, for the chief saints of Ireland claimed this right, as they claimed many other privileges originally belonging to the Druids or Fili. A criminal became safe not only when he was actually under their protection, but also if he were within any "Termon-land," that is, the lands belonging to a church or monastery; and as these lands were in time thickly scattered all over Ireland, and there were also saints to be found in nearly every district, every criminal might secure safety without any trouble. Not only so, but the saint often refused to give up the criminal to meet his just punishment, and this was the cause of many serious disputes between the chiefs and the monks, for they did not hesitate to keep even public offenders under their protection, refusing to deliver them up even to the king. It was through a dispute of this kind that Tara fell, as we shall see in the History of King Dermot. One cause of the Battle of Culdremhne, which led to the withdrawal of St. Columcille to Scotland, was a dispute about a criminal who had taken refuge with the Saint.\* Many of the most serious difficulties with which the kings had to deal arose from this abuse of privilege, for, I am sorry to say, that the monks seem often to have thought their own power was of more importance than the welfare of the kingdom.

\* i.e., Curnan, s. of Aedh, who slew a nobleman at the Feis of Tara, and fled to Columcille for protection.

## CHAPTER VI

### ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE.—*continued.*

Authorities:—As before.

#### **The Duel.**

THE death of an adversary in a duel was not supposed to be a murder, if the duel was regularly carried out: that is, before witnesses, and with the knowledge and consent of the families and of the tribal chief. The clothes and weapons of the slain man belonged to the survivor, and he had to give no "eric," unless the slain man had been forced into the duel against his will, or had been handled unfairly in the combat. Duels and single combats were a common way of settling both private and public disputes, and were considered honourable if carried on in an open, legal fashion. They were often used as a resource when a debtor would not settle with his creditors, or pay the "eric" demanded of him. In public matters, warriors and chiefs often challenged each other to single combat; and sometimes a battle seems to have been chiefly a series of single combats between well-known champions. When famous princes or warriors engaged each other in the course of a battle, the whole army on either side would seem to have stopped fighting to



watch the duel. For instance, in the story of the Battle of Magh Rath (Moirá) each champion or chief challenges some chief on the other side, while the hosts look on and cheer them forward.

### Law of Distress.

But now let us take the case of a man who has not killed his enemy, but has wounded him, or in some way done him an injury maliciously. The man demands an "eric," which is a fixed amount, depending on the extent of the injury, and on the position of the person injured. Supposing the debtor refuses to pay his legal debt, what happens? For there are no police to take him up, and no courts of law to which the injured man may appeal.

It was sometimes a very long business indeed, before such a man could get his rights, and the bulk of the *Senchus Mór* (the "Great Tradition") containing the Ancient Laws of Ireland, many of which have come down to us, is occupied with explaining what is to be done in such cases. They had resort to what was called the "Law of Distress," and by a "distress" was meant, not the trouble that was on the creditor, but the goods of the debtor which were owing to him, and the manner in which he was to get them. There are several large volumes of these old laws published, and about half of them is taken up with the Law of Distress, and all the possible ways in which it might be applied, and the

difficulties that might arise in carrying it out. A great many of the regulations seem to us very amusing, and almost like a children's game, but they were all seriously carried through, and if the least mistake were made, the creditor forfeited part or all of his compensation.

If the creditor did not exactly know the proper form he called in the aid of the officials, by making an appeal to the Brehons or judges; but it was so perilous to make a mistake, that probably the aid of the Brehon was almost always called in on occasions when the debtor declined to pay the due compensation. In all other cases the creditor and his relations conducted their own business. Let us try to understand something of the Law of Distress, and how it worked.

'Distress' meant the forcible seizing of a man's property, which generally consisted of his cows or live stock, in payment of a debt. In many villages in England and Ireland, there are still to be seen Village-Pounds, *i.e.*, enclosures, into which cattle used to be driven. These Village-Pounds take us back to the time when the Law of Distress, or something equivalent to it, was still in force.

Let us imagine a case in which a farmer has done an injury to a neighbour. The neighbour wants his compensation, but the farmer refuses to give it. The aggrieved man knows exactly how many cows and pigs will make up the amount that he is entitled to demand. If he is very angry, or the man who has injured him is

rich and quite well able to pay, he may adopt what was called "Seizure without Delay." In that case all he has to do is to send a body of men to surround the farm of the culprit and drive off as many of his cattle as they can seize to the "pound" or to the fields of the man who seeks compensation. For five days they remain there untouched, but the man to whom they belong is obliged to feed them. If after the five days, he has not come to his senses and still declines to pay, the cattle are gradually forfeited and become the property of the creditor, a few every night, until the right number are in his possession. If there are not sufficient, he makes a fresh raid and seizes more; if there are too many, the rest are sent back. So the matter is ended without the intervention of anyone.

If the creditor is more merciful, or the debtor is poor and has difficulty in raising the proper number of cattle on his own farm or among his friends, the seizure may be made "with Delays." By this method the debtor gets fifteen days' grace, instead of five, and the whole business is conducted in a more leisurely manner. First the injured man makes his formal demand for compensation. Then five nights elapse, during which the debtor may pay his debt, or send to the creditor a pledge (his son, perhaps, or a sufficient number of cattle), to show that he is making exertions to pay it as soon as possible. This pledge is forfeited if he does not keep his promise. After the delay of five

nights, if he has done neither of these things, the raid takes place and his cattle are driven off : but they are soon allowed to return; this first seizure is only to warn the debtor that the creditor intends to have his rights. Five more nights elapse, and again a raid is made if nothing has been done in the meantime. This seizure is more serious; the cattle are driven into the pound or to the estate of the creditor, and kept there, still at the debtor's expense for feeding. A message is sent to tell him where the cattle are, and his last five days of grace take place, after which his property is gradually forfeited, as in the "seizure without delay." The whole thing reminds us of a sort of play warfare : attack, and ruse, and withdrawal and final onslaught; and the method probably arose out of the customs of tribal raids. All the rules had to be very carefully observed, however, in carrying out the Law of Distress. The seizure might be a seizure of one, of three, of five or of ten nights, according to circumstances. If it were of one night, the whole thing was done in three days; if of ten, it took thirty days (*i.e.*, three periods of ten days) to complete the Distress. For a woman the time was six days in all, that is, it was a seizure of two nights.

#### **'Fasting upon' a Debtor.**

There is still a case which might, and often did occur, for which the Law of Distress did not provide a



remedy. If a chief or great man injured a poor man, how was the poor man to get compensation? He dare not seize the cattle of his lord or chief, even if he were able to do so; indeed, he was not permitted by law to do so, for the power to "distrain," as the seizure for compensation was called, was only allowed to those who held a position that entitled them to appear at the public assemblies or annual convocations, that is, to the well-to-do middle and upper ranks. Neither a chief nor a peasant could distrain, or in any ordinary way enforce the payment of a debt. What was the poor man, the serf or unfree tenant, to do? Here seems a case in which justice could only be claimed by pleading in a court of law. No doubt this course was often adopted, but it was probably expensive, necessitating, as it did, the presence of a Brehon or judge, one or more advocates, and witnesses. Moreover, the judicial courts seem to have been held chiefly at the annual "aenach" or triennial "feis," for which the creditor could not always wait. A most curious plan was resorted to, so curious, that if we did not know that exactly the same custom is carried on to this day in India and Persia, we should hardly be able to understand the accounts given of it in the old stories, and in the *Senchus Mór*. It was called "fasting upon" a debtor, and it consisted in the man to whom the debt was owing, sitting down at the door of his debtor's house and remaining there without eating until his

claim was settled. In dealing with a king, a chief, the higher nobles, or a Filé, "fasting" must always first be tried, even if it were afterwards intended to proceed to "distress." These higher personages were supposed to be sacred, and could not be treated like ordinary men.

Let us think what happened. The creditor, generally a poor man, who could not get help for himself, would sit patiently down at the door and begin to fast. In Persia, a man has been known to begin fasting by sowing barley at the debtor's door and sitting down in the middle of it. He means that he will, if necessary, sit there until the barley is grown up to feed him. The meaning of his sitting at the door, evidently is, that the man in the house is his prisoner; and though he does not seem to have employed force or attempted to injure the debtor in any way, the custom may, perhaps, have arisen out of watching at a door with intent to kill or injure. In India, Brahmins, who are the sacred or priestly class, have been known to sit at the door with poison or a weapon in the hand, threatening death to the inmate if he ventured out. There may have been, in very early times, some idea of the same kind in Ireland, but in the stories nothing of the sort is suggested.

You will say that the creditor suffered more than the debtor, but this was not always, if ever, the case, as the man inside seems to have been obliged

in honour to fast too. It was often a struggle which of them would give in first; so long as the debtor could hold out, he was safe from the consequences of his wrong-doing. We read of Adamnan and a prince named Irgalach fasting against each other for days, both standing all night immersed in cold water up to the throat. They regularly arranged the plan of procedure between them, so that neither should obtain an advantage over the other; until at last, by a not very creditable device, Adamnan got the better of Irgalach, and forced him to give in. This is probably an imaginary story, but it is founded on a well-recognised method of procedure. It was the duty of the debtor to offer food to the man at his door, and to give a pledge that he would either pay his debt or have the matter decided by a Brehon. If he did not do his duty, he was liable to pay double in the end.

As a matter of fact, the debtor would generally have to give way if the other had a just cause. It was very unpleasant to have a man fasting to death at your door; and it was still more unpleasant to feel that the whole tribe sympathised with the man, and looked upon you with detestation, as a person abandoned by God and man. It was universally believed that evil would befall the man who resisted fasting. The *Senchus Mór*, or Great Tradition, as the old law books are called, solemnly says:—"He who does not

give a pledge to fasting is an evader of all: he who disregards all things shall not be paid by God or man." The whole nation believed that some terrible catastrophe would befall such a person. It was this belief in a supernatural power behind their threats, that gave such authority to the "fasting" of the monks. In the story of the fall of Tara the mere ringing of bells and "fasting" of the monks on Tara green, seems to have brought about the fall of the monarchy. But it was the weight of the displeasure of a whole nation visited on the sovereign who had laid himself open to fasting that brought about the consummation threatened. The people fell off from a man against whom the monks fasted as from one smitten by the plague. They neither dared nor wished to give him their support. We see this pressure of public opinion even in our own day exercised against one who, even if he may be altogether innocent, has for some reason come under popular displeasure. Men fall off from him by mere force of example, and he becomes a social outcast, shunned by the society in which he formerly moved. This same social ostracism is very strong among primitive peoples, who act more often from instinct and example than from reason.

Thus you see that, as a rule, law was executed in Ireland without having recourse to courts of justice, and always without the aid of police. The injured man carried out his own punishments, even in cases where



the Brehon was called in to arbitrate. You will notice, also, that the punishment generally consisted rather in payments from the possessions of the criminal, than in harm or confinement to his person.

It was the business of the Brehon to apply the law to special cases or to amend or modify it as occasion arose. The Brehon Laws are full of instances—most of them imaginary, and many of them very far-fetched—in which some little variation in a case demanded a separate treatment, or a modification of the law; in many instances the regulations seem to have been so old that the Brehons who wrote them down did not understand their application owing to the changes in society in their own day. In these cases they were ingenious in making all sorts of guesses at the intention of the law which had been handed down to them, but of the meaning of which they were doubtful. These explanations or glosses on the laws fill two or three times the space of the regulations themselves.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE FILÉ AND OLLAMH.

Authorities:—O'Curry's "Manners and Customs," and "Manuscript Materials of Irish History." M. D'Arbois de Jubainville's "Introduction a l'Etude de la Littérature Celtique (1883). The Mac Ternan Prize Essay on Irish Poetry by Dr. Douglas Hyde. Introduction to the Senchus Mór, etc.

#### The File.

LET us speak a little further of the ancient laws of Ireland and of the Brehons or judges who administered them. Strange as it may appear to us now, it was, in the very earliest times of all, the Poet, or Filé, who administered the law, and laid down the rules for the country, and gave decisions in disputed cases. We think of poetry in these days as only a pleasant pastime for those people who have not very much practical work to do, and are inclined to be dreamy and contemplative. Busy people think that it is not meant for them, and they are inclined to despise those who read and think about poetry. In consequence of this way of looking at it, poetry is now chiefly written for people with leisure, and no one expects others to interest themselves in it. But in early times the ideas about poetry were entirely different. It was then the most necessary and practical thing that could be imagined; for every-

thing of any importance was composed and written in poetry. The laws, the genealogies of the clans, the history of the tribes, were all composed and recited in verse. Consequently, the most important persons in the land, next to the chiefs, were the Fili. It was their business to act as law-givers, arbitrators, genealogists, and historians, besides being the story-tellers and poets of the tribe. They were treated with the greatest respect, and were constantly in attendance on the chief, taking part in his councils. It was not simply in order to remember the laws and annals more easily, before writing was invented, that they were recited in verse, as some people seem to think; it was also to add dignity to them. Nearly all primitive peoples proclaim matters of importance to themselves in a sort of rude verse, and this was no doubt also the case in Ireland. Even in St. Patrick's day or later, when the laws were revised and written down, perhaps for the first time, a Filé was called in "to put a thread of poetry round them." The people would have thought little of decisions made in plain prose, and the law-givers themselves would have felt that they had lost some of their dignity.

The preparation of the Filé for his position was a long and arduous one. The post of Filé was generally retained in certain families, and the sons were specially educated by a careful course of study for their exalted position. It would seem that in early pagan times,

Scotland (then called Alba) was looked upon as the home of learning as well as the most famous school of instruction in feats of war and championship. We read of some of the young aspirants to the office of Filé being sent there for their final instruction.

One consequence of their specialised education was to encourage a style in laying down legal decisions, and carrying on the duties of their office, which was quite different from the ordinary language of common life.

It became technical and full of expressions and words not understood by anyone but themselves—probably methods of expression retained from an older time, but which had gone out of use. Exactly the same thing happens nowadays; law deeds and state records are full of archaic forms and words which ordinary people cannot understand, but which have to be adhered to if the document is to become legal. It was only the other day that the German Emperor made a decree commanding his Ministers and officers to draw up their reports in simpler language, because they were so long and difficult to understand that it was tedious and troublesome to follow them. Now, one of the old kings of Ulster is said to have been obliged to make exactly the same kind of revolution in legal style as the Kaiser has attempted. The occasion was this: Adna, a learned Connaught man, was the chief Filé of Ulster in the days of Conor mac Nessa. He had a son named Nedhe, whom he designed to follow him in the post of



Ollamh (Ollav), or Head of the Poets of Ulster, on his own death. He sent him for instruction to the school of the learned teacher, Eochaid, in Scotland. One day Nedhe was walking along the shore, meditating; for it was on the sea-coast that knowledge was most generally believed to be revealed to the Filé. He hearkened to the voice of the waves, for it seemed to him that they bore him a message, in a sad, strange, trembling murmur, which they were unable to translate into human speech. It was the funeral wail over his father's tomb that the waves had borne to him; and when he had made an incantation over them, he understood their voice, and knew that his father was dead. He returned to the school, and told all this to his master, who counselled him to set forth at once for Ireland. Meanwhile, before his arrival, the post of Ollamh had been given to Athairne, a celebrated, but cruel and dangerous, satirist, and he had been solemnly seated in the official chair of the chief Filé of Ulster, and clothed in the official robe, which was in three colours, and made entirely of birds' feathers.\*

When Nedhe arrived at Emain Macha he at once passed on to the king's palace to claim his succession

\* Robes of state made in a similar way, belonging to the Hawaiian Islanders, may be seen in the British Museum. They are entirely made of scarlet and yellow feathers, and the effect is that of thick plush. Yellow is the royal colour, and only worn by chiefs. The feathers are closely sewn into a net-work ground and cut short.

to the office of Ollamh; Athairne was not there at the moment, and Nedhe straightway seated himself in the official chair, which was empty, with the cloak of honour thrown across the back. Athairne was soon informed what had happened, and he went up to Nedhe, asking, with a courtesy unusual to him: "Who is the learned poet upon whom the mantle with its splendour rests?" Nedhe replies, and a long and animated discussion follows, in which each poet displays his knowledge of philosophy, literature, and druidism. This debate, which was really a trial of skill to prove which was most fitted to occupy the exalted position to which both aspired, was listened to with great attention by the king, surrounded by all his counsellors. As the conversation was carried on in the obscure language used by the learned, they probably could not understand very much; and when the matter was finally settled, and Nedhe was proved to be in every way qualified to hold the post, they had not been able to seize the drift of the discourse sufficiently to understand how the decision was arrived at. Thereupon, Conor declared that the poets spoke for themselves alone, and made a monopoly of their science, while the people were unable to understand a word they said. Henceforth, the king decreed that the power of deciding disputes and matters of public arbitration should no longer reside in the professional class only, but should be shared by the whole tribe in public assembly. The legend was evi-

dently invented to explain a fact. The system was brought out of the seclusion of a separate caste, and became an affair of national interest and importance.

### His Rank and Duties.

Yet the Filé did not lose his position of honour in the change; the Ollamh or chief Filé of the tribe always ranked next to the king, and was his counsellor. He went about with a retinue almost equal to that of the king, and he was provided with grazing, cattle, and refectation at the public expense. The Seanachie, or Historian, was treated with similar liberality. The order of the Filidh, or the Fili, was sub-divided into seven or more ranks, according to the learning and powers of the poet; and each rank had a fixed staff of servants and order of precedence in all public assemblies. It is a little difficult to distinguish between the duties of a Brehon and those of a Filé of the higher ranks; possibly the Brehon concerned himself chiefly with private cases and the Ollamh with public concerns. But if the privileges of the Ollamh were great, they were not won without severe labour. He was, in the widest sense of the word, a learned man, so far as the scholarship of his day would take him. He was bound to be acquainted with the precise genealogies of his tribe; to know the affairs of general history, so far as it was possible in those times, and to compare them with the annals of his own race; he had to master the intricacies

of a most intricate system of verse-making, and to be able to improvise on any occasion suitable poems or satires; and he had to be familiar with the numberless prose tales, some historic and others imaginative, which he must be ready to recite whenever called upon. His education for the higher grades occupied twelve years of hard work, and often involved going to school at a distance from his native land. The keeping of the genealogies was considered of great importance in early times, as on it depended the position of each freeman in the tribe, and his right to whatever land or property he possessed. The genealogies were carefully revised at every public assembly, and written up to date. But, besides this, the Poets were the educators of the youth of the tribe. They were the professors of learning, and kept schools in which the lads, especially those who aspired to enter their order, were trained. We shall have to speak of these schools when we come to deal with the education of the children. The ideal set before an Ollamh was a very high one. He was to be possessed of "purity of learning, purity of mouth (that is, he was not to satirise unjustly), purity of hand (from blood-shedding), purity of marriage, and purity (or honesty) from theft and robbery." It is sad to have to say that the Fili fell very far short of many of these virtues, and their own pride and misdeeds brought about their fall. They became lifted up in their minds by the honour that was everywhere paid to



them; and as no one could control them or deny them anything they wished, they became outrageous in their demands, and would ask the most absurd and cruel things merely to show their power. If they were refused, they would pour forth biting satires on the person who refused them and on all that he possessed; and so terrified were the people of being satirised, that they preferred to give even their wives and children to the poets, rather than to bring down on themselves the danger of their curse, which was supposed not only to raise on the face three great disfiguring blisters, but to bring desolation on the family. So far from keeping their mouths pure from unjust satire, they used it on every possible occasion, and in the cruellest way. One of the blackest characters of all was Athairne, who disputed with Nedhe the Chair of Ollamh at Emain Macha. He used to make circuits through all the provinces of Ireland, and the people were so terrified at his coming, that they would meet him on the borders of their territory, and offer him everything that they possessed, rather than excite his revenge and wrath. It was a bad day for Ireland when he became chief poet of Ulster, and it was through Nedhe's generosity that he became it; for when Nedhe had proved himself the equal or superior of Athairne in the learned contest, he resigned his rights to him, because he was the older man, and he said he would be content to become his pupil. We are glad to

read that Athairne met his deserts in the end; for he caused so many wars and troubles in the kingdom, that Conor had him put to death with all his family, and his house destroyed.

The Fili became so wicked, that they were three times about to be banished from the kingdom; they would have been finally banished by Aedh, King of Ireland, in the sixth century, but that Columcille came over from Scotland to plead for their existence. He had, when a lad, like all the young children of Ireland who wished to become learned, attended one of their schools, and he was himself a great poet, and devoted to the study of poetry. He, therefore, felt a deep interest in the poets, in spite of all their exactions and ill-deeds. But it was plain that things could not go on as they were; so Columcille had the whole matter discussed, and it was decided that their retinues should be lessened, and that only a very few Ollamhs and Fili should be allowed in each territory, instead of the vast hoards of them then going about eating up the country. The rewards that they might ask for their poems were, too, settled definitely, and they could not henceforward ask more than the fixed payment. Besides the Fili, there were the hosts of the bards, who were of a lower standing, and did not receive the learned education of the Filé. They were singers of songs, and they, too, wandered about, often with fiddles or small harps, living on the bounty of the

peasants. They were also broken up into many grades. It would be difficult to remember all the divisions there were of poets of one sort or another in Ireland.

### The Old Stories.

In spite of their bad ways, we have much cause to be thankful to the Fili; for it was they who probably composed and certainly kept in memory all those stories of the old kings and those fine romances which delight us even in these days; it is from them that we learn the stories of Cuchulain and of Finn, and of the brave deeds of our forefathers; and how they lived, and what they thought and felt and believed. If it had not been for the professional poet, who was obliged to recite these tales, they would all have been forgotten. The Ollamh was obliged to be able to recite at any moment any of the three hundred and fifty stories which it was his business to know. We have lists of these old stories entered in the books in which the monks and scribes afterwards wrote down all the tales they could get. But many books have been lost or destroyed, so that we have only part of the stories left. There are three or four famous old books, all written by hand, which contain collections of these stories, besides other things. One is called the *Leabhar na h-Uidhre*, or Book of the Dun Cow, because it was written on brown parchment made out of the skin of St. Ciaran's favourite cow;

it was written at his monastery at Clonmacnois in the twelfth century. It is now carefully kept in the Royal Irish Academy. This is one of the most valuable books in Ireland. Another is called the Book of Leinster; it was written down about sixty years later. It was compiled by a bishop of Kildare for King Dermot mac Morrogh, the King of Leinster who invited Strongbow to bring over the Normans to Ireland, and that is how it got its name. There are a great number of stories in it, too, and it is kept in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin. Besides the stories, many of the poems of the Filidh are preserved in these big books; and what is more interesting still, we have yet some of the lesson-books from which they taught a knowledge of poetry to their pupils, with examples of the different kinds of verse. These examples show us how difficult it must have been to learn the three hundred and fifty kinds of versification which the Ollamh had to acquire and teach, for they are very intricate and puzzling indeed, much more difficult than any poetry we have nowadays. The poetry of the bards was much simpler, and was often sung to the harp, as Carolan composed and sang in later days. They wandered from house to house, and sang the praises of those who treated them with hospitality.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE DRUIDS AND THEIR TEACHING.

Authorities:—As before, with "The Voyage of Bran," by Kuno Meyer and Alfred Nutt; "Cormac's Glossary," edited by Dr. Whitley Stokes, and Old Romances.

#### Druidical Rites.

It would seem that both the *Filé* and the Druid were supposed to have a knowledge of future events, and both sought this foreknowledge by means of incantations, and in dreams seen after certain magical rites had been performed. On all sorts of occasions it was customary to resort to the soothsayers to find out whether the time for taking a matter in hand was propitious or not. On beginning a battle, or going a journey, or setting out on a raid, the magician or druid was consulted. There was a great belief in lucky and unlucky days and moments: for instance, the kings of Ulster would not begin a battle until sunrise, because they thought that to fight without the sun, even if it were sufficiently light, was unlucky. When St. Patrick came to Erin, he is said to have examined into all these magical rites. Some he abolished, because they were performed in connection with offerings to idols; but others, which were not harmful, he allowed to continue.

But in one homily, or sermon, belonging to Christian times, it is said that the Irish had "gone back to all their old sins except the worship of idols;" and certainly we find them consulting Druids and using magical arts far into Christian times. The Druids, besides being magicians and soothsayers, were medicine-men, who cured diseases by their knowledge of herbs and plants. They do not seem to have been sacrificing priests in Ireland, as we know that they were in Britain and Gaul; yet we find that it was the Druids who opposed St. Patrick more stoutly than any others. They would seem to have been teachers of the pagan beliefs, for it is recorded of Cormac mac Airt, who is said to have become a Christian long before St. Patrick came to Ireland, that he had abandoned the teaching of the Druids, for which they took their revenge by making him choke himself with a salmon-bone. We know a great deal more about the teaching of the Druids in Britain and Gaul than we do about their teaching in Ireland, and they would seem to have had a much more elaborate system of belief and a more precise ritual in these countries than was practised by the Druids of Ireland.

### Pagan Beliefs.

Our chief difficulty in determining precisely the nature of the beliefs of the early Irish in the days of paganism arises from the want of knowledge as

to how much of what is written down in the tales was really held as part of their belief, and how much was a sort of legend to them, as it is to us. For if in future ages, when our race is dead and gone, some new race were by accident to find our books of fairy-tales, they might think that we believed that people could be turned into animals, and that animals talked like human beings, and many other things that we only set down as myths. So when we read in the old Irish romances that some of the heroes were first gods, and were born again as men and women, or that the gods had human children, or that some who belonged to the race of the gods were transformed into insects or animals, or that human beings could go away into the unseen world of the gods, and return again to earth, it is not easy to tell whether they really believed these things, or whether they looked upon them just as fairy-tales, as we now do. Most of the stories of this kind are connected with the old inhabitants of whom we spoke, and especially with the Tuatha Dé Danann, who were always supposed to possess magical powers, and were never supposed to die. They were thought to re-appear as human beings, or to be re-born in the form of men and women or of animals and even insects; and they were always supposed to be interested in the affairs of men and to take part in them. Later on, in Christian times, they were thought of as invisible hosts, living beneath the hills, who sometimes made them-

selves visible to men; but I think that they looked on most of these legends simply as myths, which they only half-believed, but which were too beautiful to lose. At all events, I do not think that we can build on these stories any exact knowledge of the pagan beliefs. We only know from them that they thought such things possible to imagine.

One thing that is certain is that they worshipped the elements: the earth, the sun, and the wind, and when they wanted to make a very solemn oath, it was by these things that they swore; they believed that to break such an oath was to call down the vengeance of these elements upon themselves. A king named Laegaire (Laery) once pledged himself by the elements that he would never again impose a tax upon the men of Leinster; he broke his oath, and it was believed that the elements put him to death in revenge: that "the earth swallowed him, the sun scorched him, and the wind (which I suppose here means his breath) passed away from him." The people seem also to have believed in gods specially attached to and watching over their own tribes, for we often hear of them taking an oath "by the gods of their tribe and people."

How long and how much they worshipped idols it is also difficult to know, but it is certain that they did so in the time of St. Patrick, for we read of him destroying the idols and making the people give them up. They also seem at that time to have made sacrifices to



idols, for these he also put a stop to. He is especially said to have destroyed the great idol called the Cromm Cruach, which stood on a plain called Magh Slecht or the Plain of Adoration, in Co. Cavan. It had twelve lesser idols (probably pillar stones) round it, and all of them were broken down by St. Patrick. The chief worship of this idol seems to have taken place at the pagan festival of Samhain (Sowan), which was afterwards turned by the Christian teachers into Hallowe'en. The High-King of Ireland and multitudes of people used to assemble to worship the idol, and it would seem that human sacrifices were offered to it. An old poem describes the worship of this idol. Here is part of it :

\* He was their god,  
 The withered Cromm with many mists,  
 To him without glory,  
 They would kill their piteous wretched offspring,  
 With much wailing and peril,  
 To pour their blood around Cromm Cruach.

Milk and corn,  
 They would ask from him speedily,  
 In return for one-third of their healthy issue,  
 Great was the horror and the fear of him.  
 To him,  
 Noble Gaels would prostrate themselves . . . . . ,

\* "Dinnsenchus of Magh Slecht," Voyage of Eran, Kuno

This terrible golden idol, who demanded the sacrifice of a third of the healthy, well-born children, seems to have been a god who watched over agricultural operations, for it was corn and milk that was asked from him. Perhaps this "Bent One of the Mound," as his name suggests, represented winter, withered and "with many mists" around his head.

It is said that the people beat their palms and pounded their bodies before him, and one of the Kings of Ireland was mysteriously stricken with death when worshipping before him. There also seem to have been human sacrifices offered at the Fair of Tailte, for we read that St. Patrick forbade the burning of the first-born. If such horrible rites were practised, it was well indeed that Christianity came early to Ireland.

It is most probable that the curious games still played in Ireland at Hallowe'en are a relic of pagan customs practised at Samhain. They are not known out of Ireland.

There is no proof at all that the pagan Irish believed in a life after death. Nor did they much care for the

Meyer and Alfred Nutt, Vol. ii., appendix; *Tripartite Life of St. Patrick*, ed. Whitley Stokes, p. 91.

The above examples are the only instances as yet found of the offering of human sacrifice in Ireland. It is quite possible that they are inventions of the Christian scribe who wrote the account. This is the opinion of Dr. P. W. Joyce in his recently published "*Social History of Ancient Ireland*," Vol. I., chap. ix., § 5.

Christian heaven about which St. Patrick preached. They thought it very sad and grave and quiet, not suited to fierce warriors, and there are remaining a large number of poems, called Ossianic Poems, in which Oisín, the son of Finn, who was a poet, is represented as arguing with St. Patrick about his teaching. He says that the combats, and feasts, and hunting to which the Fianna were accustomed were far finer things than fasting and prayers and psalm-singing, and that the wide hospitality of Finn was better than the rigorous life of a Christian monk. No doubt these poems really express the feeling of many of the people to whom the missionaries taught a new way of life, and a new ideal.

There is one beautiful idea that many of their stories tell of about which we must say a word, though I think it was rather a lovely legend to them than an actual belief. They thought that some favored mortals could go away into a fairy-land of palaces and music, of beautiful men and women, and could afterwards come back again to earth and go on with their natural life. This land was called Tír na n-Og or the Land of Youth, because no one there ever grew old; or sometimes Magh Mell, the Plain of Pleasures, because it was so sweet and rich. It lay far away across the western sea, in the setting of the sun, or sometimes it was thought of as under the lakes, or in the home of the Sea-god, Manannan mac Lir. Sometimes passengers went thither by boat, sometimes on a magic steed whose feet

never touched the earth. Generally they were tempted away by a lovely maiden, who held out to them an apple-branch, and it was impossible to refuse to go, for the mortal grew sick and weak, and lost his care for the things of life in his longing for the unseen world. In that land there was neither age, nor sickness, nor any grief or pain, and all things were fair and lovely, and all were young and full of happiness and songs and love; a single apple would suffice for food for a hundred years, and it tasted of every delicious flavour that the heart of man could conceive; and there was ale and mead in abundance. There apple-trees bloomed and sweet birds sang, and there was music all day long, and men took no note of time, for they grew never old or weary.

Connla of the Golden Hair went there, and Teigue, son of Cian, for the lovely maiden beckoned to them; and Cuchulain, to speak with Fand, Manannan's Queen. And Oisín went, and he stayed three hundred years, and they seemed to him but as one day; and when he came back to earth again, his old companions, the chieftains of the Fianna, were dead and gone, and their raths and their forts covered with green grass and brambles. The memory of them had disappeared from among men, and another race, feebler and weaker, who knew not the names of Finn, and Oisín and Oscur, was in their place. Oisín told his tale to Patrick, and then he died, an old man, worn and feeble, of over three hundred years of age.



## CHAPTER IX.

### PUBLIC ASSEMBLIES.

Authorities:—"The Book of Rights," edited by O'Donovan for the Celtic Society (1847). Tract on the Fair of Carmen, edited by O'Curry, Mans. Cust. iii., pp. 523-547, appendix. Dr. Petrie's History and Antiquities of Tara Hill (Trans. R. Irish Academy, vol. xviii., part ii., 1839).

#### Divisions of the Year.

THE pagan Irish divided the year, as we do to-day, into four seasons, Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter, and each season began on a definite day, and was called by a special name. Two of these names are probably familiar to you: Bel-tine (Bealtaine) or the first of May, the beginning of summer; and Samhain (Sowan) the first of November, the beginning of winter, changed by the Christian teachers into Hallowe'en. The beginning of spring was called Oimeic, or the first milk of the sheep, afterwards called St. Briget's day; and the beginning of autumn Lughnasadh, because the games of the god Lugh were then held. The name of Beltine or Bealtaine is explained by the old writers to mean the fire of the god Bel, or the lucky fires between which on that day the druids used to drive the cattle, as a sort of offering to the god. This ceremony was supposed to keep them from disease during the rest of the year.

These fires were afterwards lighted on Midsummer day, or St. John's Eve, on which day bonfires are still often lighted; it is supposed that they were transferred to that day by St. Patrick. Oimelc or St. Briget's Day is the first of February, and Lughnasadh or Lammas the first of August.

### **Public Assemblies.**

— Now all these days were, in Ireland, the occasion of ceremonials of a semi-religious kind. They were specially marked as the times at which the chief public assemblies were held in different parts of the kingdom. The meetings were held once a year or once in three years, partly as fairs and markets, partly for the transaction of the public business of the tribe or kingdom, and partly as places of holiday, where horse-racing, and feats of strength, and games of various kinds were carried on. These frequent assemblies were not only very pleasant outings, but they no doubt brought the members of the clan together and made them feel their unity. The most important of all these meetings was the Feis of Tara, which took place at Samhain every third year at the beginning, but more irregularly in later times. Often in troubled years it did not meet for a long time together; and it was a sign that the country was peaceful and prosperous if it met regularly. At it all the married men of a certain rank assembled from over the whole country, and the Feis lasted for seven or

more days. It was established by a king named Ollamh Fodla, who was both wise and great, and whose desire it was to settle the laws of the kingdom on a firm foundation. Tara, the palace of the High-King where the Feis took place is in Co. Meath, about an hour's journey from Dublin. The Feis began with a splendid public banquet in the Mead-Hall or Banqueting Hall, over which the king presided in person. Then the public transactions of the kingdom were gone into and discussed, the laws recited, the genealogies carefully examined and corrected, and other official business disposed of; when all this was done, the people gave themselves up to feasting and amusements, particularly to horse-racing, of which the Irish have been fond from the earliest times, and to buying and selling at the fair. The Feis was divided into two chief parts: the *Dal* or *airecht* for political, legislative and judicial affairs and for the making and proclamation of laws and treaties; and the *aenach*, or fair, for commerce and pleasure. At these great central markets foreigners and farmers from various parts brought their wares and cattle to sell; here, too, the chief or king filled up the ranks of his forces, and military expeditions were planned and prepared for; here women-slaves were purchased or hired for the year. Here anyone, even the chiefs or kings, who had a cause of complaint brought it before the assembly, and it was discussed and judgment given by the Brehons, with the assent of all present. Even King

Cormac mac Airt appealed at the Feis of Uisnech against the warrior who had put out his eye, and thus rendered him unfit to reign as Ard-Righ of Tara.

— The other fairs of Uisnech, of Taillte, of Emain Macha, of Cruachan, and of Carmen, were all smaller gatherings, intended for their own provinces, but they were in all respects, except in their importance and solemnity, copied from the Feis of Tara. Some were annual, some held only once in three years. Here the chief men of each tribe met one another, and got to know each other as they could not otherwise have done; and there is no doubt that these fairs must have been much looked forward to. Women attended some of them. At the fair of Carmen, held in Leinster once in three years at Lughnasadh, they pleaded their causes before a separate court, into which the men might not enter; nor might they go into the men's assembly. They sat apart on the "slope of the embroidering women," doing the beautiful handiwork for which the Irish girls were famed. The cooking was done on one side of the hill, the horse-racing on another, while the market-place was divided into three portions, one for the live stock, one for the sale of food, and the third for the display of foreign goods, ornaments, and articles of dress.

As in Greece, the fairs were originally established on the site of ancient cemeteries, and originated in funeral games. It was considered of ill omen to the province, if the Feis was on any occasion omitted.



### The Feis of Tara.

Let us imagine for a moment that we are attending the Triennial Feis of Tara. We see in the distance the green hill, now covered with low raths, then with a large group of buildings, some of them built of wicker-work, some of wood; probably none were of stone or brick. The Forradh or Place of Assembly occupies a large open space, and on it the people are gathering in crowds for the announcement of the laws, if it is one of the first days of the Feis, or for horse-racing, markets, or games, if the Feis is in full swing. The place is alive with chatter, with the lowing of oxen, and the sounds of pipes, fiddles, bone-men, tube-players, and chorus-singers, all making themselves heard as well as they can, above the shouts of the circle watching the races, and the chaffering of the host of merchants from all countries, who are, in various tongues, bartering their goods. Jugglers are telling fortunes, buffoons in painted masks are rushing through the crowds, champions are performing all sorts of feats with weapons, balls and apples, which they throw up into the air, and catch with wonderful dexterity. The Forradh is certainly the liveliest place on Tara hill this day.

Some things we would wish away, especially the market where the women-slaves are being bought and sold to new masters, whom they will serve at all events for a year, when they may be sold again.

### Tara.

Tara was built so long ago that no one at the Feis could perhaps have told when the first raths were erected, but its more splendid buildings date from the reign of the good king Cormac mac Airt, who did so much for Ireland, and who reigned from 227-266 A.D. The great oval, still in our day to be seen on the Hill, contained within it the King's Rath and the Forradh : it is 853 feet across. Close beside the King's Rath, forming part of the same enclosure, stood the House of Cormac, and behind it further to the North stood the most striking building on the hill, the Banqueting-Hall or " Mead-Hall " where the feasts and kingly convocations were held. To the west of it stood the beautiful little house or Grianán, built by Cormac for his fair but fickle daughter, Grainne, and it was here that Finn mac Cumhall came to ask her as his wife, and from here that she ran away with Diarmuid (Dermot), to take refuge in the woods and caves of the west of Ireland. Rath Laegaire (Laery), where the last of the pagan kings was buried, standing up in full armour facing his old enemies from Leinster, is to the south; while the Rath of the Synods, near the King's Rath, is later, and carries us on into Christian times. A sad little building was the House of the Hostages, where the young princes were held in durance as security for the fidelity of their parents and tribes.

Let us look again at the Banqueting-Hall, the

Teach Miodchuarta or Mead-Hall as it was called, on account of the quantities of mead drunk at the feasts. The ruins are 759 feet long, and 46 feet wide, but formerly the hall was wider. It was built of wood, with seven doors down the long walls on either side. The walls were panelled up to the roof, which was lofty in the centre, with a roof-beam running from end to end, and sloped down to the walls at the sides. All down its length were two rows of pillars which divided it into five long aisles. A low panelling ran between the pillars, and behind the panelling, between the outer row of pillars and the wall, were the seats for the chief guests, a little raised above the level of the floor and divided into compartments. There seem to have been fifteen compartments in these upper aisles on each side, each holding a number of people, and each allotted to a special rank or office among the guests. The centre was broken up into a large hall inside the end door, where the provisions were brought in, and seats for the minor ranks, the king's mariners, artisans, smiths, jugglers, fools, etc. Three fires at equal distances occupied the centre, in which was also a huge vat for the ale or mead, and a great lamp or chandelier to light the hall. The servants occupied the lower end of the hall, and distributed the food from the central space; they sometimes, if not always, seem to have done the cooking on the fires in the room, for we have an old plan of Tara Hall, with a cook standing basting the meat on a spit beside the fire.



In one of the central compartments near the upper end of the hall, sat the King, surrounded by his chiefs, and landowners, his judges or Brehons, his Druids or soothsayers, his Fili or poets, his Historians and learned men, his champions and trumpeters. Before him on the pillar hung a silver gong which he struck to command silence.

The King on state occasions was clad in a white tunic, with a torque or twisted collar of gold. Over this he wore a crimson or purple cloak fastened by a magnificent inlaid brooch; his buckler was fastened with gold and silver clasps, and chased with animals and huntsmen in gold. Here is a description of Cormac mac Airt, from the Book of Ballymote, taking his seat at the Assembly of Tara: "Beautiful was the appearance of Cormac in that assembly, flowing and slightly curling was his golden hair. A red buckler upon him with stars and animals of gold thereon and fastenings of silver. A crimson cloak in wide descending folds around him, fastened at his neck with precious stones. A torque of gold round his neck. A white shirt with a full collar upon him, intertwined with red gold thread. A giridle of gold, inlaid with precious stones, around him. Two wonderful shoes of gold, with golden loops, about the feet. Two spears with golden sockets in his hands, with rivets of red bronze. He himself besides was graceful and beautiful of form, without blemish or reproach." The quantity of gold ornaments mentioned



in such descriptions cannot be merely imaginary. The immense number and beauty of the Irish gold ornaments found shows that they must have been commonly worn by persons of rank; they greatly exceed in number and delicacy of chasing those found in Great Britain.

As soon as the King and his chiefs were seated, the warriors and other ranks marched in by the different doors, and took their allotted places. Each knew his exact seat, for the whole matter was precisely regulated according to rank, and they were most particular about this. As they entered, the warriors hung up their weapons on racks along the walls. The banquet with which the Feis of Tara opened must have been a splendid affair.

But besides this feast, it was, as we have said, the custom for the greater nobles to entertain the king or chief in their own houses from time to time.

Bricriu of the envenomed tongue held such a feast for Conor mac Nessa and for all the men of Ulster. The preparation of the feast took a whole year. For the entertainment of his guests a spacious house was built by him. He erected it in Dun Rury after the likeness of the Red Branch House at Emain. The old tale called "The Feast of Bricriu" tells us that it surpassed all the buildings of that period in artistic design, and in beauty of architecture; its pillars and frontings were splendid and costly, its carving and lintel-work famed for magnificence.

Its banqueting-hall was on the plan of Tara's Mead-Hall, having nine compartments from fire to wall, each wainscoting of bronze thirty feet high, overlaid with gold. In the fore part of the palace was a royal couch for Conor high above those of the whole house. It was set with carbuncles and other precious stones which shone with a lustre as of gold and of silver, radiant with every hue, making night bright as day. Around it were placed the twelve couches of the twelve heroes of Ulster. The workmanship was worthy of the material of the edifice. It took a waggon team to carry each beam, and the strength of seven Ulster men to fix each pole, while thirty of the chief artificers of Erin were employed on its erection and arrangement.

### **The Champion's Portion.**

- These feasts were often far from peaceful. Disputes frequently arose out of the difficult question of precedence. If a champion or noble were not given his exact place in the order of his rank, there was sure to be a disturbance. In the seating of ordinary people these things were so well understood that it was difficult to make a mistake, but in the case of warriors and champions it was different, for the champions of the various provinces claimed the place of honour against each other, and even in the same province it was often hard to know, out of several valiant warriors, which ranked highest. There was at each feast what was called the

“Champion’s Portion,” generally a splendid boar, roasted whole. It was the privilege of the most valiant to carve the boar, and this honour was much coveted. Often a friendly banquet broke out into a bloody feud, and the combatants did not separate without fighting. When a dispute arose, the warriors were called upon to recite their deeds, and whoever could show that he had killed the most enemies was considered to have proved himself the best champion.

A quarrel of this kind once arose in Leinster at the “Bruighen” or Hospitable House of Mac Datho. Mac Datho possessed a splendid hound, and Maive, Queen of Connaught, who always liked to have the best of everything, desired to have the hound for herself. The chiefs of Ulster with King Conor at their head also wished for the hound, but Mac Datho did not wish to give the dog to anyone. But he was afraid to offend such powerful princes as Conor and Maive, and when they pressed him, he thought of a plan to get out of the difficulty by setting Ulster and Connaught quarrelling together, so that neither of them should get the hound. He sent to invite the chiefs of both provinces to come to a feast at his house, on the pretence that he would then arrange who should have the dog. When they were come he made a splendid banquet for them, and for the Champion’s Portion he killed an immense boar, which he had fed up for seven years. No sooner had the feast begun, than a dispute arose as to who should

have the right to carve the Champion's Portion. This was just what Mac Datho wanted. He was delighted to see the heroes getting more and more angry as they began one after another to relate their exploits, each one telling a more wonderful tale than the last man of the number of foes that he had killed. At last it seemed proved that the most famous feats of valour had been performed by a warrior from Connaught, named Cet mac Magach, and amid cries of fury from the Ulstermen, he sat him down triumphantly before the boar. Just as he was about to begin to carve, the door was suddenly flung open, and Conall the Victorious, the best warrior in Ulster next to Cuchulain, strode into the hall. A great shout of welcome went up from the Ulstermen, and King Conor threw his helmet from his head and shook himself for joy. With one spring, Conall was on the floor of the house. "We are pleased," he said looking at the boar, "that our champion's portion stands ready for us. Who divides for you?" "It is Cet mac Magach who divides," cried the men of Connaught proudly, "for it is he who has gained the championship"; and the men of Ulster said sorrowfully, "It is Cet mac Magach indeed."

"Is it true that thou art dividing the boar?" said Conall to Cet. "It is true," he said. "Verily our meeting together will show the truth of that, and our parting will also show it," said Conall; "and tales will be told of the deeds done between us two men in



this house to-night, by them who stand by and witness them. Get up from the boar, O Cet!" "What brings you here," said Cet angrily, "disputing my rights with me?" "Do you desire a combat with me, O Cet?" said Conall; "gladly will I give you contest and combat: for not a day of my life has passed without a conflict with a Connaught man or without plundering in their territories, and never have I laid me down to sleep at night, save with the head of a Connaughtman under my knee." "That is true," said Cet slowly, "thou art a better warrior than I. If, however, my brother Anluan were here to-night, thou wouldst have met thy match, and for every contest made by thee he would have had a better one to tell. It is a pity he is not in this house to-night." "He is here," said Conall, and he drew the head of Anluan from his belt and flung it on the table. Then he sat himself down before the champion's portion, and Cet gave up the place to him. But the men of Connaught were so angry that they pelted Conall with stones, and the Ulstermen had to cover him with their shields.\*

Fighting was the great pride of the men, and it will show you what a warlike age it was, and what a dangerous age to live in, that a good warrior could declare with pride that he never went to rest without having

\* "The Story of Mac Datho's Pig and Hound," edited by Prof. Kuno Meyer, *Hibernica Minora*, in *Anec.: Oxon., Mediæval and Modern Series*.

slain an enemy. The warriors used, as we have just seen, to carry the heads of their enemies in their belts, and sometimes brought them to the feasts to prove their bravery; or they brought trophies of the men they had slain. In the palace of Emain Macha (near Armagh) there was a separate hall for these trophies. The northern warriors were particularly fierce and warlike, so much so that they were not permitted to bring their weapons into the banqueting hall as they did at Tara, because they were so ready to spring to arms; they had to leave them in a special hall erected for that purpose.

## CHAPTER X.

### DWELLINGS IN ANCIENT IRELAND.

Authorities:—Paper "On the Remains of Ancient Stone-built Forts, etc., West of Dingle, Co. Kerry," by Mr. Du Noyer (*Archæological Journal* for March, 1856, vol. xv. p. i.), Monograph on "An ancient settlement in the South-west of the Barony of Corkaguiney, Co Kerry," by R. A. Stuart Macalister (*Trans. R. Irish Academy*, vol. xxxi., Part vii., 1899). O'Curry's *Mans Cust.*, and *Old Romances*.

#### Houses of the People.

IT will help us to realise the life of the time, if we describe the houses in which the inhabitants lived. We have already said something about the greatest dwelling in the land, the Palace of Tara, and we will now speak of the dwellings of the poor and of the upper classes of farmers.

Just as there are differences to-day between the houses of the poor and the rich, so there were in olden times. The poor lived in a very simple fashion indeed: their little huts were built of wood and wattle or of stone, according to whether stone or wood were most plentiful in the neighbourhood. Those people who lived in settlements in the clearings of the forests naturally made themselves dwellings out of stakes of wood. These huts were round, and the stakes were

closely twisted in and out with osiers, until they were quite waterproof, and thatched. They were sometimes covered with white lime outside to make them warm and bright. They had one door, but probably no window and no chimney, only a hole in the roof at which the smoke could go out. The Romans have pictured on some of their monuments huts they saw in Gaul (France), and no doubt the Irish huts were very similar. Even the monasteries, such as Clonard and Clonmacnois, when they were first erected, were built of wattled huts. Of course these feeble buildings could not last long, so that we have none of them left. But in Kerry and in some other parts of the west of Ireland, there are some very old stone huts still remaining. They are probably not older than the introduction of Christianity, but they must have been built on much the same plan as those the ancestors of the builders were accustomed to occupy. It is certain that they belonged to times when raids and sudden descents of the enemy were frequent, for they are often surrounded by strong walls. They are built in groups within an encircling wall for defence, and such a group is called a Cathair. These huts are very curious; they are called Cloghans or sometimes "bee-hive huts" because their shape is like that of a bee-hive. The surrounding wall is usually of immense thickness. Through this wall there was a passage leading into the enclosure, originally closed by a strong door.



One of these settlements, near Dingle, in Co. Kerry, was described by a visitor about forty or fifty years ago, who made a drawing of it as it then was. But I am sorry to say that since then most of the wall and some of the little houses have been destroyed. The people do not know or care about them, and the stones have been carried away to make sheep-pens. This is very sad, for they form one of the most interesting groups of early buildings in Ireland. There were five huts or Cloghans standing when the picture was taken, three perfect, and two without their roofs, and there were the remains of several more in the enclosure. The huts have very thick walls, so thick that there are sleeping-places in them into which a lad can creep and lie down flat. But the old inhabitants must have been a low-sized people, for these sleeping-places are short for an ordinary man now. The Cloghans are built of sloping stones, with no mortar to fix them together, but so beautifully laid one over the other that they have lasted for hundreds of years. The stones are so laid that the rain runs off outside and does not penetrate the walls. At the top is the small hole which serves both for chimney and window. The doors are nicely built of large flat upright stones, with a large stone for lintel, but they also are not of any great height. Several of these huts may have been used for the same family, for we find that when one hut was not large enough for a family, instead of building a larger one, which they did

not know how to do, they added new Cloghans. They were generally close together, and united by passages. In some of the houses we find a square hole in the floor, evidently for a cooking-stove. The kitchen thus seems to have been separate from the living-hut, and the house of the women was generally separate also. Outside the surrounding wall of this group there is a little chamber, concealed in the thickness of the wall, and looking out over Dingle Bay. In it a watchman used to sit, to see if any enemy were approaching, in order to give warning to those within the "Cathair," or fortified enclosure. In the old stories, we often hear of these watchmen, who were bound to challenge any passer-by and find out who he was and what he wanted, before letting him enter the door. The surrounding wall, besides being of great thickness, was built of massive stones, so that when the heavy stone door was shut it must have been very difficult to effect an entrance. In the wall, which is 18 feet thick, there are secret passages, either for storing goods, or for hiding-places. A little hut near the entrance with pointed roof seems to have been a guard-room, or hut for soldiers.\*

### **Houses of Hospitality.**

We will now speak of the houses of the large farmers,

\* Mr. Du Noyer has mistaken the name of this fort which he calls 'Cahair-na-mac-tirech,' "The Stone Fort of the Wolves." It is usually known as Cathair Connor, and is in the townland of Glen Fahan, Corkaguiney.

or land-owners, who had very different sort of dwellings. The great houses of which we hear most were the six famous "Houses of Hospitality" of which I spoke to you before. There was one at Tallaght, near Dublin, another at Lusk, a few miles north of Dublin, and others in different parts of the country. Each was owned by a Brughfer, who was the steward of the chief or king, and gathered the yearly revenues from the whole tribe. He was generally a very wealthy man, and he would need to have been so, for it was his duty to entertain the chief and all his retinue when he passed through his territory. It was the pride of the different Brughfers to see who could longest support the burden of entertaining the king. When the chief or king travelled on ordinary occasions, he was only permitted to take twelve men with him, because the people found they could not support the entertainment of such hosts of followers; but on state progresses, which the kings seem to have been very fond of making, they travelled with their whole establishment of soldiers, judges, harpers, poets, pipe and horn players, jugglers and fools, besides their servants. On these state occasions the Brughfer with whom he stayed had to spend weeks in preparing for his coming; sometimes he had to even build a new house, if his own were not large enough; and all the inhabitants were forced to bring in supplies of milk, corn, butter, honey, cows and sheep, pigs, and all sorts of provisions. This became

a great tax on the poor, but the Bruighfer made a good thing out of it, for as it was his office to collect the king's tributes, which were not paid in money, but, as we have said, in kind, he could oblige them to bring whatever he wished. The house of the Bruighfer was supposed to be a model for the whole tribe of what a house ought to be, and how it ought to be kept; and he was heavily fined if it were not always in perfect order. A very considerable piece of land belonged to him all round his house, but it was never closed, as the other houses of which we have been speaking were, for he was bound to keep open house for all travellers, whoever they might be. The Bruighen (Breen), as his house was called, had four or six doors, with pathways leading up to them from every side, and they were bound to be open night and day. There were, however, severe punishments inflicted on anyone who stole out of the house or yard. When the tributes had been brought in and the place was full of cattle, fowls, and all sorts of produce, it must have been rather a temptation to wayfarers, but these houses were well guarded by warriors, who were always ready to pursue any offender. The establishment consisted of a large group of buildings: the dwelling house, with a large room at the back for sleeping in or for servants; a mill, a kiln, a baking-house, a house for the women, besides pens for sheep, cow-houses, and pig-sties. The owner was obliged to keep at least one good riding-horse, besides



a certain number of cattle; these he sometimes lent out to the small farmers for a settled payment. He generally had a well in the centre of his dwelling; but in the Bruighen Dá Derga, at Tallaght, of which we shall learn more presently, the River Dodder ran through the court, so that there always was a supply of fresh water. Outside was a huge vat, or often two, one for milk, and one for ale or mead, and the Bruighfer was obliged to possess one pot large enough to cook a whole hog at a time, for state occasions. Round the house or houses was a garden, in which apple and other fruit trees, onions, and garden produce were grown. The dairy was furnished with all that was needed to make butter, and fresh rushes had to be constantly strewn on the floors, even of the store-houses. A huge candle, standing on a pedestal, was to be kept burning all night, to guide the wayfarers. Round the house, at increasing distances, were three high raths or banks of earth, and between them were grassy lawns, where the young men used to exercise themselves in sports and feats of arms, and where the ladies sat or walked to take the air. There was always a large family living in a Bruighen, for the master used to invite the daughters of the smaller farmers to come and live with his daughters, that they might be trained by them in all sorts of useful arts: butter-making, kneading bread, grinding corn (though this was considered menial work and was generally done by slaves); needle-work and embroidery,

in which the Irish ladies were very expert; singing, and last but not least, gentle ways of speaking and acting towards everyone. This was a very good plan, and very pleasant for the girls all living together and learning to be useful; very good, too, for the richer ladies to have to teach them, so that all learned these things together. No one was allowed to be idle.

### **Life in a "Bruighen."**

I will tell you a story about these girls, and the hero Cuchulain, of whom we have spoken before, which will illustrate their way of life. Cuchulain had from his childhood been famous for his courage and beauty, for his noble behaviour and his manliness. When he was grown up all his friends in Ulster, where he lived, wished to find for him a suitable wife, but though they sought through the length and breadth of Ireland, they could not find any woman whom Cuchulain cared to woo. Then he said that he would go himself and find a wife, for he had heard of the beauty and accomplishments of Emer, the daughter of Forgall the Wily, a Bruighfer who lived at Lusk, near Malahide. So he had his chariot made ready, and dressed himself in his goodliest raiment, and set forth with his charioteer, flying along the plains of Meath from Dundalk, then called Dun-Dalgan, where he lived, to Lusk. It was the swiftest chariot in Erin, and came bounding along, the hoofs of the horses tearing up the sod, so that it

seemed as though a flock of birds were following them, while sparks as of fire, flew from their foaming jaws. One horse was grey, the other jet-black, and they were held well in hand by the charioteer, Laegh, a tall freckled man who stood before his master in the chariot. His bright red hair was held back by a fillet or band of bronze, and by two little cups of gold on each side of the head, in which the hair was confined. The daughters of Forgall were sitting in the playing-field in front of the house when Cuchulain drew near. Around Emer were her foster-sisters, the daughters of the neighbouring farmers, to whom she was teaching fine embroidery and needle-work. Emer was the only woman in Erin whom Cuchulain would deign to woo. For she had the six womanly gifts: the gift of modest behaviour, the gift of singing, the gift of sweet speech, the gift of beauty, the gift of wisdom, and the gift of needle-work, and Cuchulain had said that he would woo no maiden but she who was his equal in age and race and feature, and who was wise and gentle, and skilled in needlework. While Emer and her maidens were sitting on the bench before the door of the house, they heard coming towards them the clatter of horses' hoofs, the creaking of the chariot and the rattle of the weapons. "Go," said Emer to her girls, "and see what is coming towards us." Then Fiall, her sister, ran to the top of the rath, and she cried that a noble chariot of fine wood with wicker sides, and frame of copper, was approach-



ing; and within it a sad dark man, comliest of the men of Erin. Around him, she said, was a beautiful crimson cloak, fastened on the breast with a brooch of inlaid gold, over a white shirt interwoven with flaming gold. A crimson shield with rim of silver was on his shoulder, and in his hand a golden-hilted sword. Hardly had she finished describing him, when Cuchulain arrived at the place, and drawing up before the maidens he wished a blessing to them. Emer lifted up her lovely face and recognised Cuchulain, and here is her sweet greeting: "May God make smooth the path before you," she said. "And you," he said, "may you be safe from every harm." Then they talk a long time to each other in a mystic speech, understood only by the learned; they did not want the maidens to understand, for fear they should repeat everything to Forgall the Wily, and he should send away Cuchulain. Emer says she is not anxious to be married, and that it is not the custom in Ireland for the younger daughter to marry before the elder, so she recommends him to marry her elder sister, who is, she says, much cleverer than she is at needle-work. But Cuchulain, who is delighted that she can talk to him so easily in the secret language of the bards, says he will have none but herself as his wife. Then she tells him that he must go away for a whole year, and learn many arts of warfare and feats of skill before she will marry him. If in a year's time he comes back a fully taught warrior, then she will go with him. So Cuchulain is forced to be content with this, and for a



whole year he goes away, and he perfects himself in all the arts of a champion before he returns to claim his bride. He had much difficulty in getting her even then, for Forgall had heard about it and he said he would not give his daughter to Cuchulain, and he set guards round his fortress to prevent him from seeing Emer. But Cuchulain persevered, and after another whole year spent in watching for his opportunity, he one day entered the dun or fort, and carried off Emer, fighting his way with her back to Dundalk against Forgall's troops. But Emer was worth fighting for and worth winning, for she was a noble woman, and a true wife to Cuchulain.\*

These houses, being all made of wood, and generally thatched, were in constant danger of being burned down, and in time of war the enemy often flung burning brands into the thatch or into the door, and destroyed the house and all who were in it. This is the way in which several of the six chief Bruighens were destroyed, and there are fine old stories about these destructions which I hope you will read some day. You will find one of these tales in Chapter XVI., which describes the burning of the Bruighen *Dá Derga* in the reign of *Conaire the Great*.

\* "The Wooing of Emer," English Trans. by Dr. Kuno Meyer, *Archæological Review*, vol. i., pp. 68-75, 150-155, etc., and "Cuchulain Saga," Eleanor Hull, pp. 57-84.

## CHAPTER XI.

### POSITION OF THE WOMEN.

Authorities:—Old Romances, with Adamnan's *Life of St. Columba* and the *Annals of Ireland*.

#### **Women.**

- THE position of women in Ireland, except as regards slavery, seems to have been fairly good. They seem to have had their own rights in property, and their own courts of appeal. That they were brought up in industrious habits we have already seen. But they probably did a large share of the agricultural work of a farm, as well as of the household tasks, such as churning, kneading bread, spinning and weaving, besides milking the cows and attending to the house. The lowest work was considered to be the grinding of corn, and this was done by the women-slaves.

#### **Women Warriors.**

- The women of ancient Ireland, however, did more than cook and weave, for they also took an active part in warfare. Not only so, but they seem to have had a high reputation as warriors, for in the old romances it is related that those champions who wished to exceed others and

perfect themselves in the arts of war and of single combat, went to the schools of the Amazons, Aiffe and Scathach in Alba, to study under these female warriors. We also read that the mother of Conor mac Nessa was a woman-warrior, and wandered through Ireland, executing deeds of valour. In the historical records we find women fighting beside their husbands, even queens with the kings. It seems to have been well recognised that women, as well as men, were liable to take part in warfare. This custom lasted until the end of the seventh century, when Adamnan, one of the abbots of Iona, secured their freedom from military service. It is said that one day the abbot was crossing the plain of Magh Breagh, carrying his old mother on his back. They came across two armies fighting, not at all an uncommon sight in that day. His mother saw two women tearing each other with iron reaping-hooks, with which one woman was dragging the other along. Shocked at the horrible sight, Adamnan's mother slipped from her son's arms to the ground, exclaiming, "I will go no further, till you have given me your promise, that you will not rest until you have endeavoured to free the women of Ireland from the terrible obligation of going into battle." Adamnan, moved by his mother's words, gave her his pledge, and at an assembly that was soon afterwards convened, he carried out his promise, and obtained the exemption of women for ever after. This act was rightly regarded as one of the greatest reforms — ever carried out in Ireland.

The wives of the chiefs and champions seem to have been very proud women, proud both of their husbands and of themselves. Like the champions, they were most particular to get the position owing to their rank, and to be treated with due respect. There is a famous old story called the "Women's War of Words," in which we find three of the greatest ladies of Erin quarrelling about the honour that ought to have been given to them on account of the position of their husbands. They were named Fedhlem-of-the-Fresh-Heart, wife of Leogaire (Laery) the Triumphant; Lendabair, wife of Conal Cernach; and Emer, wife of Cuchulain. They had been feasting in the House of Bricriu, an evil-minded man, who earned his nick-name, "Bricriu of the Envenomed Tongue," from his love of stirring up strife. After the banquet, the ladies, heated with the feast, and, I fear, also with the quantity of wine that they had drunk, left their husbands still sitting at the table, and retired with the bands of young girls who formed their train, to take the evening air outside. They were walking in the grassy space which lay between the raths or three banks of earth that encircled the building for protection. While they were scattered from each other, Bricriu approached each in turn, and poured into their ears extravagant praises of their beauty and of the valour and greatness of their husbands. "Emer of the fair hair is for thee no nick-name," were his words to Emer. "The Kings and



Princes of Erin contend for thee in jealous rivalry. As the sun surpasseth the stars of heaven, so far dost thou outshine the women of the whole world in form and shape and lineage, in youth and beauty and elegance, in good name and wisdom and address."

The ladies appear to have been very much excited by these fulsome praises, and were quite ready to do anything that Briciu suggested to them. His object was, to stir them up to quarrel as to which of them should have the most honourable place at table and be considered the first lady of Ulster. "Whichever of you," he said, "shall enter the house first on your return, shall hold the coveted place": but none of them knew that he had spoken to the others.

As soon as they could do so without attracting attention, they all turned to regain the hall, each intending to be the first to enter the door. On the farthest ridge from the house they walked slowly, with easy, graceful carriage, each one on her dignity, and pretending that there was no hurry at all. On the second ridge, their steps were shorter and quicker. But on the ridge nearest to the house, they made no attempt to retain a dignified air; they picked up their long flowing robes and ran towards the door, in such haste and confusion that the warriors within sprang to their arms thinking that a host of enemies had suddenly set upon them. The doorkeepers hastily shut to the

doors, but Emer, who got there first, put her back against one of them, and called to her husband to let her in. Immediately all the champions rushed to the doors, intending each to let in his own wife; and there was such a tumult and confusion, that the king had to strike his silver gong to enforce silence. Then each of the three ladies was permitted to speak in turn, and each proclaimed in verse the heroic deeds of her lord, and the claim she made to be considered the wife of the first warrior in Erin. Though these speeches seem to us conceited, and full of self-praise, they are fine pieces, full of spirit and pride in their husbands, and the verses so excited the three champions that they broke open the sides of the house to let their wives come in, and did so much damage that Bricriu, who had built a new house on purpose to entertain his guests, was well repaid for his foolish ways in having incited the quarrel. The place of honour was given to Emer, Cuchulain's faithful wife.\*

Emer was a good and true wife to Cuchulain, and others of the women of whom we hear in the tales were wise and faithful also; but some were bad women, like Blathnat, wife of Curoi mac Daire, who persuaded Cuchulain to kill her husband, and who herself came to a bad end; or false and heartless, like Grainne; or proud and selfish, like Maive. But on the whole, the Irish

\* "The Story of Bricriu's Feast," edited by Dr. George Henderson for the Irish Texts' Society, 1899, pp. 17-32.

women seem to have been true-hearted and ready to brave anything for their husbands, whom they seem to have greatly loved, and often they guarded and advised them and kept them safe from their enemies, as Deirdre watched over Naisi, and would have saved him from death, if he would have listened to her.

They seem when young to have been delightful girls, full of fun and gaiety and gentle ways, and they must have been charming in their homes. They were very clever and capable, too, and able to manage things, and keep the house well, and the farm and dairy. There was one strict rule about marriage, which was, that the elder sister was always married before the younger; this rule was so carefully observed, that even a king was not allowed to choose which sister he preferred. Once a king of Leinster wished to marry the younger daughter of Tuathal (Toole), a powerful Ard-Righ of Tara, who reigned about 130-160 A.D., but he was not permitted to do so, and out of this a great war arose, as we shall see in the later history. But sometimes a young man would have his own way about this, and marry the girl he liked, as Cuchulain married Emer, though she told him at once that she had a sister older than herself, whom he ought to woo instead of her. But he had to carry off Emer by main force, for her father would not give her to him.

### **Women Doctors.**

The women of ancient Ireland were very good nurses

and doctors, and it was better for them to nurse and heal the sick than to go to war themselves. We are accustomed to think that it is quite a novel thing to have women-doctors, but they were just as much believed in as the men physicians in early times, and had plenty to do. Some of their ways of doctoring seem very rough and curious to us now, but they had a knowledge of herbs and healing plants, and of bandaging wounds and cuts. For rheumatism and similar ailments, they used vapour-baths, something in principle like a Turkish bath, only very simply built. There are several of these curious vapour-baths remaining in Ireland. One is in a field near Assaroe in Donegal, but the people have forgotten about it, and few of them can tell where it is. It is quite perfect: a small stone structure, just large enough for a man to stand up inside. There is a low entrance, which was closed with a stone. A fire of wood was placed in a hole in the ground under the hut before the patient entered, and stones were heated on it; then water was poured on the stones, and the place became full of vapour, in which the patient stood.

The men and women of Ireland were very fond of bathing, and the first thing provided for a guest in any house, before he sat down to eat, was a bath. This was a very good and healthy custom. The baths were large tubs, and they were heated with hot stones thrown into the water, like the vapour-baths. They were prepared



by the women as a matter of course as soon as a guest entered a house.

### Grianans.

Let us see how the women lived in the house of a man of good position. You will remember that I told you that they had always a separate dwelling in the enclosure, and some of these houses of the wives and daughters of the great chiefs or large farmers seem to have been very beautiful and luxurious indeed. Grainne, Cormac's daughter, had a special house built and adorned for her by her father; but the "Grianán" that I am going to tell you about belonged to a princess named Crede, the daughter of a king of Kerry, in the South of Ireland. The ladies' dwellings were called "Grianáns," which means "Sunny Chambers," because they were always built in the sunniest part of the enclosure, high up, and were made as pretty and bright as possible. The chiefs used to like to visit the ladies in the Sunny Chamber when they were weary of their own stiffer rooms, and there they played chess or had music, or rested on the soft couches. Chess was a very favorite game among the Irish, and some of their chess-boards were of great elegance, made of silver, with little golden birds or ornaments at the corners. They carried the little men in bags made of metal thread, and never travelled without them. We even read of battles being fought on account of chess-boards or to settle disputes about a game.

I will now tell you how we know what Crede's Grianán was like. Crede was a great beauty and very rich, and many young princes wanted to marry her. One day the hero Finn mac Cool was seated on a hill in Co. Limerick, with his followers around him, when he saw a handsome young warrior coming quickly across the hill from the North. Finn called him and asked him where he was going in such a hurry. "To see Crede, daughter of Cairbre, King of Kerry," said the young warrior, whose name was Cael. Finn laughed and said, "It is no use going to see Crede, for she is the greatest flirt in all Ireland; all the young princes of Ireland have given her beautiful presents, but she will have none of them." "I know that," said Cael; "but do you know that there is one condition on which she will receive any one who wants to marry her?" "I have heard," said Finn, "that the only condition is that she must have a poem describing her house and her beautiful furniture, and that whoever writes the most excellent poem will win her hand." "That is true," said Cael, "and I have brought such a poem with me." "But how," said Finn, "did you know what her house was like?" "I have been to see Muirn, my old nurse," said Cael, "and she has described it to me; and if you will come along with me, we will go together and present it to her." "Very well," replied Finn, "we will go."

When they arrived at the house, Crede sent to ask

what they wanted. "It is Cael," answered Finn, "who has come to ask your hand in marriage." "Has he a poem for me?" she said. "I have," replied Cael, and he recited a long poem describing her house, which we have at this day. "Happy is the House of Crede," the poem begins, "there are men and women and children, there are Druids, and players on instruments, cup-bearers and keepers of the door." He then describes the house as built of great size, with a wide door with green door-posts and a lintel of carved silver. The thatch was brown and crimson, and the porch was thatched in bird's feathers, beautifully arranged in stripes of blue and yellow. Over the entrance hung an apple-tree, and in it the cuckoo sang; a lawn and well were before the house, and the servants went in and out, distributing food and ale and apples to all. Within, the couches were adorned with gold and silver and precious stones, the cushions were of silk, and the musicians made sweet music. All this Cael sang in a long and beautiful poem, which praised also the beauty of Crede herself. Crede was so delighted with this poem, that she promised to marry Cael: and marry him she did and loved him dearly.\*

You will like to know the end of this old love-story. Alas! they had not long been married when a war broke out between Finn's

\* O'Curry, MS. Mat., pp. 308-311. The Colloquy, *Sil, Gad.* ii., 19.

people and the Norsemen, who kept invading the western coasts of Ireland, and Cael was summoned to meet the invaders at Finntraigh or the White Strand of Ventry Harbour, Co. Kerry, where the foemen were endeavouring to land from their vessels. There was a long and fierce conflict, and Cael was left lying, mortally wounded, on the beach. Fergus, one of the older warriors, saw him, and went and asked him how he was. "I tell you," said Cael, "that I am so wounded that if my armour and my helmet were taken off me, I should fall to pieces as I lie; yet it is not that which troubles me, but it is to see yon tall warrior of the foreigners, who is getting safe off to his ships through the water. I give thee my blessing, Fergus; take me now on thy back to the edge of the sea, that I may swim after that foreigner, and perchance the foreigner will not escape me before I die, for that would give me joy, O Fergus." Then Fergus lifted him up and carried him to the brink of the sea, and set him swimming after the Norseman. The foreigner looked round as he reached the ship, and he thought that Cael was one of his own people swimming to escape, and he waited in the ship for him to come up. As he stretched his hand over the side of the ship to help up Cael, Cael raised himself, and grasped his hand round the wrist of the foreigner, and gave one valiant pull and drew him over, and together, locked in each other's embrace, they went down to the sand and gravel of the pure sea.



When Crede heard that her husband was dead she, with many other women, sought the place where he died, and over all the borders of the land were heard the sad laments she made. She went hither and thither from spot to spot, seeking her lover among the slain and wounded, but she found him not. Then, as she sat weeping, she saw a crane of the meadow sheltering her two little birds from a wily fox which was trying to catch them. While she covered one of the birds, the fox would make a rush at the other, so that the crane had to stretch herself between the two, for rather would she have died than that her little ones should be slain. And as Crede mused on it she said, "It is not strange that my fair lover is beloved by me, since the bird is so distressed about her young." Then she heard a stag on Drumm Seis above the harbour, and it ran from pass to pass among the mountains, bewailing its hind vehemently. For they had been nine years together, and had dwelt in the wood at the foot of the harbour, but the hind had been killed by Finn and his followers. And for nineteen days the stag went without tasting grass or water, mourning for its hind. "It is no shame to me," said Crede, "to die for grief of Cael, since the stag is making such pitiful moan for its hind and is shortening its life for her. It seems to me," she said, "that the birds and the waves and the wild beasts are all mourning for my love." And she made a lovely song, which is with us still, of the sad voice of the

waves and the sad cry of the birds and of her own great sorrow over Cael.\*

### Dress.

It was the custom of the Irish ladies of rank to dye their eye-lashes black and their finger-nails pink; their dress was often elaborately embroidered, and their ornaments handsome. On their head they wore a circle of gold called a "mind," and the princesses had cups, basins, combs and pins of great richness and beauty. Here is a pretty description from an old tale of a princess bathing at a well. Etain, the princess, says the story, was washing in a silver basin on the rim of which were four golden birds and little bright gems of purple carbuncle. "She stood at the edge of the well combing her hair with a bright comb of silver adorned with gold. The hue of her hair was like the flower of the iris in summer, or like red gold after the burnishing. It was plaited in two locks, and a bead at the point of each lock. She wore a mantle folded and purple, and in the mantle silvery fringes arranged, and a brooch of fairest gold. A kirtle, long and hooded, of green silk with red embroidery of gold was seen beneath it. Marvellous clasps of gold and silver in the kirtle on her breasts and her shoulders on every side. The sun

\* "The Battle of Veentry Harbour," edited by Dr. Kuno Meyer, *Anc. Oxon. Mediæval Series*, vol. i., part iv. Crède's name has hanged in it to Gedges,

kept shining on her, so that the glistening of the gold against the sun from the green silk was seen of all. There she was, undoing her hair to wash it, with her arms out through the sleeve-holes of her smock. White as the snow of one night were her two hands, and red as the foxglove her two clear fair cheeks. Blue as a hyacinth her eyes. Red as the rowen-berry her lips. The bright radiance of the moon was in her noble face; soft womanly dignity in her voice; her step was stately and slow, as the gait of a queen. Verily, of the world's women she was the dearest and loveliest and most perfect that the eyes of man had ever beheld. She seemed to those who saw her to be a shee-maiden from fairy-land." This is a very pretty description of Etain, who afterwards became Queen of Ireland, but who was, indeed, half a fairy-maid.\*

\* From "The Destruction of *Dá Derga's Hostel*." Ed. Dr. Whitley Stokes, pp. 6-7. ; and the "Story of *Ailill and Etain*." *Rev. Celt.*, iii.

## CHAPTER XII.

### CHILDREN IN EARLY IRELAND.

Authorities:—Old Romances, with Sir Henry Maine's "Early Institutions," and the Lives of the Saints from the Book of Lismore.

#### **Power of Parents.**

THE children of ancient Ireland were much more completely in the power of their parents than are children now-a-days. Not only had the father entire authority over them in their youth, but during his whole lifetime the son was bound to obey him, and could do nothing of an official kind, such as making contracts, or buying or selling the family property, without the consent of the father. This arose out of the custom of families living so much together, on one farm, so that even after they were married they remained under one roof, or in one settlement. Any payments made for any part of the family property went to the father; and the son could conclude no bargain on his own account. Only if the father was old and incapable could the son act on his behalf, and carry on business for him in connection with the family property. If the son was unwilling to take charge in such a case, or had gone away from home, a youth was adopted to take his duties and manage the estate for the old man with the consent of the tribe and family.



The power of an Irish father over his sons was very great indeed : he even had the right to put them to death if he chose; they were as completely his property as the cows or sheep on his farm.

As a matter of fact, the father probably seldom exercised this right, except perhaps when the children were deformed or weakly, though we find that female babies were sometimes exposed to die by their parents. There are several instances of girl-infants being made away with. Even kings sometimes treated their children with cruelty. We read of a king of Ulster, named Cormac, abandoning his own daughter, and giving her to his rough slaves to throw down a pit. But just as they were about to do so the child smiled so prettily up into their faces, that they had not the heart to destroy it, and they took it home and nourished it, and it grew into a beautiful woman.\* This unkindness went on even into Christian times, for we read of a king who had been told by his Druid that one of his own children should kill him, and who, on this account, commanded his wife to put to death any child they had. There was born to them a little daughter, and Mairenn gave it to her swineherd to kill. But the swineherd, looking upon the tiny baby's face, his heart went forth to her; so putting her into a leathern pouch, he carried her to the house-door

\* Destruction of Dá Derga's Hostel, pp. 10-11.

of a certain pious woman that was his neighbour, and left the bag hanging upon a cross hard by. Seeing the pouch on the arm of the cross, she peeped to see what might be in it. When she beheld the baby she loved her forthwith, and took care of her and nurtured her in all the ordinances of the church, until in all Ireland there was not a fairer maid than she. Perhaps, however, in this instance, the child would have been condemned to be killed whether it had been a girl or boy.\*

### Fosterage.

Children were seldom brought up in their own homes or by their parents. They were given over to fosterers, and became almost more part of the foster-mother's family than they were of their own. Often the parents did not see them for years, and did not recognise them when they returned home. The tie between the fosterers and their adopted children was very close and strong, and the child was bound to provide for his foster-parents in their old age.

Children were generally fostered in the families of persons of higher rank than their own. The large farmers took the children of the small farmers, and the children of the nobles were fostered in the family of the chief or king. The price of the education of a child in

\* "Fragmentary Annals," *Silva Gadelica*, edited by Standish Hayes O'Grady.

another family was fixed by law, and in noble families the cost of the education of a small farmer's child was equal to the honour-price of the child's father; but the son of a noble was taken for a price proportionately less, because the honour-price would have been very heavy. The children were often kept until they were grown up, and it was the duty of the fosterer to teach them riding, swimming, the use of arms, and all manly exercises, besides, if the child were a poorer boy, the duties of a farmer.

In Christian times, children were often confided to the charge of nuns and monks to be reared up. St. Columcille was fostered at first by a cleric, and St. Brendan by St. Ita, who loved him dearly, and wrote a little song, with which she sang the babe to sleep, likening him to the infant Jesus, taking refuge in her hut.\* Children so fostered were generally intended for the church.

### Literary Fosterage.

But besides this fosterage of the young child, there was in Ireland also what was known as "literary fosterage." If the child were destined for a learned profession, such as that of Brehon or Filé, he entered

\* It is not stated that this hymn was written for St. Brendan, but it is a cradle-song for a foster-child. It begins—

"Jesukin  
Dwells my little cell within,"

the family, which was also the school, of a Brehon, and became one of his children, in much the same sense as he had before been and still remained the child of the fosterer. As the fosterer trained him in dexterity and manly ways, so the Brehon trained him in learning and literature. The child or his father did not make a bargain for the education of his son, as is done now-a-days; the fees were fixed by law. They were not paid by instalments, but when the Brehon was in need, he had through life a claim on the property and goods of his pupil. No pupil would have allowed his master to be in want, as is alas! often the case now. Instead of merely getting so much teaching out of the master for a certain sum, and then forgetting him, the pupil became one of his family. If the master did not require payment none was given, but on the other hand, through all his life afterwards the pupil would be ready to help and provide for his old master if he were infirm or in need. This was a very beautiful system, and I wish it could be introduced again among us, for we do not now think as highly as we ought of those who have taught and helped us in our youth. They are too often forgotten in after life, and few pupils take the trouble to find out whether they are in want or not. Even girls seem sometimes to have been placed under the charge of Druids or Brehons for instruction, for we hear of two daughters of King Laegaire in St. Patrick's time, who became Christians, living under the care of a Druid



when St. Patrick met them. Probably the same system of payment was carried on into Christian times, and the pupil gave what he could to the monastery in which he was taught. We hear of St. Ciaran, when he was a boy, begging his mother to allow him to take a cow with him as a gift when he went to his first monastic school.

### Games.

You will perhaps like to hear what sort of games the children played in ancient Ireland. Most of their sports were a sort of preparation for their after life; and this was, after all, a very sensible plan. They were taught to swim and do wonderful feats under the water; and to wrestle and hunt and exercise themselves in various ways in order that they might grow strong and clever. And they were taught to fish and shoot birds for food. They were especially fond of hurley, and hockey, and at the king's palace at Emain Macha, in the North of Ireland, there was a Boys' Club formed for playing together on the green in front of the palace. Here it was that Cuchulain played with the other boys of the Corps. One day the king, who was very fond of his Boy-Corps, was about to take a journey, and he went out to bid the boys farewell. There he saw a curious sight. At one end of the green were three hundred boys, and playing against them at the other end was one single little lad, who yet, in spite of all, always took the goal. As

the king watched, they began to play a game called the hole game, in which each boy had a ball that he had hit into a hole while the other side prevented it. Again, there was Cuchulain standing alone beside the hole, and catching all the balls so that not one went in; but when his turn came he would get in the entire set of balls without missing one. The king grew interested in watching the little fellow who was so much cleverer than the rest, and stayed on to see what they would do next. They played then a game to see who could tear off each other's mantles (this must have been rather a rough game), and Cuchulain would have the mantles off them all before they could even get out his brooch. Then they played at upsetting one another, and before they could get him down he would have them all lying on the grass. When the king saw that, he said, "If this little boy proves as clever when he is grown up as he now is, it is a good thing for our country that he is come to us." And so it was, for when he was a man he saved the province of Ulster from the hands of its enemies, all alone and unaided, as he had defeated the Boy-Corps in his childhood. Cuchulain was always doing something or other, either work or play: he was never idle for a moment, and that is how he accomplished so much in his short life, for he died when he was only twenty-seven years old. Even when he was going a long journey on foot as a little boy, he used to take his hurley-stick with

him, and make the way seem shorter by driving his hurley-ball before him and running after it. In this way the journey did not fatigue him so much, for he forgot the distance in his interest in the game. But as warfare was the chief business of the men, so to learn early to fight was the chief desire of the boys. The Boy-Corps at Emain was chiefly formed for this purpose, and the king took special interest in it, and himself invested the lads in their armour the first day they put it on. They had complete suits of tiny armour, with swords and spears and shields, just like a grown warrior, and it was a proud day for the young fellow when he was allowed for the first time to don his arms. He was bound to go out and prove his fitness by some feat of courage, done single-handed, and on his return he had to report himself to the king.\* Sometimes, in moments of great danger, the Boy-Corps is said to have taken part in actual fighting. An old Roman writer once said that Irish mothers gave their babes the first bit of food from the point of a sword, to make them fond of fighting, and certainly the Boy-Corps seems to have been very anxious to take part in real warfare. At the time of the Battle of Ventry, of which we heard in the last lesson, the boys of the Corps in Emain petitioned the king to let them go and help to defend the coasts against the Norsemen. The

\* "The Táin Bó Cuailgne," see section entitled "Cuchulain's Boy Deeds," Cuchulain Saga, Hull, pp. 135-155.

king refused, thinking that they were too young to fight with grown and fierce warriors, but when they heard that the fighting was going on, and that Finn and the warriors of Ireland were in sore distress, they once more begged to be allowed to go. The king gave leave, and they marched right across Ireland from North to South, and arrived during the heat of the battle at Ventry.\* Alas! hardly one of the brave boys returned alive. Their leader, the son of the king of Ulster, was drowned fighting with a foreigner, and the two bodies were washed up the next morning by the tide locked in each other's arms; and nearly all the little band of followers was slain. It must have been a sad day for Emain Macha when the remnant returned home, broken and wounded, to their friends.

The Irish fought with spears and javelins, swords and sling-stones, which last were thrown by hand. They had large shields, with bosses on them, and those of the chiefs were often chased with elaborate patterns in gold. They marched to battle to the sound of music, and the long trumpets that have been found may have been used to call to arms. The Irish pipes were held under the arm, and were not blown by the mouth, like the Scottish pipes. The Irish harp was usually small and held in the hand, instead of resting on the ground.

\* "Battle of Ventry Harbour," ed. Kuno Meyer. It will easily be seen that there is a confusion in this tale as regards dates. The Norse descents did not begin till long after the fall of Emain Macha.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### BURIAL RITES, ETC.

Authorities:—Old Romances, with O'Curry's "Mans Custs." Sir William Wilde's "Boyne and Blackwater," and Fergusson's "Rude Stone Monuments."

#### Early Writings.

WE must ask, did the people of ancient Ireland know how to read and write, and in what fashion did they do so? We do not know exactly when the knowledge of writing was introduced; probably it came with the early knowledge of Christianity to the country. But from the earliest times there were various systems of writing on wood, stone and other materials. We hear of messages being sent on wands or bars of wood, notched or inscribed in some manner which was understood by the reader. Writing on stone was called Ogam, and was formed of straight or slanting lines cut across and at both sides of the edge of a pillar-stone, each line or set of lines making a letter. Only a few words at a time could be inscribed in this way, and Ogam writing was generally confined to inscribing the name of a noted person or hero, whose grave the pillar-stone marked. Several of these Ogam inscriptions have been read. We frequently hear in the romances that when a cham-

pion died, "his grave was dug and his name was written in Ogam." Another very ancient method of writing was on wooden tablets, most likely also carved or engraved with a sharp pointed instrument. I will tell you an old love-story about this. There was once a youth called Baile the Sweet-spoken of Ulster, who loved a girl named Aileen, of Leinster; and they had agreed to meet each other at Rosnaree on the Boyne, which lay about half-way for each. Baile set out and reached the spot, and in great gaiety he and his party unyoked their chariots, and turned the horses out to graze, filling up the time with sports and merry-making. While they were pleasuring thus, they saw a horrible spectre coming towards them with great speed from the South, "Who is it?" said Baile affrighted. The spectre hardly stopped to answer, but he cried as he fled past: "I come from Leinster, where I saw one Aileen, who was coming to meet a lover of her's, named Baile the Sweet-spoken; but as she came, warriors of Leinster overtook her and killed her, for it had been foretold by the Druids that she and Baile should never meet in life, but after death they should meet, never to part again." When Baile heard these woeful tidings, he fell dead on the spot, and they raised his tomb and his rath, and put up his name in Ogam. Now the tale told by the spectre was all a lie, for Aileen was not dead; but he wished to spoil their joy. When he saw the death of Baile he turned South, and went into the bower

where Aileen was. The girl was frightened, and cried out, "Whence cometh this man whom we know not and what is his news?" The spectre replied, "The news I have is not worth lamenting over, but I passed just now by Rosnaree, and there men were digging a grave for a youth named Baile the Sweet-spoken, who was coming to meet his lady-love and sweetheart; but their fate is not to meet in life, and neither shall see the other alive." When he had spoken his cruel tale, the spectre darted forth, and the heart of Aileen broke, and she fell down dead. Out of Baile's grave there grew a yew, with a shape like the shape of Baile's head upon the top. Out of Aileen's grave grew an apple-tree, and it seemed as though the shape of Aileen's head was above it. At the end of seven years the princes and prophets cut down the trees, and of the yew they made a poet's writing-tablet, and on it they wrote the tales of the visions and feasts and loves of Ulster; and they cut down the apple-tree, and made of it another tablet, and on it they wrote the love-tales of Leinster.

Many years after, at the Triennial Feis of Tara, poets and learned men came to Tara as was their custom, and they brought the tablets with them. Now the king had heard the strange and sorrowful story of the tablets, and he was curious to see them. But when he took them in his hands and held them face to face, the two tablets sprang together, and they twined themselves as a woodbine

twines itself round a branch, and no one could separate them again. The king commanded that they should be laid up with the jewels and the precious things of Tara in the royal treasury. And there they remained until the treasury was burnt down many years afterwards. This is, of course, only a fairy tale, but it is a very beautiful and touching one, and it shows us that in very early times writing on tablets was known. As foreigners came into the country, no doubt the knowledge of writing on parchment became common; the monks were great scribes, and we shall speak of their books later on.\*

### Modes of Burial.

We have learned how the Irish lived and what occupations and games they had. I must now tell you about their modes of burial. There seem to have been two ways of burying; sometimes the dead were burned and the bones collected and put into or beneath urns. We have a great many of these urns remaining, of which some are in the Museum in Dublin. The urns were buried, often under mounds, and have been dug up. But they also buried the bodies just as they were, and the bodies of chiefs and great men were interred with much honour in large mounds called "tumuli." You remember I told you that the graves of the princes of the

\* "The Story of Baile the Sweet-Spoken." Ed. by Dr. Kuno Meyer, *Rev. Celt.* xiii., and O'Curry MS. Mat., pp. 463-466.



Tuatha Dé Danann are to be seen along the Boyne, near Drogheda. Some of these graves have been opened, and it is possible to go into them, and very interesting they are. They were, indeed, opened many centuries ago by the Danes, who hoped to find gold ornaments in them, and perhaps did so; but though they entered the graves and may have carried many interesting things away, there is still much to see and learn from them. These great tumuli, like a range of hillocks, extend along the northern bank of the River Boyne, about five miles from the town. It is strange that so few Irish people take the trouble to go and see them, for they are within a day's trip from Dublin, and are some of the most wonderful old structures in the world. There are about seventeen of them, but the three largest are more important than the rest, and are called New Grange, Dowth, and Knowth. Near them is a smaller one, which is believed to be the tomb of the Dagda Mór, the greatest of the Tuatha Princes. Only two of them, Dowth and New Grange, have been explored. Let us see what they are like. New Grange is a mound about 70 feet high, with some very large stones round it. Formerly these pillar-stones probably encircled the entire mound, but some have been broken or removed. No doubt there were larger ones to mark the entrance, for the Danes seem to have had no difficulty in finding their way in, and the door has always been known. The mound has small trees

now growing on it, and it has been so much pulled about, that it is difficult to know exactly how large it originally was, but it appears to have been 310 or 315 feet across and nearly 1,000 feet round the circle of the great stones outside. The entrance is marked by a large stone on the threshold, with curious carvings on it, and stooping down, you enter a long dark passage formed of upright flags, some of them decorated, which leads to the central chamber. This is a domed room, much loftier than the passage, off which three smaller chambers open in the shape of an irregular cross. It is necessary to take matches and candles, as it is of course quite dark, and it will then be seen that one of the chambers or crypts has in it a shallow stone basin, but it is not known for what purpose this was used. Two skeletons are said to have been found in the chambers.

The tumulus of Dowth is much like that of New Grange outside, but the entrance is not so well marked, and the chambers not so high. There are several passages through the mound leading to different chambers. It has, however, not been thoroughly opened, and the smaller tumuli have not been opened at all, at any time. It is possible that if the tomb of the Dagda Mór were opened, his bones and armour, and possibly other interesting relics, might be discovered, for the Danes did not open the smaller tombs. There were some beads and jet bracelets, pins and rings found

in Dowth, and some gold ornaments and coins have been found lying in the soil of the mounds outside, but these are probably later, as persons were buried in the mounds after the interments had been made in the central chambers. The later kings of pagan Ireland were buried in these mounds, which had become sacred as the tombs of the Tuatha, right down to the time of Christianity, after which they were interred in consecrated ground; they may, therefore, be called the Royal Tombs of Ancient Ireland. Only three of the High-Kings of Tara were not buried there: Cormac, because he was a Christian; Art the Solitary, his father, who was killed in battle; and Niall of the Nine Hostages, who was buried at Ochaim, having been killed in Gaul (France) or on the sea between France and Britain. It is said that one of the Tuatha princesses "took with her to her tomb her little dog, Dabilla"; that is, the dog was buried with her. It would be interesting if the bones of the pet dog and his mistress were ever dug up.

### Standing Interments.

A few of the kings told their servants that they were to be buried standing up, in full armour, and facing their enemies. They thought that this would prevent their foes from being successful. There was a king of Connaught named Eoghan or Owen Bel who had often fought with the men of Ulster, and he

said, "Bury me with my red javelin in my hand on the side of the hill by which the Northerners pass when fleeing from the army of Connaught, and place me with my face turned towards them in my grave." This was done, and the Ulstermen were routed after that; but at last they removed the body to another grave, in which they placed it mouth downwards, and then they were successful again. The last king of Ireland who was buried standing up was King Laegaire (Laery), who was king when Patrick came to Ireland to preach; he was a determined pagan and resisted all St. Patrick's teaching. He was buried south of Tara in a rath still called "Laegaire's Rath," standing in full armour, facing his old enemies the Leinstermen, against whom he was always fighting during his life-time.

We have thus learned a good deal about the social life of pagan Ireland, and we have now to think of the political history, and learn the old tales relating to the early kings.



## PART II.

# THE ROMANCE OF THE EARLY KINGS.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE DAWN OF HISTORY AND THE RISE OF THE KINGDOM OF ULSTER.

WE will now try to learn something about the Early Kings who reigned in Ireland before the coming of Christianity to that country. Of the times immediately succeeding the settlement of the Milesians in Ireland and the division of the country between Heber and Heremon our knowledge is very scanty, but it points to the gradual settlement of the country, the establishment of law and order, and the beginning of those national customs which we find existing at a later period. Though many of the kings given in the Annals and old histories are merely names to us and we are inclined to suspect that they never really existed at all, but were merely put in to fill up that vast space of time between the supposed date of the coming of the early races and the dawn of certain history, there are a few of them of whom some facts are given.

and these point to a gradual increase in the enlightenment and civilization of the people.

For instance, an early king named Tighernmas (Teernmas) was the first who discovered gold and smelted it and introduced the use of ornaments in dress. He must also have greatly improved the system of weaving and the art of dyeing, for he taught his subjects to dye their clothes different colours, brown, red, and crimson, and to ornament them with fringes and to wear brooches of gold and silver. He taught them, too, to use drinking horns at their feasts and endeavoured to make them more refined in their ways of life. His successor Eochaid (Eochy) went a step further and ordered that each class among the people should wear a different number of colours in their dress. Servants were to wear plain clothes of one colour ; rent-paying farmers, two ; officers, three ; and so on up to seven colours in the dress of kings and queens. Thus each rank was at once known by its dress, a convenient and sensible custom. The colours were no doubt worn on different parts of the costume, the cloak, the tunic, and the shirt ; but some may have worn tartans or mixed colours like the Highland clans.

Again, a wise king named Ollamb Fodhla, or Fola the Learned, is remembered because he established the Feis of Tara, which met, as you will remember, once in every three years at Samhain (Sowan) in November to examine the Records of the Kingdom, to establish

and promulgate the Laws, and for a week of public festivities. It was he who arranged the order in which the guests were to enter the Banqueting House, and caused them to sit according to rank; he also made a wise law, that if any quarrel arose during the seven days of the Convention of Tara and a man struck another with a weapon intending to kill him, he should inevitably suffer death. Not even the king himself had power to pardon a crime committed in the king's own house during the continuance of the peaceful Feast against one under his protection. Fodhla seems also to have endeavoured to bring order into the provinces by appointing a military leader or captain over every cantred or tribal division, and a gentleman-farmer in every village, who were to attend him when he needed their services. This bound each tribe and district to the central monarchy of Tara. He was a very wise monarch, and during his long reign of forty years the country advanced in prosperity and order.

The next event of importance is the founding of the capital of the Northern Province of Ulster in the reign of Cimbaoth (Kimbay), about 289 B.C. One of the most reliable of the old Irish historians, Tighernach (Teernach), who wrote his Annals before 1088 A.D., tells us that all the history before this time is uncertain, and that reliable history begins from this date. But it is difficult to see why he fixes upon this special event as the beginning of accurate history, for some of the earlier records

seem to have just as much foundation in fact as those that come after, and it is quite certain that many of the later stories are either pure romance or are romance founded on fact. Even the story of the founding of Emain Macha or Emania, the capital of Ulster, is woven into a romance, as you shall hear. Three Kings of Ireland made an agreement together, that each of them should reign seven years in turn, and they took as witnesses seven druids, seven "fili" or law-givers, and seven young chiefs who bound themselves to see that the compact was carried out. All went well for sixty-three years, but at last one of the three, Aedh Ruadh or Hugh the Red, was accidentally drowned in the waterfall in Donegal, called after him Assaroe (Eas Aedha Ruaidh) or the Fall of Red Hugh. He had no son, but his only daughter, Macha the Red-haired, who was a warlike and fierce woman, claimed to reign in place of her dead father. The other two Kings, Dithorba and Cimbaoth, said they would not share the throne with a woman, whereupon Macha raised an army and defeated them and seized upon the sovereignty of Ireland. During her reign of seven years, Dithorba died, and his five young sons claimed to succeed their father as she had succeeded hers. But Macha would not hear of this. She said things were different now and that, as she had gained the right to reign through force of arms and not by mere succession, she would retain the kingdom. The young men fought for their rights,



but Macha defeated them and banished them to Connaught.

Then she married Cimbaoth, and resigned the command of the army to him. But she was uneasy while the sons of Dithorba lived, and she pursued them to Connaught, and by a cunning device got them into her power and enslaved them. She obliged them to build a magnificent fort or palace for her, which, from the gold pin at her neck wherewith she marked out the ground on which it was to be built, was called Emain Macha, or the neck-pin of Macha (*Eo*, a brooch or breast-pin, and *muin* the neck).\*

The power of the Northern Kingdom took its rise at this period, and it grew steadily till about the beginning of the Christian era. It was during the time of its greatest brilliance that King Conchobhar (Conor) lived and the hero Cuchulain and the champions of the Red Branch, of whom so many famous stories are told. These fine old stories every Irish child ought to know, but they are too long to tell here, for we have to deal rather with the stories that belong more certainly to history, and especially to those dealing with the affairs

\* O'Curry gives this account from the *Book of Leinster*, M.S. Mat. pp. 70, 71, and Appendix No. XXXVIII., pp. 526-8. A different origin for the name is given in the story known as the *Cess nóiden Ulad* (see Hull, *The Cuchulain Saga*, pp. 97-100). Emain Macha was destroyed by the Three Collas in 332 A.D., but the raths may still be seen at Navan Fort, Co. Armagh.

of the central monarchy of Tara, and of them, too, there are a great number. Whenever a king of any importance reigned, the old story-tellers used to take the main facts of his life and weave them into a romance. Some of these stories are ugly, full of foul and cruel deeds, which show us what a wild time it was ; but some are pretty, like fairy tales, and full of poetry and imagination. They were recited in just the same manner as the purely romantic tales were recited for the amusement of chiefs and royal personages at banquets and entertainments ; and in consequence there was what the old writers call " a thread of poetry " woven round the bare outline of fact, to make it interesting and amusing to listen to. Some of the stories were evidently written by enemies who made the worst they could of the actors in the story. There was always great jealousy between the kings of the North and South, that is, between the Ui Neill of Ulster and Leinster, who gave a long line of monarchs to the throne of Tara, and the race of Oiliol Olum, Kings of Munster. For this reason, the stories told by the Munster poets naturally make the most of the triumphs of their own chiefs and blacken the deeds of their rivals ; while the Northern story-tellers exalt the deeds of the North and of the Northern champions, and delight to make the worst they can of the motives and actions of the Southern race. This jealousy lay at the bottom of most of the internal wars which kept Ireland in a perpetual state of disquiet, and we see it reflected

even in the pages of the sober historians, such as Keating, and the author of the history of the wars between the Irish and the Norsemen, called the "Wars of the Gaedhil and Gaill," who always make the best of their own side and the worst of the other. Therefore, we must be cautious in receiving these stories just as they come to us: they are rather romances founded on fact than actual history; and the story-tellers have added little touches out of their own imagination here and there to give them freshness and variety. Nevertheless these old romantic tales come much nearer the truth than any modern historical novel, such as the novels of Sir Walter Scott; and the main facts can be proved in many ways to be true, and are accepted as true by all the old historians. Therefore, I am going to tell you a few of these famous stories which in old days were well-known to every one in the country; and I have thought it a pity to take out of them all the fairy and imaginative bits which the writers put in to make them charming, the "thread of poetry" they wove around them, so that you will have to pick out the germ of truth from the story just as the historians did when they came to write down the history of Ireland in their Annals. It does not much matter now whether we believe a little more or less to be historical; but it matters very much that we should understand the condition of Ireland in these early times, and this we can only do by reading the stories of the race.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE ROMANCE OF LABRAID THE VOYAGER, AND THE DESTRUCTION OF DIND RIGH.

Authorities : "Keating's History," "Annals of the Four Masters," "Annals of Clonmacnoise," &c. The Romance entitled "The Destruction of Dind Righ," Edited by Dr. Whitley Stokes, (*Zeitschrift für Celt. Phil.*, Band III.)

The first story I have to tell is not a pleasant one. There was in the year of the world 4567 (633 B.C.) a king of Tara who reigned forty years and who was the ancestor of nearly all the chief families of Ulster, Leinster and Connaught. His name was Ugaine Mór or Ugaine "The Great," and after his death he was succeeded as king of Erin by his son Laegaire (Leary) Lorc. Laegaire had a brother who lived at the Hill of the Kings (Dind Righ) in the present Co. Carlow, and ruled over a part of Leinster called Breagh or Bregia. His name was Cobthach (Cova, now Coffey), and he so wasted away with envy at the better fortune of his brother that he was called Cobthach Caol or Coffey the Lean. He at last made up his mind to murder his brother, and gave out that he was dead in order to induce Laegaire to come and see him. He had himself laid out in his chariot like a dead man prepared for the funeral, and caused messengers to be sent to Laegaire



to bid him come to perform the burial rites. When Laegaire, suspecting nothing and full of sympathy, came and leaned over his brother, bewailing his death, the unnatural Cobthach raised himself up, and plunged a knife into Laegaire's side, killing him on the spot. He followed up this act of treachery by poisoning Laegaire's son Ailill, and then he seized on the kingdom. Now Ailill left one son named Maen, a mere child, who was found to be dumb, and who therefore, according to the old Irish law that no prince with a bodily defect could reign at Tara, was incapable of becoming a danger to Cobthach. For this reason his life was spared, and he was placed under the charge of two tutors, Craftine, a harpist, and Ferceirtne, a poet. Under their care he grew up to youthfulness, and it was noticed by everybody that he was a princely-looking young man, but without the gift of speech. One day he was exercising with other lads on the playing-ground when one of them struck him. In his effort to retaliate and express his disapproval, the spell that was on his tongue gave way, and the young man spoke. "Maen speaks! Maen speaks!" ("Labhraidh Maen") cried all the lads, gathering about him and, in the excitement of the moment, quite forgetting the quarrel; and Craftine exclaimed, "The Prince shall henceforth bear the name of Labraid (Lowra)—which means 'he speaks'—Maen, in remembrance of this day."

The news of the wonderful event came to the ears of the King, and he laid a plan by which he might entrap Labraid and get rid of him out of the kingdom. He summoned Labraid and his tutors to the Feast of Tara. When the feasting was over, the poets and singers began praising the virtues of the monarch of Erin, as was their custom. While this was going on, the King asked of all present, "Who is the most hospitable man in Erin?" "Yourself," replied all the courtiers in turn: but Craftine the harper said, "It is Labraid Maen who is the most hospitable man; for when I went to him in spring for a gift, he killed his only ox for me"; and Ferceirtne said, "It is without doubt Labraid who is the most generous man; for when I went to him in winter, being in distress, he had but one cow and that he killed for me." When Cobthach heard that, he was furious. "If Labraid is so much better than I am," he said, "you both may go with him, for in Erin he shall not remain," and he drove them from his presence. "The loss will be greater to you than to us," they replied. This turned out to be so; for they took refuge with the King of West Munster, where Labraid married Moriath, the beautiful daughter of the King, who promised him the aid of all his forces to recover the kingdom of Leinster.\* They were at

\* The story of Labraid's wooing of Moriath and of Craftine's part in it is a most romantic one. It is told in the story called *Longas Labhrada* and a sketch of it is given by O'Curry in MS.

first unsuccessful, for the forces of Cobthach were too strong, and Labraid was forced to withdraw for a time from his native land and take refuge in Britain and France.

He, however, kept up a correspondence with his friends at home, and having distinguished himself in the military service of the King of France, he at last disclosed his name and birth and asked the king for help in regaining his rightful inheritance. The king at once consented, and the host landed at the mouth of the River Slaney, in Wexford, and being joined by the men of Munster, they marched to Dind Righ, the palace of the kings of Leinster, now occupied by a strong garrison of Cobthach's troops. They tried in vain to scale the ramparts and were beginning to despair of taking the fortress, when Craftine took out his harp and, walking round the walls, he played on it the slumber-strain, an air so sweet and soothing that all the garrison were lulled by it into deep and delicious slumber. Outside, the hosts of Labraid lay prone on the ground with their fingers in their ears that they might not hear the melody, all except the Princess Moriath who, after the custom of those days, had marched to battle beside her husband. She was

Mat. pp. 251-256. Labraid is sometimes called Labraid Loingseach, or the 'Voyager' on account of his wanderings during the time that he was awaiting an opportunity to return to Erin. The above account combines part of both versions of the story.

too proud to shut out the sound of the music of their own harper, and she fell asleep, lying motionless for three days before the walls of Dind Righ, while the host marched up and took the fort, slaughtering the garrison and sacking the palace. Then Labraid possessed Leinster and he and Cobthach were at peace.

But Labraid never forgave the monarch of Erin for the injuries he had inflicted on him and for the slaughter of his father and grandfather. He bided his time and slowly and with cunning cruelty he took his revenge. He built a strong house of iron, enclosed in wood. It took a whole year to build and was constructed with the greatest secrecy, so that from the curiosity that men felt about this house a proverb arose, "The secrets of the men of Leinster are as many as themselves." When it was finished, Cobthach and thirty of his chiefs were invited to feast in the marvellous new house at Dind Righ. Apparently the king was suspicious, and, in order to allay his fears, Labraid's mother and his jester were sent within the mansion to welcome him. The jester was bribed to sacrifice himself by the promise of the blessing of the men of Leinster for ever and the freedom of all his descendants from slavery; but the woman needed no bribe, for it was she who had urged her son to avenge the death of her husband and his own wrongs, and she gloried in the deed.

Next day, when the monarch of Erin and his cour-



tiers were resting in the house, Labraid, apparently afraid to begin his horrid work, was found playing with the young men of his court in the meadow. There his tutor found him, and he chastised the prince with a thorn-stick, telling him that he ought to be in the house looking after his guests. "Apparently the murder thou hadst in hand was only a boy's freak after all," he said; "away and set about your task."

Then the prince felt that the time had come, and he put on his royal mantle and entered the house, and ordered meat and ale and fire to be brought in. When they were all feasting inside he slipped out, and nine appointed men dragged to the heavy iron door with a chain and flung the chain over a pillar-stone to fix it. Between the iron and the wooden walls they lighted great fires and blew them up with thrice fifty bellows of the forge. As the iron walls grew hot, the men outside reminded Labraid that his mother was in the house, and he called to her to escape. "Nay, nay; my darling son," she cried, "secure thy honour through my death; for I am old, and in any case I soon must die." So the iron walls grew red hot, and all within, Cobthach and his chiefs and all his followers, perished on the eve of Great Christmas three hundred years before the birth of Christ. This is the Destruction of Dind Righ in Leinster.

Some stories say that after this Labraid went into foreign lands and gained a realm as far as the Ictian

Sea (the English Channel). They say that he brought two thousand and more followers with him to Ireland and settled them in Leinster; and from the broad lances that they carried in their hands they called the district Laighen, from whom the Leinstermen are named. And it is from Laegaire the grandfather of Labraid, whom Cobthach slew, that the chief families of Leinster are descended.\*

\* It is related of Labraid Loingseach that his ears resembled those of a horse; he was so ashamed of this that once a year, when his hair was cut, the barber was immediately put to death in case the secret became known. Lots were drawn to determine who should exercise the fatal office. The lot fell once on the only son of a widow woman, whose distress was so great that the king promised to spare her son if he took an oath of secrecy. The youth was, however, so horrified with what he saw and so oppressed with the secret, that he felt he must divulge it to someone or die. A Druid bid him go to four cross roads and impart the secret to the first tree he came across. This the youth did and instantly felt relieved. Years after, the tree, a willow, was cut down and a harp made from its wood for Craftine, the harper. But when they strung it, it seemed to everyone to say "Two ears of a horse has Labraid Loingseach," and this it went on crying until the king, regretting that he had put to death so many of his subjects, himself revealed the secret to everybody.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### CONAIRE THE GREAT AND THE DESTRUCTION OF THE BRUGHEN DÁ DERGA.

Authorities : As before, with the Romance entitled " The Destruction of Dá Derga's Hostel " ; edited by Dr. Whitley Stokes.

IT was during the reigns succeeding that of Labraid the Voyager that Ulster rose to its greatest height of prosperity. All the legends about this time are full of romantic adventure and heroic feats. The story of the next King of Tara with whom we have to deal, Conaire the Great, son of Eterscel, has taken its tone from the tales of the Red Branch, and is written in the same romantic manner. It contains, too, some fairy-lore, as we shall see. The events with which it deals are supposed to have happened about forty years before the birth of Christ.

There was a king ruling over Erin, named Eochaid (Eochy) the Constant Sighing. He was riding one day with his followers in the open plain of Longford past the shee-dwelling of Midir, the fairy king. He saw beside a well a maiden from the fairy-mounds combing her hair with a bright comb of silver adorned with gold, and washing in a silver basin, wherein were four golden birds, and little bright gems of

purple carbuncle in the rims of the basin. She was of all the women of the world the loveliest and most noble that the eyes of men had ever beheld. Of her it was said, "Dear and shapely are all women until Etain comes beside them."

Then Eochaid, marvelling at her beauty, sent and asked her name and wooed her for his wife. "I am Etain," she said, "daughter of Etar, King of the shee-cavalcade. For twenty years have I been here since my fairy birth. The kings and nobles of the shee have been wooing me, but they get nothing from me because ever since I was able to speak I have given thee a child's love for the high tales I have heard of thee and of thy splendour. And though I have never seen thee, I knew thee from afar, on account of all that I had heard of thee, for now at last thou art come." Then Eochaid was glad, and he loved her and took her for his one and only wife, and in time they had a daughter, who was wedded to Cormac, King of Ulad (Eastern Ulster). She, too, had but one daughter, and Cormac was angry, for he had desired a son, and he took the child roughly from her mother and gave it to two slaves to cast into a pit; but the babe laughed up into their faces as they were about to throw her down, and their hearts failed, and they took her home and trained her up amongst themselves. When she was grown they shut her in a house of wickerwork, without a door, and with a window open only to the sky, for



they were fearful lest the King of Ulad, her father, should hear of her and punish them for sparing her. But here she was found one day by some of the servants of King Eterscel of Tara, as they were searching about for food; for it chanced that they climbed up and looked in at the window, thinking that corn was hidden there. They told the king about the lovely maiden who lived in the hut without a door; and the king was so much interested that he sent to fetch her, and he made her his wife.

In course of time they had a son, Conaire, who was not reared at home, but was brought up with other boys, his foster-brothers, on the Plain of Liffey, until the death of King Eterscel; and Conaire became King of Erin after him, for the soothsayers had prophesied that a young beardless lad should come along the road to Tara having a stone and a sling in his hand, and that he who came thus should be chosen king; and it was then and in this manner that Conaire came.

His reign was prosperous and peaceful; there was plenty and good-will in the land and abundant merchandise upon the sea. Only his three foster-brothers disturbed the kingdom, and they wrought such havoc that at length he ordered them to leave Erin and go and wreak their rapine upon the men of Alba (Scotland). This they did, uniting themselves with the son of the King of Britain and committing piracies; but they bided their time that they might revenge themselves on Conaire.

It came to the ears of Conaire that two others of his foster-brothers had stirred up war in Munster, and he was told that unless he himself went to make peace between them, no quiet could be obtained. Though it was dangerous to him to go amongst his foster-brothers, Conaire went to them and stayed five nights with each of them and left them at peace. But though he had quieted them, the war that they had raised still went forward, and as he was returning through Meath to Tara he saw their war bands and their hosts; and men raiding the country of the southern O'Neills from East to West, and all the land a cloud of fire before him.

“What is this?” said Conaire. “It is easy to see,” said his people, “that the king’s law has broken down in the country, since it has been destroyed and set on fire.” Then fear fell on Conaire and his people, because they saw no way by which they might pass north to Tara; and they were obliged to turn again southward along the sea-coast. “Whither shall we seek shelter to-night?” asked the king of his men. “Would that I could tell thee, my fosterling Conaire,” cried MacCecht, his champion. “In old times it was the men of Erin who were contending for the honour of receiving thee, but to-night it is thou that art wandering for a guest-house.” “Judgment goes with good times,” said the king; “I had a friend in this country, if only we knew the way to his house.”

"What is his name?" asked Mac Cecht.

"Dá Derga of Leinster," answered the king. "It would be strange if he did not welcome me to-night, for he came a while ago asking a gift from me; and it was not a refusal he got, but every sort of valuable treasure he got from me, and should he come again he would get the same from me." "As I remember his house," said Mac Cecht, "the road by which we are travelling ran right up to it and through its court. It is a great house with seven doorways and seven bedrooms between each two doors; if thou goest thither to-night I will go on ahead and prepare fires before the host."

*welcom  
house*

Then Mac Cecht went on and Conaire and his people followed. But as he went the three Red Men of the shee-mounds, on red weary steeds that were alive and yet were not alive, rode past him, and though men called aloud to them they would not stay. Conaire's son rode after them at swiftest speed, lashing his horse as he went, yet for all that he could not overtake them. But they sang this lay over their shoulders as they rode fast forward to the house of Dá Derga.

"Lo, my son, great are our tidings, weary the steeds we ride, the red steeds from the shee-mounds of Donn Tetscorach. Behold, signs of destruction and ending of life; the ravens are sated, the crows are filled; on the field of slaughter the sword-edge is wetted; in the dark hour of night broken bosses of shields! Lo, my son!"



Thus they rode forward and fastened their red steeds to the door of the house, and they entered and took their seats therein. Then evil forebodings seized Conaire and his host when they saw the three Red Men of the shee-mound that were alive and yet were not alive going on before them, for they knew that they had come to join themselves with his enemies and to avenge themselves upon him. Never had the shee-people forgiven Etain that she had married a mortal prince, and they remembered that Conaire was himself of fairy birth, being her daughter's grandson. So when the king saw them he knew that evil would befall.

Now about this time the sea-fleet of the foster-brothers and of Ingcél the One-eyed, the British prince, came again to Ireland after it had marauded in Britain and in Scotland; and it lay, a fleet of three times fifty boats with sails furled, under the hill of Howth. They sent two who were swift of sight and hearing to the top of the hill to watch the host of Conaire as it came along, and to bring tidings of it which way it went; when they found it was making for Dá Derga's house, they hoisted their sails and manned their boats, five thousand men in all, and steered them in for the shore, and they ran up on land not far below the Bruighen (Breen) of Dá Derga. Scarcely had Conaire and his people entered the Bruighen than the pirates marched up secretly under cover of the night till the house was surrounded on every side. Each



man brought in his hands a stone from the beach to build a cairn, for whenever a battle-rout was to be made they planted a pillar-stone, but they built a cairn when they planned the entire demolition of a building ; but this time they erected it far from the house that they might not be observed.\* Some of the foster-brothers, when they saw the bright cheerful firelight that came out from the house and shone between the chariot-wheels that were clustered round the door, thought pity of the deed they planned to do. " May God not bring the king here to-night," said one. " It is a pity to destroy him, for his reign has been good and prosperous, and hostages for peace are in his house, and good-will and excellent laws prevail. Moreover, the king is little more than an infant in age ; it were pity to destroy him." But Ingcél the One-eyed and the foreign pirates drove them on. Ingcél went to spy the house between the wheels of the chariots to see if Conaire were really there.

When he returned he said, " The house is a kingly house and whether Conaire be there or not I will take the house for my rights. It is now my turn for a raid and to take the spoils of it." " We have left the matter in thy hands, O Ingcél !" said Conaire's foster-

\* Those that were left after such a destruction each took a stone from the cairn on their return and by the number of stones that were left they knew how many had fallen. This was a custom in Eire.

brothers ; though their hearts misgave them at the deed. "Rise up then, ye champions," said Ingcél, "and set upon the house!" Then they formed in line and marched up to the Bruighen and surrounded it.

"Silence," said Conaire within, "what noise is that I hear?" "It is the sound of champions about the house," said one of his guard. "Well, we have warriors ready to answer them," said the king. "They will all be needed to-night," replied Conall. Then Conaire and his host took their weapons in great haste and marched out to meet the pirates, and at Conaire's onset six hundred were killed. Three times the enemy flung fire into the house and three times it was extinguished, so that before the fury of his onslaught the pirates were driven back. But at length a terrible thirst overcame Conaire, so that his strength left him, and he asked a drink of his cup-bearers. "All the water and the liquids in the house have been poured upon the fires," they replied, "and the Dodder River which runs through the court is dried up." Then one of his bravest warriors, named Mac Cecht, a Connaught man, took Conaire's golden cup under his arm, and seizing his spears in his hand, he burst out of the Bruighen with such fierceness, that he forced his way through the army of the foe, and sought far and near for a river or lake from which to fill the cup. But there had been so great a drought that the rivers were all dried up, and he had nearly

despaired of finding water, when in the distance he saw a wild duck rise from a hidden pool, concealed among the trees. Then he stooped down and filled the cup, and fought his way back to the Bruighen, just as the dawn was breaking. Alas! as he was crossing the third ridge towards the house he saw the savage foster-brothers striking off Conaire's head. Exhausted by thirst and the fever of his wounds, the good king had no longer been able to resist, and Mac Cecht, furious at the sight, struck off the head of one of the destroyers from behind and flung a great stone after the other, who was fleeing away with Conaire's head. Then, disappointed at the failure of his task, he poured the precious water over the dead body of the king.

Mac Cecht took up the body of the king and carried it to Tara and buried it. Then he departed into Connaught to his own country to be healed of his wounds. But Ingcél went to Alba (Scotland) and there he received a kingdom, as some say; but others say that the pirates were destroyed and exterminated by Mac Cecht and Conall in the morning, and their ships burned, in vengeance for the death of Conaire.

This is the Destruction of Dá Derga's Bruighen and the Death of Conaire the Great.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A PERIOD OF DISTURBANCE.

Authorities: Keating's History of Ireland, with the romance entitled—"The Sickbed of Cuchulain," Edited by O'Curry in *Atlantis*, Vols. I., II

AFTER the Death of Conaire Mór a space of seven years passed by without the election of any king to the throne of Tara. At length the inconvenience grew to be so great that it was determined to call together the princes of the four southern provinces, as they then were, namely—Connaught, North Munster, South Munster, and Leinster, to elect a king. The King of Ulster, Conchobar (Conor) mac Nessa, they would not call to the Council, because at that time the whole of Ireland was in opposition to Ulster. A bull feast was made in the usual manner, and having eaten of the feast a man slept, and the druids pronounced a spell over him. Then in a dream there was shown to the sleeping man a vision of the prince whom they should elect as king. "I see," he said, "a young man strong and noble, with two red marks on his body, and he sitting beside a sick man at Emain Macha of Ulster." The young man was Lugaid (Lewy) of the Red Stripes, the pupil and friend of Cuchulain, and it



was beside the sick bed of Cuchulain that he sat, comforting and solacing him. It was not pleasant to those who were gathered at the Convention of Tara to take their king from among the nobles of their enemies; nevertheless they dared not disobey the voice of the soothsayer, and they sent messengers at once to Emain Macha to bring Lugaid to Tara. As the messengers entered the room where Cuchulain lay sick in a decline, he arose out of his sleep and shook his weakness from him, and he uttered wise words of counsel and instruction to Lugaid how he should conduct himself as Monarch of Erin. These are some of the admonitions he gave to Lugaid. "Be not proud, passionate, or hasty. Be not elated by wealth, and stir not up sharp and ignoble contests. Be not cold-hearted to friends, but be vigorous against your foes. Avoid disputes. Do not gossip or abuse others. Waste not, hoard not, part not with the possessions of your throne. Do not sacrifice justice to the passions of men. Do not take part in feats of strength, lest you make men jealous; be not lazy, lest you become weak; ask not gifts, lest men despise you. Do you consent to follow these counsels, my son?" Lugaid answered, "These counsels are all worthy to be observed, and before all men I will prove my obedience." Then Lugaid went with the messengers to Tara, and reigned as King of Erin.

Lugaid had a fair wife named Dervorgil, the

daughter of a Norse chieftain of the Western Isles, whom Cuchulain had rescued from pirates and had given to his friend to wife. Lugaid loved Dervorgil, and on her death he died of grief for her.\*

About this time the Irish were largely engaged in foreign warfare and in endeavouring to extend their dominions beyond the shores of Ireland. We have spoken of the expedition of Labraid the Voyager to France. Ugaine the Great is described as "King of Ireland and the whole west of Europe as far as the Muir Toirrian" (*i.e.*, the Mediterranean Sea). Though this description is probably much exaggerated, there is little doubt that the Irish were engaged at this period and for the next four hundred years in trying to obtain possession of lands in Alba (Scotland), Britain, and the West of France. Their young chiefs seem to have been sent to Britain or Alba to study the arts both of peace and war, and the friendly communication between these countries, points to the existence of settlements of Gaelic-speaking people even at this period on the western coasts of Scotland. There were also early settlements in Wales, the Isle of Man, and Devon. But several successive kings attempted further to extend their dominions on the Continent of Europe, and we read that Crimthan, who reigned soon after the death of Lugaid, was killed by a fall from his horse at his fortress on Benn Edair,

\* For this story see Hull, *The Cuchulain Saga*, pp. 81-82.

or the Hill of Howth, near Dublin, after returning from a successful foreign expedition, in which he secured costly jewels and treasures and much spoil. He reigned at the beginning of the Christian Era.

While Crimthan was engaged in foreign expeditions, a most serious revolution was preparing at home, and the discontent of the people burst out into a wholesale rebellion and massacre immediately on his death. The insurrection was organised by the tenants or labouring classes against the nobility, and it is supposed, with great probability, that these people were chiefly the descendants of the Firbolg race, who had been reduced to a lower rank by the dominion of the Milesians. They were called Aithech Tuatha, that is, the rent-paying class; and no doubt they had been ground down by their masters, the chiefs and princes, who thought more of carrying on their foreign wars than of the good of their people at home. They organised a massacre of all the nobles whom they could induce to come together to a feast at a place called Magh Cru, or the "Bloody Plain," in County Galway, and there set up one of their own party, called Cairbre Cathead, to be King of Erin. He was so-called because it was said by his enemies that the shape of his head resembled that of a cat. They succeeded so well that no one dared to offer resistance, and for five years Cairbre reigned, a most disastrous period for Erin, according to the accounts written by their



opponents, for evil is said to have flourished during his reign, and there was no happiness or prosperity in the land. He had, however, a son, who was a wise counsellor to the King, named Moran the Just, the fame of whose wisdom became a proverb in Erin. There is a legend that he possessed a golden collar, which he put round the neck of any person who was accused of a crime. When the report of the crime was true, the collar closed round the neck of the criminal until it choked him. But if he were innocent, it grew larger, and fell off. This is, I suppose, a way of saying that Moran always gave judgments which were just and true.\*

After the death of Cairbre Cathead the crown was offered to Moran, but he refused it, saying that the rightful princes should be brought back and one of them made king.

So the young princes of royal blood who were in exile with their mothers were sent for to resume their authority. One was the son of Crimthan, King of Erin, and the others were sons of the blind King of Munster and of the King of Ulster. Their mothers were said to be princesses of the royal houses of the Picts, the South Britains and the South Saxons.† The tradition of these inter-marriages shows that there was frequent and friendly communication between Ireland and the neighbouring

\* The story of Moran belongs properly to the Cuchulain tales.

† The Saxons did not come to Britain till much later than this.



countries even at an early period. The young princes and their royal mothers had each taken refuge with the mother's relations, and there the youths were brought up and educated. On their return, the rebels swore a solemn oath by heaven and earth, by the sun and moon and all the elements, that they would be obedient to them and their descendants, so long as the sea flowed round the shores of Ireland. Each of the princes then settled down on his hereditary domain, Feradach, the "Fair Righteous One," becoming King of Ireland, and progenitor of the race of Conn, of whom are the chief families of Ulster and Connaught; Corb Olum, the forefather of Olioll Olum, and head of the principal families of Munster, becoming King of Munster; and Tibruid becoming King of Ulster.

But in spite of their oaths of subjection, the Aithech continued their uprisings. At length a prince ascended the throne after defeating them in twenty-five battles who was strong enough to hold them in check. His name was Tuathal or Toole the "Lawful," and he not only forced the rebels to renew their oaths of allegiance, but he erected or fortified four strong kingly residences in Meath as a protection to the monarchs of Tara. They were named Tlachtga, Usnech, Tailte, and Tara itself; the last had long been a royal palace, but he probably strengthened it with ramparts. We are not to think of these as stone-built castles, but as groups of wooden, earthen, or

wicker buildings, with earthen raths surrounding them. It was at Tlachtga that the festival fire was burned once a year by druids, when all other fires were ordered to be extinguished throughout Ireland, and it was the disobedience of St. Patrick to this old custom that brought about the collision between him and King Laegaire, as we shall see. At Usnech and at Tailte there had been from early times annual meetings and games of skill, and from Tailte the King of Ulster received his rents. It was there also that the marriages of the year were arranged; the young men stood on one side and the girls on the other while the parents arranged the preliminaries and decided how much the bride-gift should be.

\* The History of the Aithech Tuatha is much confused in the Irish accounts; probably it is mythical, at least, in parts.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE TRIBUTE CALLED THE BOROMHE (BORU).

Authorities: Keating's History of Ireland, with the piece entitled—"The Boromean Tribute," Edited by Dr. Standish Hayes O'Grady, in *Silva Gadelica*.

It was Tuathal who formed the Province of Meath and set it apart for the support of the high king of Tara. He took a piece of land from each side of the great stone, still called the "Stone of the Divisions," which is on the side of the Hill of Usnech where the Provinces of Ulster, Munster, Leinster, and Connaught met, and he formed of this new division the royal Province of Meath, the estate of which was to form the special appanage of the High King of Tara. He held the Feis of Tara with great splendour and re-established the monarchy. It was in the reign of Tuathal also that the heavy tribute called the Boromhe (Boru), about which so many fierce battles were fought, was for the first time laid upon Leinster. It is from it that Brian Boromhe, or "Brian of the Tributes," is supposed to have got his name long afterwards.

This was the cause for which the tax was levied on the Kingdom of Leinster. Tuathal had two daughters, loving and beloved, and the elder of them

(for it was the custom in Ireland that the younger daughter should not be married before the elder) was given in marriage to the King of Leinster; but it was the younger that the King preferred, and would have sought in marriage. He got up a story that the elder sister, his wife, was dead, and returned to Tara to ask the hand of the other princess. Tuathal said, "Had I fifty and one daughters, gladly would I give them all to thee if thou wast in need of a wife." The other maiden was therefore given to him, and he bore her away to Leinster, and for a long time they were happy, but one day it chanced that Fithir caught sight of her sister, Dairine, and she knew that the report of her death was untrue, and she died straightway of grief and shame. The other sister died immediately after. When this story came to Tara, the King was exceedingly angry, because of the slight that had been put upon his daughters; the Kings of Connaught and Ulster, too, who were the foster-fathers of the two girls, gathered their forces together, and they marched into the borders of Leinster to the North and West, and harried and devastated the country. Moreover, they fought two battles with the King of Leinster, and his son was slain, and many chiefs; until at length, because winter was coming on, they made peace, and Leinster agreed to pay the blood-price which the King of Ireland exacted for the death of his two daughters. It was a heavy tribute that Tara



laid upon Leinster. Thrice fifty times an hundred cows, thrice fifty hundred swine; mantles as many, and chains of silver; thrice fifty hundred sheep; thirty red-eared cows, with calves of the same colour; caldrons and other household pots. From the time of Tuathal to the time of Cormac, son of Art, that tribute was yearly lifted from Leinster, but often it could not be obtained without a battle, for the burden was heavy, and Leinster was impoverished by it, and the men of the province resisted the payment. After Cormac the payment could not be enforced for a time, though the destruction of the thirty royal maidens who were burned in their house at Tara by Dunlang, King of Leinster, caused them to endeavour to enforce it again.

Many great battles were fought to resist this unjust tribute from time to time, and it was because of the Boromhe that the Province of Leinster sided always with the enemies of Tara, as we shall see in the later history.

The King succeeding Tuathal, who fell in battle, was Feidhlimidh (Felim), called the "Legal," because he endeavoured to establish better laws and an appeal to justice in Ireland. Hitherto if a man wounded or killed an adversary, he himself took vengeance, exacting life for life, eye for eye, hand for hand, according to the rule of "like for like"; but Felim strove to induce men to bring their cause before the Brehons, to be legally tried, and he obliged them

to accept the decision of the judge. In his reign were great wars between Leinster and Munster.

Then, in 122 A.D., Cathair Mór, the "Great," seized the kingdom, and drove out the young Prince Conn, the son of Felim, who was afterwards called Conn of the Hundred Battles, to Connaught. There he was brought up in feats of arms and chivalry by Conall, King of Connaught. But one day a certain Druid, who had lived in his father's court, came to seek the prince. He found him hurling on the green among the other children, and he upbraided him for his childish behaviour in being content in the position in which he was, instead of seeking to recover the kingdom of his father. The boy, seeing the Druid in tears, threw away his hurly, and went to the King of Connaught and demanded freedom to go and recover the sovereignty of Tara.

"What, child," cried the King, "content yourself, you are not yet of age to war against the monarch of Tara. Stay with me till you are of maturer age and judgment." But when Conall saw that he would not be persuaded, he placed the whole forces and power of his kingdom in Conn's hands, and they met the forces of Cathair on the banks of the River Boyne, and there the army of Cathair was overthrown, and the king himself was slain, and he was buried near the river.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### CONN OF THE HUNDRED BATTLES, 123-157 A.D.

Authorities:—"Annals of Clonmacnoise" and of "The Four Masters." The pieces entitled "The Battle of Magh Lena" and the "Courtship of Momera," edited by Eugene O'Curry for the Celtic Society, 1855.

So Conn slew Cathair Mór, King of Ireland, and reigned in his stead. It was in his reign that Eoghan (Owen) Mór wrested from the monarch of Ireland half the country, all south of a line from Dublin Bay to Galway, and the northern half henceforward was called Conn's half and the southern half Mogh's half (Leth Cuinn and Leth Mogha), and this is how it happened.

When Conn came to the throne, he bestowed the portion of Leinster on his tutor, the druid who had brought him up, in token of affection. But at this time, a captain of Conn's host, Cumhall (Cool) by name, had made himself leader of a great army gathered out of all the provinces of Erin for the support and protection of the king. It was this host that was afterwards known as the Fianna or Fians of Erin, and which accomplished wonderful exploits under Finn son of Cumhall (Finn mac Cool). Cumhall thought that the kingdom of Leinster should have been given to

him, in reward for his services in organising the army, and bringing it into such good condition; but at the moment when Conn gave the province to his tutor, Cumhall was away in Alba (Scotland), whither he had fled with the wife whom he had chosen, and who had been refused to him by her father. It was she who was mother of Finn.

He immediately returned, and seized upon the kingdom of Leinster. Conn called upon Aedh mac Morna, chief of the Fians of Connaught, to come to his help against Cumhall, and he offered him as a bribe the captaincy of all the Fians of Tara if he would fight against him. The Connaught Fians liked to be independent of the whole body, and they accepted these terms, and met Cumhall in the Battle of Cnuca, and in that battle Cumhall was killed and his troops defeated; but Aedh lost an eye, and he was called henceforth Goll, or the "blind" mac Morna. On the side of Cumhall in the battle of Cnuca were Eoghan Mór, son of the King of Munster, and the troops of Munster with him.

This Eoghan was discontented and ambitious, and he was not satisfied to be prince of Munster merely, but aspired to the monarchy. He picked a quarrel with Conn, because Conn had favoured three princes of Eoghan's family more than himself, and they met at the first battle of Magh Lena. A skirmish took place there, but Eoghan, finding himself hard pressed,



begged for a respite for three days and three nights to take counsel what he would do. Nevertheless he harried the country, and they soon fell to arms again, and Eoghan would have been killed but that he was carried away by a fairy maiden who loved him, and she brought him to her dwelling on the island called Inis Greagraidh, in Bantry Bay, and there she hid him for many days, and when his enemies pursued him, she put him on her ships and out to sea, beyond the reach of Conn. After a time his troops gathered to him there, and they took ship together and sailed away to Spain. And the King of Spain received Eoghan with great honour and gave him a place to dwell in, and made him and his followers welcome.

Now the king had a beautiful daughter, named Beare (though she is sometimes also called Momera), and before the coming of Eoghan, she had been told by her druid that there should come a prince from Ireland to woo her. The druid also bade her weave for him a lustrous coat out of the magic salmon's skin that swam in the River Ebro. So she caught the salmon that night and stripped him of his glistening coat, and out of it she wove a mantle bright and shining, and of iridescent colours. She laid it by till the prince should come for her. That very night came Eoghan and his train to ask for hospitality. When Eoghan saw the princess, he admired her exceedingly, and soon he grew to love her, but because

he was poor and an exile and had no dowry to give, he dared not ask her hand in marriage, and she wondered that he did not speak. And all the time the shining mantle lay by. At last the king discovered the love that Eoghan had for Beare, and he asked him why he had not asked for her? Eoghan answered modestly that he had nothing worthy to bestow on her, being now an exile and without a kingdom. The king said that there was no one on whom he would so willingly bestow his daughter as on Eoghan, and that as for a gift, he himself would give all that was needed for them both. Then they were betrothed, and Beare brought the salmon's glistening robe and put it on Eoghan, and all were astonished at the splendour of his beauty and at the marvel of the iridescent mantle. So they were married, and for six years Eoghan sojourned there in quietude and happiness.

But his thoughts turned to home, and the longing grew upon him to reconquer his kingdom. But when he spoke of it to Beare, she said, "If that island of yours were loose at the roots, I would get my soldiers to cut it off and tow it over, and fix it to an angle of Spain, and then we both should be contented: you with your island home, and I with mine." So she laughed the matter off, for she did not want to leave Spain and voyage across to Ireland, and to be troubled with wars and contests, and all the struggle for a kingdom. However, at last he resolved to go, and Beare's

brother and a great body of Spanish troops volunteered to accompany him, and help him win the kingdom. They landed on the fairy isle in Bantry Bay, but he changed its name from that time, and called it Beare Island, in honour of his wife, because it was there she first set foot on Ireland, and so it is called to this day.

Then Eoghan summoned the princes of Munster to come to him, and join their forces with his to recover the kingdom for Eoghan. But they sent back a jeering message, and made little of Eoghan and his designs, until he sent a troop to surround them and to force them to submit. By degrees he collected a great army, and persuaded the men of Ulster and Leinster to revolt to his side, so that the three provinces were with him, and only Connaught was left to Conn, who fled from Tara to take refuge in Connaught among the troops of Goll. Eoghan followed Conn, and harried and plundered all Connaught, and when Conn heard of the great army that was with Eoghan, he gnawed his spear from the shaft to the iron point with rage. They sent their women into the lonely passes of the mountains and of the wildernesses, and Conn commanded that his troops should silently approach where Eoghan's army lay. Also he commanded that all through the wood where he was sheltering for the night, between every two or three of his few troops, a fire should be lit, so that it should appear

that the forest was filled with soldiers. "How does the wood appear to you now?" asked Conn when all was done. "It is all one broad sheet of red flame," they said.

In the morning a messenger came to Conn with proposals from Eoghan, and though the proposals were hard, namely, the half of Ireland to Eoghan, Conn thought it better to submit. So then Ireland was divided into halves, from Dublin Bay to Galway; and Conn kept the Northern half, and Eoghan took the South. They were called Leth Cuinn, or Conn's half, and Leth Mogha, or Mogh's half, for Mogh Nuadhat was another name for Eoghan Mór.

For fifteen years things remained like this, yet Eoghan would not send the foreigners home; and all that they desired was to fight with Conn, for they liked a fight better than a truce, and after that to return to their own country. They had come far, they said, and had not yet seen a battle. So they tried to stir up a cause of revolt in the mind of Eoghan. It happened one time that Eoghan was making a kingly circuit of his half of Ireland, until he came to the harbour of Ath-Cliath, or Dublin. Of the merchant vessels that lay in the harbour, only a small number were on his side, but on Conn's side the water was covered with ships. Eoghan demanded that as the half of Ireland was his, so, too, the half of all the goods and merchandise that came to Ireland should be his also. When Conn



heard that, he said that never while he lived would he consent, and rather would he lose his crown than submit to such unjust demands. At this reply, Eoghan and his troops were pleased, because it gave them a cause of war, and they got themselves in readiness, and it was not long before they marched with banners flying to Magh Lena, (Co. Westmeath), where the former battle had been fought. There they prepared themselves leisurely, setting up a kingly pavilion for Eoghan and huts and comfortable quarters for the soldiers. All lent a hand in cutting down the forest trees, choosing smooth poles and wattles with the best sedges from the marshes to build and thatch their sheltering sheds. And they made broad paths between the dwelling-places and stacked their weapons in ranges and their armour on racks, and they regulated their sleeping and cooking-places, and their markets, and their places for hearing music. Eoghan desired his best workmen to erect three high palisades for defence, and three strong forts and three lofty walls and three firm cathairs where they might lie in safety.

When the King of Ulster heard that they were come he rejoiced, for he knew that it would be to Conn like a fire in his heart, or like a troublesome creditor sitting at his door, to have those three strongholds erected on his borders. He descended from the North on Meath and Tara, and Meath was ravaged by his troops, and the

country became a high-road of plunder before them. Behind them, as they passed, they left a waste and a raging, awful sheet of rapid flame, burning villages, with women and children slaughtered. Then Conn gathered the hosts of Tara to him, and though it was like the sailing of a rotten ship between two powerful billows to steer between the troops of Ulster and those of Eoghan, he rushed valiantly upon the men of Ulster and drove them back. The King of Ulster was killed, and Conn restored the captives and the sorrowful women to their homes, and then he returned to celebrate the Feis of Tara, and to be cured of his heavy wounds.

So soon as he was well he marched on Ath Luachra and encamped there, and he called a secret counsel of his chiefs to consult what should be done. They all encouraged him to go forward, but he said that he felt the weakness of his troops against such a powerful army, and that it would be wiser and safer to come to terms with Eoghan. "What terms?" said Conal, the foremost of his captains. "The terms," said the king sadly, "that he shall retain the provinces of Erin, which are already his, with Ulster added, though grievous it is to me to part from that sword-supporting land of my battalions; and that Connaught only be left to me with the territory of Teffia (the north-west portion of ancient Meath) and Tara, for from the profits of those territories I have been fed ever since my birth."

“Those are great terms,” said Conall. Then two princely youths were charged to take that message, for the king said that if he sent it by the hand of the bards, as was usual, Eoghan would take it as a complete submission; but the princes would present the message with dignity. The princes were admitted to the pavilion of Eoghan, who listened attentively to their words. But he answered at once that it would be like ale without a cup to drink it from, or like a loan which never was returned, to have the whole of Ireland without Tara. He was ready to attack them in his anger, but they said that it was not lawful to attack those who came with an offer of peace, nor was it wise to grow angry over deep submission. “Who are ye yourselves, O youths?” said Eoghan. “We are Eochaid (Eochy) of the white knees, and Fiacha of the white hands, sons of Crimthan of the yellow hair,” they said. “If your lives are spared, will you remain with me as hostages for your own king, that he acknowledge me supreme King of Erin?” said Eoghan. “Truly not, O high King,” they fearlessly reply, “for that would be for Conn to resign the crown; and the lives of any two would not oblige him to do that. Moreover, though Conn has offered you terms, we think, so far as we know him, that he will not readily give up the least farmland to you, and that he wishes that you should reject his terms.” When Eoghan heard this defiant answer, he was filled with wrath, and he commanded those two princely



youths to be seized and hanged at sundown. All his men refused to perform a deed of treachery upon the youths, but the king forced them, and between day and night, at the setting of the sun, they were hanged on a hill in face of the army of Conn. When Conn saw that, he said that though he would have retired and left the whole of Erin to Eoghan had he acted like a prince, he now would fight to the last. Then he sent Finn back to defend Tara, and that very evening he would have fallen on the foe in a night attack but that Goll refused, for he could not see to lead the troops at night. The next morning he put the battle in array, and every chief and great warrior undertook to oppose himself to some special division of the host of Eoghan. Conn said that he and Conall desired in this fight to do some special service, and asked what he should do. "Have done, O High King," they all exclaim, "for the part of High Kings is only to exult in the brave deeds of their army."

But to Eoghan an awful apparition appeared as he prepared for battle, and as he passed through his troops to cheer and hearten them. Three venomous-tongued repulsive blue-bearded goblins, the like of whom were not known in Erin, met him with shrieking and dismal howlings. Women they were, but they had beards, grey and shaggy, like men, and their gaunt lean bodies and withered arms and claw-like fingernails, struck terror into Eoghan and his host, so that



they cowered before them. "Whence are ye come?" cried Eoghan, "and how got ye here?" "We come from afar, and it is our own power that brought us," they replied. "What are your powers?" said Eoghan again. "It is to speak of them that we are come," say they. "It is we who draw the waters of the ocean up upon the high lands, and scatter the white snow upon the ground. It is we who cast over the wide plains the broad sheets of summer lightning, and bring distortion and madness upon men; and it is to show you the approach of your own death, and the little length of life that is left to you, that we are come, O Eoghan."

"Upon yourselves and upon Conn be your evil forebodings," said the king, "and may your evil intention be drowned and smothered in the depths of the sea." "You may not escape us," they reply, "for the end of your life and of your prosperity is near, and every stroke of the men that are with Conn shall find its victim. You yourself, O King, will leave your head and your trophies with the troops of Conn."

Even as they spoke the troops of Conn came on. Then Eoghan summoned his valour and his kingly command, and he bestirred his men, and a valiant and eager contest was fought that day. Conn and Eoghan engaged in single combat, and those two chiefs meeting together was like the meeting of two young lions. In the end Eoghan fell by the hand

of Conn, though Conn was sore wounded, and was carried off the field of battle. But after a time he revived again, and he gathered home his troops and reigned in Tara for twenty years from that.

Conn offered the sovereignty of Munster to his son, Conaire, but Conaire said, "Give it to Macniadh rather, for I am thy faithful vassal, but Macniadh is not submissive to thee." "Take thou my blessing for that speech," said Conn; "Munster shall be divided between you two; moreover I hope that thou wilt obtain the sovereignty of Erin after me," which fell out as he had said. For Conaire reigned next to Conn, and after him Conn's younger son, Art the Lonely One, as we shall see.

One old writer says that when Eoghan was killed, Goll's warriors raised the body on high upon their shields before the contending armies, pierced as it was with wounds, exulting in his death. But when Goll saw that, he said, "Lay down the body of Munster's King, for he died as a hero should."

## CHAPTER XX.

### ART THE LONELY ONE, AND THE BATTLE OF MAGH MUCRAMHA, 166-196 A.D.

Authorities :—The piece entitled "Battle of Magh Mucramha," edited by S. H. O'Grady in *Silva Gadelica*, "The Annals of the Four Masters," &c. Dr. Joyce gives an English version of the Voyage of Connla of the Golden Hair in *Old Celtic Romances*.

ART THE SOLITARY, son of Conn. He was called the Solitary or Lonely One (*i.e.*, Art Oenfer, 'Only-Man'), because his two brothers, Connla and Crinna, had been slain in their youth, and he was the only one left of his family. But Connla, who was called "Connla of the Golden Hair," did not die as Crinna did, but he went a dream voyage over the western sea, and entered the Land of the Ever-fair and Ever-young, for a fairy maiden had called him, and she held out to him the golden apple from the immortal wine-producing apple-tree, and he was fain to go. So he passed gladly out of the dark unquiet land of earth and entered the bright and fragrant land of everlasting life. But Crinna died, and Art was left alone, and he reigned in Tara, in the place of his father, Conn of the Hundred Battles. Now Olioll Olum, "Bare-ear," was King of Munster, and some say that he was called Olioll Bare-

ear because Aine of the fairy mound had bitten his ear in her anger, when he had killed her father, the king of the shee-mound of Knock-Aine. His wife was Sabia, daughter of Conn of the Hundred Battles, and from them were the Tribes of Thomond, or North Munster, descended; that is, the great Dalcassian race. They had seven sons, and a foster-son also, who was brought up with their sons, but lived to be a trouble to their race, for by him his foster-brothers were slain at the Battle of Magh Mucramha. His name was Lugaid (Lewy) Maccon, "Son of the Hound," for when he was a child he played with a great hound, so that the two were seldom seen apart; therefore the people called him the Hound's Son.

The cause of the quarrel between Lewy and his foster-brothers was the dispute of the phantom yew-tree of Mac Aingis, which held the little fairy man. One day the foster-brothers heard that Art the Solitary was making a journey in Connaught, and they set out together to join him. As they were passing across a flat land by the River Maigue, in Co. Limerick, they heard the sound of sweetest music coming from a clump of yew that overhung a waterfall. They halted to see who made that music, and in the clump they saw a little fairy man with a timpan, a tiny instrument of three strings, in his hand. Then they caught the little man and they began to quarrel together which of them should have him for their own. They could not decide, for both of



them wanted him, so they turned back to Olioll the king to ask him to decide. The king asked the little man his name. "I am Ferfi, son of the king of the sheemound whom you slew in your youth," said the little man. "And what are you quarrelling about?" said the king to his sons. "We are quarrelling who shall have the little man." "Why, what good is he?" asked the king again. "He plays on the timpan," said they. "Let me hear him play," said Oiloll. Then the tiny man sat up and he played first the weeping-strain, so that all who heard him began to weep and wail, and all in the palace were shedding tears; and then he changed and played the laughing-tune, and they laughed so loud and long, that their mouths were wide open, and you could see right down their throats; and then he played the sleeping-strain, and it threw them into a sleep so sound that they did not wake again for many hours, and while they slept he returned back into the fairy palace whence he came. Now all this was a device of the little man to breed mischief between the foster-brothers, in revenge for the death of his father, the king of the fairy palace. Much mischief, indeed, it did breed, for when they awoke, the brothers fell a-quarrelling again as to whose should be the phantom yew-tree. "Not much use is the yew-tree to you now," said the king, "seeing that the timpan-player is gone; what said ye when the little man was found?" "I said, 'Mine his music,' " said Maccon;

“ And I, ‘ Mine the musician, ’ ” said the other. “ Just so, ” said the king, “ and yours he shall be. ” And at that decision Maccon was so wroth, that the two foster-brothers fell to hot words, and Maccon said he would have the head from Eoghan his brother on the battle-field. That day month they fought the battle of Cenn Febhrat and Maccon was defeated, and fled away to Scotland with part of his forces.

For fear of being known, Maccon instructed his friends to disguise themselves and never to tell their names, for he was afraid the King of Scotland would send him back to his own country. But in course of time the king guessed who his visitor was, and he entrapped him into telling his name. It was with the desire to help him and not in order to betray him that the king did this, and as soon as he knew certainly that it was Maccon, he sent to the kings of Britain and of the Saxons, who were his relations, and gathered together a great army, and it is said that the fleet of ships and galleys and of small boats made a continuous line from Scotland across to Ireland. Maccon sailed round the South of Ireland, but found no place where it was safe to land until he came to the coast of Galway. There he and his host put ashore, and Maccon and Beine Brit, son of the King of Britain, led on their troops, until they met the forces of Art at Magh Mucramha (Moy Mucrava) between Athenry and Galway. The plain is called Magh Mucramha, or the

"Plain of Pig-counting," because there it was that Queen Maive tried to number the pigs of darkness and destruction that issued out of the Cave of Cruachan. For wherever those pigs trod, whether it were on corn or green grass-blade, no living thing would grow for the space of seven years, but if anyone tried to number them, they would migrate into another country. After the counting of Maive, they fled away, and it is not known whither they went.

There Maccon made traps cunningly to destroy his enemies. He placed his advance guard in pits, so that they could not be seen, and over them he placed light hurdles, with their spear-points just showing between the hurdles. To prevent the hired soldiers from Scotland and Britain deserting from his forces, he made the foot of each one of them fast to the foot of a Gael, or to one Gael two Britons would be attached; thus none could run away alone if the battle went against them. There a great battle was joined, and each of the leaders went forward with a crested helmet on his head and a coat of mail about him, and a broad sword in his hand. In the thick of the fight the warriors arose out of the pits and surrounded the forces of Art and Eoghan on every hand, and they gave way before them, and the victory remained with Maccon. The brother of Olioll was fighting on Maccon's side against his own kith and kin, and he saw Beine the Briton striking the head off his nephew Eoghan, and anger came upon him,



and the warm stirring of affection, and he sprang upon Beine from behind, and smote him, so that the head of Beine fell upon the prostrate body of Eoghan. When Maccon saw that, he cried out, "That was a bad stroke of generalship, O Lugaid (Lewy), to strike off the head of an ally." "I will make up to thee for that," said Eoghan, "for in place of the head of Beine I will bring you the King of Ireland's head." Then he set forth northwards until he encountered Art, and he slew him and took off his head, and brought it to Maccon.

Then forcibly Maccon seized on the kingship of Ireland, and for seven full years he was in Tara, but in his reign was neither plenty nor prosperity: the grasses would not pierce the ground, nor the leaves sprout in the woods, nor would the grain grow in the fields. Because he was a tyrant the men of Ireland hated him, and his foster-father Olioll hated him secretly more than they, for he had caused the death of his sons. In the end the men of Ireland drove him out of the kingdom, and with great plenty of cattle, horses, and followers, he returned southward to his own country. For he thought that Olioll would receive him, and care for him to the end of his days. But Sabia, his foster-mother, bade him beware of Olioll. "An evil man is he," she cried, "and an unforgiving." Maccon heeded her not, and went up to embrace the old man, and Olioll caught him and inflicted on him a wound, and drove him out, and sent men after him to destroy him, among whom the



chief was Ferches the poet. When Maccon saw Ferches, he placed his back to a pillar-stone, and his followers made a circle round him with their shields; but Ferches flung his spear athwart the host, and struck Maccon in the forehead so that he died. Olioll, when he heard that, said, "For thirty years till now I have been a worn old man, but the cast that Ferches made has roused me from my lethargy." And he took the kingship of Munster again into his hands. But Sabia, his wife, said, "Alas and woe the day that ever Ferfi played sweet music in the yew!"

## CHAPTER XXI.

CORMAC MAC AIRT, 227-266, A.D.

Authorities:—Pieces edited by Standish Hayes O'Grady in *Silva Gadelica*, entitled "The Panegyric of Conn's Grandson, Cormac," the "Battle of Crinna," "The Birth of Cormac, Grandson of Conn," and "The Adventures of Teigue, son of Cian." Piece entitled "Cormac's Adventure in the Land of Promise;" edited by Dr. Whitley Stokes, *Irische Texte*, Dritte serie, i. heft.

OF all the kings who reigned in Ireland, three were pre-eminent in nobility, in renown, and in the prosperity of their rule, namely, Conor, King of Ulster, and Conaire Mór, who died in the Destruction of the Bruighen of Dá Derga, and Cormac mac Airt, King of Ireland. But in wisdom, and in power, and in the love and affection of his people Cormac exceeded them all. When his father Art died in the Battle of Magh Mucramha, Cormac was not yet born. His mother was on a journey to Connaught when the child was born. She came down from her chariot and her maid pulled twigs from an overhanging tree, and made a couch of leaves for the mother and the babe, and there the mother fell asleep, enjoining the maid to look after the child, until she should wake again. But the maid was weary with the journey, and she too fell asleep; and while she slept a she-wolf came out of the forest and

carried off the babe in her mouth to the stone cave in which her whelps were being reared. When the mother awoke and found that her child was gone, she started out of her sleep suddenly, and uttered a lamentable cry. There Lughna (Luna), a friend of Art, to whom she was going, found her; and he was much disturbed that the child had been carried off. He took her to his house, and gave out that whoever could find the child should have whatever reward he desired. For Lughna knew that it was the son of a king. One day a man wandering about the country came by chance in front of a cave where wolf-cubs were playing, and among them a little wild child gamboling on all fours. "Ah," said the wanderer to himself, "this is certainly the lost child." He went to Lughna, and made his bargain with him for lands and property; and then he led Lughna to the cave; and both the boy and the cubs were taken away by him, and brought to his home to be nurtured. The boy grew in comeliness of form and feature, so that he was a joy to many to look upon; in ready speech, too, and fire and pride and high spirit he surpassed all his companions, and Lughna called him Cormac, as Art had desired. Once upon a time Cormac was at play with Lughna's sons, and Cormac struck one of the lads. "Ochone!" cried the lad, "I have been struck by a fellow whose very birth and clan is uncertain, and whose father no man knows." When Cormac heard this he was sorely cast

down; and he went to his foster-father, and told what the boys had said. "They said not the truth," replied Lughna; "for indeed thou art the son of a king, namely, of Art, son of Conn of the Hundred Fights, and of thee it is foretold that thou shalt possess thy father's realm; moreover, so long as he who now rules in Tara is lord, there shall neither be prosperity nor plenty in the land."

When Cormac heard that, he said, "Let us go to Tara, and bide our time, till I return to my father's house and kingdom." "We will go," said Lughna. So they set forth, Cormac and Lughna, and a body-guard of foot soldiers with them: but with Cormac went his wolves, following him; and they were received at Tara, and he dwelt as a pupil there. Maccon sat yet on the throne, but he was hated for his evil rule, and for the poverty that fell on the people of Erin in his time. Once the King made an award because of some wandering sheep that had eaten up the queen's crop of greenstuff. The king angrily demanded that the sheep should be given to the queen instead of the stuff that they had eaten. But Cormac, who sat beside the king upon the couch, exclaimed, "That is too harsh an award, O King. Rather let the sheep be sheared, and the wool be given for the food that they have eaten, for both the greenstuff and the wool will grow again." This he said because he saw that the woman who owned the sheep was sorely afflicted on



account of their loss. "It is a just award," said all; "surely it is the award of a king's son." And they paid attention to the boy from that time forward. For another year Maccon reigned, but so tyrannical was he, that at last the people rose against him, and ran him out of the kingdom, as we saw, and set up Cormac in his stead.

So Cormac dwelt at Tara, and reigned as King over Ireland, and there was not in the world so great a king as he. In wisdom and eloquence, in dominion and royal sway, in the vigour and splendour of his rule, there was none like him before or after him. And of Ireland he made a land of promise: there was no theft or violence in his day, nor did any need to guard the flocks, nor was anyone distressed for want of food and clothing. For every man went about his daily work, and none dare fail, except he were required by the king for military service in the defence of the kingdom. Cormac rebuilt the palace of Tara with great magnificence, and added the banqueting-hall, and the Grianán, or Sunny House, for his daughter, Grainne, and many buildings and underground storehouses besides. Here he celebrated the Feis of Tara with splendour, so that the old writers say that this was the noblest convocation ever held before the Christian Faith. At that meeting the book of the ranks and clans of the men of Erin was revised, and the possessions and authority of each was set down; the laws also were settled and promulgated.

Splendid was the appearance of Cormac and the chiefs as they entered that assembly. Every chief had around him his royal robe, and his golden helmet on his head, for they wore their crowns only on the battle-field. But Cormac outshone them all. His hair was golden, and slightly curled. Around him was his kingly purple mantle, fastened with a golden jewelled brooch upon his breast. A necklace of gold round his throat, and a girdle of gold with precious gems around him. He wore two shoes of network of gold, and golden buckles, and in his hand he carried two ringed spears, with many clasps of bronze, and a crimson shield with engraved devices, and golden hooks and clasps of silver. In the full glow of his beauty, without defect or blemish, he stood before the assembly.

It was Cormac's daughter, Grainne, who was to have married Finn, but who preferred to run away with Diarmuid (Dermot), his follower; and it was in the beautiful house that Cormac had built for her, that the banquet took place, from which she escaped with Diarmuid. For Grainne was vain and frivolous, and she despised Finn because he was, as she said, old enough to be her father, while Diarmuid was young and handsome. And Diarmuid was forced to go with her half against his will, and he met his death in consequence.

The reign of Cormac was not peaceful, for the men of Ulster and of Munster made war on him; and

it is said that in one day seven fights were made against them, in all of which the men of Ulster were routed. The fiercest fight, it was the first, was the Battle of Crinna; and the cause of it was that the men of Ulster considered that they were treated with indignity when they went to the Feis of Tara. They had sent on messengers to prepare the houses in which they should dwell during the feast; but the messengers found the walls agape and ruinous—no thatch, no means of warming, and the place foul from the cattle of the town. They returned in anger, and told these tidings; they said, moreover, that the troops of Cormac were few, and that it was an opportunity in which they might safely meet him in battle. So they sent a challenge to Cormac, but the king felt himself not yet strong enough to meet the forces of Ulster, so he marched south, and begged help from Olioll Olum, King of Munster, and from his grandson, Teigue.

Olioll welcomed him, but he said he was now an aged man, and that he had given up the kingdom to his sons; he advised that Cormac should seek the help of Lugaid (Lewy), his nephew, a famous warrior. Cormac knew that Lugaid would not be willing to aid him, for he had been the friend of Maccon, and he hated Cormac because he had superseded Maccon, and taken the kingdom from him. When Cormac reached the Glen of Aherlach, where Lugaid dwelt, they heard that Lugaid was unarmed, and bathing in a stream.



Cormac divided his men into three parties, and they came on Lugaid on all sides at once, and Cormac drew his sword and held it over his head, and cried, "Death hangs over thee, O Lugaid!" "I will give thee the life of another instead of my own," said Lugaid. "I will take no life," said Cormac, "except it be the life of a king in battle." "I will give thee that," said Lugaid. "I will take no life," said Cormac again, "except it be the life of Fergus Blacktooth, King of Ulster." "Thou shalt have it," said Lugaid. "Pledge thine honour upon it," said Cormac. "I do so," Lugaid replied; but with that he raised his head, and cried, "May he who prompted thee to this never prosper, for it is Olioll who has sent thee here; bad is the beginning of this affair, and bad will be its end."

Then Cormac went on to Teigue, but Teigue refused, for he said it was none of his affair. But Cormac persuaded him, and he promised him that if he would fight the battle of Crinna, he should have, over and above his just reward, so much land as his chariot could drive round between the hour at which the battle was won and the fall of night on the same evening. Then Teigue consented to go with him; but on the night before the battle, a deep sleep fell on Teigue, and he went away to the spirit land, and he foretold the end of the battle, and revealed the future to Cormac in his sleep. For Teigue was of those who dream, and to whom wondrous unseen things are revealed; and he



went in after days into the Land of Promise, and of Eternal Youth, and he abode there a good time, and saw wonders. But of this we cannot here tell the tale.

Then they set in order the battle, and Cormac reminded Lugaid of his promise to give him the head of Fergus Blacktooth, Ulster's King. And Lugaid promised again. Then the troops of Ulster charged with reckless valour, rushing into the battle, so that the earth shook and trembled beneath their feet. Their horses were maddened with the blows on the war-shields, and by the hurtling of javelins through the air and the rattling of the glittering mail, and they gave way before the forces of Cormac and Teigue. But Lugaid, wreaking his fury as he passed along, made his way to Fergus, as he thought, through the press, and though he was sore wounded as he went, he struck the head of Fergus from him, and carried it to Cormac. "Here, Cormac," he cried, "is the head I promised thee." "A blessing on thy valour," said Cormac; "had it been indeed the head of Fergus, I could hardly have been more pleased: but this is the head of Fergus's brother, set up with the king's helmet and crown upon it, to deceive us. I see the king yonder, fighting yet, O Lugaid, and I claim thy promise from thee." Then Lugaid said, "Stuff into my wounds some healing balms, that I may see what I can make of this other Fergus." Right and left then Lugaid smote down his foes, until he reached the spot where

the king, as he thought, was, and on the same stone as that on which he had smitten off the former head, he smote off the head of Fergus. Then he flung the head and diadem at Cormac's feet, crying, "The head of a king for thee, Cormac." "Success attend thy honour and thy name, O Lugaid," said Cormac; "for next to the king himself, there is no head that pleases me more than this." "What is this," cried Lugaid; "is this also not the head of the king?" "It is not," said Cormac. Then said Lugaid to his spear-bearer, "Look now, boy, and see how the battle goes, and if Teigue is still afoot." "I see him fighting still," answered the boy. "What are they doing now?" "The grey-beards of Munster in their last line of battle, are facing the youths of Ulster," said the boy. "Put some more sops into my wounds," said Lugaid, "that along with the grey-beards of Munster, I may wreak my death-fury on the men of Ulster." Then he rushed into the battle, where the old warriors of Munster were routing the striplings of Ulster, and upon the same stone Lugaid smote off the head of Fergus. Now, Cormac was afraid of the wrath and battle-fury of Lugaid when he returned from this last rout, and he forced his wizard to take the royal seat and place the kingly crown upon his head. When Lugaid returned to seek Cormac, he made a shot with the head of Fergus at the wizard, supposing it to be the king; and he slew the wizard with that stroke.

Then Cormac came to Lugaid. "It was no kindly stroke which killed my wizard, O Lugaid," he said. "Not thy wizard but thyself it was that I meant to kill," was the wrathful reply.

Even as he spoke, a great outcry was heard from the battle. "What shouting is that which I hear?" asked Lugaid of the boy. "It is the cheering of the men of Munster, pursuing the flying Ulstermen," cried the boy. At the same time there came a roar of battle from the front. "What cry is that?" asked Lugaid. "It is the men of Ulster returning to face their foes," said the boy. "If that be so," said Cormac, "it must be that Eochaid (Eochy) has joined them, and it will be no child's play to contend with him." "Unless I myself make my way to him," said Lugaid, "there is no man that can stand up to him; the little remnant of my life that is in me, on him it must be expended." Therewith he arose, and rushed again into the battle, and then and there, indeed, a fight was delivered; for when the weapons of both parties were flung away or destroyed and useless, hand to hand they fell upon each other. There the Ulstermen were routed, and the day remained with Cormac and the men of Munster.

After the battle, Teigue repaired to Cormac, and said, "Fulfil your promise, and give me the land round which a chariot can ride before sundown." "It shall be done," said Cormac. But



Teigue was so sore wounded that every moment he would swoon away, and Cormac, seeing this, laid a trap for him, that he might not be obliged to give him the land. He placed him in his own chariot, and instructed his charioteer, that whenever Teigue should swoon away, he should turn back the horses, and retrace his steps. "What reward shall I get for this?" asked the charioteer. "Thy freedom and the freedom of thy children for ever, if thou see that neither Tailte (Teltown) nor Tara fall to Teigue," said the king. So the charioteer did as the king commanded, and when Teigue fainted with the exhaustion of his wounds, he would turn the horses round eastward again and retrace their steps. In the evening they came to the River Liffey, and Teigue said, "Good now, boy, what river is this?" "Verily, it is the Liffey," said the man. "Have we passed round Tailte and Tara?" asked Teigue. "We have not," answered the charioteer. "Have we brought away either of them?" enquired Teigue. "We have not," was the reply. Then was Teigue wroth. "An ill trick hast been played me," he cried, "but the reward for which thou hast played it shall never be thine." And he drew his sword, and slew the charioteer on the spot. Then he set out for his own home, and when he found that Cormac sought excuses why he should not give him the land, he prepared to fight him for it; but when the king heard that, he gave way, and did as he had promised him.



A great misfortune overtook Cormac in the height of his prosperity. This was the loss of one of his eyes by a thrust from the weapon of Angus of the Poisoned Spear. A brother of Conn of the Hundred Battles named Fiacha lived on some land he had acquired near Tara called Deisi (Deece, Co. Meath), and he had three distinguished sons. One of these, Angus of the Poisoned Spear, became security for a warrior who had fallen under the displeasure of King Cormac. This was frequently done in those days, and a king would seldom injure a man who had been taken under the protection of a powerful chief. But one day a son of Cormac, named Cellach, fell out with the warrior, took him prisoner, and had his eyes put out, without the knowledge of the king, his father. Angus, on hearing what was done, marched straight to Tara, his spear in his hand, and with one thrust of it he killed Cellach, who was standing behind the monarch's chair, and, by misadventure, at the same time put out Cormac's eye. Cormac on this raised a force and drove Angus and his sept into banishment. For one year they remained in Leinster, constantly fighting Cormac; thence they proceeded south into Ossory; and finally Olioll Olum, whose wife was a sister of Conn of the Hundred Battles, and aunt of Angus, invited them to Munster, and he gave them a tract of land in his territories in Waterford and Tipperary, where they established themselves, and were known henceforth as the Deisi

of Munster. This expulsion of the great clan of the Deisi from Meath and their settlement in Munster is a well-marked fact in Irish history.\*

These events brought about great wars with Munster, which occupied much of Cormac's reign. In one of the battles Angus of the Poisoned Spear was killed. Cormac endeavoured to impose rents on Munster to support his great household, for he had largely increased the number of his dependents, and the province of Meath was not sufficient to supply them. But the King of Munster refused; and when Cormac levied a host against him and marched into Munster, he was driven back in rout to Ossory, and was compelled to give him hostages and securities. Some authorities say that Cormac was afterwards forced to retire with his fleet from Ireland, and that at this time he obtained a kingdom in Scotland. However this may be, he was obliged to resign the throne of Tara, for there was an old Irish law that no king with any defect or blemish should hold the monarchy; therefore, on account of his injured eye he could no longer remain King of Ireland. He

\*There were two divisions of the sept. The Northern Deisi had the Plain of Cashel from the R. Siuir to Corcu-Ethrach. The Southern Deisi had from the R. Siuir to the sea, and from Lismore to Credan Head. By the time the Anglo-Normans came to Ireland only the Southern Deisi remained (see Book of Rights Ed. O'Donovan, page 49-50 n)

withdrew to a house that he had built for himself at Cletty on the River Boyne, resigning his throne to his son, Cairbre of the Liffey; and there, in his old age, he composed the Laws and Royal Institutes of Ireland; and it is there that he is said to have renounced the doctrines of the Druids and his belief in pagan gods, and to have become a Christian. The Druids were very angry at this; and they caused him to be choked with a salmon bone, which had been kneaded up with a loaf of bread, and of which he died. He prayed that he might not be buried with his pagan ancestors at Brugh on the Boyne, but in spite of this, the host endeavoured to cross the river with his body to bury it in the tombs of the kings. But three times the river rose to a flood, and they were driven back, and at length they turned aside, and buried him at Rosnaree, with his face set eastward towards the rising sun.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### CAIRBRE OF THE LIFFEY AND THE FIANNA OF ERIN.

Authorities : Keating's History ; Transactions of the Ossianic Society ; *Silva Gadelica*, Vol. i., pp. 89-93, 130-132, 257 ; vol. ii., pp. 96-101, 142-145, 292, &c.

It is well that you should know something more about the Fianna and Finn mac Cumhall (Finn mac Cool), their leader ; for though the stories about them are so mixed with legend that it is difficult to know how much is true, yet in all the tales of Conn of the Hundred Battles and his successors they play an important part. Old people in Ireland who speak the national tongue can still tell stories of Finn and his warriors, even if they have forgotten about Cuchulain and the Champions of the Red Branch ; and in Scotland, too, he is well remembered, and the old people recite tales and songs of him round the fire on the long winter evenings.

It is very probable that some such band of trained warriors as the Fianna are represented to have been, did exist in Ireland about the time of which we are speaking. The foreign wars in which Ireland took part, and the constant invasion of troops from Britain and Scotland, would have made it necessary to have a standing army to guard the coasts and to be ready



for foreign expeditions. Hitherto there had been no regular army, but every man was trained to war, as is the case with the Swiss nation to-day. War was made chiefly at certain seasons of the year, when the people were not needed for husbandry; but the chiefs and upper classes seem to have given up their entire lives to warfare, and to have thought of little else. The warriors did not live in barracks, but in their own homes, and they assembled whenever the chief or king determined on a raid or battle. Cormac mac Airt is said, however, to have added a large military station to the palace buildings at Tara, and he constantly had trained soldiers in his service.

Finn had been born and bred an exile from his country, and he first came under the notice of the king from having one night, when he was still a youth, protected Tara against a threatened destruction. In reward, the king had restored to him his patrimony and his rights, and had made him also the Chief of the Fianna of Erin, in place of Goll mac Morna, whom he forced to strike his hand in Finn's hand and to swear to obey him. Finn proved himself to be a great warrior and an heroic and hospitable man, and he became so powerful that he was called the "Seventh King of Erin"; that is, the kings of the five provinces, and the King of Tara, and Finn himself.

It was not an easy thing to enter the ranks of the Fianna. Any youth who desired to be enrolled had to

prove his agility and skill by a variety of severe tests. He must run so swiftly that when pursued through the forests by men intent on inflicting on him a wound, he must escape unhurt from them. If his weapon quivered in his hand, or if in his flight he had cracked a dry branch of the wood, or if a braid of his plaited hair had been caught by a branch and ruffled, he would not be accepted. He must, without slackening his pace, leap a fence level with his brow, and stoop under a bar no higher than his knee: while running at full speed he must draw a thorn out of his foot without stopping. Besides all these proofs of dexterity and quickness, he must be able to defend himself from a hole in the ground with only a shield and a hazel-stick against nine warriors contending with him; he must never turn his back to fly before any nine warriors who were opposed to him.

He was to be learned as well as warlike; for no warrior could enter the Fianna without having passed through the highest education that could be given in those days. He was obliged to obtain the rank of a poet, and to be versed in the twelve books of poetry.

In return for their protection, the Fianna, however, obtained great privileges, and they made large demands upon the people. They had the right to hunt where they would through Ireland, and many are the stories told of their chase of wild boar, deer, and wild birds. Finn had a pack of famous hounds of his own, of which his favour-

ite was Bran, the dog which saved Dermot and Grainne when they were pursued by Finn.\*

Their success, and the idleness in which they passed a great part of the year when they were not engaged in fighting, led them at last into great excesses; they grew burdensome and insolent, and oppressed the people terribly, and they were so strong, having all the military power in their hands, that even the King of Tara dare not offend or resist them. They demanded unheard of sacrifices from the people and chiefs, namely, a cantred in every province, a townland in every cantred, and a house in every townland, besides wolf-dogs and other perquisites. For half of every year during the winter the troops were quartered about on the country, and no one dare refuse to take his share of the soldiers; while during the summer only the Fianna were allowed to hunt the wild game, and if any other person took even a hare found dead on the ground, he must pay a heavy fine: an ox if he killed a stag, a cow if he shot a fawn, and a sheep for smaller game. They even came to demand that no girl should be allowed to marry unless she had three times been offered to the Fians, and if one of them wanted her, she was forced to marry him instead of her own lover. This tyranny was the harder to bear, because the Fians were of an inferior

\*"Pursuit of Diarmuid and Grainne," (Society for the Preservation of the Irish language, 2 vols.).

race, and though they were good warriors and expert champions, such demands became intolerable.

The matter came to a crisis in the reign of Cairbre of the Liffey. King Cairbre had a lovely daughter, Sgeimhsolas, "Light of Beauty," and a chief of the Deisi, O'Faolain (Phelan), desired to marry her. When Finn heard this, he and his Fians dispatched messengers to Cairbre, reminding him that he was bound to pay them a large sum in gold as tribute for her marriage, or to deliver the girl up to them. Cairbre was naturally indignant, and said that sooner would he resign his crown than consent to such conditions. Finn replied that if he did not do so, the head of the princess would fall in revenge, and nothing short of this would satisfy them. Cairbre felt that the time had come to put a stop to this tyranny, and he sent envoys to call together in consultation the Kings of Ulster, Leinster, and Munster. They met, and agreed to submit no longer to such servitude; and, returning home, they gathered together their forces in the hope of expelling the Fianna from Ireland. The leaders of the Fianna also collected their troops from all parts of the country, as well as from Alba; there are said to have been twenty times the number of the king's forces in the army of the Fians. They met at Gabhra, or Gaura, in Meath, and this battle, which ended the power of the Fianna in Ireland, has been celebrated in many songs and stories. The troops of



Erin were led by the king himself, who fell in the battle. The Fianna were led by Osgur, grandson of Finn, whose death in the heat of the fight is told in such pathetic language in the old tales. They were in alliance with Morgcorb, King of Munster. Many of the poems and tales describing the deeds of the Fianna are ascribed to Oisín (Ossian), son of Finn, who was believed to have come back to the world again in the time of St. Patrick, to tell him the brave tales of the old days. They are, therefore, called the Ossianic Tales and Poems, though few, if any, of them could have been written by Oisín himself.

On the Hill of Howth, near Dublin, is a cromlech, known as "Aideen's Grave." Aideen was betrothed to Osgur, and she died of grief on receiving the news of his death.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### RISE OF NIALL OF THE NINE HOSTAGES.

Authorities :—“ The Death of Crimthan son of Fidach ” and the “ Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Muigmedon.” There are two editions of these tales, one by Dr. Wh. Stokes, *Rev. Celt.*, XXIV., 1903, and another from a different version by S. H. O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, Vol. i., pp. 326-336 ; Vol. ii., pp. 368-378.

CAIRBRE of the Liffey was succeeded by his son Fiacha. He had a son named Muiredach, whom he made his lieutenant and general of his forces, and who was to reign after him at Tara. One time when Muiredach was away fighting in Munster, a conspiracy was made by his cousins, the three Collas, to dethrone Fiacha, his father, in his absence, and seize the kingdom. They excited rebellion in the army of Tara, which they commanded, and they killed Fiacha in battle. But Muiredach, returning victorious from Munster at the head of an enthusiastic army which was ready to proclaim him king, soon overthrew the Collas, and sent them flying to Alba (Scotland) for protection. The King of Scotland received them warmly, for they were good soldiers and brave men. After three years they determined to return to Tara; they had been told by a Druid that if they could so exasperate the king as to make him

kill one of them, the sovereignty would pass from him and his descendants and be transferred to them. They went alone and unarmed to Tara, and asked admission. The gatekeeper sent word to the palace, "The three Collas stand on the green without; what shall be done with them?" "Open the liss," said Muiredach, "and enquire wherefore they are come." When they stood before the king, he asked: "Have ye news?" They replied, "No news can be more grievous to thee than our act in killing thy father." "We know that news already," said the king. "We are not come to ask pardon for that deed, you understand," said the men insolently. "Do not trouble about that," replied the king, "for no revenge shall be taken on you. If it was to excite me to kill you that you are come it will not succeed; for I will not take this means to make men forget the infamy with which you have covered yourselves." "That is the taunt of a coward," answered the Collas. "Be not disturbed by such ideas," said the king, "and you shall have peace and a welcome." When they saw that they could by no means disturb the gentleness of the king, they changed their manner towards him, and entered into friendly relations and brotherhood, and Muiredach made them commanders in his army, and a great affection grew up between them.

After a time, when their families increased in number, the Collas asked King Muiredach whether

they might conquer a territory for themselves and settle on it. Muiredach advised them to turn their arms against Ulster, which was not kindly disposed to him. So they entered into alliance with Connaught, and routed Ulster in seven battles, and harried the country, and made sword-land of it for themselves from Lough Neagh and the River Newry westwards. They destroyed the old capital, Emain Macha, and burned it, so that only its raths remain to-day; and they settled on those great territories, and made them their patrimony. This was about the year 332 A.D.\*

Muiredach was succeeded by his son, Eochaid (Eochy), who had two wives, Mongfind of the Long Fair Hair of Munster, and Cairenn of the Curly Black Locks, daughter of the King of the Saxons. Mongfind had four sons—Brian, Ailill, Fiacra, and Fergus—but Cairenn had never more than one child, who was more famous than all the rest, for he was Niall of the Nine Hostages, from whom men are proud to trace their pedigree. Mongfind was a harsh and evil woman, full of passion and black jealousy, and she hated Cairenn because the king loved her better than herself. She drove the poor girl out of the royal palace, and made a slave of her, condemning her to draw water from the well on the palace green: she alone to supply all the water needed by the servants

\* See Extracts from Annals—*Silva Gadelica*. Vol. II. (II. xviii.). The story is given in a shorter form by Keating.



in the palace. Even on the day when Niall was born she must do her duty, and draw as usual, for the queen's desire was to kill both her and the babe she bore. There, on the green before Tara, beside the pail was Niall born, and the mother durst not even pick the boy up from the ground, but left him exposed to the birds of prey; nor, for fear of Mongfind, who was possessed of magical power, durst any man of Erin come to her help.

But the same evening Torna the Poet, the Man of Learning, came across the green, and he saw the babe lying there all alone, and the wild birds of the air swooping down upon it. He snatched up the child from them, and laid it in his bosom, and then and there he sang a song to it. "A welcome to the little guest that shall yet be Niall of the Nine Hostages; in his time a multitude will fall by him; battle-plains will be enlarged; hostages will be overthrown; wars will be fought. Watchman of Tara, Leader of Magh Femin's hosts;\* Veteran of Liffey; Guardian of Moinmoy;† twenty-and-seven years shall Erin be ruled by him, and from him ever will the men of Erin reckon their descent." Then Torna took the boy home with him and fostered him; and until Niall was old enough to be

\* A plain in Munster.

† A territory in Co. Galway. Niall is acclaimed as ruler of all the provinces of Ireland.

king neither he nor his fosterer came to Tara. At length the day of his return arrived, and there on the green they saw Cairenn, who, during all those years, still drew water as a woman-slave, for even the king dared not interfere with Mongfind. She passed with her pail as Niall came near, but Niall, when he knew it was his mother, cried, "Leave alone that service, mother." "I dare not," she answered, "because of the queen." "My mother shall not work as a slave and I the son of the King of Ireland," he replied; and whether she would or no, he took her with him to the palace, and commanded that she should be clad in purple raiment, as became a queen.

Then Mongfind was furious, for she heard the men of Erin acclaiming Niall as their future king. She went secretly to the king, her husband, and said: "Tell me which of thy sons shall receive the kingdom after thee." "I cannot tell," said Eochaid, "but we will consult the smith of Tara, who is a wise man and a prophet." The smith called the young men into his forge, and when he had got them inside he shut them in and set fire to it. "Now we shall see," he said. Out came Niall first, bringing the anvil and its block along with him. "Niall prevails," cried the smith, "and he will be a solid anvil for ever." Then Brian got out, and he had the sledge-hammers in his hand. "Brian, the hammerer in battle," cried the smith. Fiacra brought with him a pail of ale and the bellows,

and Ailill carried the chest with the spear heads. "Fiacra for ornament and science and Ailill for vengeance," said the smith. At length Fergus appeared; but all he had with him was a bundle of dry sticks with one bar of green yew amongst them. "Withered and useless is Fergus," said the smith; and that was true, for of his seed only one came to any good.

Mongfind was now more angry than ever because Niall was chosen, and she tried to get her sons to kill Niall, but Torna preserved him from them.

One day the youths were hunting together in a forest with new weapons that the smith had made for them, and they lost their way, and could not by any means discover the path leading homewards. So they lighted a fire and roasted a portion of their game. Then they felt thirsty, and sent Fergus to look for water. He found a well, but it was guarded by an old, withered crone, so hideous to behold that he was terrified. "So that's the way, is it?" he said. "The very way," she answered. "Will you let me take away some water." "I will, indeed," she replied; "but only if you give me one kiss on my cheek." "I pledge my word," he said, "that sooner than give thee a kiss, I would perish with thirst."

One after another the brothers went to the well, but none of them could make up their minds to kiss the old crone, until Niall came. But he said that he would kiss her willingly for all she was so ugly, for

they needed the water greatly, and were near dying of thirst. As he kissed her he looked up, and lo! the old hag was gone, and in her place a young damsel, more graceful and beautiful than the eye of man had ever beheld. "What art thou, O maiden of many charms," cried the lad. "I am the Royal Rule and Sovereignty of Tara," she replied. "And as at first I was ugly, so is Royal Rule, which may not be won without battles and conflict, but in the end it is splendid and comely. Take the water to thy brethren, but give it not to them till they yield thee their place and birth-right, with thy weapon raised an hand's breadth over theirs, and an oath from them not to oppose thee or thy posterity. For none of their descendants shall reign at Tara save Dathi and Ailill, of the seed of Fiacra, and Brian of the Tributes out of Munster."

Then Niall did as the maiden bade him, and they returned to Tara and seated themselves, with Niall in their midst, and his weapon the breadth of a hero's hand above their weapons. And all men acknowledged him as the future King of Tara.

But Mongfind was not appeased that her eldest son Brian should not reign; and when Eochaid died, she used all her magic arts to have her brother, Crimthan, made king in order to keep Niall out of his sovereignty until Brian might go over the seas and learn the arts of a brave warrior, that so he might return and claim his



realm. At the end of seven years Brian came back, bronzed and vigorous, with the strength of a bull and the knowledge of all martial science and skill. Mongfind, who had put Crimthan into the sovereignty, now wanted to get rid of him, so that Brian might immediately take the kingdom. But Crimthan had proved himself a powerful king and a great warrior, and had made himself respected even among foreign nations on account of his over-sea wars, and it was not easy to get rid of him without raising an insurrection in the country, so in her foul heart she planned an ill design; for she invited her brother to a banquet, and there she offered him with her own hands a poisoned cup. "I will not drink," he said, "till thou drink first": for he suspected that his sister had a design upon him. Then they drank together, and Mongfind died, but Crimthan got as far as the home of his forefathers, and he died at the Mountain of the Throne, which is now called Crimthan's grave.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### CLOSE OF THE PAGAN PERIOD.

Authorities : English Chronicle, Bede's *Eccle. History*, Rhys' *Celtic Britain*, with the piece entitled " The Death of Crimthan," in *Silva Gadelica*.

BUT, after all, Mongfind's cruelty did not avail her ; for Brian, her son, did not succeed to the throne, but Niall succeeded. He was one of the most powerful kings of his day. He made wars in Britain, Alba, and Armorica (Brittany), and gained the name of Niall of the Nine Hostages, because he subdued princes in all these countries, and took hostages from them. Niall went with a great army to strengthen the Irish settlers in the south-west of Alba (Scotland) against the Picts. This province began to be called Scotia Minor, or Lesser Scotland, while Ireland was called Scotia Major, or Greater Scotland ; for you will remember that Ireland was then commonly called Scotia and its people Scots, and Scotland was always called Alba. But when these settlers grew powerful, as they did in after days, they gave their kings to the country, and then the name of Scotland became common to the whole kingdom, and was finally transferred from Ireland to Northern Britain. On the Continent, however, Ireland

was known by the name of Scotia as late as the 15th century. The reigns of Niall and his immediate successors were marked by the descents of the Picts and Scots upon the Roman settlements in Britain, about which we hear so much in English and Roman history. The Scots there spoken of were the Irish of Erin and Alba, who united with the Picts of North Britain, and made frequent and terrific descents upon the northern and western coasts of England. The accounts in the Irish Annals are here, therefore, strictly historical. The Irish Annals tell us that during his short reign Crimthan had overrun Britain, Alba, and Gaul. This would be about 366 A.D., and we know from the English Annals that twenty years later the Scots and their allies had made such progress that they were driven back from the gates of London by the Emperor Theodosius.\*

In 364 they were joined by the Picts and Saxons and by the Atecotti, who seem to have inhabited part of the district between the walls of Hadrian and Severus. Theodosius drove back the combined forces each to its own country, and the Atecotti, who seem to have been great fighters, were enrolled in the Roman army and stationed on the Continent. In 387 Britain was weakened by the drawing off of a large army under Maximus to Gaul. Maximus was a Briton who had obtained the command of the Roman army in Britain and had

\* Bede mentions that the Picts came from the North and the Scots from the West. *Eccle. Hist.* Book I, Ch. XII.

caused himself to be proclaimed emperor. He went over to Gaul with the flower of the army to support his claims, and perished there with most of his followers. His usurpation was disastrous to his own country; for his withdrawal of the troops left it exposed to the attacks of enemies on all sides.

The Britons appealed for aid to Rome, and in 396 A.D. the able General Stilicho was sent to drive back the invaders. The difficulty of his task is proved by the rapturous praise bestowed on Stilicho by Claudian on the successful general's return. "The Scot (*i.e.*, the Irishman)," he exclaims, "moved all Ierne against us, and the sea foamed under his hostile oars." It was probably against Niall of the Nine Hostages that Stilicho fought.

When the Roman troops were again withdrawn in 402 A.D., the Picts and Scots once more swept over the country, and again the Romans sent aid. It was in 407 A.D., two years after the death of Niall, that Constantine withdrew the Roman troops for the last time to resist the invasions of the Goths, who were threatening to overwhelm Rome.

→ Niall brought hostages and slaves with him from every country in which he warred successfully; one of these slaves was St. Patrick, whom he carried off as a boy of fifteen from his father's home, which was probably situated in the district between the walls, somewhere near Dumbarton, and brought as a captive to the North of Ireland. It was during the close



of the reign of Niall and in that of his successor Dathi, that Patrick lived as a slave and keeper of swine among the mountains of Slemish, in Co. Down.

Tradition says that it was during one of his wars in Gaul, that Niall met his death. He had in his host, besides his Irish troops and people from the district of Scotia Minor, a son of a king of Leinster whom Niall had defeated and driven into exile. This young man had followed the army in the hope of finding some opportunity of taking vengeance for the death of his father. He did not present himself before the king, who seems to have been unaware of his presence, but when Niall encamped beside the River Loire, he entered a grove on the opposite side of the river, and awaiting his opportunity, he shot Niall through the heart with an arrow. Niall had fourteen sons, who settled in Meath and Ulster, but he was succeeded on the throne by his nephew Dathi, a son of Fiacra, one of Mongfind's children.

These step-brothers of the King had not only indulged in wars between themselves during his reign, but they had proved very troublesome to Niall. He had placed Brian next to himself as head of his army, and had permitted him to acquire the sovereignty of Connaught, but Brian was so jealous of his brother Fiacra and of his nephew Dathi, who had also obtained some property there, that he pursued them in one battle after another till Dathi finally defeated Brian and killed him in battle. Niall then bestowed Brian's kingdom on

Fiacra and his son Dathi, but Fiacra fell in a battle with Munster. There is a terrible story that when he was buried, the hostages of Munster who were with his army were buried alive round his tomb as a taunt and reproach to his enemies.

— Dathi was the last of the Pagan Kings of Ireland. He also was a warlike man and carried on the foreign wars of Niall. He had advanced as far as the Alps with his troops and was ascending the mountains, possibly with the idea of passing into Italy, when he was struck by a flash of lightning and killed. It was generally believed that this fate overtook him in consequence of his cruel treatment of a recluse named Formenus, who had built a tower for himself high up on the mountains, in which, after the manner of some recluses, he had shut himself up so that he never saw daylight. The soldiers of Dathi began to demolish the tower, but Formenus knew nothing until he suddenly felt himself exposed to the air and light. His body was buried or his relics preserved at a village lower down on the mountain.

The body of Dathi was carried by his army all the way home to Ireland. On their way they fought several battles, and it is said that his son caused the dead body of his father to be carried in state in the midst of the army, erect, and with a lighted fuse in the mouth, that the enemy might still think him to be alive and breathing. He was buried at Rathcroghan in Co. Roscommon, the royal burial place of the Kings of Connaught.

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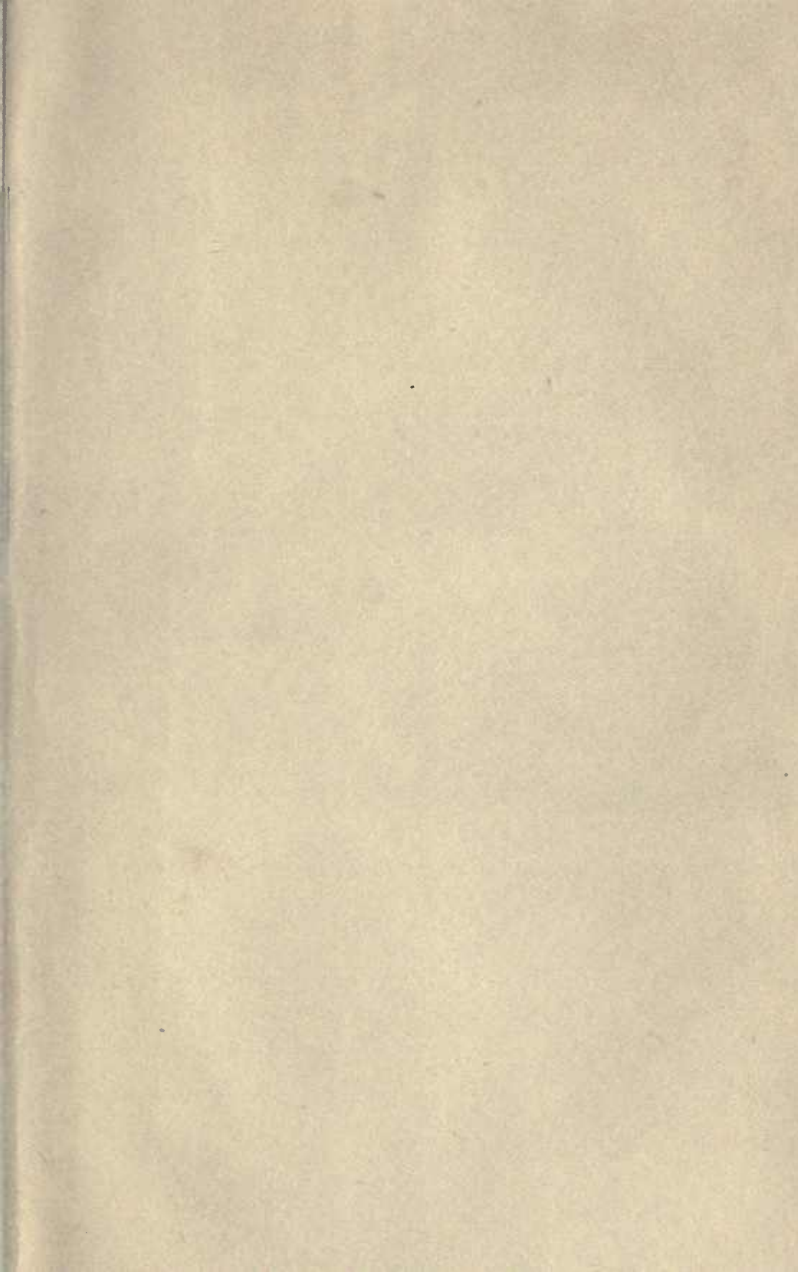
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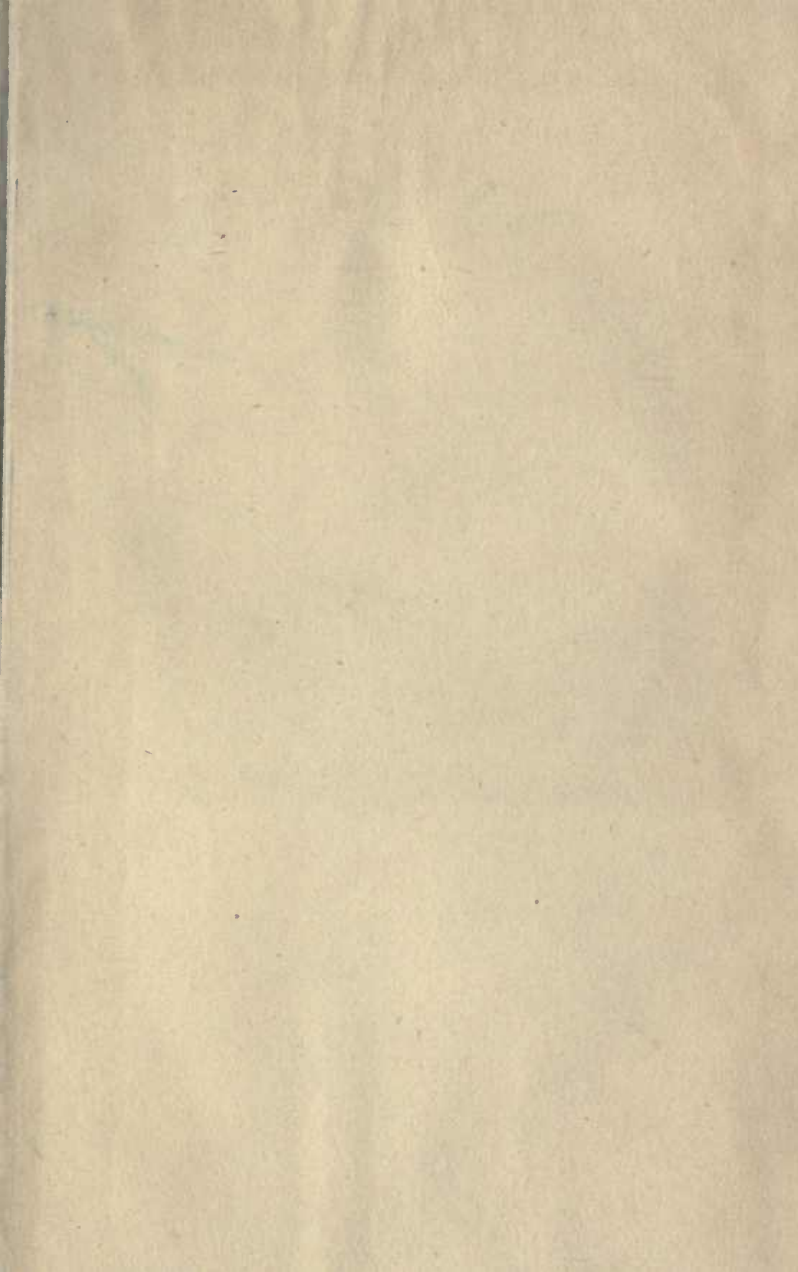
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