

IRISH KINGS AND BREHONS.

THE difficulty most of us find in obtaining a just idea of a people at a given period springs, to a large extent, from ignorance of the conditions of our own ancestors at the same time. False ideas of the English past have encouraged contempt of other nations. Ireland has suffered

from this more than other countries. The smile Englishmen and Americans of liberal education give when they hear persons boast descent from an Irish king may be set down to ignorance of the state of things in Britain at the same period. Even after feudalism was made a system in Great Britain and Ireland the power of the kings of Norman stock was by no means what is often supposed. Before that period the difference between a king in Britain and a king in Ireland was small: neither could hold even a nominal lordship over the greater part of the land without constant warfare; both needed to be equally politic, vigorous, sanguinary; neither had anything but the rawest means at hand to keep the smaller kings and princes from plundering the subjects of their nominal overlord. During certain periods the average of civilization was higher in the smaller isle. Yet the Englishman who regards with reverence the representative of a peerage created a few centuries back, and justifies his reverence on the score of antiquity of family, has only indifference for the descendant of an ancient Irish stock whose ancestors were provincial kings or were temporarily overlords of Ireland a thousand years ago. In Britain the great majority of families of similar ancestry have been lost in the people, owing to the profound alterations in society made by the Normans, and also to the standard of material well-being, fixed in part by the money-loving instinct of the Normans, in part by the Saxon addiction to trade. That fine old contempt for wealth as wealth which sounds so superior but has such uncomfortable results, that romantic love of adventure, that scorn of persons in trade, linger in Ireland as nowhere else, and present one more paradox in a community full of contradictions in other ways. Indeed, we must look to the Gaels of Ireland and Scotland for an element which leavens the materialism of the British Empire with ideas of chivalry, of love, of sacrifice for one's

country. The average Englishman is amazed when he sees Irishmen devoting their lives to a struggle that seems not only hopeless but without profit of any kind, and is too ready to suggest that the men who have adopted such a line of life are unable to succeed in any respectable pursuit; in other words, to charge them with just that hypocrisy which the French, for example, never weary of ridiculing in the men of Albion.

An Irish king, whether the sovereign of the whole island, like Brian of the Tribute, or despot of one of the four great sections, Ulster, Leinster, Munster, and Connaught, had little but glory to render his life better than that of his subjects. He could not hand down his scepter to his son if his brother was alive and had no mental or physical defect. In times of peace he was not an object of much interest, and found it hard to collect the tribute in cows, greyhounds, hawks, mantles, male and female slaves, ships, and so forth, which were his, according to the versified laws retained in the capacious memories of bards and sennachies. Hence war was not only his business but his source of profit. Christianity sat lightly on him. Should his wife have powerful relatives, he was in the position of the Turk whose religion allows of variety in women, but whose first wife is often powerful enough to make him swear, like a French gallant of the last century, *Une me suffit*. But if ambition caused him to marry the sister or the daughter of a powerful kinglest and she was masterful, he could not indulge his passions without danger. On the other hand, he could repudiate his wife with little difficulty and marry another if his wife lacked family support, just as the Turk can, especially if she proved to be childless. The queen, if badly treated, might fly to the territory of another prince, put herself under his protection, and demand asylum and guard, according to the old laws of chivalry which we find living in ancient Ireland, but merely a literary survival in Great Britain and France during the later Age of Chivalry so called. It was such a case that made an opening in Leinster for the Welsh-Norman adventurers who thereupon flung wide the gates of Ireland to Henry the Second.

Derforgilla, a princess of part of Leinster, whose husband, Diarmuid mac Murragh, abused her, took refuge with another prince who held sway in a territory named from the

O'Brefnys. This act has made Derforgilla an outcast in history, but we have never heard her side of the story. She was forty years old, her husband sixty. In the war that ensued to protect her Diarmuid was vanquished, and fled to Britain after traditional wont, whence he returned in secret after having made his plot with Henry II. and the adventurers of Wales. The ruler of O'Brefny had every precedent to compel him to be the champion of that princess. Did not each bard and story-teller have by heart the tale of Grainné, whom we have learned to know? but they did not know, as a sun-goddess of the aboriginal Turanian underfolk, Grainné was, or was to be, the wife of Fion mac Cumhal, the semi-divine folk-hero. But she forced Diarmait the Beautiful, him of the beauty-spot that made women who saw it mad, to elope with her from the Fenian court. In the twelfth century the kinglet of O'Brefny would have been despised, perhaps dethroned, had he refused to be Derforgilla's champion when the latter reached his bounds. Doubtless she cited to him the famous case of Grainné. Doubtless she laid *geasa* or obligation of a Fenian knight on that petty ruler, just as, in the delightful old legends of Ireland, Grainné laid *geasa* on Diarmait the Beautiful.

The mythical Diarmait was of course originally a deity also. His name is by all probability the same in meaning as that of the old jovial god Dagdé mentioned in "Pagan Ireland"¹ as a being with burlesque traits like Woden among the Scandinavians and Vulcan among the Latins. Dagdé means the Good God. Diarmait, notwithstanding an intrusive *r*, probably means the God Good. We have in our own tongue a case of intrusive *r* upon the word *Dia*, goddess, namely in the exclamation "Dear me!" descended from *Dia mia*. But the period of the kings and brehons of Ireland which is now in order belongs to an earlier stage than the twelfth century, when poor Derforgilla had to fly from her liege lord. Though kings and brehons existed till the time of Elizabeth, they are naturally found in the best condition for examination many centuries before the Norman-Welsh effected those changes in Ireland which were made far more thoroughly in Britain by the Normans under William the Conqueror.

Though from the earliest times we hear of the king of such and such a province, the arch-king of all Ireland, the kings of Orkney and Man, even kings of Dublin, Waterford, and other walled cities of Scandinavian origin, we must not understand any such position for these rulers as, for instance, belonged lately to the kings and reigning princes of Germany. It was not a holding of the land according to the

divine right of kings. Neither was it quite the medieval holding of a king on a system by which geographical limits were fixed, within which limits princes paid homage to the king, barons to princes, lesser nobles to barons; so that when war was declared every part of the territory contributed its quota of soldiers to the banner of the overlord. It was a far looser organism. Hence the intrusion of freebooters or the advance into Ireland of a regular army was comparatively easy; for one province hardly knew or cared what was happening to another. It needed fearful calamities and an enemy who was plainly resolved to ruin the whole island to cause enough adherence among the kinglets to make them forego their old petty enmities and band together to resist a common foe. So it was in Britain when Cæsar and the later Roman conquerors entered; when the Saxons followed; when the men from the Baltic under the common term of Danes broke up the Saxon kingdoms piecemeal.

This looseness of organization accounts for the ease with which an enemy got a foothold. The Norman-Welsh brought in by Diarmuid mac Murragh gave little uneasiness to the generality of Irish; even the advent of Henry II. and the campaigns of John and Richard assumed no such importance as Irishmen of to-day assign them. Though so loose, the organization had wonderful elasticity, because it did not rest on walled towns, nor even greatly on agriculture. Such towns as the Norman-Welsh found became the bases of their power. Waterford's best relic is the tower shown in the sketch, which preserves the name of a Scandinavian prince who trusted to his walls and perished. Cattle could be driven out of the line of march of a regular army; wood and wattle houses could be destroyed with little loss to the owners; a population had only to retire till the foe was gone and then return. This semi-nomadic side to Irish life under the *Reguli*, as the English writers called the petty kings, accounts largely for the fact that practically the Irish were never conquered at all. Even the ruthless acts of Cromwell, that Englishman with a Keltic name whom the Anglo-Saxonists of the present day would have us believe a typical Saxon—even the wholesale deportation of the Irish and Anglo-Irish by Cromwell's command failed, because the people were really used to such things on a smaller scale and knew how to meet them. The more Keltic and inveterately anti-English a family was who suffered in that way, the surer that very family returned and in time gained possession of the territory confiscated for the benefit of the intruders.

The only articles so far discovered in Ireland which can be called insignia of royal power

¹ See THE CENTURY MAGAZINE for January, 1889.

are hats of gold, very thin and light, similar to the figure on page 304. They bear a striking resemblance to the hats of Tatars and Chinese as we get them in accounts of travelers during the later Middle Ages. Bronze shields, however, are not unknown, and even the wooden core over which the bronze skin was hammered may be seen in the woodcut. In this case the covering has disappeared, while in that of the bronze, of which front and back are figured, the wooden support has crumbled away. Such a bronze shield was discovered in Britain in March of the present year. One is an oval shield, the other that round target which was known down to the Elizabethan period in England and until the last century in the Scottish Highlands. The game of chess was peculiarly an enjoyment for chiefs, if we are to judge from constant allusions in literature and the presence of chessboards as ordinary articles of tribute. A chessman found in the county of Meath may be noted on page 302 for the antique appearance of its simple decoration.

The absence and explicit disdain of walled towns and immovable property shown by the houses and main riches of the native septs had its parallel in their war-clothes. The Irish regiments that fought in Scotland, England, and France were early noted for their headlong valor, but also for being cut to pieces owing to the absence of defensive armor. It is true that the gallowglasses had suits of mail and strong helmets, but in the Irish tongue *galloglas* means the foreigner from over sea. They were mercenaries in Ireland who wore non-Irish battle-clothes. The kerns, or "battle-men," were the true Irish soldiers, and they wore at most a light helmet; often they fought nearly naked. Hence the Anglo-Irish in suits of Norman mail had little difficulty in cutting through their ranks and putting them to flight if the country was open.

Thus Gilla-Brighde mac Conmidhe, the bard and foster-brother of Brian O'Neill, a native king of Tyrone, who was killed in battle A. D. 1260, and whose seal has been found in England, says in the lament:

The foreigners from London,
The hosts from Port Lairge
Came in a bright green body thither,
In gold and iron armor.

Unequal they engaged in the battle,
The foreigners and the Gaedhil of Tara;
Fine linen shirts on the race of Conn
And the foreigners one mass of iron.

But woe to the detachment caught in woodlands or bad ground, in bog or hill country. Then the extraordinary vigor and daring of

the Irish foot-soldier made him more terrible than an Indian. He would sometimes watch his opportunity, vault on the enemy's horse, pinion his foe's arms, and bring him in a prisoner for enslavement or ransom, as the case might be. The Irish in all ages have shown an extraordinary contempt for an enemy who trusts to armor, though constantly that enemy has put them to defeat through better appliances of war. It is this romantic element in the Irish, this delight in taking big odds, which forms one of their most meritorious sides; but it is attractive on much higher grounds, for it is an essential to the spirit of chivalry.

Another hindrance to peace was the difficulty that kings experienced in keeping possession of any objects of value. Their courtiers and retainers were like a lot of children, who had to be kept in good humor by presents. Custom erected into a grievous tax what ought to have been rewards for merit. Various singular ideas conspired to this end. One was a chivalrous idea that the leader should share the luxuries as well as necessities with the defenders of his life and honor. Another sprang from the fear of the supernatural, ever present to the barbaric mind and far from lacking among educated persons to-day in all parts of the world. Refusal of a demand for an object, such as a favorite brooch or the rings that served for coins, was not only dishonorable to a king, but might entail a curse under which the king would die, provided he who asked was a poet or a magician.

In the early days there was a king Caier, who got his name from the *cae* or stone fort rare in those times. His wife fell in love with his nephew, and, tempting him with the sovereignty of Connaught, devised this plan. Neidhé, the young prince, was a poet, and could pronounce an imprecation which would raise a blemish on the face of the man he satirized. His uncle Caier had a dagger given him under an oath never to part with it. Neidhé yielded to the wicked wife, demanded of his uncle the dagger, on the plea that kings cannot refuse such requests, and being refused uttered his imprecation — perhaps after going through just such a ceremony as is described in "Fairies and Druids of Ireland."¹ The next morning King Caier went to the spring to make his toilet, after the primitive fashion of that age, and discovered three ugly swellings on his face, one white, one green, one red. As these were enough to make him no longer fitted for the kingship, he fled, and his nephew took wife and throne. The nephew's conscience however drove him to seek out his uncle in his retreat, when Caier died of shame, and

¹ See THE CENTURY MAGAZINE for February, 1889

the weak Neidhé was killed by a piece of a rock which suddenly split and pierced his brain.

In this ancient tragedy we get some idea of the difficulties of kingship. Personal services to the king could not be paid by lands, or titles, or drafts on the treasury. As Professor de Jubainville has shown, there was no coinage then in Ireland. King Caier has the dagger given him with a bond not to bestow it on any one else, the giver knowing that otherwise custom would not permit him to keep it should a member of his household long to become its owner.

The curse uttered by a magician had its effect through the terror inspired by a rite in which both performer and victim completely believed. The blemished king could no longer reign, because, on the practical side, a blemish, say of the eyes, mouth, or ears, foot or hand, might make him less war-worthy and ready to defend his clans; and on the romantic and superstitious side he was an object of aversion as unlucky, and liable to be refused obedience by his men. Were this fine old rule to be applied to the crowned heads of Europe to-day what an exodus from thrones would ensue!

There were three kinds of kings among the old Irish, named respectively the Ard-rioh or high-king, the Ríoh, and the Oir-rioh or petty king. Eogan or Ugaine the Great, a primeval who tried to hold the entire island, not only during his own life, but for his descendants, was an Ard-rioh. He "exacted oaths by the sun and the moon, the sea, the dew and colors" (probably the points of the compass, which were defined as four and afterwards as eight colors), "and by all the elements visible and invisible, and by every element which is in heaven and on earth." He is a king whose descendants bear names of Turanian origin. In the second century of our era a king whose pedigree ran back to Eogan did the same, and further stipulated that, even if in the future these oaths should be violated, his descendants and those of the mythical Ugaine should continue to hold the Hill of Tara with its ancient royal graves, and also the land called Meath, nearly central in Ireland.

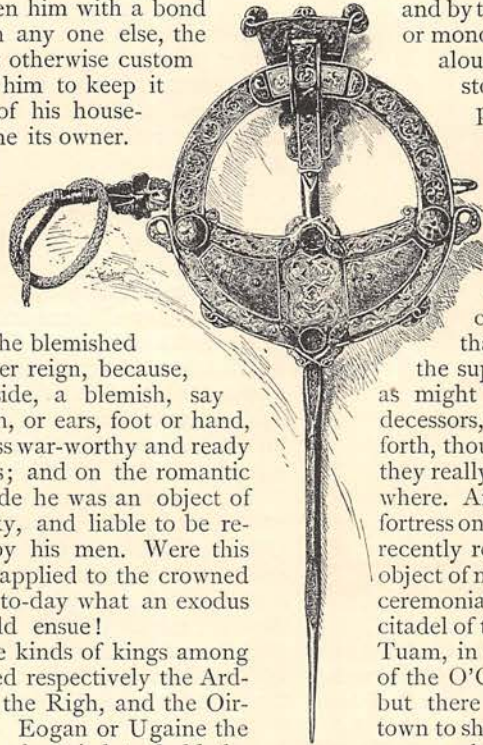
Meath held an anomalous position as regards the four provinces, somewhat like the District of Columbia towards the States of our Union. But it was not a no-man's land, like the

District; it claimed to be the fifth of Ireland. Hence Munster is called in Irish Cuigé Mumhan, the "Mumhan Fifth," and the other provinces in the same way, though sometimes Meath was omitted and East and West Munster were separated to make each a fifth. The wisdom of Eogan in holding for his family the great meeting-place of Ireland consecrated by traditions, by the tombs of the kings, and by the "shrieking stone," that rock or monolith which was thought to cry aloud when the true monarch stood upon it, is of course apparent. A clan that by antique oaths held Meath with Tara

was likely in the long run to furnish to Ireland most of her archkings. But in course of time the pagan ceremonies which were traditional about that hill so incensed the Christian priesthood that they cursed Tara, acting on

the superstitions of the Irish exactly as might have done their pagan predecessors, the Druids or bards. Thenceforth, though kings were called of Tara, they really made their headquarters elsewhere. Aileach, near Derry, an ancient fortress on a high hill, which has been very recently repaired, and has become the object of no little public interest, was the ceremonial palace and perhaps the citadel of the Nials of northern Ireland. Tuam, in Galway, was the seat of one of the O'Connors, kings of Connaught; but there is nothing in that little old town to show former antiquity except its name, which appears to refer to such tumuli as used to be raised for the graves of mighty men in the ancient days. According to the "Banquet of Dun na Gedh," a comparatively late historical romance, Domnall mac Aedh, being shy of Tara owing to the curse of the priests, fixed his residence at a fortress of Dun na Gedh, on the river Boyne. The story describes as follows the principal buildings within the walls of the Dun, the author, to all appearance, having striven to recall the buildings on Tara as well as he was able from tradition and from the ruins which remained there well within historical times:

"And he drew seven very great ramparts around this fort after the model of regal Tara, and he also laid out the houses of that fort after the model of the houses of Tara, namely, the Midhchuart (banquet-hall), in which the king himself, and the queens and the ollaves (chief poets) and those who were most distinguished in each profession, sit; also the Long Mumhan (house for the men of Munster), the



TARA BROOCH
OF GOLD AND
WHITE BRONZE.
BACK VIEW.

Long Laighen (house for the men of Leinster), the Coisir Connacht (feasting-hall of the Connacht men), the Eachrais Uladh (fair-ground

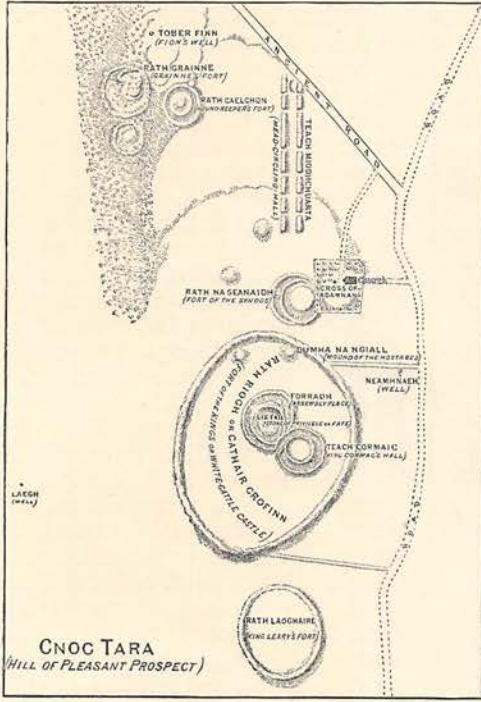


CHART OF AN EARLY SEAT OF GOVERNMENT, ADAPTED FROM PETRIE, WITH ENGLISH TRANSLATION ADDED.

of the Ulster men), the Prison of the Hostages, the Star Chamber of the poets, the sunning-house of the one pillar (which last had been

first built at Tara by Cormac mac Airt for his daughter Gráinne), and other houses besides."

The chart fixes the probable site on the Tara slope of some of the buildings repeated on the Boyne by this prince. It represents the arrangement of a king's fort in Ireland before the eleventh century. The traits of genuine antiquity are many. Thus the ramparts are not stone; they are the earthen walls we still find in the *rath*, *hos*, and *dun*, the wrongly called Dane's forts scattered everywhere. A separate building for each person was the rule in granges and farmers' settlements; separate buildings for the different groups of the court are found here. Rebellion, or rather refusal of tribute, was kept in check by hostages who were lodged under guard in one building. The bards and historians slept in another; the women were lodged in a *grianan*, or house with windows of stone slabs, thin skins, or glass; and in the case of a powerful monarch provision had to be made for the chiefs and champions of the four provinces when they came to debate affairs of state. Finally there is a great round hall where ceremonies took place and the general banquet was held on state occasions. Very curious is Tara to the student of early methods of government.¹

The several ramparts were entered by gates so disposed as to embarrass a hostile force. Outside of all, in the very ancient forts of stone on the west coast, and presumably in the earthen forts too, was a watchman's room or box in the wall, cut off entirely from the interior. A guard surprised here would have to perish at his post if he could not save himself by flight. The ramparts were often tunneled longitu-

¹ The division of Ireland into fiths must be very ancient, if the following identification of the names of the provinces handed down in Gaelic is correct. They are Ulster, Leinster, Munster, Connaught, and Meath. For three of these, explanations have been offered by Irish writers of the past. Meath is explained by Latin *medius*, because it holds the middle of the island. Leinster is derived from the spear, *laigen*, used by an army from Gaul. Connaught means "people of the race of Con." Only the last etymology has any possibility of acceptance, and in this case we have an older name preserved in Gaelic, namely, Ollnégmacht.

The termination "ster" in the names of the three most important divisions is explained by Scandinavian *stathr*, "place." But comparatively recent comers like the Scandinavians, who were also, in all probability, on a lower plane of civilization than the Gaels, are not the source for place names common to the Gaelic-speaking population. If we turn to Esthonian and Finnish, however, the roots "Ul," "Lein," and "Mun" find explanations which agree with the natural traits of these sections; moreover, the termination "ster" is seen to spring from a suffix common to the Finno-Ugrian tongues, but not to the Aryan.

The Irish call Ulster *Uladh*, but the final consonants are silent, and represent a mistake of Gaelic grammarians. The word is Esthonian *üle, üli*, Finnish *ylä*; as in *Ylä-Saksa*, "Upper Saxona." It marks the upper,

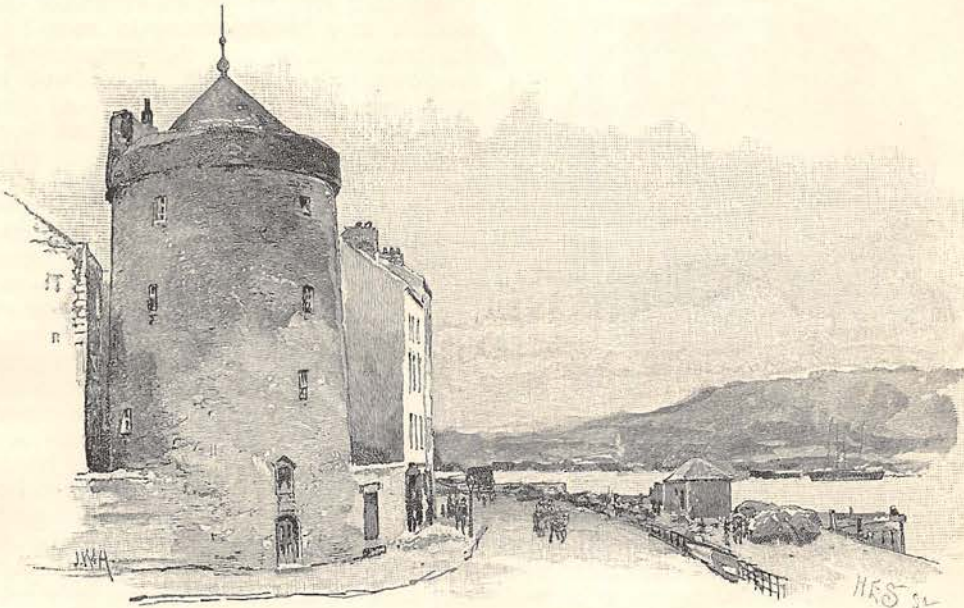
or northern, district. Esthonia and Livonia are called *üle-ma*, "upper or main land."

Leinster in Irish is *Laighen*. This comes from a word found in Esthonian as *lauga, lage*; in Finnish as *laakea maa*, "flat, low, gently rolling land."

Munster in Irish is *Mumha*, in which the *mh* is silent and the word is spoken *mooa*. The root is found in Esthonian *muhe*, "soft, rich (ground)," and the parallel from the Baltic is the island Mohn, which in Esthonian is *Muhu-ma*, "rich land"; Finnish, *Muheha mukkea*.

In "ster" we may trace a case-ending peculiar to these tongues, which has been called the elative, and means "from," or "out of." In Finnish the suffix is *sta, stä*. Such forms as Ulster, Leinster, and Munster grew up from possible *Ulestä, Lagenesta*, and *Muhenesistä*, receiving from Scandinavians and English the final *r*, which does not belong to them. The original meanings were (the men) from the upland, from the flat land, from the rich land, agreeing exactly with the several traits of these three districts.

The old name of Connaught was Ollnégmacht, a term the hardest grammarian of Ireland has avoided. But in Finnish we have *onelma*, "the valleys"; perhaps from *one*, "bad, worthless," or connected with Esthonian *ülenema*, "to be elevated." That of Meath may come from an equivalent of Finnish *maatala*, "to make land," in allusion to the necessity the earliest inhabitants of Ireland were under to subdue the bogs of the central part of the island. Compare Esthonian *muda*, "slime, bog."



REGINALD'S TOWER, WATERFORD, WHERE THE LAST KING OF WATERFORD WAS SLAIN BY THE WELSH AND NORMANS.

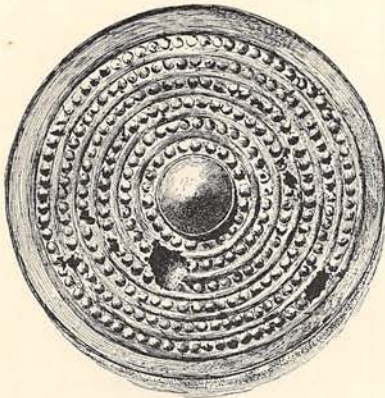
dinally, and nearly always the inner spaces were excavated in shallow subterranean halls and passages lined and ceiled with large rough slabs. Perhaps these were for treasure, or merely for food; the tunnels in the ramparts were apparently a part of the defensive system. Stone forts had narrow steps that led to the top of the wall. The area inside the inmost rampart was dotted irregularly with buildings which to our ideas would be exceedingly small. Buildings were of timber if great luxury was used; of wood and wattle or of basket-work as a general rule. The tendency of the people to have a hut for each grown person was of course curbed in a fort, where space was valuable; but down to late centuries, here and in ecclesiastical settlements, the old trait continued of clustering small edifices together, rather than arranging one large building for occupancy by many persons.

Such a structure as Staigue Fort, which will be shown in the article on architecture, may be considered a very ancient work in the nature of a citadel, the small size of which does not warrant its rejection as a military work. Its later use may have been to inclose flocks, but the stairways carefully arranged in the interior show that it was erected for defense against men. In "The Monasteries of Ireland," published in this magazine for May, 1889, is a cut of the "Fort of the Wolves" as partly restored by Dunoyer; here one sees a very complete citadel of some ancient chieftain on the west coast. Under such circumstances divinity could not hedge a king.

We can see from the action of the historical

tales that the people had great freedom of speech, criticizing their superiors and conducting themselves with democratic ease. Yet any attempt to assume a rank to which a man was not born received the promptest rebuke. The very rigidity of popular rules on such matters put men at their ease. It appears, however, that the Irish had a complete system of progress upward from rank to rank, at least among what is now called the gentry and nobility. This depended on wealth: a man with so many cows could lay claim to such an honorific title; as soon as he got together so many more, he rose to the next rank. Perhaps this frank recognition of the golden calf, if that bull be permitted, was manlier than the present system, which pretends superiority to the influence exercised by wealth, yet at heart worships it and on the sly bows down before its possessors.

The old kings and chiefs may be best likened to the chieftains of the Scottish Highlands as described by Sir Walter Scott, after subtracting much that is obviously modern in their weapons, houses, and habits. Undoubtedly this colony from Ireland into the northern parts of Britain retained many traits which disappeared from large portions of Ireland. We can account for the high intellectual and physical average of the people of Scotland by the difficulty of subsistence in a sterile land, by the outdoor life and simple food in a rude existence, but also from the constant mixture of hardy races going on there — the purer Kelt whose blood came from Ireland long before the Norman



BRONZE TARGET WITHOUT WOODEN CORE. OBVERSE.

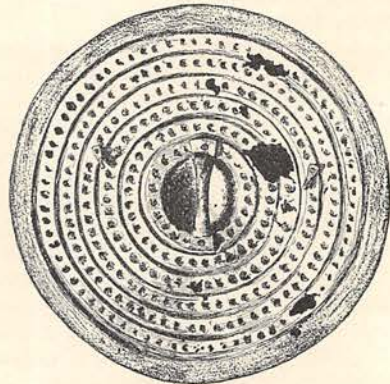
invasion constantly intermingling with Norse and Saxon, and all three leavened by the primitive Pict. The clansmen of the Highlands and the old Irish have a host of obvious resemblances besides the practical identity of their tongue, though the most salient feature of the Highlanders, their dress, appears to have descended from the Picts, the nakedness of that painted and perhaps tattooed race remaining last about the knees, which the true Highlander considers it effeminate and base to cover.

War-cries, meant originally to keep the fighting men aware of the place of their own clan in battle, or when scattered in woods and hills, came down to the baronial period, and were used by the Anglo-Norman nobles out of consideration for their Gaelic retainers. The commonest shout was some name of famous place or famous man with the addition *aboo*, a word well fitted for the clamor of a band of fighters, being at once more musical and less wearying to the voice than our "hurrah." The Kildare retainers cried "*Crom aboo!*" in honor of Crom Castle, a citadel in Limerick County, originally a stronghold of the O'Donovans, which one of the intrusive Geraldine families, named after the town of Kildare, occupied while turning Irish. The O'Neills cried out, "*Lawv dareg aboo!*" because the Lawv dareg or Red Hand was the badge of the family and clan. The O'Briens cried, "*Lawv Laider!*" or "*Laudir aboo!*" or "Strong Hand Aboo!" The translator of Geoffrey Keating's "History of Ireland" suggests as the meaning of *aboo* the Irish word *booa*, victory; but analogy would point rather to *boa* (*beotha*) lively, awake, spirited; when *aboo* would be an exclamation like the French *alerte!* and *vive!* A parallel in Irish is the well-known *Erin go bra!* "Erin till judgment day!" where *go bra*, forever, implies the same idea of living which the word *beotha* actually contains, since the latter is the Keltic equivalent of Greek *bios*. "*Yabu!*" is the exclamation of Tatar horsemen when

urging their steeds forward. While on this topic it may be interesting to note that this Irish word, or its Welsh equivalent *yu byw*, corrupted to *boo* and *boh*, is found in our colloquial expression, "He does n't dare say boo to a goose"; in other words, he is too cowardly to sound his war-cry in the presence of the most peaceful of creatures.

Certainly very primitive were the habits that lingered in Ireland, in Wales, in north-western Scotland, down to comparatively recent times. When we use the word calculate—and if we are to believe our Old World cousins we employ that word almost as often as "waal" and "I guess"—we forget calculus and the use that little stones afford primitive minds in doing sums of arithmetic. The Chinese mount their calculi on wires, and in business do most of their computations with a board of beads. Counting with stones is not at all extinct in Ireland. A correspondent of an American paper noted in a remote western village that an old woman who came every week to pray beneath the window of an invalid who had been kind and helpful to her never failed to add a stone to a heap on the window-sill. She wished to be able to remember from the heap how often her prayers had duly gone up for the sick lady. Down to historical times the kings and chiefs of Ireland made use of a very archaic system to arrive at the number of men who went into battle, and that of the survivors. Thus Lughaidh Mal, a prince expelled from Ireland, recruited followers in Alba or North Britain and landed in Ulster at a spot now marked by a cairn called Carnn Mail. It was formed by these intruders, as we learn from the poem published by the Celtic Society in their Miscellany for 1849, J. O'Donovan's translation. Tribute to the returned exile was refused by the Irish sept or "men of Fail"—

Battle or tribute was demanded
By Lughaidh of the men of Fail.



BRONZE TARGET WITHOUT WOODEN CORE. REVERSE.

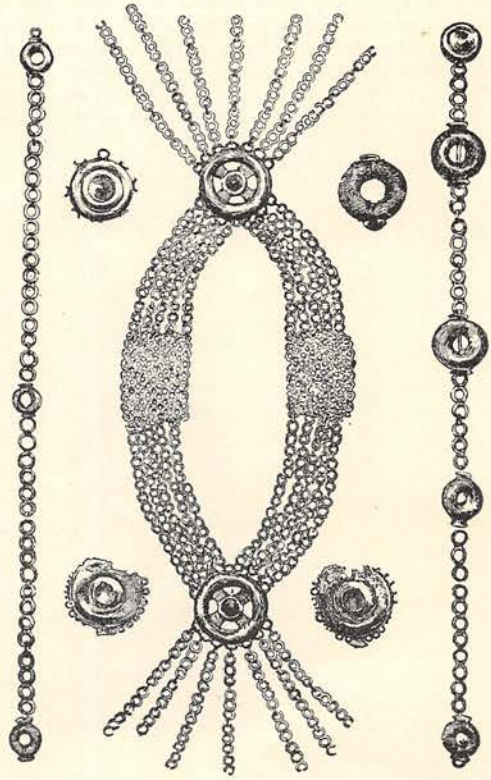
To draw them into battle
Was the object of the future monarch.

After this he came up quickly
To enjoy in battle very fiercely,
Each man brought a stone into the battle,
And thus Carn Lughaidh was made.

And there Lughaidh Mal was
On the even, white-surfaced carn
Until the great battle was gained
Over the beauteous men of Eire.

The conqueror had only to direct the survivors to take up each a stone from the heap thus formed, and the remaining stones gave the tally of the dead and missing. Should he have lost, the cairn would be all ready to receive his body if the victors were generous enough for that. His head would most naturally grace the house of his most powerful opponent, while his brain would be carefully extracted, mixed with lime and clay, and formed into balls that were thought to have terrible powers when propelled from a sling. Such would have been the fate of Lughaidh or a prince equal to him in fame at the remote time to which the poem refers. He is called the conqueror of Brittany in France, Spain, the Orkneys, and Great Britain. This attribution of wide conquests to a prince expelled from Ireland is explainable when we note that his name recalls the old Keltic god Lug who lies concealed in the names of Lyons and Laon in France, Leyden in Holland, and, according to some Keltic students, London on Thames.

The brehons were the professors of law of the Irish according to a system common to Gauls, Britons, and other Keltic nations. The office was often hereditary in families, and was of great importance to the kings, as the brehon (the *ver-go-bretus*, or man-at-law of Gaul, in *Cæsar's "Commentaries"*) must have acted as a check to the bards and sennachies, who trusted to their memories only. Cae was one of the earliest of the brehons mentioned in Irish history; only a few fragments of the *Brathcae*, or Cae's Judgments, remain. He was fabled to have been with Moses in Egypt; but, not relishing the prospect of the wandering in the wilderness, he left his friend, proceeded to Thrace, and voyaged thence to Ireland. Other lawgivers of the remotest past have left short records in brehon law. All appear to have used a style which was intentionally obscure, a charge made by Rabelais against the French lawyers of his day, and still occasionally brought against the profession in all countries. The law tracts—a specimen page of one being given in the woodcut—are full of curious relics of the departed civilization of Keltic lands, mixed perhaps with echoes of the Roman law brought in by



FRAGMENTS OF BRONZE CHAIN ARMOR AND RING MAIL.

Christianity, and through the classical studies of the better educated law-men. Many of the manuscripts belonging to these professionals have been published in facsimile and translated at expense of Government, but so poorly as regards a profound knowledge of old and modern Gaelic that Whitley Stokes, Ernst Windisch, and Standish O'Grady ask for a complete revision owing to the number of mistakes. They explain the complicated systems of land tenure from monarch to slave through landlords and tenants; and as custom produced many variations in different districts, the tracts are full of most curious references to household and public life. Thus the first passage of the law tract given in the cut reads in the translation authorized by the Government commission:

If it be the tenant that returns to him out of contempt to him, he (the chief) is entitled to honor-price, with restitution of all that is due him.

If it be to clear off to another chief (*commentary in smaller writing*: if to make a true removal to another chief), and not out of contempt that the tenant separates, it is half honor-price that is due to the chief, with double restitution of the original property and of the services (*commentary*: double the services of the food), but if he (the chief to whom he goes over) be more lawful as to rank, a chief of legitimate family (*commentary*: *i. e.*, the

son of a chief and the grandson of another), and if he be more lawful as to tribe property, it is only one-third of the honor-price that is due to the chief, to whom the stock is returned with double restitution of his property, together with what was failed in (*commentary: i. e.*, with double of the thing that was failed in, *i. e.*, the food of the year in which they separate).

From this obscure passage one may at least gather that the brehons had to consider a diffi-

Lone is dead, Lone is dead!

To Cill Garad it is a great misfortune.

To Erinn with its countless tribes

It is a destruction of learning and of schools.

Lone has died, Lone has died!

In Cill Garad great misfortune.

It is a destruction of learning and schools

To the island of Erinn beyond her boundaries.

That brehons existed far down into the



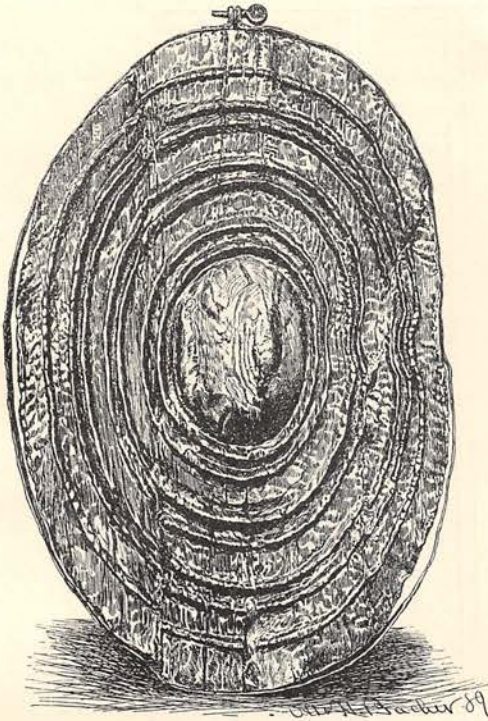
CHESSMAN FOUND IN COUNTY MEATH. (PETRIE COLLECTION, ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY, DUBLIN.)

culty we find among many nomadic peoples, and those where the clan system prevails, namely, the desertion of a chief by his clansmen or tenants.

The largest very ancient body of laws is the *Shanchus Mór*, which the annals say was compiled A. D. 439, and state to have been the joint work of Laeghaire the archking, St. Patrick, and the chief bard of Ireland. If St. Patrick did work at a compilation of laws it is evident that he could bring "little Latin and less Greek" law into the combination. The chances are that his name was added by the brehons in order to give to the origin of their digest the countenance of the clergy. That of the territorial aristocracy was secured in the person of King Leary, and of the poetic profession in the name of the chief bard. Yet the antiquity of the laws, customs, and prejudices in the *Shanchus Mór* need not be questioned, though we get them in a garbled form. A curious legend of a saint called Longarad the White-legged applies far better to a brehon than to a saint, and was probably adapted by monkish story-writers from the heathen past. When Longarad died all the satchels in which books were kept fell from their pegs in the house of St. Columbkille, whereupon the latter prophesied, like the Druid he really was:

present time is certain. They were in full activity in the Elizabethan age, as we see from records of the Government at Dublin. Thus in 1558, when Tege O'Karwell is appointed "capitayne of his natyon" in Eile, Tipperary, he is given the powers of a justice of the peace and made the judge before whom brehons argue cases in Gaelic: "And for all other controversies between party and party in the country, every man to stonde to suche order as shalbe by the Breyhouns taken between them in the presence of Tege or by his assignment." They existed in the next, and traces of them will be found even in the eighteenth century.

In 1607, the poet John Davies, Attorney-General of Ireland for King James I., wrote to Robert, Earl of Salisbury, a letter in which a pathetic view is given of one of the old brehons lingering on neglected, yet respected by the septs that dwelt in McGuire's country. Certain points concerning taxes were referred to O'Bristan, a chronicler and principal brehon of that country, and him the Lord Chancellor and Attorney-General summoned before them. He was very aged and decrepit, and when demand was made on him for a certain ancient roll he was said to possess he denied all existence of it. "The old man, seeming to be much troubled with this demand, made answer



WOODEN SHIELD FOUND IN COUNTY LEITRIM. (NOW IN ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY, DUBLIN.)

that he had such a roll in his keeping before the war, but that in the late rebellion it was burned among other of his papers and books by certain English soldiers." On being promised its return under oath, the patriarch pulled the roll out of his bosom, "where he did continually bear it about him." "We caused it forthwith to be translated into English, and then we perceived how many vessels of butter, and how many measures of meal, and how many porks, and other such gross duties, did arise unto M'Guyre out of his mensall lands." Sir John Davies is said to have carried this roll off to Dublin and to have lost it there, so that the poor old "last of the brehons" never saw his treasure again.

The "Book of Rights," in which the largest number of rules and regulations for the income of kings and chiefs are found, came down in its best shape in the "Book of Ballymote," a compilation made about 1390 by the brehon of a provincial king of Sligo, Roscommon, and Leitrim. Another was found in the handwriting of a Macfirbis, one of a hereditary family of chroniclers in Sligo, who died about A. D. 1400. At some period a Christian exterior has been applied, some changes made in the text itself, and the originator of the compilation made a St. Benean, possibly a St. Benedict. In order to give an idea of this curious record it may be said that the tributes to, restrictions

on, and perquisites of, various kings are first given in prose and then repeated in quatrains, often rhymed, but not always. The following stanzas may be taken as examples. The king in question is the archking holding Tara, supposed to be powerful enough to control the island.

On the Calends of August, to the king
Were brought from each respective district
The fruits of Manann, a fine present;
And the heath-fruit of Brigh Leithe;

The venison of Nas; the fish of the Boinn,
The cresses of the kindly Brosnach;
The waters of the well of Tlachtgha too,
And the swift deer of Luibneach.

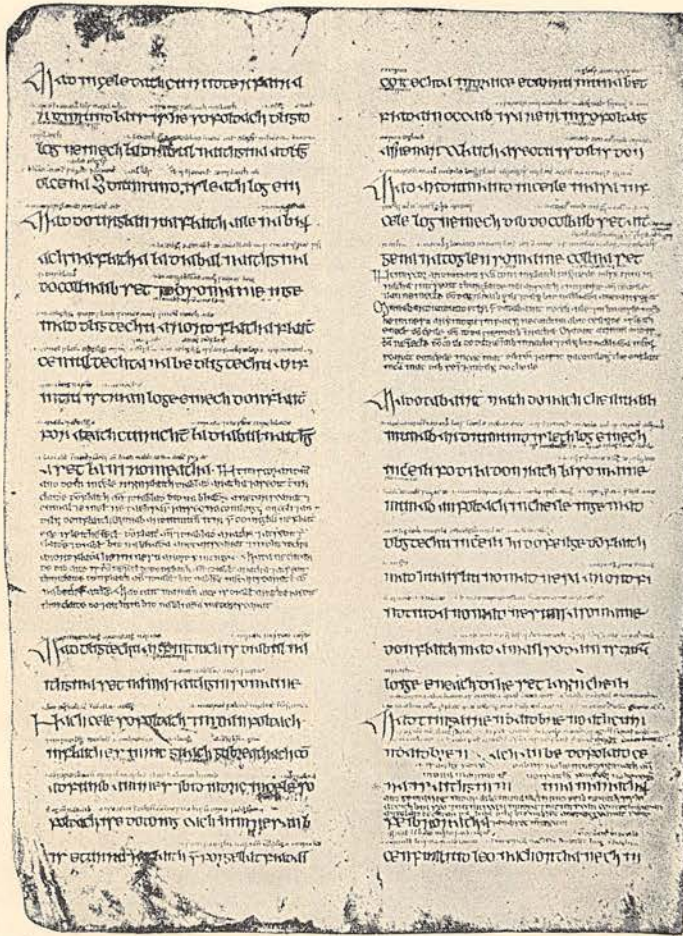
Let his seven restrictions be read — no reproach
To the King of Tara; if he observe them,
It will guard against treachery in battle
And the pollution of his high attributes.

'T is prohibited to him to go round before going
to heaven,
Over north Leinster left-hand-wise;
'T is prohibited to him to sleep with head inclined
Between the Dothair and the Duibhlinn.

The acts of a king were indeed so hedged about by antique superstitions, old privileges of other men and places, that one thinks of various nations of India, of Tatars, Chinese, and American Indians, and the network of superstitious ideas in which they live entangled, or even of the African chief with his rain-makers and magicians. Such ideas were easily twisted to the profit of the king or his chiefs, but they were too real not to have caused the king great discomfort. It is difficult to remember that they were common to our ancestors in every part of Europe within historical times, more or less effaced by the changes of conquest or left alive by the geographical position of tribes beyond the most violent storms of change. Students of the evolution of the family, clan, tribe, and state, students of totemism and barbaric rites, of feudalism and modern



ROYAL SEAL OF BRIAN O'NEILL, THIRTEENTH CENTURY.



PAGE OF A LAW TRACT IN GAELIC.

governments, and those who examine the sources of our laws, will hereafter go to the old Irish records for enlightenment. A few, a very few, Englishmen have seen this, notably the late Matthew Arnold and Sir Henry Sumner Maine; but the greater part of lexicographers, historians, students of philology and

ethnology who write in English proceed on their way as if they had neither British, nor Irish, nor Scottish ancestors — as if the chimera of Anglo-Saxonism were not only an actuality, but made it unnecessary to consult in any way the remains of the uncomfortable Kelt.

Charles de Kay.



HAT OR CROWN OF BEATEN GOLD FOUND IN IRELAND.