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DEIRDRE'S LAMENT.

A Land of Heroes

Stories from
Early Irish History

BY

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WITH SIX ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN H. BAON



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INTRODUCTION.

Who the authors of these Tales were is unknown. It is generally accepted that what we now possess is the growth of family or tribal histories, which, from being transmitted down, from generation to generation, give us fair accounts of actual events. The Tales that are here given are only a few out of very many hundreds embedded in the vast quantity of Old Gaelic manuscripts hidden away in the libraries of nearly all the countries of Europe, as well as those that are treasured in the Royal Irish Academy and Trinity College, Dublin. An idea of the extent of these manuscripts may be gained by the statement of one, who perhaps had the fullest knowledge of them—the late Professor O'Curry,—in which he says that the portion of them (so far as they have been examined) relating to Historical Tales would extend to upwards of 4000 pages of large size. This great mass is nearly all untranslated, but all the Tales that are given in this volume have already appeared in English, either in *The Publications of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language*; the poetical versions of *The*

Foray of Queen Meave, by Aubrey de Vere; *Deirdré*, by Dr. Robert Joyce; *The Lays of the Western Gael*, and *The Lays of the Red Branch*, by Sir Samuel Ferguson; or in the prose collection by Dr. P. W. Joyce, entitled *Old Celtic Romances*; and the contributions to *Atlantis*, and *The Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History*, by Professor O'Curry.

These translations or compositions, however, are, besides being lengthy, suited rather for mature minds; the present telling of the Tales is intended to reach the level of children, in the hope that a more lively interest may be taken by these readers in the historic events and places of Ireland. With this view the Tales, drawn from different sources, have been placed in something of chronological order, and an English dress has been given to the Irish names. The deterrent effect of the appearance of Irish words on purely English readers is well known, even without the strangeness of the Celtic element, which is referred to by Dr. Douglas Hyde in his *Sketch of Early Gaelic Literature*, where he says: "The moment the English reader embarks on the sea of native Irish literature he finds himself in absolutely unknown waters. Its allusions are to things and times and events and cycles and dynasties, strange and unknown to him, and he thus finds himself suddenly launched into a new world, whose existence was by him perfectly unsuspected." And,

in estimating the value of these Tales, Dr. Hyde may be again quoted: "We find in our most ancient Tales a genuine picture of Pagan life in Europe for which we look in vain elsewhere, and, through this early Irish peep-hole, we get a vivid picture of the life and manners of the (Celtic) race in one of its strongholds, from which we may conjecture, and even assume, a good deal with regard to the others".

"Foreigners", says Mr. Standish O'Grady in his *Early Bardic Literature*, "are surprised to find the Irish claim for their own country an antiquity and a history prior to that of the neighbouring countries. Here lies the explanation. There is not a conspicuous sepulchral monument in Ireland the traditional history of which is not recorded in our ancient literature, and of the heroes in whose honour they were raised. In the rest of Europe there is not a single barrow, dolmen, or cist of which the ancient traditional history is recorded; in Ireland there is hardly one of which it is not."

With reference to the amount of credence to be placed in the "Historic Tales", Professor O'Curry, in his *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History*, says that—"Under the ancient laws of Erin an obligation was imposed upon certain high officers to make and preserve regular records of the history of the country. The duty of the Ollavs was, however, a good deal more

extensive than this, for they were bound, by the same laws, to make themselves perfect masters of that history in all its details, and to teach it to the people by public recitals, as well as to be the legal referees upon all subjects in dispute concerning history and the genealogies (and you will bear in mind that the preservation of the rights of property of individuals intimately depended on the accuracy of that history and of these genealogies). The laws provided strictly for the education of the Ollav (and no one could be a Brehon or Judge that had not attained the degree of an Ollav), and they conferred on him valuable endowments and most important privileges, all which he forfeited for life if he became guilty of falsifying the history of any fact or the genealogy of any family."

"The education of the Ollav was long and minute. It extended over a space of twelve years of hard work, and it appears that he was bound (even from the very first course of his professional studies), among other duties, to have the Historic Stories; and these are classed with the genealogies and synchronisms of history, in which he was to preserve the truth of history pure and unbroken to succeeding generations. According to several of the most ancient authorities, the Ollav, or perfect Doctor, was bound to have (for recital at the public feasts and assemblies) at least seven fifties of these historic narratives. It is thus perfectly clear that the com-

positions called Historic Tales were composed for a much graver purpose than that of mere amusement; and when the nature of the profession of the Ollav, the Poet, the Historical Teacher, is considered, as well as the laws by which it was regulated, it will not be surprising that the poems and tales, in which those officers preserved the special facts and details of history, should have been regarded, at all times, as of the greatest authority."

As will be seen, however, from a perusal of the Tales, it was permissible to introduce fairy agency or necromancy. This can hardly be considered as mere "poetical machinery", but rather as the true expression of the ideas which the writers had, of the means by which the occurrences that they relate were brought about.

The earlier stories, such as those of the "Sons of Turenn" and "Children of Lir", belong to the class of "Imaginative Tales", and must be regarded mainly as mythological. The Tales of this class are numerous, and were all composed before the year 1000. They contain, in the originals, references to places mentioned in history, and the descriptions are so minute that the situations of towns, forts, and burial-places, which might otherwise be uncertain, can be easily identified. Even in the wildest of them there will almost always be found something made use of that is drawn from the mode of life that was passing around the author,

or from accounts with which he was familiar by tradition from his forefathers, and hence they are of advantage in getting a slight acquaintance with early Irish life.

A sufficient warranty may therefore be claimed for bringing a selection from these Historic and Imaginative Tales before young readers.

The favour of the permission granted by Lady Ferguson to insert the two poems of the late Sir Samuel Ferguson, and by Dr. Joyce to include "Finola's Farewell", as well as Dr. Joyce's kindness in reading the proofs and examining the Irish names given in the Tales, are gratefully acknowledged.

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A LAND OF HEROES.

NUADA OF THE SILVER ARM.

MANY, many hundreds of years ago, and long, long before our Lord was born, there was a king in Ireland who was called Nuada of the Silver Arm, because one of his arms had been cut off from the shoulder by a Firbolg warrior at the battle of Moytura, near Cong, in the county Mayo, and a clever workman had made him another of silver. The king had a soldier to guard the gate of his palace, which at that time was called a rath, and was situated at Tara, in the county Meath; and this soldier, at one time, had only one eye. But a doctor put a cat's eye in the place of the other one, so that when the soldier was asleep, if only a mouse stirred, or a bird flew past, he would awake. This made him a very good watchman.

Although this king ruled over his people, who were called De Danann, and were workers in bronze and copper and silver, they had to pay a heavy rent or tax to another people called Fomorians. For every quern or stone that they had for grinding their corn, for every trough that they had for kneading their dough, and for every baking stone or griddle, they had to pay a tax. Besides, they had to give an ounce of gold for every nose of a De Danann that was on the hill of Usnach, which lay to the west of Tara. These taxes had to be paid every year, and any man who would not pay had his nose cut off by these terrible Fomorians.

One year Nuada held a great fair or meeting on the hill of Usnach, then called Balor's Hill, in Westmeath. To this fair came a young man whose face was bright like the sun. His name was Lugh "the long-armed", and he rode upon a steed that was as swift as the cold east wind, and that could go as well on the sea as on the land. He was covered with shining metal, which saved him from being

wounded either under, over, or through it, and on his head was a helmet or head-piece that had two beautiful bright stones in front and one behind. At Lugh's left side was a sword, and a wound made by it could never be healed; and with him came the Fairy horsemen. All these had been given to him by Fairy King Mannanan, who dwelt in the Isle of Man, which people sometimes called the "Land of Promise", and sometimes "Tir-na-noge", or the land where people were always young and happy.

When Nuada had bid welcome to Lugh and his Fairy troop they saw an ill-looking, fierce band of men coming towards them. These were the stewards of the Fomorians coming to take the taxes or tribute.

The king and all the De Danann stood up when the ugly band came before them, and Lugh then asked:

"Why do you stand up before this grim people, while you did not arise when we came?"

"We are obliged to do that," said the king, "for if there were even a child of ours that

was only a month old, who did not stand up before them, they would slay it."

When Lugh heard this he said to Nuada, "I should like to kill these tax-men. Too long have you let these men make slaves of you." He then arose and slew eight times nine of them. There were nine more that he let live, because they ran and sat near the king and begged him to save them.

To these Lugh said, "I would also kill you, but that I wish you to go to your people and tell them what has happened to the others".

These nine went back, therefore, to Lochlann, as Denmark or Sweden was then called, where the Fomorians lived, and they told the news of the slaying of all the stewards except themselves.

THE DEATH OF LUGH'S FATHER.

The chiefs of the Fomorians then came together, and one of them, named Bres, said:

"I will take seven brave troops of warriors and go into Erin and fight this mighty one, and bring back his head with me to Lochlann".

They hoisted their sails of different colours, and rowed out steadily and strongly across the sea till they reached Eas Dara, which means Dara's waterfall, and is now called Ballisodare, in Sligo. Here Bres let his host of warriors free to plunder and destroy all the west part of Connaught, of which county Bove Derg was then king.

Lugh "the long-armed", when he knew that the Fomorians had come ashore at Eas Dara, rode away west from Tara. He had not gone far when he met three warriors named Cu, Kethen, and Kian, the three sons of Canta, and he asked them to go and gather together the Fairy host of horsemen wherever they might find them in Erin. Cu and Kethen went southwards, and Kian went north till he came to the plain that lies between Drogheda and Dundalk, which was then called Murthemna.

As he came upon the plain out of the woods that were around it, he saw three armed men coming towards him, and he knew them to be the three sons of Turenn. Their names were Brian, Urcar, and Ur.

There was a great hatred between the sons of Canta and the sons of Turenn.

Kian tried to hide, as he was only one and they were three, but they found him and killed him. But instead of killing him with weapons they pelted him with stones, and made a horrid mass of him, and afterwards they buried him in the earth.

Now this Kian was Lugh's father.

Lugh had gone west by the ford at Athlone to the Curlieu Hills, and across Corran mountain in Sligo, until he came to the "Great Plain of the Fair", near Ballisodare, where the Fomorians had gathered all the spoils of Connaught. He asked them to give back the milch cows they had taken from the people of Erin, but they replied that he would never get either a dry or a milch cow from them.

Lugh then put a magic spell upon the cattle, and sent back to every house its own milch cows, but he left the dry cows with the Fomorians so that they should not be able to leave the country until the Fairy troop overtook them.

After three days' and three nights' waiting, the troop came, and King Bove Derg with them. Then began a great battle, in which they first threw their spears at one another until these were all broken, and then they drew their broad bronze-handled swords and began smiting one another. When Lugh came near the battle-pen, where Bres stood in the middle with all his brave warriors around him, he attacked it, and two hundred of the body-guard were slain by him. But he let Bres live when he promised to fight him some other time at another Moytura that is in Sligo.

When Lugh found that his father had not been seen in the fight he set out with the Fairy troop to find him, and went along until they came to the place where Kian was buried. Here he heard a magic voice, which told him all that had happened to his father. Lugh had a great tombstone erected where Kian was buried, and put his name on it. He sang a dirge or death-song for his father, and then set off for Tara.

LUGH ASKS FOR AN ERIC.

There was a feast at Tara, and Lugh sat in the highest place, among the chiefs of Erin, next the king. As he looked round him he saw the sons of Turenn seated also at the feast.

Lugh asked for the chain of attention to be shaken, which was a signal that all were to be silent and listening. He then said, "I ask each of you chiefs what vengeance you would put upon those who had killed the father of any one of you?"

Great wonder fell on all upon hearing this, and the king answered first:

"We hope it is not your father who was killed."

"It is indeed," said Lugh, "and I see here in this house the persons who killed him. I ask for an eric from them for his death, and I will say here what the eric is to be, and if they think it too great it shall be lessened by a part."

You must understand that at that time the laws which the people had to obey were called

the Brehon Laws, and one of these said that anyone who killed another should pay to the nearest relation a fine as a punishment, and this fine was called an "eric".

The children of Turenn at first thought to deny having killed Kian, but they afterwards confessed it, and agreed to give "eric" for him to his son Lugh.

"This is the eric," said Lugh, "which I shall ask from you—namely, three apples, the skin of a pig, a spear, two steeds, a chariot, seven pigs, a whelp, a cooking-spit, and three shouts on a hill. If you deem it heavy, a portion of it will be forgiven, here upon the spot, but if you do not think it heavy you must pay it all to me."

Brian, the eldest of the sons of Turenn, said they did not deem the fine heavy, nor would they think three hundred thousand apples, and skins of pigs, and one hundred of each of the other things, too heavy an eric for a father's death.

The children of Turenn then gave the king, and Bove Derg, and the nobles of the De

Danann as bails for the payment of the eric to Lugh.

“Now,” said Lugh, “I will explain the eric to you. The three apples are in a garden in the east of the world, and they are the best and most beautiful and wonderful apples in the world. They will heal the wounds or cure the sickness of anyone who eats of them; but I don’t think you possess the power to take those apples from those that have them. The skin of the pig which I want belongs to the King of Greece, and it will cure and make whole all the wounded and infirm of the world if only it is put over them while the life is in them; but I do not think it is easy to get it. The spear belongs to the King of Persia, and difficult it is to get. The two steeds and chariot are owned by the King of Sicily. No matter how often these steeds are killed they will become whole again, if only their bones are found together, and I deem it will not be easy to get them. The seven pigs are with the King of the Golden Pillars, and neither disease nor ill-health will happen to him who

eats some of them. The whelp is owned by the King of the Iroda, and the cooking-spit by the women of the island of Fingara. There is a hill in the north of Lochlann which belongs to Midkena, who taught my father, and, even if I forgave you his death, I am sure Midkena and his sons will avenge him on you, should you try to give the three shouts on his hill. And this is the eric I ask of you," said Lugh.

THE GOLDEN APPLES.

In great trouble the children of Turenn went to their father, as they now feared that they could never fulfil the eric. He told them their doom was a just one, for it was an evil thing to kill Kian, but that it was only by Lugh's help that they could get all that was required. He sent them to Lugh to ask for a loan of the steed of Mannanan. "This", said Turenn, "he will not give you, but he cannot refuse you whatever you may ask for next. Ask him therefore for a loan of the currach of Mannanan, which is called the 'Wave sweeper'."

When the three sons went to Lugh and asked for the steed, Lugh said:

“I have that steed myself only on loan, and since I do not own it, I will not give you a loan of a loan.”

“Well,” said Brian, “give us a loan of the currach of Mannanan.”

Lugh gave the loan of the currach, and the three brothers went to Brugh-na-Boinne, or “Palace of the Boyne”, which was on that river near where Slane is at present. There the currach lay, and they set off from the borders of Erin.

This currach was a magic little boat, made of skins stretched on twigs, that seemed as if it could hardly hold the three of them; but when they bade it sail to the Garden of the Apples it went on the bosom of the green-crested waves in the straightest course across the sea to the port near the garden.

The apples in the garden were watched over by guards both by day and night, and in order to escape being killed by these guards, Brian changed his two brothers and himself, by his

magic wand, into three beautiful hawks. The guards threw fierce and deadly spears at the birds, but did not hit them, and when all the spears had been cast the hawks swooped down and the younger brothers flew away each with one apple, but Brian took two; and they brought them to the currach. They then sailed for Greece to seek the skin.

THE PIG-SKIN AND THE SPEAR.

“It will be best”, said Brian, “not to appear as warriors here, but to go as poets or bards from Erin, for in Greece these are held in greater respect.”

So they tied up their hair like poets, and had themselves brought before the king. They were at once made so comfortable and happy, that they thought there was not in the whole world a king's court so good, nor a household so numerous.

The king's poets arose and sang their lays for the people. Brian then sang a poem in which he spoke about the skin. The king said it was a good poem, but that the skin which

he was asked for would not be given to the greatest poets or chiefs of the world unless they were able to take it away in spite of him. But he offered them thrice the full of the skin of gold for the poem. Brian said he would take the gold, but when the servants were going to measure it he made a swift snatch at the skin with his left hand, and with his right struck with his sword at the man nearest him, so that he cut him in twain. He wrapped himself in the skin, and, with the help of his two brothers, fought and killed the guards and nobles, and then came before the king. Brian and the king then fought until the king was killed. After staying for three days and three nights to rest in the king's palace, they went in search of the spear of the King of Persia.

When the currach reached the shores of Persia the three sons agreed that it would be best to go again as poets. They were received with great honour by the king, and his poets arose and sang their lays.

Brian sang a poem, and when he asked for the spear as a reward for it, the king said,



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BRIAN SNATCHES THE PIG-SKIN.

“You were ill-advised to demand that gift from me, and the greatest honour that can be given to your poem is that I should spare your life, for you deserve death on the spot for asking for the spear”.

On hearing this, Brian threw one of the apples at the king, and sent it right out through his brain at the back. Drawing his sword from the sheath he began slaying, with the help of his two brothers, the hosts around him till he had fought his way to the courtyard, where the spear stood with its head in a cauldron of water, so that it might not burn the court, and they carried it off.

THE STEEDS AND CHARIOT.

The children of Turenn next set off to King Dobar to seek for the two steeds and the chariot.

They were very proud and in high spirits after what they had done, so they agreed to go to this king as Irish soldiers who wished to fight for him, as they thought they could best in that way find out where the steeds and cha-

riot were kept. They enlisted with him; but a fortnight and a month went by and they did not see the steeds. At the end of that time they put on their fighting suits of arms, and, with their weapons in their hands, went before the king and told him that they were going away to serve some other king, because he had not shown them his steeds and chariot, which they heard were the best in the world.

“It is ill of you to make that an excuse for going away,” said the king, “as, had I known you wished to see them, I would have shown them to you the first day; for there never came to this court soldiers dearer to me and to the chiefs of my country than you are.”

The king then sent for the steeds, the chariot was yoked to them, and they were driven round in view of the brothers. Now Brian was carefully watching the steeds when they went by as swiftly as the raw, cold winds of spring, and when the chariot came near him he seized the charioteer by the small of the foot and struck him against a rock and killed him. Then he bounded into the cha-

riot and made a stroke at the king with the spear of the King of Persia, by which he split his heart. The three brothers afterwards slew the host of warriors at the court, and brought away the steeds and the chariot.

THE SEVEN PIGS AND THE WHELP-HOUND.

By this time the news of the three Irish warriors had spread far and wide, and everyone heard how those skilful fighting men were bearing away the best and most wonderful things in the world. When they came then to the harbour of the King of the Golden Pillars, he asked them why they went about killing so many of the kings. Brian told him their story, and how it was the sentence of another man that obliged them to do it.

“And why have you come to this country?” said the king.

“For the seven pigs which you have,” said Brian, “to take them along with us as a portion of the eric. If we get them with your good-will, we take them thankfully; but if we do not get them in this way, we must

give battle to you and to your people for them."

The king, who was named Asal, took counsel with his people, and they agreed of their own free-will to give the pigs.

"What journey do you now propose to take, O children of Turenn?" said the king.

"To Iroda, for the whelp-hound which is there," said they.

"Grant me a request," said the King of the Golden Pillars. "Take me with you to the King of Iroda, for my daughter is his wife, and I would like to persuade him to give the hound to you without strife."

They consented, the king's ship was got ready, and they sailed away to the delightful and wonderful coast of Iroda, which is now known as Iceland.

Asal went ashore peacefully and, going to where his son-in-law was, told the King of Iroda the story of the children of Turenn from beginning to end.

"What brought them to this country?" said the King of Iroda.

“To ask for the hound which you have,” said Asal.

“No three warriors in the world will be able to get my hound either of my free-will or by force,” said he. So Asal went back to the brothers with these tidings.

They took a quick and warlike grasp of their arms and went against the host of that cold land. The fury of the contest was great, until in the fray Brian reached the battle-pen of the king, and after a stout combat overcame him. Then, seizing him in his arms, he brought him to where Asal was.

“There is your son-in-law for you,” said he, “though it would have been easier to kill him thrice than to bring him in this way to you but once.”

They obtained the hound and released the king, from whom they then parted in peace and friendship.

THE LAST OF THE ERIC.

The children of Turenn had now obtained every portion of the eric of which Lugh was

in need to help him in his battle with Bres at Moytura. Lugh therefore put a magic spell on the brothers which made them forget the rest of the eric and wish greatly to come to Erin.

When the children of Turenn landed at Brugh-na-Boinne the king of Erin was holding a fair or meeting on the plain before Tara. They came to where the king was and a welcome was given to them, and they asked for Lugh in order that they might give him the eric. Lugh had been at the meeting, but when he knew of their coming he had gone to Cahir Crofinn in the Rath of Tara, so messengers were sent to him from the children of Turenn. The answer he gave to the messengers was that he would not come, and that the eric should be given to the king. When he knew that this had been done he came to receive it from the king, as he had been the bail for the payment of the eric.

“But,” said Lugh when he had got all that they brought, “there is a balance that it is not lawful to forgo, for an eric fine must be paid

in full. Where is the cooking-spit, and where are the three shouts upon the hill?"

Sadness and deep sorrow came upon the children of Turenn when they found that they had to go through yet more troubles. But after spending one night at the house of their father they went to their ship and away over the loud-murmuring sea, and were a quarter of a year without getting tidings of the island where the spit was.

Then Brian put on his water-dress, and around his head he put a helmet or head-dress made of crystal, that let in light, and he took a plunge into the water. He was a fortnight walking in the water before he found the Island of Fincara. There he saw a troop of women working with their needles, and amongst the other things that they had with them was a cooking-spit. Brian raised it and was bringing it to the door, when the women burst into a laugh and said that the least of them, if she wished, could prevent him and his brothers from taking the spit, but nevertheless he might have it as he was so

brave as to attempt to carry it off in spite of them.

When Brian found his brothers the three took their course towards the hill of Midkena. Midkena came towards them, and Brian attacked him. The fight of these two was like the fury of two bears or the rage of two lions, until at length Midkena was killed. Then his three sons came to fight against the children of Turenn, and the combat was worth while coming from the east of the world to see. The sons of Midkena put their three spears through the bodies of the children of Turenn; but Brian, Urcar, and Ur, in their turn, pierced with their spears the bodies of the children of Midkena, and then passed into a faintness like death.

While life was still in them Brian arose and raised one brother in each of his arms, though he was losing much of his own blood, until they gave the shouts, and then he bore them to the ship.

When they were a long time at sea they reached Ben Edar, and thence went to Dun Turenn and said to their father,—

“Go, O dear father, to Tara and give this cooking-spit to Lugh, and bring the skin of the pig to us to cure us.”

Turenn found Lugh and asked him for the pig's skin to heal his children, but Lugh said he would not give it.

Brian was then brought to Lugh, and he asked the skin from him; but Lugh again said that he would not give it, and that if they were to give him the breadth of the earth of gold he would not accept it from them unless he thought that their death would come of it, on account of the deed they had done to his father. For Lugh was a pagan, and did not know how to forgive.

When Brian heard this he went back to where his brothers were and lay down between them, and the souls of all three went forth at the same moment.

THE BATTLE OF NORTH MOYTURA.

The Fomorians came, as they had said they would, to fight with Lugh. To help him, Lugh got Goban the smith, and Cerd the gold

and silver smith, and Luchtin the carpenter. The smith was to make the spear-heads and the swords; Cerd was to make rivets to fasten the spear-heads on to the handles, and to make the handles or hilts of the swords, and to put knobs or bosses and rims on the shields; and the carpenter was to make the spear-handles and the shields.

For three years these three worked away in the middle of a forest that was then to the east of the hill of Mullaghmast in the county Kildare, near the northern part of Wicklow, where the smith had his forge.

This is how they used to work. When the smith had made a spear-head to the right shape and pointed at the end he would take it in his tongs and throw it from him towards the door-post, in which it stuck by the point. The carpenter then had the handle ready, and was able to throw it so nicely that it went straight into the socket of the spear and got fixed in the hot bronze of which the spear was made. Cerd then came with his red-hot rivets and put them into the holes in the sockets, so

that he had not to bore any holes in the heads, but the rivets went right through to the other side.

These De Danann spear-heads are now often found buried in the earth, and are nicely pointed. But other spear-heads are found with a round or blunt point, and no socket for the handle to go into, but a short spike or knob to go into a handle, and these, we are told, belonged to the Firbolgs.

When the time of the battle came the smith moved his forge near to where it was to be fought, so that if any of the De Danann arms were broken during the day's fighting he could mend them at night.

Every chief and brave man of the Fomorians had a helmet on his head, a broad spear in his right hand, a heavy sharp sword at his girdle, and a firm shield at his shoulder.

The De Danann had a sharp-pointed narrow spear for casting called a "sleigh", a broad spear, with a head like a trowel, for thrusting, and a sword like a flagger leaf. The leader of the Fomorians was Balor "of the evil eye".

This eye was so frightful to look at that the sight of it killed you at once, so Balor had to keep it shut, except in battle when he wanted to kill anyone by a look of it. At this battle of Moytura he lifted up his eyelid and struck Nuada of the Silver Arm dead. When he saw Lugh coming towards him he was going to open it again, but Lugh darted a sling-stone at the eye and drove it out through his head, so Balor fell down dead. So many were killed at this battle that to this day we can see the mounds and cairns of the people buried there in the barony of Tirerrill in Sligo.

Lugh was afterwards made King of Erin, and had a palace at Nas or Naas, in Kildare. It was he who began the custom of holding, on the 1st of August, games of horse-racing and sports, and a fair for buying and selling, at Tailteen or Teltown in Meath, on the river Blackwater, midway between Navan and Kells, which month is still called, in Irish, Loonasa, *i.e.* Lugh's custom or fair.

LIR'S CHILDREN

WHEN Bove Derg was King of Con-naught Lir lived at Shee Finnaha, which means "the Hill of the White Field", and was near Newtownhamilton, in the county Armagh. He had married Eve, a foster-child of Bove Derg, and they had four children—a daughter, Finola, and three sons, Aed (Hugh), Ficra, and Conn. Ficra and Conn were twins, and their mother died when they were born, which caused Lir much grief. He loved his children very dearly, and Bove Derg said it would be best if Lir married Eve's sister, Eva, to be a second mother to them. Bove Derg used often to come to Shee Finnaha for love of these children, and also to take them to his own house near Killaloe.

Lir's love for his children grew to be so great that his second wife Eva began to be

jealous of them, and at last she came to hate them.

One day she had her chariot yoked, and she took the four children with her and set off towards Killaloe. On the way she asked some of the servants to kill the children for her, as she said they were taking all her husband's love and affection from her; but no one would do so. She went westward till she reached the shore of Lough Darvra or Derryvaragh, which means "the Lake of the Oaks", and is near Castlepollard in the county Westmeath. Here she told the children to bathe and swim in the lake, but as soon as they were in the water she struck them with a magic wand and turned them into four beautiful white swans.

Then Finola said to her wicked stepmother, "It is a bad deed that you have done, but do not make us stay in this shape for ever; tell us when this evil will be taken off us".

To this Eva replied, "No friends nor any power that you have shall be able to take you out of these forms until you shall have been three hundred years upon Lough Darvra, and

three hundred years upon the Sea of Moyle that runs between Antrim and the coast of Scotland, and three hundred years upon the Bay of Erris and Iris Glora, or Glory Island, to the west of Mayo, and until the Taillkenn comes, and the woman from the south shall be joined to the man of the north”.

Eva then grew sorry for what she had done, and she told them for comfort that they would retain their own speech and sense and reason, and be able to sing, and that the music of their voices would soothe men and lull them to sleep, for there would be no music in the world to equal it.

Eva's steeds were caught and the chariot yoked, and she went to Bove Derg.

“Why”, said he, “have you not brought the children of Lir with you?”

“Lir”, said she, “does not trust you, and he fears to send his children to you lest you do them some harm.”

But Bove Derg thought in his mind that this was not true, so he sent messengers to Lir to tell him what Eva had said, and to ask for

the children to come to him. Sorrowful indeed was Lir on hearing this, for he knew then that Eva had harmed or killed his children.

THE FOUR SWANS ON LOUGH DARVRA,

Early in the morning Lir set out upon the road, and reached Lough Darvra, where he heard a sad song that Finola was singing.

He came to the verge of the lake and saw that it was birds with human voices that were singing. But Finola told him they were his own children who had been thus changed by his wife, the sister of their own mother. She told him also of all the long years they had to remain as swans, with no hope of release until the *Taillkenn*, or "man with the shaven head", should come, with his tinkling bell, to bring faith and devotion into Erin.

Lir and his people stayed listening to the music of the swans upon the brink of the lough, and they slept most pleasantly that night, though their hearts were full of grief for the fate of the children.



When Lir arrived at Bove Derg's, and Bove heard that it was Eva, his own nurseling, who had put the children he loved so dearly into the forms of pure white swans, Bove became fierce with rage, and struck Eva with a magic wand, by which she was changed into a demon of the air. In this state, he said, she should remain for ever, but that the Taillkenn would drive her out of Ireland.

Bove Derg and Lir, and many of the De Danann, afterwards came to the shore of Lough Darvra, and made a camp there to listen to the music of the swans.

The swans used to talk all day with their friends and former fellow-pupils, and at night they used to sing away the sorrow of those who mourned for the children who were kept in such shapes. This is Finola's last song to them, which Dr. Joyce has given in his *Old Celtic Romances*:—

FINOLA'S FAREWELL.

Farewell, farewell, our father dear!
The last sad hour has come;

Farewell, Bove Derg! farewell to all,
Till the dreadful day of doom!
We go from friends and scenes beloved,
To a home of grief and pain;
And that day of woe
Shall come and go,
Before we meet again!

We live for ages on stormy Moyle,
In loneliness and fear;
The kindly words of loving friends
We never more shall hear.
Four joyous children long ago;
Four snow-white swans to-day;
And on Moyle's wild sea
Our robe shall be
The cold and briny spray.

Far down on the misty streams of time,
When three hundred years are o'er,
Three hundred more in storm and cold,
By Glora's desolate shore;
Till Decca fair is Largnen's spouse;
Till north and south unite;
Till the hymns are sung,
And the bells are rung,
At the dawn of the pure faith's light.

Arise, my brothers, from Darvra's wave,
On the wings of the southern wind;
We leave our father and friends to-day
In measureless grief behind.

Ah! sad the parting, and sad our flight
To Moyle's tempestuous main;
For the day of woe
Shall come and go,
Before we meet again!

THE SEA OF MOYLE.

The period of three hundred years passed away, and Finola said to her brothers, "This is our last night here, and to-morrow we must go upon the angry Sea of Moyle".

Next day they took flight, and never rested till they reached the Moyle in safety, for it had been made a law through all the land that no swan should be killed, lest harm should come to the children of Lir.

When they saw the great length of coast that spread along the Moyle they were filled with grief and regret, for they thought the troubles that had come to them before must be as nothing to those they would have to suffer upon that salt surf. One night there came a thick mist and tempest, and Finola said, "My beloved brothers, this storm, I am sure, will drive us away from one another, we must

therefore settle on some place to meet when it is over."

"Sister," said they, "let it be at Carrick-narone or 'The Seal's Rock', which we all know so well."

When midnight came, the wind grew stronger and the waves much wilder, the thunder rolled and the lightning flashed, and the rough sea drove the swans so much about that not one of them knew which way the others went. After this great tempest had passed away, Finola was alone on the sea, and her brothers were nowhere to be seen.

She then sang the lay, which the poet Moore has put to an old Irish melody:—

THE SONG OF FINOLA.

Silent, oh Moyle, be the roar of thy waters,
Break not, ye breezes, your chain of repose,
While, murmuring mournfully, Lir's lonely daughter
Tells to the night-star her tale of woes.
When shall the swan, her death-note singing,
Sleep, with wings in darkness furled?
When will heaven, its sweet bell ringing,
Call my spirit from this stormy world?

Sadly, oh Moyle, to thy winter wave weeping,
Fate bids me languish long ages away ;
While still in her darkness doth Erin lie sleeping,
Still doth the pure light its dawning delay.
When will that day-star, mildly springing,
Warm our isle with peace and love ?
When will heaven, its sweet bell ringing,
Call my spirit to the fields above ?

She stayed upon the rock all night until the rising of the sun upon the morrow, watching the sea on all sides around her, until she saw Conn coming towards her, with his head drooping and his feathers drenched. Fiera came also, cold and quite faint.

“If Aed would but come to us now, how happy we should be!” said she. And soon afterwards they saw him coming, with his head erect and his feathers looking beautiful. Finola welcomed him affectionately, and put him under the feathers of her breast and chest, with Fiera under her right wing and Conn under the left.

“O, my brothers,” said Finola, “bad though last night may have seemed to you, there will, I fear, be many more like it in the future!”

THE FAIRY HORSEMEN AT THE BANN.

Often indeed did these children suffer cold and misery on the Sea of Moyle, but at last one night there came snow, and wind, and frost; and the water was frozen, and each of the poor swans, as they lay upon the rocks, had its feet and wings frozen to the ground, so that they were not able to move. They tried hard to get free, and in their struggles they left the skin of their feet, and the feathers of their breasts, and the tips of their wings sticking to the rocks. Sad was their state now, for they were forbidden to leave the salt water, and if it got into their sores it would kill them. They could go on the shore in the daytime, but had to return to the Moyle each night. But in time new feathers grew, and their wings and sores were healed.

They came one day to the mouth of the river Bann, where they saw a troop of horsemen on milk-white steeds coming from the south-west. These were a part of the Fairy horsemen that had been seeking the swans for a long time.

Friendly and lovingly did they welcome each other, and the children of Lir heard how the De Danann had been beaten at the battles of Telltown and of Drumlcen, near Raphoe in Donegal, by a people called Milesians, who had come into the country. They heard also that Lir and Bove, and most of the De Danann, had gone to live under the hills in "shees" or fairy palaces, where they spent their time merrily and happily, without fatigue and without uneasiness, enjoying the Feast of Age, that never let them grow old or die. The names of some of these hills are known even to this day, for we have Bove Derg's Hill, now called Knockavoe, near Strabane; Knockma, near Tuam; Mullaghshee, near Lanesboro' in Roscommon, and another at Ballyshannon; and Knockna-sheega, near Cappoquin.

Then Finola told them how different was the life of suffering and misery which they had on the Sea of Moyle.

ERRIS AND INISGLOIRE.

The end of the second three hundred years came at last, and they left the Moyle and passed on to the Bay of Erris, where, for a long time, they suffered cold and misery even as great as at Moyle.

It happened that there was living at that time in Erris a young man of good family, who had often heard the singing of the birds and began to know and love them; and soon he spoke to them, and heard from them the story of their lives and how they came to be in such trouble. His name was Aibric, and he was a poet, and made a poem of all they told him, which he sang, and taught to his children and his children's children, so that is how we now know this story of the children of Lir.

At Erris there came a night such as they never had the like of before or after. The snow and frost were so great that the water between Erris and Achill Island became one great sheet of ice, and into it the swans' feet and sides were frozen so that they could not

stir. The brothers began moaning greatly, and Finola could not calm them, so she said:

“ My brothers, believe ye in the truly splendid God of Truth, who made heaven with its clouds, and earth with its fruits, and the sea with its wonders, and ye shall have help and full relief from that Lord ”.

“ We do believe ”, said they.

“ And I believe with you,” said Finola, “ in that true and perfect God.”

And as they believed, at that same hour they received help from the Lord, and neither tempest nor bad weather hurt them from that time forth.

In course of time the three hundred years which they had to spend in Erris Bay came to an end, and Finola said, “ We may go to Shee Finnaha ”.

HEAVEN'S SWEET BELL RINGING.

Next day they set forward to the place in which they had been nursed, but they found it empty, with nothing but unroofed green rafters and forests of nettles, without a palace,

without a house, without a fire. They raised three shouts of woe, but stayed that night in the place of their father and grandfather, and chanted in it their sweet fairy music. Early next morning they arose in the air and flew back to Inis Glora. From that time they went forth each day to feed at some far part of the country, at Iniskea, at Achill; and away down to Teach Duinn, that is now called Donn's Sea Rocks—the Bull, Cow, and Calf—on the west of Kerry. But every night they returned to Inis Glora or Inisgloire, where afterwards St. Brendan founded a church, the ruins of which stand to this day.

They were in this state for a long time until the faith of Christ and holy Patrick came to Ireland, and until holy Kemoc came to Inisgloire. The first night he came to the island the children of Lir heard his bell ringing near them at matins, or the prayers said at three o'clock in the morning. They started in terror at the sound, but Finola said, "Beloved brothers, that faint, fearful voice we have heard is the bell of Kemoc, and it is that bell that shall

set you and me free from pain and suffering". When the cleric had finished his matins Finola said, "Let us now chant our music to the High King of heaven and earth". And they sang a slow, sweet, fairy song, praising the Lord and adoring the High King.

THE MAN FROM THE NORTH AND THE WOMAN FROM THE SOUTH.

Kemoc, who was listening to them, prayed God to tell him who was singing, and he was told that it was the children of Lir. At the coming of the morning of the next day Kemoc went to the Lake of the Birds, and when he saw them he went to the brink and asked them:

"Are you the children of Lir?"

"We are indeed", they said.

"Thank God for it," said Kemoc, "for it is for your sakes I came to this island rather than to any other in Erin. Come to land now, and put your trust in me."

They came, and he took them with him to his abode. He got a good smith to make

chains of bright white silver for them, and put a chain between Aed and Finola and another between Conn and Fiera. Lairgnen was King of Connaught at that time, and Decca, the daughter of the King of Munster, was his wife. When Decca heard the story of the birds she was filled with love for them, and asked Lairgnen to get them for her. Lairgnen sent a messenger to ask the birds from Kemoc, but he did not get them. Then Lairgnen in great anger came himself to where Kemoc was, and asked if it was true that he had refused to give the birds. When Kemoc said it was true, Lairgnen snatched the birds off the altar and was going to take them to Decca.

Kemoc followed him, but as soon as Lairgnen had laid hands on the birds their feathery coats fell off them, and in place of the sons of Lir there were three withered, bony old men; and instead of the daughter there was a withered old woman, without blood or flesh.

Lairgnen started at this, and he went away out of the place.

Then Finola said, "Come, O cleric, and bap-

tize us, for our death is near. You will not be more sad at parting from us than we are at parting from you. You must make our grave afterwards, and place Conn on my right side and Fiera on my left, and Aed before my face.

After this Kemoc baptized the children of Lir, and they died, and were buried standing upright in their graves as Finola had asked, and as was the custom in ancient Ireland. Fiera and Conn were placed at either side of Finola, and Aed before her face. Heaven was obtained for their souls, and a tombstone was raised over their grave, with their names written in Ogham on it. So ends the story of the children of Lir.

THE MILESIAINS.

NIUL was the younger son of the King of Scythia. His father gave him no inheritance but a good education, so he wandered through many countries teaching the peoples thereof, until he found himself in Egypt, where Pharaoh got him to instruct the youth. He was living near the Red Sea at the time when Moses delivered the Israelites from their bondage, and one night his son Gadelas, while asleep, was bitten by a poisonous serpent. Niul, who knew of the wonders that had been done by the two magicians of Pharaoh, but who had also seen how the Almighty God had worked such miracles for the Chosen People, brought his son to Moses and asked him to pray that Gadelas might be made well. Moses did so, and laid his rod upon the wound, when the youth

was healed at once. Moses then foretold that the descendants of Gadelas should come to inhabit a country in which there should be no poisonous creatures.

From that time the followers of Gadelas carried a flag showing a serpent twining round the rod of Moses. This was afterwards called the "Sacred Banner of the Milesians", and when you see any of the beautiful carving on stones in the old buildings in Ireland, or the drawing and painting that is called illuminating, which is to be found in old Irish books, you will find how often this figure of the serpent is shown, twisting and twining in all kinds of ways.

But many years passed away before the descendants of Gadelas arrived in Ireland, which was the country foretold for them. After much wandering they reached Spain, and in course of time one of them, named Milesius, became king of a part of that country. Ith, the uncle of Milesius, went sailing across the sea in search of the "Promised Isle", and landed in Ireland, but was attacked and killed

by the De Danann. To avenge the death of Ith the whole family of Milesius, who was now dead, sailed in thirty galleys, and were led by Scota the widow, and Heber the Fair, Amergin, Heber the Brown, Colpa, Ir, and Heremon, and two other sons of Milesius. From this Scota, Ireland was afterwards called *Scotia*, and from Gadelas the people were called *Gaedels* or *Gaels*.

Ireland was at this time ruled over by three De Danann princes, and we find that the country is often called from the names of their wives Eirè, Banva, and Fóla. It derives the name Ireland from Ir, the first son of Milesius, who was buried in it. The following is the poet Moore's description of—

THE MILESIAANS' FIRST SIGHT OF IRELAND.

They came from a land beyond the sea,
And now o'er the western main
Set sail, in their good ships, gallantly,
From the sunny land of Spain.
“Oh, where's the Isle we've seen in our dreams
Our destin'd home or grave?”
Thus sung they as, by the morning's beams,
They swept the Atlantic wave.

And, lo, where afar o'er ocean shines
A sparkle of radiant green,
As though in that deep lay emerald mines,
Whose light through the wave was seen.
" 'Tis Innisfail—'tis Innisfail!"
Rings o'er the echoing sea;
While, bending to heav'n, the warriors hail
That home of the brave and free.

Then turn'd they unto the Eastern wave,
Where now their Day-God's eye
A look of such sunny omen gave
As lighted up sea and sky.
Nor frown was seen through sky or sea,
Nor tear o'er leaf or sod,
When first on their Isle of Destiny
Our great forefathers trod.

THE LANDING OF THE MILESIA NS. AND THEIR EARLY KINGS.

The Milesians landed in Ireland, but the De Danann said it was by unfair means, as there was no army in the country to defend it, because the people were not soldiers but mostly workers in metals. They said, however, that if the new-comers would go back into their ships, and were able to land once

again, the people of the country would receive them as masters of the island.

Amergin, who was the Ollav, or learned man and lawgiver, told them to agree to this, and the Milesians withdrew in their galleys nine waves from the shore. The De Danann magicians then raised a great storm, and the ships of the Milesians were divided and cast upon distant parts of the island—some in Kerry, and some at the mouth of the Boyne. A great battle was fought near Tralee, in which Scota was killed, and the cairn or heap of stones over her grave is still to be seen in Glen Scohene. Another battle was fought at Telltown, in Meath, at which the three De Danann princes and their wives were slain. In a short space of time the Milesians became rulers of the whole country, but the peoples who had been in it before them—the Firbolgs, who were farmers, and the De Danann, who were metal and wood workers—were allowed to remain as a kind of slaves or servants, and were called the “unfree” clans, as they were not permitted to vote at the making of a king,

while the Milesians, who were fighting men, were called the "free" clans.

Only three of the sons of Milesius were saved from the storm, namely, Heber the Fair, Here-mon, and Amergin. Heber and Heremon ruled together over the country for the space of one year. Tea was the wife of Heremon, and she had a palace built at the place now known as Tara, which was then called Teahair — that is, the Mur or Palace of Tea. There were, at that time, three pleasant hills in the island, two of which lay in the country that belonged to Heber. But Heber's wife was a woman of great pride, and she envied Tea the enjoyment of the other hill. She therefore got her husband to demand the hill from Heremon; but Tea resolved to fight rather than give it up. So a great battle took place on the plain near Geashill, in Leinster, in which Heber was killed, and Heremon became sole king, and for two thousand five hundred years afterwards Ireland was ruled over by kings who were all descended from the family of Milesius.

With the Milesians had come a number of persons whose business it was to clear the country by cutting down the woods, and many places are still called after these workers, such as Meath (Meidhe), Liffey (Liffe). As the Milesians spread themselves over the country, we read of them finding out the rivers and lakes, and in the reign of the fifth king after Heremon, or about 100 years, the first goldmine was found near the Liffey. Tigernmas (Teernmas), the king who reigned at this time, made a law that the quality or position of every person should be known by his dress. Thus, the clothes of a slave should have only one colour, of a soldier two colours, of an officer three colours, of a gentleman who kept a house to receive and entertain strangers four colours, of the nobles of the country five colours, and of the king, queen, and their family six colours. Persons who were very learned, and poets, were allowed the same number as kings and queens. But this king, we read, was the first who began to worship idols in Ireland. Before his time they had

worshipped the sun, moon, sky, fire, and water, but he set up a great stone pillar covered with gold, called Crom Cruach, and twelve other pillars around it, for worship at a place called Magh Slecht, or the "Plain of Adoration", in the county Cavan. He himself and three-fourths of his people were destroyed there by the hand of the Almighty, but the idols remained till the time of St. Patrick, who threw them down. St. Patrick put an end to the pagan worship wherever he went, and drove away the demons who used to work wonders and magic spells for the Druids before Christianity was brought into the country.

Most of the kings have names given to them on account of something remarkable in themselves or some notable event that occurred during their reign. Thus, one was called Ollmucka, because he had a larger breed of swine than any other person in Ireland; another Finn-scoh-a, because in his reign there was found a quantity of white flowers which the people squeezed into cups, using the juice for drink and for medicine; another Slaun-ole,

because the people were all in perfect health during his time; another Ap'ha, for once every month during his reign the whole island was troubled with an incurable sickness; another Shana In'ricka, as he was the first king who gave a fixed pay to his soldiers and made military laws; another Sheer-lauv, on account of his long hands, for it was said that when he stood erect his fingers could touch the ground; another Oor-Kas, from the skiffs or currachs that he invented; another Feev-i-na, because he was fond of chasing deer and other wild beasts in woody and wild parts of the country. One was called Lavra Linsha, or "the Voyager", but his story will be told more fully in another place.

TARA OF THE KINGS.

EVEN before Tea, the wife of Heremon, built her palace at Teamhair, the hill of Tara was the place where the Firbolg and De Danann kings lived. It was called by the former Druim Cain, or "the Beautiful Height". As has been fairly said recently, by the author of *Beauties and Antiquities of Ireland*, there is no other spot in Europe of which the history goes so far back into the past. Long before a hut of old Rome was raised upon the Tiber (*i.e.* 754 years before Christ), or many of the grand buildings were placed in ancient Greece, on the rock that stands in the middle of Athens, there were kings at Tara whose names are given in Irish history.

It is over 3000 years since the first king reigned there.

At the present time we can only see some

grassy mounds and ramparts; but what is said in old Gaelic writings of the size and splendour of Tara is found to be correct when we examine the ground, and see the gold and silver things that have been found buried in the soil. Nothing has been discovered in Greece or Troy, or even buried in Pompeii in the days of Rome's greatness, that can equal the Tara brooch, which can be now seen in Dublin. As a place of meeting, or for the dwelling of a ruler, no hill in Ireland would suit so well, for there are on the top of the hill about a hundred acres, and it stands nearly in the centre of the island.

Although history gives the name of the "*stone-builder of Tara*" and the "*rath-builder of Tara*", some people think that there were no buildings on it of stone. Nevertheless the size of the buildings that were there, as shown by the grassy ramparts that enclosed them, is certain proof of their having been grand and beautiful. It should also be remembered that Tara ceased to be the chief seat of the kings in the year 563, or over 1300 years ago.

The building which is believed to be the oldest is "Rath na Riogh" (Ree), or the house of the kings, called also "Cathair (Cahir) Crofinn", or "the enclosure of the white house". Placed about the middle of the hill, it is an oval, about 853 feet in its greater length, with a ditch 4 feet deep and a rampart 6 feet high round it. Inside are the grassy banks of "Teach Cormaic" or Cormac's house, and "Forradh" (Forra) or the place of meeting. This latter earthwork is 216 feet from east to west, and 296 north to south. Where these two buildings joined, Tea is said to have been buried.

But the chief building at Tara was the Micorta, or banquet hall and hall of assembly. It is now seen on the northern part of the hill as two mounds, running down at the same distance from each other, along the slope of the hill, and so placed as to raise the king and nobles at the southern end above the people at the other or northern end. It is 759 feet long, 90 feet wide outside the grassy rampart, and 45 feet inside. It had seven doors on

each side, and our ancient books give us a clear picture of what it was like, at a feast, in Tara's best time. The long room, we are told, stretched down the slope; along each side were double rows of seats and tables, while in the middle space stood lamps, vats, or tubs of liquor, and huge fires at which a great number of servants were employed cooking the meat on spits. Every person had a portion according to his rank. Most, if not all, of the drinking vessels were of gold and silver, and were studded with red stones or with enamel. At the southern or highest end sat the king and chiefs. Lower down sat the courtiers, bards, doctors, historians, druids, and then the common people. The dress of all is described as being dazzling with splendour; and, to plentiful eating and drinking and the noisy mirth of jugglers and jesters, there were added the pleasures of music, songs, recitations, and chess.

OLLAMH FODHLA (Ollav Fóla).

When Achy the Fourth, who is better known as Ollav Fóla, or "the learned man of Ireland", was king, that is about 1000 years before Christ, he began the "Feis Teamhrach" or "Assembly of Tara". This was a parliament that was to meet every three years. To it were called together all the kings, princes, and chieftains; all the ollavs, bards, judges, scholars, and historians, and all the great soldiers in Ireland. The most perfect order was followed in beginning and carrying on the business that was done at the meeting. New laws were made, and old ones changed if they were found to be hard on the people. From a wish to have a correct history of the country sent down to us who have come after, all the accounts of what happened in former times, and what was then going on, were examined, and any falsehoods in them were struck out. When the histories had been made out correctly they were written in the "Saltair of Tara" or Book of the Chief King, and kept safely in the

king's palace; and hence it is that we now know so much of the history of ancient Ireland. Before they began the public business all who were to be present were given a feast, to which they were called in, according to their rank, by three loud blasts of a trumpet, and each person had his place settled beforehand for him at the table. The nobles also, of that time and for centuries after, had each historians of their own who wrote down, with the strictest care, the account of their forefathers and their relationships. They had also bards who made songs and poems of these histories. At one time there were as many as twelve hundred of these bards in Ireland.

There were five roads leading from Tara: westward, one running towards Lough Owel, near Mullingar, and thence to Rathcroghan; one called the "Great Road", in the direction of the "Esker Riada" (Reeda) (a line of sand-hills from Dublin to Clarenbridge, in Galway); one northward; one south-east towards Wicklow, called the "Cualann Road"; and one south-west towards Cashel in Ossory. Besides

these there was the Fan-na-carpát or "Slope of the Chariots" leading towards Navan.

One thing more at Tara should be mentioned, namely, the *Lia fail* or Stone of Destiny. This was a stone brought to Tara by the De Danann, that was said to have the power of making a strange noise whenever the true monarch of Ireland was crowned on it. It had a prophecy connected with it, at a later time, that in whatever country the stone should be kept a prince of the family of Milesius should govern. Fergus, son of Erc, having gained the kingdom of Scotland, sent to his brother Murtough, who was King of Ireland, about 500 years after Christ, asking for the stone in order that he might be crowned upon it. It was sent, and was afterwards kept in the abbey of Scone, till Edward I. of England brought it away from Scotland, and placed it under the chair on which English kings and queens are crowned in Westminster Abbey, where it now remains.

THE HARP THAT ONCE THROUGH TARA'S
HALLS.

The harp that once through Tara's halls
The soul of music shed,
Now hangs as mute on Tara's walls
As if its soul were fled.—
So sleeps the pride of former days,
So glory's thrill is o'er,
And hearts, that once beat high for praise,
Now feel that pulse no more.

No more to chiefs and ladies bright
The harp of Tara swells;
The chord alone, that breaks at night,
Its tale of ruin tells.
Thus Freedom now so seldom wakes,
The only throb she gives
Is when some heart indignant breaks
To show that still she lives.

—Moore.

QUEEN MACHA.

THERE were three kings in Ulster who quarrelled as to which should be the chief. Their names were Dihorba from Usnach, Red Hugh from Donegal, and Kimbay from Magh Inis.

At last they agreed that each should reign seven years in turn. They lived until each had been twice king, and then Hugh (Aedh) was drowned in the waterfall near Ballyshannon, which has been called Assaroe, or Eas-Aedha-Ruaidh, on that account—Ruaidh meaning red. Hugh left no sons, but when it came to be his turn to be king again, his daughter Macha (the golden-haired) claimed to reign in his place. Dihorba and Kimbay said they would not let a woman govern the country, but Macha got together an army from among her friends and fought a battle with them, in which

they were beaten, and she became queen in turn. Dihorba was killed in battle soon afterwards, but he left five sons, and they now claimed to have their turn as kings. Macha said she would not consent to this, as she was not queen by the old agreement, but because she had gained the battle. The five sons at once gathered an army to force Macha to give them their turn, but in the battle which was fought they were beaten, and had to go for safety into the wilds of Connaught.

Macha married Kimbay soon afterwards, and so made certain that she would continue to be queen when her own seven years were ended. She then went into Connaught, found out where the sons of Dihorba were, and took them prisoners into Ulster. The Ulstermen, wishing to put an end to the quarrels, wanted the young princes to be killed; but Macha did not like to put a stain upon her reign, and, instead of putting them to death, she made slaves of them, and obliged them to build a rath or palace for her, which she said should be the chief place in Ulster ever after. To mark out

the line of the trench and ramparts, she took from her chest or neck the golden brooch that she wore there, and hence the place was called Emain or Eomuin, from *eo*, a breast-pin, and *muin*, the neck, which afterwards became "Emania"; and Armagh came from Ardmacha, or Macha's hill.

Next to Tara, Emania is the place most often named in Irish history. There are still extensive remains of this famous palace of the pagan kings of Ulster in the earthen fort or rampart that the people call "Navan Ring" or "Fort", about two miles west of Armagh city. From 300 years before Christ, down to 331 after, a ditch between 20 and 30 feet deep surrounded and guarded the inside space on which the buildings of Emania stood, and the site still covers 12 acres. But the country around has always been largely given to tillage, so that all this has been made more or less level, and the traces of its former greatness have been ploughed away. As in other places of old splendour and strength, there is now hardly a stone to be seen, and hence its buildings are thought to

have been of wood. But neither is there now anything to be seen of the ancient city of Armagh, which St. Patrick set twelve men to build about a century after Emania was burned by the three Collas. To account for the disappearance of both these places of former greatness, we need only remember that twelve times, between the ninth and the eleventh centuries, did the Danes plunder, partly or wholly, the country around. The bards and historians, however, so often speak of it as "Emania the Golden", that it must have been a splendid stronghold.

LAVRA MAIN.

UGAINE MOR, or Hugony the Great, was the next king but one after Kimbay and Macha, and he reigned for thirty or forty years. He married a daughter of the King of France, and is said to have been monarch of all the Western Isles of Europe. From him came all the great families of Connaught and Leinster. He had twenty-five children, and he divided Ireland among them. From his son Coffey came the families of Connaught, as well as the O'Donnells, O'Neills, and others of Ulster; and from his elder son, Leary, those of Leinster.

Leary claimed to be king after his father, and was kind and generous to Coffey. He gave him much land and money, but Coffey envied his brother so much that he wasted away, and was called Coffey Keal Bra from being so lean,

and living at Maghbreagh or the plain north of the Liffey. At the end of two years he pretended to be dead, and when Leary came and stooped down, weeping over him, he stabbed him. Coffey then got the kingship of Erin. But he was uneasy still, lest Leary's son, Ailill Aina, who was King of Leinster, should be made chief king of Erin, so he had him killed too, and then tried to kill Ailill's son by making the little child eat a live mouse. The child, however, whose name was Main, became dumb with fright, and, as there could not be a dumb king, Coffey let Main live and stay in his father's palace at Dinnree, now called Ballyknockan Fort, near Leighlinbridge, under the care of a poet and a harper named Craftine.

Main grew up handsome and clever, but one day he was injured by another boy, and when striking back he gave a great shout, at which his playmates cried out with joy, "Labhraidh Maion" (Lavra Main), that is, "Main speaks", and henceforth he was called Lavra.

Coffey was now once more afraid that Lavra would become king, so he banished him.

Lavra went to Scoria, a king of West Munster, and brought Craftine with him. Craftine was an ollav or "most learned" in music, and knew the three highest classes of music. These were the Soontree, which no one could hear without falling into a sweet sleep; the Golltree, which no one could hear without bursting into tears; and the Gantree, which no one could hear without breaking out into loud laughter. By playing these on his harp he persuaded Scoria to give Lavra his daughter, Moriath, for a wife. Lavra, with the help of his father-in-law's men and his own friends, besieged and took the palace of Dinnree, but was driven out of it again by Coffey, who marched from Tara with a large army. He had, therefore, to send his wife Moriath back to Munster with Craftine, and went himself to Britain, and then to France, where he joined the army of the king, and became one of his chief soldiers.

Lavra pined to be back in Ireland, and after a time his friends in Munster thought it would be best if he came back, so he was one day

joyfully surprised to hear the familiar music of Craftine's harp, to which the old man was singing. Lavra went and told his story to the King of France, and related how his grandmother had been a daughter of another French king. The king gave him a choice body of 2200 troops, with a number of ships to bring them to Ireland, and they soon landed safely at the mouth of the Slaney, now called Wexford. They marched by night to Dinnree, where Coffey then was with thirty native princes and seven hundred men. The palace was attacked and set on fire, and the king, princes, and guards were burned to death. Lavra, who was afterwards called Lavra Linsha, or "the Voyager", but whose real name you will remember was Main, was King of Erin for eighteen years, and this happened about the time of the Prophet Ezekiel or Ezechias.

CRAFTINE'S SONG.

There is a home to which I stray
 In thoughts by day, and dreams by night ;
Its fields to me are ever gay,
 Its skies to me are ever bright ;
Loved land ! I turn, with what delight,
And bless the hour that once again
 Will give thy rude cliffs to my sight,
High rising o'er the foamy main.

I would not be a glittering thing,
 To live in countries far away,
For all the wealth the world could bring
 To lure and captivate my stay !
Earth could not show a bower so gay,
But it would make me love *it* more ;
 Nor power a glory could display
To tempt me from *its* em'rald shore.

There live the friends I've loved and tried,
 That is the land my fathers won,
And shall I throw their name aside,
 And never say I am their son ?
Shall I a base life still drag on,
A hireling on a foreign strand,
 And live and die alike unknown,
A stranger in the stranger's land ?

THE HORSE'S EARS.

Lavra is said to have brought into Ireland a sort of green-headed partisan or sword of steel, in Irish called Laina, which was used by all his army, and from this comes the name of the province Leinster, that before was named Gailean. It is also told of him that although very handsome, he had one defect which he wished to keep from the knowledge of his people. This was that he had long, pointed ears like a horse. It came to be observed that when the king had his hair cut the person who acted as barber was sure to be killed, and as he got it cut only once a year the hair-cutters used to draw lots to settle who should be the king's hair-cutter for the year. It happened that the lot once fell upon a young man, the son of a poor widow, and he was her only child. Knowing that her son would be killed, the mother went to the king to beg of him to spare his life. The king took pity on the woman, and agreed to let the son live if he promised not to tell a secret that would be made known to him.

The youth readily gave his promise, and when the hair-cutting time came, of course he saw the horse's ears on the king. Not to be able to tell this secret so weighed on his mind that he fell sick and wasted away. His mother spoke to a druid doctor, who, on looking at her son, said he had something on his mind which he should speak out. When he was told of the promise, he said it only bound the boy not to tell the secret to any living person, but that he might go to a wood near at hand and whisper it to the first tree he came to, if he put his lips close to it. The young man did as he was told and got well of his illness. Now the harper Craftine broke his harp about this time, and came to the wood to cut down a tree for a new one, and by chance he made choice of the willow to which the young hair-cutter had whispered his secret. The harp was made and strung and put in order, but it would sound but one tune, which went like the words "Daw cloos capal ar Lavra Linsha", which means in English, "Lavra the Voyager has the ears of a horse". No other sounds could Craftine get

from the harp. This news spread, and other harpers tried their skill, but still it was the same tune they played. The king, on hearing this, thought it was a message sent from heaven to warn him of his cruelty in putting people to death merely to feed the vanity of not wishing his defect to be known, and ever after he wore his hair so that his long ears could be seen.

LITTLE SETANTA.

THE fame of "Emania the Golden" was perhaps greatest when Conor Mac Nessa was King of Ulster, about the time of the birth of Jesus Christ. This king, we are told, used to spend one-third of the day in watching and instructing the noble youths of the province in games of soldierly skill and ball-hurling on the lawn of Emania. His sister's son had heard the stories of the youths and princes, of whom there were at all times about one hundred and fifty there at exercise, and one day, when he was about six years old, he asked his mother when he might go and join them.

"It is too early for you to do that yet, my little son," said his mother. "You must get some of the champions of Ulster to bring you there, or someone to be a surety for your safety from the youths."

“I hope, mother, that that will not be too long to wait,” said the sturdy boy. “But please tell me where Emania lies.”

“The place is far from here, my son,” said his mother; “the Fews mountain is between you and Emania.”

“I think I could find the way to it, then,” said he; and some time afterwards he set out, taking with him his playthings. These were his shield of laths, his red-bronze hurl, his silver ball, his throwing dart, and his mock wooden spear with its burned top.

This is how he went along. He would give his ball a stroke of his hurl and drive it to a great distance before him. He would then throw his hurl after it and give it a second blow that would drive it as far again as it had gone at first. Then he would cast his dart and hurl his wooden spear, and running after them, he would catch up his hurl and his ball and his dart, yet would go so fast that the end of his wooden spear would not have touched the ground before he had caught it by the top while it was still flying. It was not long before

he came to the lawn, with seats all round it, that stood in front of the palace of Emania, and here he saw the young princes at their sports.

The boy ran at once into the playground among them, and he snatched up the ball from them between his legs, and he did not let it pass above his knees nor below his ankles. He kept it thus closed between his legs, so that not one of them could reach it by a blow, a stroke, or a thrust of the hurl, and in that way he carried it over the brink of the goal.

The youths all looked at the boy in surprise, but the king's son cried, "Youths, seize yonder boy, all of you, and put him to death; for you know it is an insult for any youth to come among you without first having asked for or gained your protection, even though he be the son of one of the champions."

At once they all attacked him, and threw their hurls at his head, but he raised his play-hurl and warded these off. Then they flung their balls at the boy, but he raised his fists, his wrists, and his palms and warded off the balls. Then they threw at him their mock

spears of wood burned at the end, but the boy raised his little lath-shield and did not let one of the spears touch him.

Without waiting longer he rushed at them, dashed some of them to the ground, and chased some others across the lawn towards where the king sat playing at chess, when they ran towards the palace. He was springing over the table when the king caught him by both wrists and said:

“Holloa, my little boy! You seem to be dealing roughly with the youths.”

“And so I should,” said the little fellow, “for I did not receive from them the honour due to a stranger, though I have come a far way.”

“And who are you?” said Conor.

“I am Setanta, son of your own sister, and it is not in this manner, I think, that you ought to let me be treated.”

“But, my little son,” said the king, “did you not know that no stranger can enter among them till he has first put himself under their protection?”

“I was not aware of that,” said the boy, “and had I known it I should have been more cautious.”

“Well, youths,” said Conor, “take upon yourselves the protection of this little boy.”

“We are right glad to do so,” they cried. So the king let go Setanta’s hands.

But no sooner was Setanta free than he rushed on the young princes again, and knocked many of them to the ground with such force, that some of their fathers, who were looking on, thought they must be dead.

“Holloa!” cried the king again, “what do you mean by this?”

“I mean,” said the boy, “that until they have all come under my protection and under my defence, in the same way as I have placed myself under theirs, I shall not cease till I have laid them all flat on the ground.”

“Be it so,” said Conor. “Take the princes under your defence.”

Some time afterwards King Conor was going to a feast at the house of his kerd or smith, and coming on the lawn to take leave

of the young princes, he was surprised to see all the youths ranged on one side and only one boy against them on the other, yet the boy was gaining every game and goal at the hurling.

When they played "the game of the hole", and it was their turn to throw and his to defend, he would catch their balls outside the hole and not let one of them pass. When it was their turn to defend and his to throw, he would send the balls into the hole in spite of them, without missing one. When it was the feat of pulling off each other's clothes, he would snatch away their cloaks from them, and they would not be able to remove so much as the brooch from his cloak. Then the time for wrestling came, and he would bring down each of them to the ground; but from among them all there was not found one who could lay hold of him. The boy was Setanta.

King Conor invited him to the feast, but the boy refused to go till he and his comrades had finished their sports and exercises;

but he promised that, when they were over, he would follow the king.

CUCHULAIN AND THE RED BRANCH KNIGHTS.

King Conor, Setanta's uncle, had gone to the feast given by his chief smith—for you should know that, at that time, few persons were thought more of than the smiths who made the arms and weapons for a people that were nearly always engaged in fighting. The smith's name was Culann, and, as was common at the time, he had a fierce dog or wolf-hound that he let loose at night to guard his house against wolves and wild boars, or against robbers or other troublesome persons. Setanta, who was then only a boy eight years old, was late in coming to the feast, and found the door shut and the dog on guard. He had nothing with him to help him when the dog attacked him, but even so, in a struggle with the dog he killed it. The smith made a strong complaint to the king that the only guard for his safety had been taken from him,

whereupon Setanta said he would, in the future, be the smith's guard and hound, and so from that time he was called "Cuchulain", or "the hound of Culann". From this you will understand what great strength he had, and in the stories that are told of him we hear of him killing nine men with one cast of a spear, and of his twisting out a giant's arm from the shoulder. Indeed, he seems to have had strength like David or Samson in the Bible. His uncle, Conor, made him a champion or knight of the Red Branch when he was only seven years of age.

These Red Branch Knights were a number of champions or fighting men whom Conor brought together to help him in his kingdom of Ulster, and he had his mansion in Emania, and their great doings are very often mentioned in the historic tales of Ireland. We know to this day where their lands and their mansion were, for there is a townland about two miles from the present city of Armagh called Creeve Roe or "Craebh Ruadh", which means "Red Branch". It is thus that the names of places

all over Ireland tell us, at the present day, about people and deeds of long, long ago.

Cuchulain is called in one of the tales "The Great Chief of the Plain of Murthemna" (which place, you may remember, is mentioned in "The Death of Lugh's Father"), for that northern part of the county Louth belonged to Cuchulain's clan.

At the present day the trenches and embankment of what was once Dundalgan, or the *dun* or fort of Cuchulain, may be seen about a mile from the Dundalk railway-station. The mound on which was the house or mansion is not a natural one, so the labour that must have been used to raise it may be understood when we find that, even after nearly two thousand years of the wearing away of the ground by the weather, it is still about forty feet high, and is half an acre on the top. The outer bank of the *dun* is nearly thirty feet high, and encloses a space of about two acres. Such was the kind of castle in which this famous soldier of the Red Branch Knights lived in the reign of Conor Mac

Nessa. The building on the top, like all, or nearly all, those in Ireland and the northern countries of Europe at that time, was perhaps of wood; for here, as at Tara, Emania, and elsewhere, there now remains only the raised ground on which the houses stood and the dug-up ditches that formed the protection against the attacks of enemies.

Besides the Red Branch Knights of Ulster, under King Conor, there were at that time two other orders of champions; one belonging to Connaught, at the head of which was Ailill Finn, and the other called the Children of Deaghda, who lived in the west of Munster, and had for their leader Curoi, the son of Daira. In the third century of the Christian era, when Cormac Mac Art was king, there were the Feena of Erin, who were the militia of the Chief King of Ireland, and were under Fin-mac-Coole. Of these we shall read later on.

FOSTERAGE.

IN something very like the way in which youths were being reared and taught war-like feats at Emania, it was common to find children throughout Erin in what was called fosterage. There was then, as now, a practice of putting children out to be nursed and cared for in their infancy and early childhood by paid people, who were generally of the poorer classes. But there was also a custom that began very early, and was still in use up to about two hundred years ago, of placing children with a tribe, a family, or a particular person of learning, such as a poet, for their training and education. There they remained, sometimes till they were seventeen years of age, and this fosterhood in very many cases became a bond of friendship and union between the two families or tribes. Some

of these foster-parents were like what we would now call the heads of boarding-schools, and they sometimes kept a large number of houses near their own in which a great number of young people were brought up together.

The daughters of peasants were taught by their foster-parents to grind, to sift, and to knead, as well as the needlework suited to their station of life; whilst the sons were taught the rearing of all sorts of young cattle, besides the kiln-drying of corn and the preparation of malt.

The daughters of the higher classes were instructed in the sewing, cutting, and embroidering of cloth, and in music; whilst the sons were taught the game of chess, the arts of swimming and riding, and the use of the sword and spear.

The foster-children, as a rule, went everywhere with their foster-parents, and we read that there was a king of the district now called Knockany, in the county Limerick, who had at one time forty foster-sons or pupils

under his care, the sons of the chiefs and nobles of Munster. When this king was asked by Meave and Ailill, Queen and King of Connaught, to visit them at Cruachan, he went attended by his forty foster-sons, each mounted on a splendid steed shod with gold.

THE CHAMPION'S HAND-STONE.

ACHY FAYLA, who was the chief monarch of Erin not many years before the Christian era, had three sons, known in Irish history as the "Three Fair Twins". These princes were fostered at the court of Emania, where they learned many of the feats which were practised by the Champions of the Red Branch. When grown up, they tried to induce their father to give up the throne of Erin to one of them, as he was then very old; but he refused, and so they sent him a challenge to battle, and gathered a large number of followers in Ulster. They then marched at the head of these through that province, round by Ballyshannon, or Assaroe, and Sligo, to Rathcroghan, and thence across the Shannon into Westmeath. The old king, on hearing this, called together his chiefs, and

with their forces went westward from Tara till he came to the hill that is now called Drumcree, near Delvin in that county. The unruly sons had made a camp close by at Ath Comair, or the "Ford of the Meeting of Waters", on a river that passes by the hill.

In the battle that ensued the men on both sides fought bravely with their broad green lainas, which, you may remember, were first brought to Ireland by Lavra Linsha. They threw at each other thick showers of missiles, such as whirring, swift-flying darts, and smooth, easily-cast sleaghs or spears, until they came within an easy distance for using their craisechs or long spears.

Then Lothar, the youngest son, saw his father in the middle of the stream with Conal Carna on his right and Ceat on his left guarding him, and he came near the brink of the ford. From the inside hollow of his shield he took out a Champion's Hand-stone, and, putting all his strength into his wrist and hand, he hurled the thick stone, with a twisting or rounding throw, towards his father.

When Ceat and Conal saw this they raised their shields against it, but it passed between the two and struck the king full on the breast, and he fell down across the middle of the ford. But the old king soon rose up again, and put his foot on the stone where it had fallen, and buried it in the river's bed, where it is still to this day.

The champion's hand-stone was not a common or shapeless stone, but was of oblong form, more or less flattened on two of its four sides. It was made narrow at one end and was sharp at both ends. Holding it by the small end it was easily hurled, and was sure to leave its mark, and we are told that it often went right through the skull. These stones were not carried or used by all warriors, but only by those who had learned how to throw them properly. Very many of them have been found in the beds of rivers or buried in the soil, and a large collection is to be seen in the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin. They are sometimes called "celts".

The battle went against the brothers, who

were slain, and their heads were brought as trophies to the old king. His heart, however, never ceased to grieve for their loss, and that is why the hill is called Drumcree (Druim Criaich).

THE POET'S JOURNEY.

IN the time of Conor Mac Nessa, who is also called Concohar, there lived in Ulster a poet called Aithirna. The Red Branch Knights had carried off spoils from Connaught, they had beaten the men of Leinster in the battle of Ross-na-ree, they had gone into Munster and burnt there the palace of Curoi Mac Daira, called Teamhair Luachra, near Abbeyfeale; so that they felt there was no enemy left to fight with, but still they wanted a cause to quarrel.

Now it was a custom of that time for poets or bards to pass from one province to another, at pleasure, on visits to kings, chiefs, and nobles, and to receive presents for their poems. Aithirna, therefore, set out on a round of visits, in the hope that, by asking for gifts that would be too difficult to give, or by saying things in his poems that would

be displeasing to the kings, some offence or insult would be given to him, and the "Red Branch" would come and avenge it.

The kings and chiefs of North Connaught gave him freely all he asked rather than be drawn into a war with Ulster. To the King of South Connaught or Mid-Erin, who lived between the present Scariff and Mount Shannon, and who had only one eye, Aithirna went next, and, as he knew that the king was very generous and would not refuse to give up any of his riches, he asked for the king's only eye. To his surprise, the king took the eye out of its socket and handed it to the poet. The king then bade his servant lead him down to the lake to wash away the blood, and so red did the lake become that it has since been called Lough Derg-deirc, or the Lake of the Red Eye.

The poet next crossed the Shannon into South Munster, to the palace of Tierna, who allowed himself to be insulted. He was afterwards buried near Rathcormac, in Cork, at Carn Tierna. Thence Aithirna went through

Munster and South Leinster till he came to Ard Brestina, in the present county Carlow. Here the king and people came and offered him presents, but he would not take them, as he said he wanted only the richest present or article that they had. This was a difficult thing to find out, but, while the people were trying to do so, a horse, on which a young man was riding, happened to throw up a clod with one of its hind hoofs, and it fell into the king's lap. The king saw stuck in it a beautiful gold brooch, and Aithirna said he would take that as his present, probably because he thought the king would not part with his "luck".

Aithirna then passed on to Naas, where Mesgedra, the chief King of Leinster, had his palace. There he remained twelve months, and received entertainment and rich gifts; but the more he got the more he asked for, until, when leaving, he demanded seven hundred white cows with red ears, a countless number of sheep, and a hundred and fifty of the wives and daughters of the Leinster nobles to be carried in bondage into Ulster.

Though the Leinster people agreed to those terms, Aithirna thought that, when the laws of hospitality had been carried out and he had been permitted to take the spoils of their country, the Leinster men would attack him and recapture their gifts. He, therefore, sent to Conor for a strong body of men to meet him as soon as he should pass across the border of the province of Leinster. As he expected, the men of Leinster went with him on his way, and, as the sheep could not cross the river Liffey at the usual ford, the people had to go into a neighbouring wood and cut down trees and branches to make a kind of bridge by means of which the poet and cattle passed over into Meath. The place where this passage was made was afterwards known as Ath Cliath (clia) or the "Ford of Hurdles", which is the ancient name of Dublin.

The Leinster men, or Lagenians as they were called, when Aithirna had crossed the ford, rapidly seized their wives and daughters, but failed to rescue their cattle, as a large troop of Ultonians, as the Ulster men were

called, had been waiting at the river Tolka, and rushed down on them. A battle was fought, and the Ulster men were driven to Ben Edar, or Howth, but they brought with them the seven hundred cows. A fort, or earthen embankment which they threw up, was afterwards known as Dun Aithirna, and here they waited till the Red Branch came to their help with Conal Carna as leader. Conal followed Mesgedra across the "Ford of Hurdles," past Drimnagh, near Tallaght, and through Naas, till he overtook him at the ford of the Liffey at Clane. A fierce combat took place between Mesgedra and Conal Carna, in which the former was killed, and Conal, according to the horrid custom of the time, cut off his head and took out his brains and made them into a ball to be kept as a proof of his victory. Such was the result of the poet's journey.



DEIRDRE.

THE nobles of Ulster were feasting in the house of Felim, the rhymer or bard of King Conor Mac Nessa, when the wife of Felim became the mother of a daughter. Then Cafad the Druid arose and foretold that the fair-haired bright-eyed child would bring sorrow on Ulster, and said her name should be Deirdré, which means "child of disaster". When the Druid had thus spoken, the nobles present cried out that the child should not be allowed to live, but Conor would not permit them to slay it, for he did not believe Cafad, and wished to have the infant for himself. So, taking the child from Felim, he gave her into the care of his own people, and, when she was nursed, he sent her to be brought up in a lonely fort, surrounded by a broad moat in the midst of a forest, where she should never see

any other man till Conor might make her his own wife. Here Deirdré dwelt till she had grown to be the most beautiful maiden in all Ireland.

In the king's court there were three youths, the sons of a prince Usnach, and so sweet was the music which these sons of Usnach played upon the harp that the cattle listening to it milked over two-thirds more than was their wont, and all pain and sorrow went from whatsoever man or woman heard the strains of their melodies. And they were great in fighting, too; for, when each set his back to the other, all Conor's province was unable to overcome them; and they were as fleet as hounds in the chase.

As Naisi, one of the sons, sat singing on the plain of Emania, he saw a maiden coming towards him. She held down her head as she came near him, but passed without speaking. Naisi knew that it was Deirdré, and a great dread fell upon him.

“Depart, I pray you, damsel,” said Naisi. “You are the wife that is to be of the king.”

“The king is very old,” replied Deirdré, “and I do not love him, and I wish you could save me from him.”

Then plucking a rose from a brier she threw the flower at him and said, “Now, if thou dost not save me from Conor thou art dishonoured before all men of thy country, on account of the gesa or bond I have put upon you. I pray you take me away from King Conor, and I will be as a sister to you and your brothers.”

Deirdré took Naisi’s harp and began playing sweetly. When the men of Ulster heard the delightful sound a magic spell fell upon them, but the sons of Usnach rushed forth and came running to where their brother sat and Deirdré with him.

THE FLIGHT OF THE SONS OF USNACH.

“Alas!” cried Ardan and Ainli, Naisi’s brothers, “what hast thou done, brother? Is not this the damsel fated to ruin Ulster?”

Then Naisi told them what had happened, and said, “By the laws of my knighthood I

shall be disgraced before men if I do not help her, since she had put me under gesa" (pronounced *gëssa*, with *g* hard).

"Evil will come of it," said the brothers.

"I care not," said Naisi; "I had rather be in misfortune than in dishonour. We will fly with her to another country."

The brothers took counsel together, and for the love they bore to Naisi they promised to accompany him whithersoever he might go. So that night they set out, taking with them one hundred men of might, one hundred maidens, and one hundred greyhounds, held in leash by one hundred servants.

Conor was greatly enraged at the loss of his intended wife, and followed them hither and thither over Erin from Assaroe to Ben Edar, wherever in court or camp they found a welcome. At length the wanderers sailed into Alba, as Scotland was then called, and made their home in the midst of a wild place therein.

There, when the chase of the mountains failed them, they fell upon the herds and

cattle of the men of Alba, and the fame of their deeds reaching the ears of the king of that country, they were received into friendship by him. But upon a certain day the king's steward saw Deirdré asleep in the tent, and going to the king said:

“O king, we have at length found a wife fit for you. There is a woman with the sons of Usnach, who is worthy of the king of the west of the world. Let Naisi be slain, and do you marry the maiden.”

Deirdré heard of this, and said to Naisi:

“If you depart not to-night you will be slain to-morrow.”

Then the sons of Usnach set forth from the land of the King of Alba and went into an island of the ocean—

“The nearest of those rock-bound Hebrides,
Set mid the crystal splendour of the sea”.

But when the spring-time came the brothers and Deirdré returned, and, having gained one-third of the country by their valour, and made alliance with the King of the Picts, they settled at Loch Etive.

THE FEAST OF KING CONOR.

Upon a certain day King Conor was feasting with his nobles in the mansion of Emania, to the strains of sweet music, and there was much delight among all present. When the bards had sung about the glories of their kindred, and the echo of the shouts of applause had ceased, King Conor raised his royal voice and said:

“Princes and nobles, tell me whether you have ever seen a feast better than this, or a mansion better than Emania?”

“We have seen none,” they replied.

“I would fain know of you,” said Conor, “if there be anything whatsoever here wanting?”

“Nothing,” they replied.

“Say not so,” said Conor. “I well know what is wanting here: the presence of three famous youths, the warlike lights of the Gael, the three noble sons of Usnach: Naisi, Ainli, and Ardan. Alas, that they should be absent from among us here for the sake of any woman

in the world! Sons of a king indeed they are, and well could they defend the kingdom of Ulster. I would that they were with us."

Then the nobles replied, and said:

"Had we dared to speak our thoughts that is what we ourselves would have said, for had we but the three sons of Usnach in the country, Ulster alone would be more than a match for all the rest of Erin, for they are men of might and lions for valour."

"Let us then," said Conor, "send messengers to the clan Usnach in Alba, on the shores of Loch Etive, to ask them to return."

"Who can give promise of safety to them sufficient to persuade them to come into thy kingdom?" asked the nobles.

"There are only three of all my nobles," said Conor, "on whose surety against my anger the sons of Usnach will trust themselves; and they are Fergus, Cuchulain, and Conal Carna. One of these I will send upon this message."

Then he called Fergus, the son of Roy, apart, and said: "Go thou to the clan Usnach,

and bring them to me on thy surety for their safety. Return by the way of Dun Barach, but let not the sons of Usnach tarry to eat with anyone till they come to the feast I shall have ready for their welcome to Emania. Give me thy pledge to do this."

Then Fergus bound himself by gesa or solemn vows to do the king's commands.

But the king called Barach into a place apart and asked him had he a feast ready at his mansion.

"I have a feast prepared in Dun Barach," said Barach, "to which thou and thy nobles are ever welcome."

"Let not Fergus, then, depart from thy mansion," said Conor, "without taking part in that feast on his return from Alba, and be sure the feast hold out two days or three."

"He shall feast with me for three days," replied Barach, "for we are brothers of the Red Branch, and he is under vow not to refuse hospitality."

"My love thou hast henceforth," said Conor.

THE RETURN TO ERIN.

Next morning Fergus, with his two sons Buini "Bove" or "the Red", and Illan "Finn" or "the Fair", and the shield-bearer Callon, departed from Emania for Alba. They sailed across the sea until they came to Loch Etive, where dwelt the clan Usnach in green hunting-booths along the shore. And Deirdré and Naisi sat together in their tent, with a polished chess-board between them, and played at chess. Now when Fergus came into the harbour he sent forth the loud cry of a mighty man of chase, for he saw a stag bounding forth from the woods. Naisi, hearing the cry, said, "If the son of Roy be alive I hear his hunting shout from the loch. Go forth, Ardan, my brother, and give our kinsman welcome."

Ardan went and welcomed Fergus, and embraced him and his sons; then they came to the tent of Naisi, where he and Ainli and Deirdré were together. After many embraces had been given to Fergus and his sons, they asked what news from Erin.

“Good news,” said Fergus. “Conor hath sent us to be a surety for your safe-conduct, if you will return to Emania.”

“There is no need for them to go thither,” said Deirdré. “Greater is their own sway in Alba than the sway of Conor in Erin.”

“To be in one’s native land is better than all else,” said Fergus, “for of little worth are power or riches to a man if he seeth not each day the land that gave him birth.”

“True it is,” said Naisi, “that dearer to me is Erin than Alba, though in Alba I should enjoy greater fortune than in Erin.”

“Put your trust in me,” said Fergus, “I pledge myself for your safe-conduct.”

“Let us go, then,” said Naisi. “We will go under Fergus’s safe-conduct to our native land.”

At the dawning of next day they went down to their ships and set sail across the sea, and Deirdré, standing at the vessel’s stern, looked back upon the land of Alba as it sank behind the waters, and made a mournful song of farewell, that the late Sir Samuel Ferguson has translated thus:—

DEIRDRE'S FAREWELL TO ALBA.

Farewell to fair Alba, high house of the Sun,
Farewell to the mountain, the cliff, and the Dun:
Dun Sweeny adieu! for my Love cannot stay,
And tarry I may not when love cries away.

Glen Vashan! Glen Vashan! where roebucks run free,
Where my Love used to feast on the red-deer with me,
Where, rock'd on thy waters while stormy winds blew,
My Love used to slumber, Glen Vashan, adieu!

Glendaro! Glendaro! where birchen boughs weep
Honey-dew at high noon o'er the nightingale's sleep,
Where my Love used to lead me to hear the cuckoo,
'Mong the high hazel bushes, Glendaro, adieu!

Glen Urchy! Glen Urchy! where loudly and long
My Love used to wake up the woods with his song,
While the Son of the Rock, from the depths of the dell,
Laugh'd sweetly in answer, Glen Urchy, farewell!

Glen Etive! Glen Etive! where dappled does roam,
Where I leave the green sheeling I first call'd a home;
Where, with me and my true Love delighted to dwell,
The Sun made his mansion, Glen Etive, farewell!

Farewell to Inch Draynach! adieu to the roar
Of the blue billow bursting in light on the shore;
Dun Fiagh, farewell! for my Love cannot stay,
And tarry I may not when love cries away.

THE JOURNEY TO EMANIA.

In time they reached the port of Dun Barach, and Barach himself, meeting them upon the shore, welcomed Fergus and his sons, and the sons of Usnach and Deirdré. Then Barach said to Fergus, "Tarry and partake of a feast with me, for I will not let thee part from me for three days under penalty of breaking thy vow of brotherhood and hospitality."

When Fergus heard this he became crimson red with anger from head to foot, and thus he spoke:

"Thou hast done ill, Barach, to ask me to thy feast, knowing as thou dost that I am bounden to Conor not to let the sons of Usnach, who are under my safe-conduct, tarry night or day for entertainment from another till they reach Emania, where he hath his banquet prepared to welcome them."

"I care not," said Barach; "I lay thee under the ban of our order if you refuse my hospitality."

Then Fergus asked Naisi what he should do. Deirdré answered:

“Thou must either forsake Barach or the sons of Usnach; it were truly better to forsake thy feast than thy friends who are under thy protection.”

“Neither Barach nor the sons of Usnach will I forsake,” said Fergus, “for I will remain with Barach, and my two sons shall be your escort and pledge of safe-conduct, in my stead, to Emania.”

“We care not for the safe-conduct,” said Naisi; “our own hands have ever been our pledge of protection.” And he departed from Fergus in great wrath; and Ardan, Ainli, and Deirdré, and the two sons of Fergus followed him, leaving Fergus sad and gloomy behind them.

Then said Deirdré: “I think it would be best, my brothers, that we go to the Isle of Rathlin and stay there till Fergus shall be free to accompany us, for I fear this safe-conduct will not long protect us.” But Naisi and the sons of Fergus reproached her, and refused

to take her counsel, but went forward to Emania even as they were. So they went on till they came to the Fews mountain and the oak-glade of Ardsallagh, and then Deirdré said to Naisi, "I see a cloud over Emania, and it is a cloud of blood. I counsel you, sons of Usnach, go not to Emania without Fergus; but let us go to Dundalغان, to our cousin Cuchulain, till Fergus shall have fulfilled his duty with Barach." And again Deirdré cried, "Oh, Naisi! look at the cloud over Emania; it is a cloud of blood, gore drops fall from its red edges. Go not to Emania to-night; let us go to Dundalغان, let us take shelter with Cuchulain, or else at the house of Conal Carna."

"I fear not," said Naisi, "I will not hear thy counsel; let us proceed."

"Sons of Usnach," again said Deirdré, "I have a signal by which to know if Conor intends evil against us. If we be admitted into the mansions of Emania, and Conor thus speaks, 'Abide with me three months, partake of my salt, drink of my cup, and my bread

securely break', he designs no harm towards us; but if we be lodged apart in the mansion of the Red Branch, then Conor surely intends evil to us."

By this time they had arrived before the gates of Emania. Naisi knocked at the gate, and the doorkeeper asked who was without.

"Clan Usnach and Deirdré," replied Naisi.

Then they were conducted towards the house of the Red Branch, by Conor's orders.

"It were better to take my counsel even yet," said Deirdré, "for evil is surely now meant for us."

"We will not do so," said Illan Finn, the son of Fergus. "Cowardliness has never been known of the sons of my father; I and the Ruthless Red Buini will go with you to the Red Branch."

Then they moved on to the house and entered it; and servants brought them rich meats and sweet wines until all were satisfied and cheerful, except Deirdré and the sons of Usnach, for they took little food or drink, being weary from their journey, and scorning

to taste a traitor's feast. Then said Naisi, "Bring hither the chess-board that we may play"; and he and Deirdré played upon the ivory board.

THE ATTACK ON THE RED BRANCH.

When Conor knew that Deirdré was in the house of the Red Branch, he could not rest at the feast, so he said to one of his people, "Knowest thou who slew thy father, Trendorn?"

"Naisi, son of Usnach, it was that slew my father and my three brothers," replied Trendorn.

"Go, then," said Conor, "and bring me tidings of Deirdré and the sons of Usnach."

Then Trendorn went to the Red Branch, and found one window unfastened, and looked through it. He saw Naisi and Deirdré within, and the polished board between them, for they were playing chess.

And Deirdré said to Naisi, "I see someone looking at us through the window."

Then Naisi flung the chess-man he held in his hand at the spy, and dashed the eye out of

the head of Trendorn. Trendorn went to Conor and told him, when Conor cried aloud, "This man, who has maimed my servant, would himself be king!" Then he asked, "What tidings of Deirdré?"

"Such beauty has she," said Trendorn, "that there is not on the surface of the earth a woman so beautiful."

As Conor heard this his jealousy and hatred came back, for he was heated with wine, and he rose from the table in great wrath, and cried that the sons of Usnach had sought to slay his servant. He called on his people to assault the Red Branch, and bring the sons of Usnach forth that they might be punished.

The brave but simple knights were mindful of their pledge to the sons of Usnach, and yet they looked upon King Conor almost as a god, and so they said, "We in this war will take no part". But Conor had some alien base-born troops in the pay of Ulster, and these came to the Red Branch, and, with dreadful shouts, battered at the doors and windows. The sons of Usnach, when they heard the shouts, asked

who were without. "Conor and Ulster," cried the troops, and shouted again.

"Villains," cried Illan the Fair, "would you break my father's pledge?"

Red Buini threw the gates open, and went forth with his men and slew one hundred and fifty men of might. Then Conor asked who made such havoc of his people, and Buini answered, "I, Red Buini, the son of Fergus".

"Hold thy hand," said Conor, "and I will give you the lands of Slieve Fews." Then Buini Bove held his hand from the fight, and asked, "Wilt thou give aught else?"

"I will make thee my chief counsellor," replied Conor. Then Buini ceased altogether from the fight, and went away. But it is said that his lands that night were turned into a desert, which is now called Dalwhinny, a wild moor on the mountain of Fews.

When Deirdré saw that Buini Bove had deserted them she said, "Traitor father, traitor son"; but Illan Finn cried, "Yet will not I be a traitor; while lives this small straight sword in my hand I will not forsake the sons of Usnach!"

DEATH OF THE SONS OF USNACH.

Then Illan Finn went forth with his men, and they made three attacks on those round about the mansion, drove them a mile away, and slew three hundred. Taking torches, Illan Finn and his men went forth a second time, and drove the hireling host of Bonachts from around the House of the Red Branch.

Then it was that Conor cried, "Where is my own son Fiacra Finn?"

"I am here, my king," cried Fiacra.

"It was on the same night that thou and Illan Finn were born," said Conor; "go, then, and do battle with him manfully. Take thou my shield 'Ocean', whose echoes roar like the sea on Erin's coast, my spears 'Flying Fate' and 'Victory's Wing', and my sword 'Death', since Illan bears the arms of his father Fergus."

They fought a fair fight, a stout, bitter, savage, and hot fight, till Illan Finn beat down Fiacra, so that he forced him to crouch beneath

the shelter of the shield "Ocean", that three times sent forth its sea-like roar.

Conal Carna had heard the tumult, and, taking his arms, had come towards Emania, where he knew Conor his king must be in peril. There, on the open field before the Red Branch, he found Fiacra Finn sore pressed by some enemy, and, coming from behind, he thrust his sword through the heart of Illan Finn, whom he did not know, for he had not yet seen his face. Illan, turning round and seeing Conal, cried, "Alas! that deed was not like Conal's—to slay me while defending the sons of Usnach, who are in the Red Branch under my father's pledge of safety."

"This shall not be unavenged," cried Conal; and he struck off Fiacra Finn's head, and went away in rage and sorrow.

And now the men of Conor came again to set fagots and fire to the doors. Then Ardan and his men came forth and put out the fires, and slew three hundred. And Ainli and his men went forth the other third of the night, and slew six hundred. Naisi himself came

forth with his men the last third of the night, and ere day-dawn had slain two hundred, and driven all the troops from around the mansion.

At dawn the forces of Conor were so defeated that the sons of Usnach marched out of the flaming mansion of the Red Branch, surrounded by many followers, and, guarding with their shields the fatal Deirdré, they turned towards the north. Conor, on hearing this, sought Cafad the Druid, and by oaths that no wrong would be done, by his hand, to the sons of Usnach, and that he only wished to hold them captive for a time, he induced the Druid to cast a spell upon the clan Usnach. Soon the followers of the three brothers seemed to see the plain covered with a great flood, that rolled down from the hills, and, as they toiled on, it seemed to deepen, so that they had to throw away their arms to save themselves by swimming. While the dreamers swam on, the hirelings of Conor received command from him to spare none except Deirdré, and to smite the sons of Usnach first. So the three brothers

and Deirdré, though they had not felt the spell, were soon alone amid their slaughtered host, and ere mid-day the valiant three lay stretched to the west, south, and east, with Deirdré standing over them.

Conor sent orders to leave them unburied, but the champions of the Red Branch, with Conal Carna at the right and Cuchulain at the left, caused a grave to be made, and the brothers were laid in it. Deirdré, standing at the head with face as white as marble, her garments covered with blood, sang forth a dirge over the dead heroes.

When she had finished, for a moment she remained in silence, and then fell forward dead into the grave.

A cairn of stones was piled upon the place, and the fate of the sons of Usnach carved in Ogham characters upon a tombstone.

Cafad, when he heard how Conor had been forsworn, cursed the king and his race. The perfidy of Conor is rendered immortal in the following lines, by Ireland's best-known poet, Moore:—

LAMENT FOR THE SONS OF USNACH.

Avenging and bright fall the swift sword of Erin
On him who the brave sons of Usnach betray'd!
For every fond eye he hath waken'd a tear in,
A drop from his heart-wounds shall weep o'er her
blade!

By the red cloud that hung over Conor's dark dwelling
When Ulad's three champions lay sleeping in gore;
By the billows of war, which so often, high swelling,
Have wafted those heroes to victory's shore—

We swear to revenge them!—No joy shall be tasted,
The harp shall be silent, the maiden unwed,
Our halls shall be mute, and our fields shall lie wasted,
Till vengeance is wreak'd on the murderer's head!

Yes, Monarch, tho' sweet are our home recollections;
Though sweet are the tears, that from tenderness fall;
Though sweet are our friendships, our hopes, our
affections,
Revenge on a tyrant is sweetest of all!

QUEEN MEAVE.

WHEN Fergus knew what had come to the sons of Usnach he joined with another champion, raised a large body of troops, and marched to Emania, which, after a great fight, in which Conor was beaten, they seized and plundered, putting to death all they met.

Cormac, another of Conor's sons, who was also bail for the safety of the sons of Usnach, got together 3000 stout men, and marched out of Ulster. He is henceforth known as "Conlingas" or "the Exile". The three champions with their men then passed over into Connaught to the court of Meave at Rath Cruachan. From this place for many years they used to go to burn and destroy the fruits and crops, and drive away the cattle belonging to the people of Ulster.

This Queen Meave was the daughter of

Achy Fayla the chief King of Ireland, who, you may remember, was father of the "Three Fair Twins". When very young she had been married to Conor Mac Nessa, but the marriage was not a happy one, and she returned to the court of her father, who married her a second time, while still a young girl, to a prince of Connaught. But this husband died soon afterwards, and Meave became the powerful Queen of Connaught. For another husband she went to Naas, and took the younger son of the King of Leinster, named Ailill More.

Meave was one of the most beautiful women of her time, and is said to have reigned ninety-eight years; but she was a warlike woman, and at one time marched into Ulster with 54,000 men. She seems to have put her trust in her soldiers and not in ramparts, for what is now to be seen of her palace or rath at Rathcroghan near Carrick-on-Shannon, in the modern county of Roscommon, is only a circular platform of about 1 acre, raised about 8 or 9 feet above the level of the field in which it stands. It cannot have been large originally, however,

because we read that when her father, as chief King of Erin, fixed on the place on which to have a palace built, and the plan was drawn, the people set to work, and the ditch which went round the whole was finished in one day. But then we are also told in the ancient Gaelic manuscripts that it was a splendid palace built of pine and yew, and contained beds enough for an entire army, so that Meave probably added extensively to it.

When Ailill More was killed at Rathcroghan by Conal Carna, Meave went to Iniscloran, an island in Lough Ree, and made a present of the palace to her mother. Meave had many enemies, and was killed by one of the sons of Conor in the following manner. She was under a gesa or bond not to let any morning pass by without taking a bath, and while she was bathing at Iniscloran, the son of Conor cast a stone from a sling at her. He had, some time before, secretly taken the exact measure of the lake, and had learned to sling stones at an apple from the same distance, so that when he flung the stone at Meave he

smote her full in the forehead, and she died on the instant.

There is within half a mile of the mound of Meave's palace one of the great burial-places of the pagan Irish kings called "Relig na Riogh". This covers between 2 and 3 acres, and at first sight seems only a piece of ground with a very broken surface, but the slight mounds all mark the graves of kings and heroes, and here, too, Dathi, the last pagan Irish "Ard Righ" (Ree) or "Chief King", was buried, and a red pillar stone marks the spot.

THE CATTLE SPOIL OF CUAILGNÉ.

Rathcroghan is the fairest spot—near the Magh Ai or Plain of Roscommon—that could be found in Connaught for a queen whose wealth was mainly in cattle, as her flocks and herds could hardly be numbered. Her great march into Ulster was for a cattle spoil, and is told in this way.

Meave and Ailill More began one day to quarrel as to which had the greater amount of wealth. They counted up their wooden,

bronze, silver and gold vessels, and dishes; their finger-rings, clasps, bracelets, thumb-rings, twisted torques, and crowns of gold; their dresses of crimson, blue, black, green, yellow, white, mottled, and streaked stuffs; their flocks of sheep; their steeds; their herds of swine; their droves of cows; and they found them to be equal. But Ailill had a young bull, called "White Horned", the match of which was not to be found in Meave's herds! She therefore sent to find, in all Ireland, another like it, and at last heard that there was one, a brown bull, in Cuailgné—that is, Cooley, near Dundalk—which was owned by one Daré. So Meave sent to ask for it, and Daré consented to let her have it. But the messengers, when talking together, said that if Meave had not got it for asking she would have taken it. This vexed Daré, and he refused to give the bull; so Meave, with her great army, came into Ulster to fight for it, and, marching at their head, burned all before her, nearly to Emania, till she had taken the brown bull. After many combats between Cuchulain for Ulster

and several champions for Queen Meave, a great battle between the armies of Meave and Conor Mac Nessa was fought at the hill of Gaisech, near Athlone, and Meave was beaten. But she had got the bull, and had punished her former husband, Conor, even at the very gates of his palace of Emania.

MESGEDRA'S BRAIN-BALL.

King Conor, like other kings and chiefs, had two fools at his court, and these silly persons, when they saw how highly Mesgedra's brain-ball—that we heard of in "The Poet's Journey"—was prized, by being kept among the treasures in the great house of the Red Branch, one day stole it, and began to play with it on the lawn of the court.

At that time Ulster and Connaught were at war, and a champion from Connaught, named Ceat, was near Emania. When he saw this precious ball being thrown from hand to hand by the fools, by some means he got them to give it to him, because there was a saying that Mesgedra would one day avenge himself

on the Ulstermen. From that time Ceat carried the ball in his girdle. Shortly afterwards the men of Connaught made a raid into Ulster with Ceat at their head, but they were overtaken by the Ulstermen, and both sides got ready for a battle at Ardnurcher in the county Westmeath. Ceat found that King Conor was with the Ultonians, and thought that the time had come for the prophecy to be fulfilled. He saw that a large number of the ladies of Connaught had come out to a hill near at hand to welcome back their husbands and to look at the fight, so he hid himself among them. Now it was a custom at that time, when warriors or armies were about to fight, for the women, if any were present, to ask the chief from the other side to come among them, that they might judge whether the praises which they had heard of his strength and manliness were true. Ceat, therefore, got the Connaught women to ask Conor to come to them, and the laws of the time obliged Conor to do so. When he had come a short distance, however, he saw Ceat

among them with a sling in his hand; so, thinking there was contemplated treachery, he turned back. As he did so, Ceat, who had put Mesgedra's brain-ball in the sling, cast it from him and struck Conor in the head, so that the ball remained in his skull.

Conor's chief doctor looked at the wound, but said it would be best not to take out the ball. It was left, therefore, in Conor's head, and he recovered his health; but he was warned by the doctor that he should be most careful not to ride on horseback, or take much exercise, or allow himself to get angry or excited, for if the ball were to come out, owing to any of these causes, his death would follow.

For years he had good health and felt no trouble from the ball, but on the day of the crucifixion of our Lord, when Conor saw the darkening of the sun, and felt the trembling of the earth, he asked his druid what was the cause of it.

The druid answered that the Son of the living God was being put to death by his own people.

“And what crime has he committed?” said Conor.

“None,” said the druid. “They are slaying him, though he is innocent of any crime.”

The king became so enraged at the thought of so cruel a deed being done, and no one being there to strike a blow in defence, that he drew his sword, and in a fury rushed from the palace and began to hew down the young trees in a wood near at hand, saying as he did so:

“Oh! if I were present, it is thus I would cut down the murderers of that innocent man.”

His rage grew greater, until at last the ball which was lodged in his skull dropped out, and he fell dead on the spot.

He has been counted ever since as the first man who died for the sake of Christ in Ireland.

BOHER NA BREENA.

CONAIRE MORE, or "Conary the Great", had one of the longest reigns as "chief king" of Erin. He was a king who ruled with justice and vigour, and in consequence of his strictness and fairness a large number of idle and unruly persons were banished or sent away out of the kingdom. Among these were his own foster-brothers, the four sons of Donn desa, a great Leinster chief. These young men got a number of followers and ships, and led the life of pirates on the sea between Britain and Ireland. While carrying on this wicked life they met with Ingcel, a son of the King of Britain, who, with his six brothers and a large band of fierce men, had been banished for ill deeds from Britain. Joined together, these made a number of descents or raids on both

the Irish and British coasts, in which they plundered and burned many duns and raths.

It happened that they landed one time in the bay of Turvey, near Malahide. They at once began to lay waste the country by fire and sword, and went forward towards Tara. Conary, at the time, was on his return from North Munster, where he had been to settle a difference between two chiefs of that province, and he had only a small number of followers with him. On entering Meath, and drawing near to his palace at Tara, he saw the whole country in flames, and thinking that there must have been a general rising of the people against the law while he was away, he bade his charioteer to turn to the right from Tara and drive towards Dublin. His servant obeyed and drove by the hill of Cearna, Lusk, and the Road of Cualann; but instead of coming to Athcliath (Dublin) he crossed the Liffey above the ford, and took the road to the mansion of the great Brooa Da Derga. This mansion was built on the river Dodder, at a place that to this day bears the name of

Boher na Breena, which means "the road of the court" or mansion, and is near Tallaght, in the county Dublin. This was one of the six great houses in Ireland where there was free and open entertainment of food and lodging for strangers and travellers. The owner, Da Derga, had often been the guest of the king, and been at feasts at Tara, so that he was glad to be able to give Conary the proof of his remembrance of past kindness, and set before the king a splendid entertainment.

Meantime, when the outlaws found that they had missed the king, whom they thought to surprise on his way home, they took all the spoil they could from Bregia or East Meath, and went back to their ships and sailed to Ben Edar (Howth). There it was agreed that two of the sons of Donn desa should come on shore and find out where the king was, as they had already learned that he had turned back when on his way to Tara. Having heard that Conary was at Da Derga's, the whole host of pirates landed south of the river Liffey, and marched over a part of the Dublin mountains

till they reached Boher na Breena. They attacked Da Derga's court, plundered and destroyed it, and killed Conary and the chief part of those who were with him.

When Conor Mac Nessa was King of Ulster, "Conary the Great" was chief King of Erin, and, in an old Irish book called the *Book of Ballymote*, the time when these kings lived is very fully set forth. It is there stated that, in the fourteenth year of the reigns of Conary and Conor Mac Nessa, Mary, the mother of our Lord, was born, and that eight years after Meave's cattle-spoil of the Cuailgné, our Lord was born.

This *Book of Ballymote* is a beautiful collection, made in the year 1391, of histories of kings, saints, and ancient Irish families, written in very early times, so that there is hardly anyone with an O or a Mac to his name at present who would not find in this remarkable book, which is treasured in the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, an account of the ancient line from which he is descended, and the particulars of the remote person whose name he bears.

DUN ANGUS.

WHEN the Firbolgs or Belgmen were beaten by the De Danann in the battle of Moytura, many of them left the country and went to the Hebrides or islands on the north-west of Scotland. There they remained until they were driven away by the Picts, and returned to Erin a short time before the birth of Christ. They were led by their native chief, Angus, and his brothers, the sons of Umor. On coming to Erin they asked the chief king to give them some rich lands in Meath, for which they were willing to pay him a fair rent. The king agreed, but required to get also bail or security for their good intentions, and Ceat of Connaught, Ross Mac Deaga of Munster, and Cuchulain and Conal Carna of Ulster were pledged for them. The king, however, began to make the rent too heavy for them to bear, so they went away secretly

across the Shannon with all their property, and, having gained beforehand the good wishes of Queen Meave and her husband Ailill, they were allowed to settle down in South Connaught in the present counties of Galway and Clare—for Clare at that time was part of Connaught. Carbry “Neefar”, the king, at once called on the four champions for the pledges they had given, and these warriors passed into Connaught to take captive the sons of Umor.

Three of the brothers of Angus and his son said that they would only go back if beaten in a fight with the champions, so a combat took place; but the four “Clan Umor” were slain, and over the grave of the son of Angus, who was called Conal Cael, or Conal the Slender or Lean, was raised the heap of stones that is called Carn Chonail (the cairn of Conal), or Carn Connachtach, the cairn of the Connaughtmen, that is in the parish of Kilshanny, north of Ennistymon, in Clare.

Angus, the chief, had settled himself in the island of Aran, off the coast of Galway, and built the stone fortress which bears his name,

“Dun Angus”, to this day. Such is the story told by Mac Liag, the chief poet to Brian Boru.

Dun Angus is one of the chief points of interest in the north isle of Aran, or Aranmore, as it is one of the finest stone forts in Western Europe. It stands above the village of Kilmurvey on the edge of a cliff nearly 300 feet high. It is a great wall of bare stones without any mortar. It has three ramparts of stone and the remains of a fourth. The inner “cashel”, as it is called, is 150 feet from north to south and 140 feet from east to west, and in the middle is a natural square platform. The rampart round this is, in one part, 18 feet high and nearly 13 feet thick. Then comes the second rampart, enclosing a space 400 feet long and 300 feet wide. Outside of this is a broad circle of rough pillar stones to prevent an enemy from rushing in a body against the fort. Another rampart encloses about 11 acres. Such was the Dun or castle of Angus. There are said to be ten stone forts built without mortar in the Aran Islands, and over one hundred in Clare, put up by the Firbolgs.

CARBRY CAT-HEAD.

WHEN reading of the coming of the Milesians into Ireland, you may remember it was said that the people were divided into the “free clans” and the “unfree clans”, and that the latter were nearly slaves. The greater part of them, from the first, were the former peoples—the Firbolgs, who were tillers of the soil, and De Danann, workers at the different trades. The Milesians were a fighting people, and thought it was a mean thing to do anything else; but during the hundreds of years that had passed since their first coming, many of the Milesians had lost their place and become mixed up with the other races, and so were brought down to the same state of slavery. This class of the people was called “Aitheach Tuatha” (Aha-thoocha), that is, rent-payers or rent-paying tribes, which

by English writers has been turned into "Attacots". From time to time taxes and fines were put upon these Attacots till their burden was very heavy, and about the middle of the first century of the Christian era they met together secretly, for about three years, and formed a plan to destroy the kings and rulers, and this is how they did it.

They said they wished to give a great feast to the chief king, the kings of the provinces, the chiefs, and all the nobles in the land, with their wives and families, in order that they might show great respect and affection for those above them. This feast was given at a place which since that time has been called *Magh Cru*, or the "Bloody Plain", in Galway. Thither came the monarch Fiacha, called "Finnolaid", or the prince of the white cows, from the number of these that were in the country in his time, and with him Ethnea his wife, a daughter of the King of Scotland; Fay, the King of Munster, and his wife Bertha, daughter of the King of Wales; and Breasal, the King of Ulster, with

his wife Aine, the daughter of the King of Britain, and a great train of nobles and followers. When the feast had lasted nine days, and the guests were thoroughly enjoying themselves, the Attacots surrounded the banquet-hall with men in armour, and slew without pity all who were within, so that none escaped except Queen Ethnea, who made her way to Scotland to her father.

There were three leaders in this revolt, of whom the chief was Carbry Kinn-cat or Cat-head, and him the insurgents chose as their king. He was an exiled son of the King of Lochlann. The change did not bring the relief to the people which was hoped for, and Carbry died at the end of five years. Then they chose Elim, who had been made King of Ulster, to be the chief King of Ireland.

In their desire to be free the people left off following their trades, the ground was untilled, and a famine followed. Even when they went back to their work the gifts of heaven seemed to be taken from the soil, and the air was full of sickness and death. They were glad, there-

fore, when they heard that a son of Fiacha, who had been born in Scotland, had come to claim his just right. This was Tuathal, called "the Legitimate", and also "Taghtar", from the state of plenty and fruitfulness that came upon the land when he was made king. He landed in Bregia (Meath), and being joined by several chiefs, marched to Tara, where Elim was still seated as king. A fierce battle, known as the battle of Acaill, was fought on the hill of Skreen, near Tara, in which Elim was slain, and so ended the revolt of the unfree tribes. Except for this break of about twenty-five years, the sceptre of the kings never passed out of the hands of the family of Milesius for upwards of two thousand five hundred years.

TUATHAL THE LEGITIMATE.

TUATHAL (Too'hal) had been brought up with great care by his mother, and was twenty-five years of age when he became king; but he had many battles to fight after Acaill—some say twenty-five in Connaught, twenty-five in Leinster, and twenty-five in Munster—before he sat down in full power and honour in the palace of the kings at Tara. His first act then was to call together the Assembly, or “Feis”; which had not been done during the time of revolt. One of the acts of this meeting was to take from each of the four provinces a part on which to build a palace for the chief king, and add it to Bregia (Meath), to make a fifth or special province for the chief king, or “Ard Righ” (Ree). From Munster was taken that part now called the Hill of Ward on which the Palace of Tlachta

was built, and where a sacred fire was to be lighted on the eve of All Saints (31st Oct.). From this all the fires used in the country were to be taken, and no other fire was allowed to be kindled on that night till after this ceremony. For this the people were to pay the King of Munster a tribute.

Usnach was in the part taken from Connaught, and there the people were to assemble, on the 1st of May, to offer sacrifice to the chief god of the island, called Beal. One of the forms of worship was to drive a number of cattle between two fires, to preserve them against disease or murrain. The 1st of May was hence called La Bealtine or Beltaine, from *La*, a day, *Beal*, the god, and *tinne* or *teinne*, fire.

Taillteen or Telltown was taken from Ulster, and the assembly which had been begun by Lugh centuries before, was again held yearly on the 1st of August, with some arrangements regarding marriages added to the other objects of the meeting.

From Leinster was taken Tara, on which

Tuathal built a new palace or assembly house.

Two other assemblies were held during Tuathal's time—one at Emania and one at Rath Cruachan.

In these assemblies (perhaps owing to the revolt before his time) we read that the artificers, the tradesmen, and handicraftsmen of the kingdom were brought under rules and regulations, and that, for this purpose, the mechanics of all occupations, such as smiths, carpenters, &c., were called on to attend. Some of their number were then selected to try the skill and ability of every mechanic, and to make choice of sixty of the best in each of the trades. To these chosen men, who were called Illanee, or skilful mechanics, was given the power to make laws or rules for the rest; to put away from any trade such persons as showed themselves to be unfit or bad workmen, and not to allow any to follow a calling unless he had been examined by them and been properly licensed.

THE BOROMEAN OR COW-TRIBUTE OF
LEINSTER.

The act most worthy of mention in Tuathal's reign is the imposing of the "Boru LEEAN," or "Leinster tribute", because most of the wars and troubles between the chief King of Ireland and the under kings of Leinster were on account of this tribute.

Tuathal had two beautiful daughters who were said to be fairer than the clouds of heaven, and were named Fihir and Dairina. Achy, the King of Leinster, asked for and was given the younger one, Dairina, for a wife, and brought her home to the palace at Naas. Some time afterwards his people, it is said, made him believe that he had not done well in taking the younger daughter instead of the elder for his wife. He thereupon set about a plan to obtain the other daughter too. For this purpose he shut his young queen into a secret room in his palace, and announced that she was dead. A short time afterwards he went to Tara and told Tuathal that Dairina had

died, asking the king to give him Fihir as a second wife. Tuathal agreed to this, and the King of Leinster came back with a new bride to his court. Not long after this Dairina managed to escape from the place where she was shut up, and in going through the palace met her sister. On seeing Dairina, whom she believed to be dead, Fihir fell into a swoon, either from fright at seeing what she thought was her sister's ghost, or from shame at finding the king's first wife alive, and she died almost at once. Dairina was so much shocked at what she saw, and now knew had happened, that she shut herself up in her lonely room and died of grief shortly afterwards.

When Tuathal heard of the injury that had been done to his daughters, and of their death, he at once raised a large army, to which came help from the three other provinces, and marched into Leinster, spreading distress with fire and sword as he passed. The people, in order to save themselves from complete ruin, asked to be allowed to pay an eric or fine. To this Tuathal consented, and the payment



M 607

THE TWO QUEENS MEET

of a tribute to the chief king every two years, and to last for ever, was agreed to.

The tribute was fixed by Tuathal at 15,000 ounces of silver, 15,000 cloaks, 15,000 fat cows, 15,000 fat hogs, 15,000 fat wethers, and 15,000 large vessels of brass or bronze. It was called Boromean from the great number of cows to be paid in it. *Bo* being the Gaelic for cow.

This was to be divided equally among the people of Connaught, the people of Oriel, and the people of Hy Neill. It was paid to forty monarchs after Tuathal, and lasted until about the year 680, when St. Moling, of St. Mullins, in Carlow, persuaded the king at that time to make no further demand for it. Let us remember that the Leinster of that time was little more than half the size of the present province, for it went no farther north than the Esker Riada (Reeda), or line of low hills running from Dublin to Galway; that the present counties of Meath, Westmeath, Longford, and Louth did not belong to it, as they had been taken by Tuathal himself to make

the new province of Meath; and then let us count over the amount of this tribute, and can we wonder that "it never was paid without a fight"? The part of the present Leinster which was then the province could hardly pay such a tax at the present day. What should we think, then, of the country and the people at that time? Must it not have been more thickly peopled, and must they not have been far richer than now?

In the reign of King Cormac Mac Art, in the year 241, it is said, thirty royal maidens were assembled at Tara, and they had each a hundred maids with them, when the palace was attacked by Dunlang, King of Leinster, and, there being few or no guards there at the time, the 3000 girls were slaughtered. Dunlang's attack arose out of the demand for the tribute, and Cormac, in revenge for the massacre, put to death twelve princes of Leinster, and added to the amount of the tribute as laid down by Tuathal.

Again, there is an account of a great battle that was fought in 594 at *Dun Bolg*, near

Baltinglass, in Wicklow, between Aed (Hugh), the chief King of Erin, and *Bran Duv* (one of the early ancestors of the O'Byrnes), King of Leinster, in which the monarch Aed was slain and his forces routed.

It was the attempt of Brian, when he became chief king, to put the payment of this tribute again on Leinster, after it had ceased for over three hundred years, that gave him the name of Brian "Boroimhé" (Boru), or Brian of the Tribute.

It is not, therefore, to be thought strange that the Lagenians grew to dislike, if not to hate, the chief king and the people of the other provinces who got the benefit of what was taken from them, and that they sought at different times the help of the Danes and the Normans against their own countrymen, by whom they had been punished so heavily.

CONN OF THE HUNDRED FIGHTS.

SOME time before Meave's father was chief King of Ireland, a noble family called Ernees were driven out of Ulster, and they went to Munster, where they became very powerful and acquired large estates, so that they spread over West Munster and all the neighbouring islands. In time they came to govern the whole country, but as they were the descendants of Heremon, they were opposed by the descendants of Heber, who were the rightful or earlier rulers of Munster. The descendants of Heber, at the time we are now come to, had as chief Mow-Nooat, or Owen-More.

Mow-Nooat had gone, in earlier life, for safety to Leinster, when Cahir More was chief king, and there sprang up so warm a friendship between him and Daire, Cahir's son, that he now asked him for help to recover the

crown of Munster. With this assistance Mow marched into Munster, where Angus of the Ernees was claiming to be king, and gained a victory at Ee Leehan. Angus after his defeat fled to the chief king, who at this time was Conn, and who, from the number of battles that he had to fight during his reign, has been known ever since as Conn Ked-Caha, or "Conn of the Hundred Fights".

Conn, who was a son of Felimy, and whose mother was Una, daughter of the King of Denmark, gave Angus fifteen thousand men. With this force he entered Munster, and a battle was fought at Cree Leehan, in which Mow was again successful and Conn's men were routed. The help which Conn gave to Angus was afterwards the cause of numerous battles between Conn and Mow, in which the latter was so often the victor that he forced Conn to divide the kingdom with him. The line of division was the Esker Riada (Reeda); and south of that was known as Leath Modha (Leh Mow) or Mow's half, and north was known as Leath Cuinn (Leh Conn) or Conn's half.

This Mow-Nooat in another way gained power and influence with the people. It happened that the druid who attended on him foretold that at the end of seven years there would be a great famine. Mow, in order to prepare for this, fed himself and his followers on fish and fowl (of which there was, at that time, plenty in the country), and by this means saved all the corn in his own half, and also built storehouses and filled them with all the corn he could purchase in Conn's half.

The famine came, as was foretold, and the whole island was in frightful misery. The people came to Mow, when they knew that he had corn, and he agreed to relieve them on condition that they would pay a constant tax or tribute to Munster, and to this the starving people joyfully consented, whereupon he opened his storehouses and gave them food. Mow was married to Beara, the daughter of the King of Castille in Spain, of whom the district round Castletown Bere or Beara, in West Munster, still preserves the name. He was subsequently slain at Moylena, near Tulla-

more, by Conn, and left behind him a son named Olioll Olum. Conn himself was barbarously murdered at Tara by fifty men who were sent, dressed as women, for that purpose, by the King of Ulster. Conn's grandson Riada (Reeda) went into Scotland with a colony, who were afterwards known as Dalriada.

It was from this Conn that the province was called Connacht, which means the country of Conn, for before his time the name of the province was Ollnegmacht.

CORMAC MAC ART.

CORMAC was the son of King Art, who was called "Aonfir" or "lonely", because he fretted so much when his two brothers were killed by two brothers of Conn of the Hundred Fights. Art had a nephew whose name was Lugh, but who was called Mac Con, after a greyhound "Con" that was his playmate. This Mac Con was a Munster prince, but had been banished, and went to Britain and Scotland, where he got together an army. With this, and the help of the son of the King of Britain, he landed at Galway Bay, and soon after a battle was fought between his forces and those of the king, Art Aonfir, on the plain of Muc-rivy, that lies between Athenry and Galway. In this battle nineteen sons of Olioll Olum, who in turn was Mow-Nooat's son, took the part of the king, and seven of them were

killed ; but Olioll's brother, Lugh Laga, changed sides in the fight, and by him King Art was slain. Art left an only son, who was Cormac, but Mac Con, within a week, had himself made King of Erin, and reigned at Tara for thirty years.

This battle was fought about the year A.D. 195, and the place where Art was killed is called Tulach Art, or Art's Hillock, to the present day. It lies between Kilcornan and Oranmore, close to the townland of Moyveala.

Cormac, who was then very young, and was in fear of being killed by Mac Con, had to hide himself among his mother's friends in Connaught, so that he grew up unknown to the king, but was reared with much care and wisdom. At one time he went to Tara and entered the judgment-hall of the palace at the moment that a case was brought before Mac Con for decision. For the King of Ireland in those times was, like Solomon and the kings in the East, believed to have great wisdom, and was judge among his people; and it was part of his duty to decide any cases that might be

brought before him, even though they were about matters of small value. It happened that some sheep, belonging to a widow who lived near Tara, had strayed into the queen's garden and eaten a valuable crop of a dyeing plant. They were caught by the queen's servants, and the king was called on to say what should be done with them. Mac Con said that the sheep should be taken from the widow and given to the queen. Young Cormac, on hearing this sentence, cried out that it was unjust, "for," said he, "as the sheep have eaten only the fleece of the land, the most that should be taken from them is their own fleeces". This view of the case appeared to the people to be so wise and reasonable that there was loud applause all through the hall.

Mac Con rose from his seat and cried, "That is the judgment of a king"; and thinking that he recognized young Prince Cormac in the stranger, he ordered him to be seized. But Cormac escaped.

Mac Con was slain at Magh Fevin, near Derg

Rath, that lies on the north side of Ath-nacarpát, or the Ford of the Chariot, near Cahir, in the county Tipperary. He was engaged in giving rewards of large sums of gold to the poets and chief workmen of the province of Leinster, at a place that has since been called Gortanore, or "the Field of the Gold", when he was pierced through the heart with a javelin by a poet named Ferchas. The chief kingship was immediately seized by the King of Ulster, who was one of three Ferguses called Fergus "Black Teeth", Fergus "Crooked Teeth", and Fergus "Long-haired". During Mac Con's time, when "Black Teeth" was King of Ulster, Cormac had invited the three of these to a feast, but, in the middle of it, the King of Ulster ordered one of his servants to set fire with a candle to Cormac's beard, which, it seems, was very beautiful, and then he drove Cormac from the province of Ulster.

THE THREE-HEADED KING.

Cormac, filled with rage at the base usage of Fergus, sought help from Thady, a grandson of Olioll Olum. Thady promised assistance, but said that the help of his grand-uncle, Lugh Laga, was necessary to gain the day. Cormac went in search of old Lugh (who, it will be remembered, had killed Art, Cormac's father), and found him at the Glen of Aherlow, near Slieve Grott, the mountain now called "The Galtys", in a mean cottage, stretched asleep with his face upwards. Cormac pricked him gently with his lance, upon which the old soldier asked sternly who dared to disturb him in that manner. When Cormac made himself known, Lugh Laga said it was generous of him not to kill him, as he might have done, finding him asleep, in revenge for his father's death. As a suitable return Lugh said he would give Cormac a present of a king's head, in the battle he agreed to fight for him. Thady had, in the meantime, easily raised a large army to

go against Ulster, because Fergus Black Teeth had slain Thady's father in the battle of Sowna, and they marched to Bru-mac-an-óge and Creena Kinn Cummer, and here, at Creena, a battle was fought between Thady and the three Ferguses. Thady would not allow Cormac to take part in the fight, but made him change clothes with one of his followers, and remain on a hill near at hand looking on. This was done because of Lugh Laga's changeable turn of mind, when the fury of battle was on him. The fight raged, and, after a time, Lugh came with the head of Fergus Longhair and threw it at the feet of the person in Cormac's clothes, and asked was that the head of the king. The servant said it was not. Back went Lugh to the slaughter, and soon returned with the head of Fergus Crooked Teeth and threw it down, asking was it the head of the king.

The servant said no, but the head of his brother. Fearfully enraged, Lugh went back into the thick of the fight to find the king, and, coming upon him with much fury, struck

off his head and brought it in triumph to the supposed Cormac. Holding it up before him he asked, "Is that the head of the king?" and, on the servant answering "Yes," he flung it with such force at him that he killed him on the spot. Seven times the army of Ulster rallied after being beaten back, but the hardy troops of Thady drove them at last off the field, and followed them from Creena to Glash-an-arra, near Drum In-as-glinn, though Thady himself received three spear wounds.

After this battle Cormac became chief king. Before the battle, however, he had promised to give Thady as much of Meath as he could drive round in his chariot from the close of the fight till sunset, and the hero, wounded as he was, managed to go round the part stretching from Duleek to the Liffey, which was afterwards called Kianachta, that is, the land of Kian's descendants, because Kian. Olioll Olum's son, was Thady's father.

CORMAC AND ETHNEA.

Brooa Buckee kept a house for entertaining strangers, and he made a practice of having always boiling upon the fire a large cauldron full of flesh and provisions for all persons who came that way, which he gave free of cost without asking his guests who they were or whence they came. He had at one time seven herds of cattle, and each herd numbered seven score. He had a noble stud of horses, and flocks of sheep too many to be counted. The gentry of Leinster, with their families and servants, would come and stay at his house for a long time, and when they left him they would bring away with them a drove of his cows, or his horses and mares, or whatever else they pleased, without asking his consent, and would never make him any return. But at last, by this means, he was stript of all his cattle except seven cows and a bull. So with this small part of his fortune he went away one night secretly from Dun Buckee, taking with him only his wife and a foster-child

named Ethnea. He travelled until he came to a wood near Kells, in Meath, and there built a small tent with turf and boughs, in which he meant to spend the rest of his days with his wife and the fair Ethnea, who waited on her foster-parents as a servant.

It happened that Cormac, who was then living at Kells, rode out into the wood, and chance brought him towards this rude dwelling, where he spied Ethnea very cheerfully milking the cows. She wore a simple rustic dress, and had two vessels, which she made use of to divide the thin or poor milk from the richer, for when she began to milk a cow she put the first part of the milk into one vessel, and the latter part of the strippings she milked into the other. This she did with each cow till she had gone over the whole number, then she took up the vessels and carried them home.

The young milkmaid did not stay long in the cottage, but came out again with two other vessels and a bowl in her hand, and went to a spring of water not far from the hut; she



stooped to the brink of the spring, and with the bowl she filled one vessel with the water that was near the surface, while into the other she poured the water that she ladled from the middle of the spring, which was cooler and clearer than the rest. When her vessels were full she returned home. Cormac was surprised at her innocent behaviour and the great sense shown by her actions. She came out again with a reaping-hook, and, going a short distance, came to a place where there was a quantity of rushes. When she had cut a handful, she separated those that were long and green from such as were short and withered, and so went on till she had as much as she wanted. Cormac rode up to her, and, when she had recovered from the surprise of seeing so fine a person as the young prince in a place so wild, he asked her the reason why she made the differences in the milk, the water, and the rushes. The maid replied that she tried to keep the best of everything for one to whom she owed all the services of her life, and to please whom it was her utmost care.

“And who is this fortunate person?” asked the prince.

“The unhappy Brooa Buckee,” she replied.

“What!” said Cormac, “has the generous herdsman of Leinster come to this? and are you Ethnea, the daughter of Dunlang, his foster-child, of whom he has taken care from infancy?”

“Yes, sir,” she answered, “though I cannot understand how you know so much about me.”

Cormac was so much pleased with all Ethnea had done and said, that he went with her to the cottage and made himself known to Buckee, and proposed to make Ethnea his wife. This he afterwards fulfilled, and to Buckee he gave a great stock of cattle and a tract of land situated near the palace of Tara, so that the queen of the greatest monarch in ancient Ireland was always able to continue the duty she felt she owed to her foster-parents. The son of Cormac and Ethnea was Carbry “Liffahar”, so called because he was nursed near the banks of the Liffey.

KING CORMAC.

The Feis of Tara had ceased to be held for many years before Cormac came to the throne as Ard Righ, but he had it established again, and he repaired and improved the Micorta. In the *Book of Ballymote*, which we have read about already, a description is given of Cormac when he came to this great assembly. Beautiful, it says, was his appearance, without any blemish or fault, with his flowing and slightly curling golden hair. He carried a red buckler, with stars and animals of gold and fastenings of silver upon it. A crimson cloak in wide descending folds was around him, and was fastened at his neck with precious stones. A torque of gold was around his neck. A white shirt, with a full collar and intertwined with red gold thread, was upon him, and a girdle of gold inlaid with precious stones was around him. Two wonderful shoes of gold, with golden loops, were upon his feet. Two spears, with golden sockets and many rivets of red bronze, were in his hands.

Cormac has been looked upon, from all times, as the greatest king that ever reigned in ancient Erin. He was a great warrior, and a sage, a judge, and a scholar as well. When speaking about "Tara of the Kings" we only gave some of the oldest of its buildings, but there are many grassy mounds there that belong to Cormac's time especially. Within the Rath na Riogh, besides the Teach Cormaic, or Cormac's House, there is to the north the Duna-nan-yal, or house where he kept his hostages; for in those ancient times, when any agreement was made between kings or chiefs, it was usual to leave one or more important persons to be kept as bail or security for the true carrying out of the compact, and if it was not carried out, then these hostages were put to death. There, too, is the stream that issued from the well "Navna", or "the Pearly", on which Cormac had put up the first water-mill in Ireland to grind the corn and spare the labour of the quern to Ethnea's handmaiden, Kiarnaid. To the west of the north end of the Micorta is "Rath Grainne",

or the sunny palace of his daughter Grainne of the golden hair, who was the intended wife of Finn Mac Coole.

There never was a monarch on the throne of Ireland who had so many nobles around him. When he dined in public one hundred and fifty attendants waited on him and served him in dishes and cups of massive gold and silver, and the number of guards who were in service at the court is said to have been a thousand.

When Cormac went to live at Acaill, which you shall read of afterwards, and his son Carbry was king, the latter would consult Cormac regarding all the difficult cases that came before him, and the sayings of Cormac regarding them can be seen to-day in the *Book of Acaill*, or "Advice to Kings". From this we know for certain that at that time in Erin there was a great amount of learning, and that there were also both the knowledge and the use of the art of writing. We have read, from time to time, of the Irish going and coming to and from Britain, France, and Spain, and marrying people from these countries, and

you may remember that in the battle of Mucrivy there was a son of the King of Britain. Any knowledge that these peoples may have got from the Romans was therefore sure to find its way into Erin, and so perhaps there may have come to Cormac some account of the Christian religion, even before the coming of St. Patrick, if we may judge from what happened at his death.

BRUGH-NA-BOINNE.

About two miles below Slane the river Boyne is fordable, and there are many little islands in the stream. Here, upon the left or south-western bank of the river, is the place called Ross-na-ree, or the wood of the kings. On the other bank are a number of raised mounds, forts, caves, circles, and pillar-stones. This is a city of tombs. It was the burial-place of the kings and nobles of the Tuatha De Danann, and in an old tract, called the *History of the Burying Grounds*, there are given the names of those interred at Brugh-na-Boinne—that is, Bru of the Boyne

—which was then the name of this place. In a space about three miles long and a mile broad there are about twenty houses of the dead, for the burying-places here are not merely cromlechs or cairns, but are rooms built round with upright stones and covered in at the top with flat stones, over which is earth, grass, and shrubs.

Looked at from a short distance they seem but little hills, each covering some two or three acres, having a circle of pillar-stones standing apart round them. But on going closer to the hill we find an opening that at one time was hidden, but which we can now enter, and find ourselves in a narrow passage more than 60 feet in length. This is formed of upright stones at each side, and is roofed with flags resting on the uprights, some of which are 17 feet long and 6 broad. The passage leads to a large room roofed with flags in the shape of a beehive; and sometimes there is more than one room under the hill. All is dark, but, by the help of a candle, strange markings, the meanings of which have not yet been dis-

covered, can be seen on the stones, and in many of the rooms there are large flat basins of stone. When the Danes used to plunder the country they opened most of these houses, and took from them the gold ornaments and other things of value that, we are told, were buried with the kings, some of them as far back as the time of Moses. Urns or earthen vessels filled with ashes of bones, or half-burned bones, have also been found, by which we know that that was one form of burial in those times. In Egypt and some Eastern countries there are burying-houses like these, called pyramids, but Ireland is perhaps the only country in Europe where anything of the kind is to be found so old as those pagan tombs of the De Danann kings at Brugh-na-Boinne.

It happened that there was a noble at the court of Cormac who for some ill deed had been banished by the king. But after much entreaty on the part of one Angus Gayvool-ta, a nephew of Conn of the Hundred Fights, Cormac took him again into favour upon the bail of Angus for his future good

conduct. This offended Cormac's son, Kellagh, who, some time after, was guilty of gross violence in this noble's family. Angus, on hearing of the barbarity, marched to Tara with a numerous following, and, entering the palace after sunset, when it was contrary to the law to take in arms, he took down Cormac's spear and slew Kellagh standing at his father's side, and with the end of the spear—it is said by accident—put out one of the king's eyes. Angus and his two brothers fled to Munster, the king of which, through pity for them, gave them the country of the Deasie, now Decies.

It was understood at that time to be a bad omen for the good of the country should a king who had any blemish on him live in the royal palace of Tara. Cormac, therefore, gave up the government to his son, Carbry, and went to reside in a thatched house at Acaill, at the hill of Skreen, not far from the court. Here he spent the rest of his life in retirement, and, besides writing the book of advice for his son, which has been already alluded to as "Advice to Kings", he passed much time in

thinking of religion, and, finally, he gave up all his pagan beliefs and seems to have come to a knowledge of the true God. This was not unknown to the druids or pagan priests, who one day brought him one of their idols, a golden calf, to worship. Cormac refused, and said he would pay divine homage to but one supreme God; but this, it is said, cost him his life, for some days afterwards, when eating a salmon, a bone, it was supposed by the magic power of the druids, stuck in his throat, and he died at the house of Cletty, A.D. 266. Before his death, however, he gave orders to his servants not to bury him at Brugh-na-Boinne, as it was pagan, though it was there that most of the kings had been buried, but at Ross-na-ree. But the druids and the people thought otherwise. "Why", said they, "should not Cormac 'Ulfada'"—*i.e.* 'of the long flowing beard and hair'—"be buried at Brugh-na-Boinne with the other great kings? True, Hugony and Meave and most of the High Kings, before the time of Achy Fayla's grandson, rest at famous Relig

na Riogh—the Burial-place of Kings—and “lonely” Art lies at obscure Trevit. But at Brugh of the Boyne lies Conn, and there also is Lugh, near the place at which he kept the ‘Wave-sweeper’, and with him Dagda and the nobles of the Tuatha De Danann.”

“To Brugh-na-Boinne, therefore,” said the druids, “Cormac should go.” But it was not to be, for thrice did the servants attempt to cross the stream with the bier, and thrice they were prevented by the rising of the water in the river; and the last time it rose so high that it carried the bier away and landed it at Ross-na-ree, where the king was afterwards buried. Cormac is said to have been the third person who believed in Christ in Ireland before the arrival of St. Patrick.

The following poem, by the late Sir Samuel Ferguson, on this event is, by permission, given with slight alteration:—

THE BURIAL OF KING CORMAC.

.

But ere the voice was wholly spent
That priest and prince should still obey,

To awed attendants o'er him bent
Great Cormac gather'd breath to say,—

“Spread not the beds of Brugh for me
When restless death-bed's use is done:
But bury me at Ross-na-ree,
And face me to the rising sun.

“For all the kings who lie in Brugh
Put trust in gods of wood and stone;
And 'twas at Ross that first I knew
One, Unseen, who is God alone.

“His glory lightens from the east;
His message soon shall reach our shore;
And idol-god and cursing priest
Shall plague us from Moy Slaughter no more.”

Dead Cormac on his bier they laid:—

“He reign'd a king for forty years,
And shame it were”, his captains said,
“He lay not with his royal peers!

“His grandsire, Hundred-Battle, sleeps
Serene in Brugh: and, all around,
Dead kings in stone sepulchral keeps
Protect the sacred burial-ground.

“What though a dying man should rave
Of changes o'er the eastern sea?
In Brugh of Boyne shall be his grave,
And not in noteless Ross-na-ree.”

Then northward forth they bore the bier,
 And down from Sletty side they drew,
 With horseman and with charioteer,
 To cross the fords of Boyne to Brugh.

There came a breath of finer air
 That touch'd the Boyne with ruffling wings,
 It stirr'd him in his sedgy lair,
 And in his mossy moorland springs.

And as the burial train came down,
 With dirge and savage dolorous shows,
 Across their pathway, broad and brown,
 The deep, full-hearted river rose;

From bank to bank through all his fords,
 'Neath blackening squalls he swell'd and boil'd;
 And thrice the wondering gentile lords
 Essay'd to cross, and thrice recoil'd.

Then forth stepp'd grey-hair'd warriors four;
 They said, "Through angrier floods than these,
 On link'd shields once our King we bore,
 From Dread-Spear and the hosts of Deece".

.
 'Twas brave to see them leave the shore,
 To mark the deep'ning surges rise
 And fall subdued in foam before
 The tension of their striding thighs.

.
 But ere they reach'd the middle deep,
 Nor steadying weight of clay they bore,

Nor strain of sinewy limbs could keep
Their feet beneath the swerving four.

.

While, as a youth with practised spear
Through justling crowds bears off the ring,
Boyne from their shoulders caught the bier,
And proudly bore away the King.

At morning on the grassy marge
Of Ross-na-ree the corpse was found,
And shepherds at their early charge
Entombed it in the peaceful ground.

A tranquil spot: a hopeful sound
Comes from the ever-youthful stream,
And still on daisied mead and mound
The dawn delays with tenderer beam.

Round Cormac Spring renews her buds;
In march perpetual by his side
Down come the earth-fresh April floods,
And up the sea-fresh salmon glide;

And life and time rejoicing run
From age to age their wonted way;
But still he waits the risen Sun,
For still 'tis only dawning Day.

FINN AND THE FEENA.

IN the reign of Cormac Mac Art lived Finn Mac Cumhall or Mac Coole. Finn was not a giant or a man bigger than others, as he is said to be in many stories about him, but the leader or chief of the standing army, the trained bands or militia of the chief King of Ireland, which were called the Feena Erin, or Finians. Neither was he the person who began to form this militia, for his father, Cumhall or Coole, was chief of it before him, in the time of Conn of the Hundred Fights. Nevertheless Finn was a great man, and very powerful in the country in his time. In the county Kildare is a hill now called Allen, but anciently Knock Almhain, and it is told that Finn became possessed of it through his mother, who was granddaughter of the chief druid to King Cahir More. In the old books

Finn's residence is referred to as "the kingly, great, broad, Allen of Leinster", though all traces of ramparts seem to have disappeared from it now. On the top of another hill, near Old Kilcullen, called Aillinne, there are, however, even to this day, the remains of a most extensive dun, one of the ancient residences of the Kings of Leinster.

So much has been said about these Feena, that it is well to know what kind of men they were. The selection and training of them appear to have been very carefully done. They were enlisted at the meetings of Usnach, Telltown, or Tara, and their parents and relatives had to agree not to avenge or demand eric for any one of them who might be killed; and this giving up of revenge was allowed not to be a stain or reproach on the parents and relations. The young man wishing to enlist had to show—

1st, His ability to use weapons, by being placed in a sedgy field with nothing to defend himself but a shield and a hazel stick the length of a man's arm. Then nine men at

the same time threw javelins or short spears at him, and he was required to ward them off and escape without a wound.

2nd, His power of running and defending himself, by having his hair plaited and being pursued through a wood by a number of soldiers, who only gave him the breadth of a tree in advance of them. If overtaken or wounded before he got through the wood he was not accepted.

3rd, That he could run so lightly on foot as not to break a rotten stick in treading on it.

4th, That he could leap over a tree as high as his forehead, and stoop easily under a fallen tree that was lower than his knee.

5th, That he could, when running, without stopping or lessening his speed, draw a thorn out of his foot.

The terms of admission to this army also included:

1. An oath of truth and faithfulness to the commanding officer.
2. A promise to protect females and to be

charitable and relieve the poor; and, in selecting a wife, to choose a woman for her virtue and good manners.

In times of peace there were three battalions of three thousand men each, and in times of war seven battalions of these Feena to defend the kingdom from attacks of domestic or foreign enemies and pirates, or for assisting the Dalriads in Scotland.

The Feena were allowed no regular pay, as in modern armies, but were paid in this way. From the 1st of November, or the lighting of the Fire at the Hill of Ward, to the 1st of May, or the meeting at Usnach, they were billeted on the country, that is, the people all over the country had to support them in their houses; but during the remainder of the year they were allowed to catch fish and fowl where they pleased for their support, and they ate whatever flesh they killed, and used or sold the skins. In these hunting times, when they had secured their game, they selected some place where there was plenty of wood and water. Great fires

were lighted, and into them were thrown a number of large stones, till they were red-hot. A great pit was dug, and into it, at the bottom, was put a layer of these hot stones; upon them was placed the raw flesh, bound up hard in green sedge or bulrush, then another layer of hot stones, and again another quantity of flesh, and so on till the pit was full. In this way the flesh was baked till fit to eat. Sometimes they roasted it before the fires.

These soldiers took but one meal a day, which was always in the evening. Before they began it they always stripped themselves and had a bath in the water near which they had encamped, and so were freshened after the fatigue of the day's hunting, and clean to begin their meal. This practice of taking a bath in the evening continued for ages in all classes, for we read that Roderic O'Connor, the King of Ireland, when he was attacked by the English at Kilmainham, was taking his evening bath.

In the Feena there were two factions, the Clan Beeskna, belonging to Munster, and the

Clan Morna, belonging to Connaught. Cumhall, Finn's father, who had his "dun" at Rathcoole on the road to Naas, was of the former, and was killed at the battle of Knucha or Castleknock, near Dublin (where the mounds erected over the slain are to be seen at present), by Goll of the Clan Morna, and had his head, weapons, and ornaments taken as a trophy. Finn had to hide, in order to escape being killed, and was brought up at Slieve Bloom and the Galtys. Here he was trained for the Feena, and his "youthful exploits" are told in the *Saltair of Cashel*. He came out from his hunting and living in the woods and the marshes an expert soldier, with great muscular strength and swiftness of limb, so that he was soon made Chief of the Feena. He married the daughter of King Cormac Mac Art, and his daughter married the King of Munster. Finn was killed near the Boyne at Ath-Brea, or Rath Breaga, with a dart of a gaff by a fisherman. After Finn's death King Carbry, Cormac's son, disbanded and outlawed the Clan Beeskna, of whom Finn had been the

head, and retained in his service their enemies, the Clan Morna. The Clan Beeskna then went to Munster, where their relatives retained them, contrary to the orders of Carbry, the chief King of Erin. A civil war was the result, and in the famous battle of Gavra, in A.D. 284, at Garristown, in the County Dublin, the two military clans slaughtered each other. In the fray, Oscar, the son of Oisín or Ossian the poet, and grandson of Finn, was killed by Carbry. Carbry, though severely wounded, was then attacked by one of his own relatives, who had been expelled from Leinster, and was killed with one blow. From the descendants of Finn in Munster came the Dalcassians, of whom so much is heard in connection with Brian Boru. Moore, in the following stanzas, has written, to a spirited Irish melody, a sketch of one of the many incursions of pirates, who, in later times, were generally Danes.

THE BATTLE OF ALMHAIN.

The wine-cup is circling in Almhain's hall,
And its Chief, 'mid his heroes reclining,

Looks up, with a sigh, to the trophied wall,
Where his sword hangs idly shining.
When hark! that shout
From the vale without,
“Arm ye quick, the Dane, the Dane is nigh!”
Ev’ry Chief starts up
From his foaming cup,
And “To battle, to battle!” is the Finian’s cry.

The minstrels have seized their harps of gold,
And they sing such thrilling numbers—
’Tis like the voice of the Brave, of old,
Breaking forth from their place of slumbers!
Spear to buckler rang,
As the minstrels sang,
And the Sun-burst o’er them floated wide;
While rememb’ring the yoke
Which their fathers broke,
“On for liberty, for liberty!” the Finians cried.

Like clouds of the night the Northmen came
O’er the valley of Almhain lowering,
While onward mov’d, in the light of its fame,
That banner of Erin, towering.
With the mingling shock
Rung cliff and rock,
While, rank on rank, the invaders die;
And the shout, that last
O’er the dying pass’d,
Was “Victory! Victory!”—the Finian’s cry

THE THREE COLLAS.

WHEN the son of Carbry became king he made his own son Muredach, who had shown great bravery and skill in the art of war, head of the army, and sent him to put down a rising in Munster. Muredach was successful and started back with a great number of captives and an immense quantity of booty. But the young prince had three enemies in his three cousins, who are known in history as the three Collas. These were filled with envy at his great success, and also feared, if he became king, that he would punish them for an offence they had committed against him in early life. They therefore gained over some of the king's officers and army to their side, and made an attack upon the king before his son returned from Munster. It was usual, at that time, for a king, before going to war, to

get his chief druid to foretell what might be the result. In this case the druid said that if the king killed the three Collas, the crown of Ireland would not be worn by any of his descendants, but would go to theirs, whereas, if they were spared, his descendants would reign. He therefore accepted the battle which was offered to him by the Collas without waiting for his son's return, and though it had ceased to be the rule for the king to fight at the head of his troops, his natural bravery was so great that he took that place, and was slain in the fray. The place where this battle was fought was called Ducomair.

The lawful heir, Muredach, by the help of his brave followers, was able to put down the three brothers, and they had to fly to the King of Scotland, whose daughter was their mother.

There they remained for about three years, when they returned to Ireland in the hope that the king, in revenge for the death of his father, would put them to death, and that their children would thus gain the throne, according to the prophecy. They came to Tara with only

nine attendants each, and presented themselves before the king, but instead of treating them as traitors and rebels, he received them courteously, and, seeing their surprise, told them he thought mercy was one of the brightest jewels in the crown of princes. Then, besides giving them a princely sum to live upon, he made them principal officers in his army. After a time he pointed out to them that the positions they held would of course last only during their lifetime, and that they ought to seek some place to conquer and leave to their children. He reminded them of what the King of Ulster had done to Cormac, who was their great-grandfather and his own, and gave them a large army to try their fortunes in Ulster. Thither they advanced, and were so well received that they were joined by many nobles and 7000 troops of that province. The King of Ulster opposed them, and a battle, lasting seven days, was fought, in which the three Collas were, in the end, the victors. They marched to Emania, the court of the king, plundered and set fire to it, leaving it so

ruined and unfit for service that it was never more used as a palace for the kings of Ulster. So perished Emania the Golden in the year 331 after Christ.

The Collas divided the province between them, taking each a part for himself, and driving away the inhabitants into Antrim and Down, where, in time, these founded a new kingdom, that was called Eastern Ulad, or Ulidia, the royal palace of which was at Downpatrick. The addition of *stir*, the Danish word for a province, gave, in later times, the word Ulster, *i.e.* Ulad-stir. There was also a Northern Ulad, the royal palace of which was at Ailech, near Derry.

THE PICTS AND SCOTS.

AS early as the time of Heremon, we are told, a band of emigrants left Thrace, which was to the north of Greece, travelled through France, and set out to sea in long ships. After they had sailed round Britain, they landed in Erin. They were called Picts, and from them the town of Poitiers, where they stayed in France, was named.

In Erin they were received with welcome at first, because they assisted the Milesians against the people of Britain; but, as they afterwards thought to obtain possession of Gailean, as Leinster was then called, they were asked by Heremon to go and seek a country for themselves. Accordingly, having begged for wives from the Milesians, they sailed to Alba, or, as it is now called, Scotland.

About 250 years afterwards prince Angus

Ollmucka, who, you may remember, was so called from his great breed of swine, went into Alba and obliged the Picts to acknowledge themselves as subject to the crown of Erin, and to pay tribute to his father, the king.

Many times, too, we have read how the Irish, as in the case of the Sons of Usnach, Tuathal, Mac Con, and others, when in trouble in their own country, went over to Alba for safety or help. Conn of the Hundred Fights had three grandsons, the youngest of whom settled in Ulster, and founded the Clan Dalriada of that province; while the eldest, Carbry Riada, went into Alba, and his descendants there were called the Dalriada of Alba. Dal means a part or portion.

We thus see that the Irish were masters of a large portion of Alba, either by the sword or by friendship.

In the early history of Britain, frequent mention is made of the Picts and Scots invading that country; and the Romans, in their time, tried to keep them away by building walls and ramparts across the northern

part of the island, between the years 81 and 211 after the birth of Christ. The most famous of these was the Wall of Hadrian, still called the "Picts' Wall". It was a stone wall to the north, and an earthen rampart to the south, at a distance of sixty or seventy yards apart, and stretched from Carlisle to Newcastle-on-Tyne.

The "Scots" that are spoken of were the Irish, for "Scotia" was the name by which Ireland was known from the time of the Milesian queen Scota, and Scotland was then called Alba.

Crimthan, the monarch of Ireland, about A.D. 368 sailed with an army into Alba, and from there passed, as a conqueror, through Britain and into France; from all of which countries he received tribute.

And even down to the year 446 after the birth of Christ, we read in the History of England that the Britons were tributary to the Scots and Picts, and that they then called in the aid of the Angles and Saxons to help to drive away these overpowering people.

The Romans were rulers over Britain till the year 446, and here is what one of their poets says:—

“When Scots came thundering from the Irish shores
Then ocean trembled, struck with hostile oars”.

NIALL OF THE NINE HOSTAGES.

IN the year 379 after the birth of Christ, began the reign of the king who is known as Niall of the Nine Hostages.

Niall's mother was a Scottish princess, who had been taken captive by his father, Achy Moyvane. When he was born he was taken out of the palace of Tara and left on the green side of a hill, where he was found by a Munster poet named Torna Eigeas. By this poet he was brought up and taught in Munster till he was of age, when he was brought to Tara and given to his father. He had been thus badly treated when a baby, because there were four elder brothers, whose mother had been Achy's wife before Niall's mother, and their relations did not wish him to stand in their way. But Niall had become a fine, handsome youth, and at once found

favour with his father. Now the king began to think of some means to try the temper and courage of his sons, and it happened that one day he found them all together in the forge of his chief smith. He secretly set fire to the building, and called upon his sons to save the smith's property. Brian, who was the eldest, rushed out with the smith's chariot; Ailill, the second son, carried out the smith's shield and sword; Ficra, the third son, took out the forge trough; Fergus, the fourth son, took out a bundle of firewood; but Niall carried out the bellows, the sledges, the anvil, and the anvil-block. When the old king saw that each of his elder sons had shunned the danger as much as he could, and only saved the lighter articles of the smith's property, while Niall seemed not to see danger at all, and chose the weightier and more important articles, he at once made up his mind to adopt him as the son who was to get the throne.

Niall became monarch of Erin in the year 379 after the birth of Christ. When a monarch was crowned Ard Righ or Chief King,

it was the custom for him to receive hostages from the kings of the provinces as bail or security for their fealty or support. Among Niall's hostages at Tara was Achy, the son of Enna Kinsallagh, King of Leinster; but this Achy, after a short time, tried to hold a court himself, and, on being warned by the druids or poets that it was against the ancient and solemn customs of Tara for anyone to keep his court in that royal palace before he was admitted to knighthood, Achy broke his bail and withdrew from Tara.

When he was on his way home to Leinster he became hungry and weak, and, at Rath-beggan, he went to the house of one of the monarch Niall's chief poets in order to get some food, but it was refused to him. Soon afterwards he returned from the south with a party of followers, and burned the poet's house and killed his son. The poet sought redress from the king, as it was against the law to injure a poet in any way. Niall marched with his forces into Leinster, whereby the people suffered much misery. Weakened by

so much suffering, they were induced to seize the prince and deliver him up to the poet, who now determined to put him to a lingering death. He accordingly had him chained to a great stone that stood upright on the west side of the Slaney river, between Kilbride and Tullagh O'Felim (now Tullow). The unfortunate prince was obliged to stand with his back to the stone, loaded and galled with the weight of the chain, till at last the poet thought he would have him killed. Nine soldiers were therefore set upon him, but Achy was a person of great strength and bravery. Gathering all his courage and power, when he saw the soldiers approaching him, he forced asunder the rivets that fastened the ends of the chain, and, on obtaining his liberty, unarmed as he was, he fell upon the soldiers, killed some of them, and made his escape.

Niall soon afterwards went south again, and laid waste the country till he came to the Bay of Wexford, and encamped on the bank of the Slaney. The poet was with him, and got him to say that he would spare the country if Achy

would appear before the poet on the opposite bank. Achy consented, and the poet had his weapons taken from him, and then began to curse him bitterly. While he was thus engaged, however, the young prince suddenly drew from his girdle a champion's flat stone, which he threw at the poet. The stone struck him in the forehead, and he died on the spot. Afterwards Achy made his way to Scotland, to the chief of the Dalriada.

Niall, at the request of the Dalriada of Alba, who were at the time much troubled by the Picts, brought over a large army to assist them. When he had mastered their neighbours they asked him to change the name of the country to Scotia, as they belonged to Scotia or Ireland; and from that time Alba, or Albion, was known as Scotia Minor, or the Less; and Ireland was called Scotia Major, or the Greater. In after-times Ireland lost the name Scotia, and Alba retained it, being called Scotland.

In the ninth year of his reign this king invaded Britain, and passed thence into America,

as it was then called, or Brittany, as it is now known, in the north-west of France. Thence, as was the custom of the Irish at the time, he carried away many captives (some say two hundred), and among them a youth (who was afterwards to become the great St. Patrick) and his two sisters. His mother was the sister of Martin, Bishop of Tours.

The richness of the spoils, and the number of captives which Niall brought home from this journey, tempted him to undertake another one later on. For this he raised a great army of his Irish subjects, and sent orders to the chief of the Dalriada in Scotia Minor to follow him with the choicest troops he could collect, to assist him in the invasion. He sailed direct to France, and began, immediately on reaching its shores, to lay waste the country round the river Loire. Soon he was joined by the Scotch Dalriada, and both armies, by the dreadful havoc they caused, obliged the inhabitants to leave the country to the mercy of the invaders.

On the chief of the Scotch Dalriada going to join Niall in France, Achy Kinsallagh asked

to be allowed to be one of the party, and the request was granted; but when Achy arrived on the banks of the Loire, Niall refused to allow him to come near him, or even to speak to him, which greatly enraged the prince of Leinster. One day he saw the king sitting upon the bank of the river, and he concealed himself in a grove on the opposite side, from which he shot an arrow that pierced Niall through the body. So perished Niall, who held five hostages from the kings in Ireland and four from the kingdom of Scotland, in order to ensure that his enemies in both countries should not attempt to disturb the peace of his reign, which lasted twenty-seven years. The sons of Niall divided into two parties, one of which settled in Ulster and the other in Meath, and were called accordingly northern Hy Neill and southern Hy Neill.

THE DRUID'S PROPHECY.

DATHI (Dauhy) was nephew to Niall of the Nine Hostages, and came to the throne 405 years after the birth of Christ. About the seventeenth year of his reign he went from Tara to Assaroe at Ballyshannon, to settle a dispute as to land that had arisen among some of his relatives. The leaves had just begun to fall from the trees when he set out, but it was near the end of October before he had finished his mission, and put his relations on friendly terms again. As the Eve of the First of November, the great pagan festival of Samhain; was at hand, Dathi thought he would try and learn something as to what was likely to happen during the coming year. He sent, therefore, for the chief druid, who was called Beirdra, and said to him, "I wish to know what will happen to me and my

country between this night and this night twelve months."

"Then send nine of your noblest chiefs with me," said Beirdra, "to Rath Archail, on the banks of the river Moy, and I will reveal something to them."

"It shall be so," said the king; "and I shall be one of them myself."

They left the camp secretly and reached the plain of Rath Archail, where the druids' altars and idols were, and as there was a palace near it called Mullaghroe, in the parish of Screen, King Dathi stayed there for the night, and the druid went to the druids' mount near at hand.

When the sun was rising the next morning, the druid came to Dathi's bedroom and said, "Art thou asleep, O King of Erin and of Alba?"

"I am not asleep," said the king. "But why do you call me by a name that does not belong to me, for although I am monarch of Erin, yet I am not king of Alba?"

"It shall not be long so," said the druid;

“for I have found out what the clouds say, and it is that you will soon return to Tara and invite the chiefs of Erin to a great feast there, and that you will ask their help to go on a journey, like your great uncle Niall and your grand-uncle Crimthan More, into Alba, and Britain, and France.”

Dathi was well pleased to hear what the druid said; so he returned to the camp and told his friends secretly what he had heard, at which they were delighted, and they promised to go to Tara and bring all their forces to help him in his project.

The king set off home, but on the way stopped at the palace of Cruachan, and also at the palace that was on the hill of Frewin, in Westmeath.

THE PALACE OF FREWIN.

When they were at the feast in the evening at this place, the king asked who it was that had built the noble and royal court. His druid answered that it was Achy “Arrav”, who was King of Erin about a century before the birth

of Christ. This king had wished to have a palace for himself and his own family which would belong to them for ever, because the palace at Tara only belonged to them so long as he was Chief King, or Ard Righ, of Erin. The people gladly consented, and, dividing themselves into seven divisions, they soon built the great rath and the palace within it.

The ground on which the palace was built belonged to the Feara Cul of Teffia, in Westmeath; but although they were among the people who agreed to the building of the palace, the king unfortunately omitted, or forgot, to ask their consent to the selection of the site. This was felt very strongly by the Feara Cul, and when Achy gave his feast of Samhain on the 1st of November, to which all the kings and nobles were invited, the King of the Feara Cul came with forty men in chariots, and, in the night, slew the King of Erin and then made his escape.

The Feara Cul laid the blame of Achy's death on the fairy De Danann, that were said to live in Shee Nanta, in Roscommon; but the

true murderers were soon found out, and the Feara Cul had to flee away and settle in Con-naught to escape punishment. There they remained for three hundred years, till the time of Cormac Mac Art, who brought them back and gave them lands near Kells, whence they were called the Feara Cul Breagh, from Bregia or East Meath.

From Frewin, Dathi went to Rossnaree, where his mother lived, beside the Boyne, and remained there a short time before going to Tara. He sent out messengers to ask all the chief people of the nation to meet him at the Feast of Beltaine, which you may remember was one of the great pagan festivals, and was held on May-day. The Feast of Tara that year was more magnificent than ever before, and the fires of Tailtteen or Telltown were lighted, and the sports and games of that place were carried on with the greatest splendour in the month of August.

When these duties were over, Dathi told the chiefs of his intended journey, and they all agreed to support him with men and riches.

Very soon, then, he had ready one of the largest armies that ever left Erin, and marched by Dundalk, Carlingford, and Newry, to Oirear Caoin, or Donaghadee where he embarked and sailed to Scotland.

KING DATHI'S MARCH.

Arrived at Port Patrick, Dathi sent to the King of the Picts in Scotland, calling on him to submit and pay tribute. The Scottish king refused, but agreed to try the question by a battle after he should have had a few days to prepare for it. The time for the battle came at last, and it was fought at Magh an Chairthi, or the Plain of the Pillar-stone. The Irish defeated the King of Scotland, who had on his side, besides the Picts, a number of Scots, Britons, French, Scandinavians, and people from the Islands of the Hebrides. The fight was fierce and furious, but the end came when the Scottish king was caught up by Conall Gulban, dashed against the pillar-stone and killed.

Dathi, having placed the son of the dead

king on the throne of Scotland and received submission from him, passed into Britain, and thence into France, and in both of these countries received the submission of the kings, and a large number of hostages, as sureties for their dependence. He had crossed France, and reached the foot of the Alps, when he was killed by a flash of lightning. His body was carried home by his soldiers, and he was buried at Rathcroghan, where a red pillar-stone to this day marks his grave.

Dathi was the last pagan king of Ireland, for during the reign of his successor, Leary, St. Patrick began the conversion of the country to Christianity.

The following poem by a late gifted Irish bard, Clarence Mangan, gives an account of the death of Dathi (or Dathy, as the name is sometimes spelt):—

THE EXPEDITION AND DEATH OF KING DATHY.

King Dathy assembled his Druids and Sages,
And thus he spake them—"Druids and Sages!
What of King Dathy?"

What is revealed in Destiny's pages
 Of him or his? Hath he
 Aught for the future to dread or to dree?
 Good to rejoice in, or evil to flee?
 Is he a foe of the Gall—
 Fitted to conquer, or fated to fall?"

And Beirdra, the Druid, made answer as thus
 A priest of a hundred years was he—
 "Dathy! thy fate is not hidden from us!
 Hear it through me!
 Thou shalt work thine own will!
 Thou shalt slay—thou shalt prey—
 And be conqueror still!
 Thee the Earth shall not harm!
 Thee we charter and charm
 From all evil and ill;
 Thee the laurel shall crown!
 Thee the wave shall not drown!
 Thee the chain shall not bind!
 Thee the spear shall not find!
 Thee the sword shall not slay!
 Thee the shaft shall not pierce!
 Thou, therefore, be fearless and fierce.
 And sail with thy warriors away
 To the lands of the Gall,
 There to slaughter and sway
 And be victor o'er all!"

So Dathy he sailed away, away
 Over the deep resounding sea:

Sailed with his hosts in armour gray
 Over the deep resounding sea,
 Many a night and many a day,
 And many an islet conquered he—
 He and his hosts in armour gray.
 And the billow drowned him not,
 And a fetter bound him not,
 And the blue spear found him not,
 And the red sword slew him not,
 And the swift shaft knew him not,
 And the foe o'erthrew him not.
 Till, one bright morn at the base
 Of the Alps, in rich Ausonia's regions,
 His men stood marshalled face to face
 With the mighty Roman legions.
 Noble foes!
 Christian and Heathen stood there among those
 Resolute all to overcome,
 Or die for the Eagles of ancient Rome!

When, behold! from a temple anear
 Came forth an aged priest-like man,
 Of a countenance meek and clear,
 Who, turning to Erin's Ceann,
 Spake him as thus—"King Dathy! hear!
 Thee would I warn!
 Retreat! retire! Repent in time
 The invader's crime,
 Or better for thee thou hadst never been born!"
 But Dathy replied—"False Nazarene!

Dost thou, then, menace Dathy, thou?
And dreamst thou that he will bow
To one unknown, to one so mean,
So powerless as a priest must be?
He scorns alike thy threats and thee!
On, on, my men, to Victory!"

And, with loud shouts for Erin's king,
The Irish rush to meet the foe,
And falchions clash and bucklers ring—

When, lo!

Lo! a mighty earthquake's shock!
And the cleft plains reel and rock;
Clouds of darkness pall the skies;
Thunder crashes,
Lightning flashes,
And in an instant Dathy lies
On the earth a mass of blackened ashes!
Then, mournfully and dolefully,
The Irish warriors sailed away
Over the deep resounding sea,
Till, wearily and mournfully,
They anchored in Eblana's Bay.
Thus the Seanachies and Sages
Tell this tale of long-gone ages.

LIST OF GAELIC PROPER NAMES.

For the purpose of rendering the stories more acceptable to children who, it may be presumed, are unacquainted or unfamiliar with the Irish language, the names of persons and places that might not be intelligible if given in the accepted spelling have been spelled phonetically. But for such as wish to see them in their original form, the following alphabetical list is appended showing the Gaelic equivalents:—

Achy, *Eochaidh*.

Achy Arrav, *Eochaidh Aireamh*.

Achy Fayla, *Eochaidh Feidlech*.

Achy Moyvane, *Eochaidh Muighmhedhoin*.

Aed, *Aedh* (Hugh), a flame of fire.

Aherlow, *Eatharlach*.

Aibric, *Aibhric*.

Ailill Aina, *Ailell*, *Ailioll*, or *Oilioll*, *Ainē*.

Aillinne, *Dun Ailinne*, one of the residences of the kings of Leinster.

Aithirna, *Aithirnē Ailghesach* (the importunate).

Almhain, *Cnoc Almhain* or *Almhan*, the fort of Finn-mac-Coole.

Angus, *Aengus*.

Apha, *Aphack*.

Ard Brestina, *Ard Brestinē*.

Ardnurcher, *Bailē-atha-an-Urchair*.

Art Aonfir, *Art Aenfhir*.

Assaroe, *Eas-Aedha-Ruaidh*.

Ath Comair, *Ath Cumair* (near Mullingar).

Athlone, *Ath Luain*, the ford of a loin (of a cow).

Balor, *Balar*.

Banva, *Banbha*.

Ben Edar, *Beinn Edair*.

- Boher na Breana, *Bothar na Bruighné*.
 Boru Leean, *Boroimh  Laighean*.
 Bove Derg, *Bodhbh Dearg*.
 Bres, *Breas*, the son of *Balar*.
 Brooa, *Brughaidh*, a wealthy farmer.
 Brooa Buckee, *Brughaidh Buiciod*.
Brugh na Boinne, the palace or mansion of the Boyne.
 Bru mac an  ge, *Brugh mac anoig*.
- Cafad, *Cathbadh*.
 Cahir Crofinn, *Cathair Crobhaing*, the De Danann name of Tara.
 Cahir More, *Cathair M r*.
 Canta, *Caint *.
 Carbry Kin-cat, *Cairbr  Cinn Cait*.
 Carbry Liffahar, *Cairbr  Liffeachair*.
 Carbry Neefar, *Carbr  Niafear*.
 Carrick-na-rone, *Curraic-na-r n*.
 Clan Beeskna, *Clanna Baeisne* (came from Munster—Leth Mow).
 Clan Morna were a Firbolg sept from Roscommon—Leth Conn.
 Coffey Keal Bra, *Cobhthach Cael Breagh*.
 Conal Carna, *Conall Cearnach*.
 Conlingas, *Conloingeas*.
 Conn Ked-Caha, *Conn Ced Cathach*.
 Coran, *Corann*.
 Cree Leehan, *Crioch Liathain*.
 Creena Kinn Cummer, *Criona chin comair*.
 Crimthan, *Crimhthann*.
 Crom Cruach, *Crom* or *Ceann Cruaich*.
 Cruachan, *Cruachain*.
 Cuchulain, *Cuchulainn*.
 Curlieu, *Corr Shliabh na Seaghsa*.
 Curoi Mac Dara, *Curoi Mac Dair *.
- Dairina, *Dairin *.
 Darvra Lake, *Loch Dairbhreach*.

Daw cloos capal ar Lavra Linsha, *Da chluais chapuil ar Labhradh Loingseach.*

Deaghda, *Deadhaidh.*

Deasie (it is now called Decies), *Deisé.*

Dilhorba, *Dithorba.*

Dinnree, *Dinn Righ.*

Dobar, King of Sicily.

Drimnagh, *Drummainech.*

Drumcree, *Druim Criaich.* *Druim*, a hill, *cri*, the heart, and *ach*, a sigh or moan.

Drum Inasglinu, *Drom Ionasgluinn.*

Drumleen, *Druim Lighean.*

Duna-nan-yal, *Dumha na ngiall.*

Dundalgan, *Dundealgan.*

Eas Dara, so called from the death there of a Druid named Dara.

Ee Leehan, *Ui Liathain.*

Emania, *Eamhain Macha.*

Ernees, *Earnaidhe.*

Ethnea, *Eithne*, kernel of sweet hazel-nut.

Eva, *Aeife.*

Eve, *Aebh.*

Fay, *Feidh.*

Feena Erin, *Fianna Eirionn.*

Feevina, *Fiadhmuine.*

Felim, *Fedhlim.*

Fergus son of Roy, *Fearghus mac Roigh.*

Fews, the highest was called *Sliabh Fuaid.*

Fiacha Finnolaid, *Fiacha Finnolaidh.*

Fiacra, Ficra, *Fiachra.*

Fibir, *Fithir.*

Fin-mac-Coole, *Finn Mac Cumhaill.*

Finnscoha, *Fionnsgothach.*

Finola, *Fionnghuala*, white shoulder.

Frewin, *Freamhainn.*

Gailean, *Gailiun*.
 Gantree, *Geantraighé*.
 Gavra, *Gabhra*.
 Gayvoolta, *Gaothbhuaileach*.
 Geashill, *Geisill*.
 Glash-an-arra, *Glaise an Earra*.
 Goban, *Goibnenn*.
 Goll, surnamed "caoch" or one-eyed.
 Golltree, *Goltraighé*.
 Gortanore, *Gort-an-oir*.

Hurl, Hurling, a game similar to the modern "Hockey"
 Hy Neill, *Uí Neill*.

Illanee, *Iollanuadh*.
 Inis glora, *Inis Gluaise*, island of purity.
 Iroda, *Ioruaidhe*.

Kellagh, *Ceallach*.
 Kells, *Cennannus*.
 Kemoc, *Caemhoc* or *Mochaemhóg*.
 Kerd, *Cerd*.
 Kethen, *Cethen*.
 Kian, *Cian*.
 Kianachta, *Cianachta*.
 Kiarnaid, *Ciarnaid*.
 Killaloe, *Cill Dalua*.
 Kimbay, *Cimbaoth*.
 Knockavoe, *Cnoc-Buidbh-Derg* or *Cnoc an Bhogha*.
 Knockma, *Cnoc Meadha* or *Shee Meadha*.
 Knocknasheega, *Cnoc na sige*.
 Knucha, *Cnucha*. The account of this battle at Castleknock
 is in the Book of Lismore.

Laina, *Laighne*.
 Lavra Linsha, *Labhradh Loingseach*.
 Leary, *Laeghairé*.

Lifé, *Magh Lifé*, the level plain in County Kildare, through which the Liffey flows.

Loonasa, *Lugh Nasadh*.

Lugh, *Lugh lamh-fada*, of the long arms.

Lugh Laga, *Lughaidh Lagha*.

Magh Ai, the plain of Roscommon.

Magh Breagha, the great plain extending from the Liffey northwards towards Louth.

Magh Cru, the bloody plain.

Magh Fevin, *Magh Feimhin*.

Magh Inis, the name of a plain in County Down, and also of a plain near Knockma close to Tuam.

Main, *Maoín*.

Malahide, *Inver Domhnainn*.

Mannanan, *Manannan Mac Lir*.

Meave, *Meadhbh*. (English Mab.)

Meidhe, originally the tract of country around Usnach.

Micorta, *Miodhchuarta*, the house of mead-circling.

Midkena, *Miodhchaoín*.

Mow Nooat, *Mogh Nuadhat*.

Moyle, *Sruth na Maoile* (Maoile, the Mull of Cantire).

Moylena, *Magh Leana*.

Moytura, *Magh-tuireadh*, plain of pillars or columns.

Mucrivy, *Magh Mucruimhé*.

Mullaghmast, *Mullach Maisten*.

Mullaghshee (near Lanesboro'), formerly called *Sidh Neannta*.

Muredach, *Murideach*.

Murthemna, *Muirthemhné*.

Murtough, *Muircheartach*.

Navna, *Neamhnach*.

Nuada, *Nuada Airgeatlamh* (of the silver arm).

Ogham. This was a method of writing (earlier and ruder than the Roman), of which the remains that have been found, in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, and

Brittany, are mostly on pillar-stones or flags. The invention is attributed to Ogma, a De Danann prince. The letters are nearly always on the left-hand edge or line of the upright flag facing the spectator, and, beginning at the bottom left-hand corner, are sometimes continued downwards on the right-hand edge of the stone. There are twenty letters, formed of straight lines and dots, in four groups of five each. But Oghum appears to have been made use of in other ways for writing similar to our manuscripts, and to have had various alphabets that were known only to those specially learned in them.

Olioll Olum, *Oilioll Oluim*.

Ollav, *Ollamh*.

Ollmucka, *Ollmucach*.

Ollnegmacht, ancient name of Connaught.

Oorkas, *Uairceas*.

Oriel, *Oirghiall*.

Owen More, *Eoghan Mór*.

Ree, *Righ*.

St. Brendan (of Clonfert) was born about A.D. 484, and is famous for his travels by sea and land. Seeking still greater solitude than he had even at Annaghdown on Lough Corrib, he passed over to Irish Gloria (which is about a mile distant from the mainland of Erris in Mayo), where are still to be seen the remains of his oratory, and of a church for men and one for women.

Samhain. November the first, on the eve of which the pagans believed they could learn from the elements and by magic the things that were to happen in the coming year.

Scohene, *Gleann Scoithin*.

Scoria, *Scoriath*.

Shana Inricka, *Seadhna Ionraice*.

Shee Finnaha, *Sidh Fionnachaidh*.

Shee Nanta, *Sidh Neannta*, now called Mullaghshee.

Sheerlauv, *Siorlamh*.

Slaunole, *Slanoll*.

Slieve Bloom, *Sliabh Bladhma*, also called *Sliabh Smoil*.

Slieve Grott, *Sliabh Crotta*, the Mountain of Harps—now the
Galty Mountains.

Soontree, *Suantraighé*.

Sowna, *Samhna*.

Taillkenn, *Tailcenn*.

Taillteen, *Tailltin*.

Tallaght, *Tamhlacht*.

Tara, *Teamair* or *Teamhrach*.

Teamhair Luachra, also called *Teamhair Earnann*, the resi-
dence of the Ernees of Munster.

Thady, *Tadhg*.

Tierna, *Tighernach*.

Tigernmas, *Tighernmas*.

Tolka, *Tulchainn*.

Trebit, *Trebit* (about 3 miles east of Tara).

Tuathal Taghtar, *Tuathal Teachtmhar*.

Tullagh O'Felim, *Tulach Fedhlim*.

Turenn, *Tuireann* (wheat).

Ugaine More, *Ugainé Mór*.

Ulad, *Uladh*.

Ur, *Uar*.

Urcar, *Urchar*.

Usnach, *Uisneach*.

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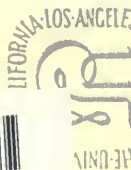
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