

CROMLEACS IN CO. LIMERICK.

No. III.

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CROMWELL.

This *Cromleac*, situated in the parish of Ballinlough, townland of Cromwell, may, from its great size, its position, and surroundings, be considered the finest in the county. It stands on a hill—which, from the name given to the townland—is commonly called Cromwell's hill. The view from it is very fine, and seen on such an evening as I visited it, with that peculiar yellow glow of a winter sunset, against which the photograph was taken, it is one not easily forgotten. To the west the great plain of the County Limerick stretches as far as the Connello country, while to the south and east the vision is bounded by the high peaks of the Galtee Range. The townland on which this *Cromleac* stands does not derive its name from the historic regicide. Dr. Joyce, in his names of places, states it to be "Crom-choill (crumwhill) stooped (crom) or sloping wood." However, some Irish scholars in the locality believe that it is a corruption of Crom-hill, after the great pagan idol, of ancient Ireland, Crom Cruach, or Crom-dubh. At the southern side of the hill is a conical shaped rock covered with ivy, called *Carraigín Crom*, and this provides a strong argument in support of the local tradition, that the hill takes its name from the idol Crom. This portion of the County Limerick is closely identified with the mythology and folk lore of ancient Ireland. It is close to Lough Gur, one of the entrances to *Ṭír-na-n'-oṡ*. To the north is *Cnoc-Ṣrúine*, the hill of the sun, or of Grian of the bright cheeks, an enchantress, whose fairy

palace stood in the fort on that hill. (1) Lying immediately to the south is Cnoc-Aine wherein dwells the De Dannan Princess Aine, daughter of Egathail.

Crom Cruach was a great pagan idol. In Dr. Whitely Stokes' translation of the Dindshenchas it is thus described :—"The King idol of Erin was at Magh Slecht in Cavan Until Patrick's time he was the god of every folk that colonized Ireland, to him they used to offer the firstlings of every issue, and the chief scions of every Clan." The idol is also referred to as Crom-dubh, and in the Tripartite life it is Cen Cruaich. Most writers now accept them as the same, though some of the early authorities were not very clear about them. O'Donovan states that Crom-dubh was a chieftain converted by St. Patrick. (2) O'Donovan was led astray by Colgan, who made him a Saint. (3) Dr. Todd appears to take Crom-dubh to mean black stooping stone; (4) but O'Curry, whose accuracy we may rarely question, states that Crom signifies a maggot. (5) Borlase too, believes Crom to mean a worm or serpent. (6) The serpent enters largely into the folk lore of Ireland. There are few lakes or wells of any importance that have not their magical serpents, and the banishing of serpents from the historic mound or croach in Connacht (Croagh Patrick) which was associated with Crom-dubh, by St. Patrick, may have reference to the destruction of these idols.

By whatever combination of words the idol was known, it must be generally admitted that it was to Crom the offering of first fruits was made, and though the festival at Magh Slecht was kept at Samhain, (7) in this locality, and generally throughout Munster, the first Sunday in August, or Garland Sunday, is known as Domhnach Crom-duibh; when the first fruits of the harvest were offered, a festival common to all nations both in pagan and Christian times.

(1) Joyce's Names of Places, 2nd Series, p. 237.

(2) Four Masters, A.D. 1117.

(3) Tr. Th. p. 508.

(4) St. Patrick, p. 128.

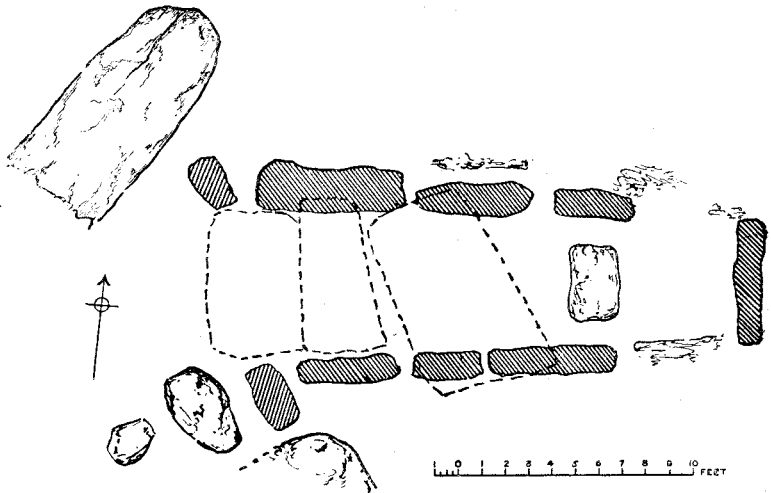
(5) MSS. Materials, p. 632.

(6) Dolmens of Ireland, p. 472.

(7) Four Masters, A.M. 3656.

In the stone circle at Lough Gur there is a large stone known as Ronadh Crom-dubh (the staff of black Crom) and the tradition of harvest offerings, lingering in the folk lore of that locality, identifies Crom with the little black man who first brought wheat into Ireland. In the Journal of the R.S.A.I. for 1852, Mr. N. O'Kearney relates that: "The three days immediately following Lammas day were sacred to Aine (8) in conjunction with Crom-dubh or Crom Cruach." Up to recent times a "pattern" was held in Cloghane, a remote village in West Kerry, on Domhnach Crom-duibh in honour of Crom-dubh and St. Brendan, an interesting example of an effort to give a Christian character to the pagan festival. (9)

Doubtless the large stone now prostrate at the north-west of the Cromleac (appearing to the right of the photograph) stood erect at one time, and may have been the idol of Crom. (10) It measures 8 feet



PLAN OF CROMWELL CROMLEAC

(8) Aine or Ana was the goddess of plenty. See Joyce's Social History of Ireland, p. 261.

(9) Journal R.S.A.I., vol. 2, p 130.

(10) I have been informed by the Rev. Timothy Lee, P.P., that at Croom, County Limerick—from which the Kildare branch of the Geraldines took their war cry "Crom-a-boo," he had pointed out to him recently a stone by the river, which the old people called Crom. This would explain the place name.

6 inches in length, by 5 feet in width, and about 1 foot 9 inches thick, and must weigh over five tons. It is shown on the plan, but I should say it was not used in the construction of the Cromleac.

The Cromleac itself has no tradition or folk lore connected with it that I could learn. It is known as Λεαβα Όιαρμαδα Δξυρ Σπαιμμα, as are many others throughout the country. It appears to have suffered little injury since it was described in the Ordnance Survey letters of the County Limerick, about 60 years ago, copied by Borlase, into the Dolmens of Ireland, vol. I, page 49.) It is of the wedge shape type, about 5 feet wide, at the eastern end, and 6 feet 6 inches at the western end, and over 20 feet long. As may be seen from the plan, only one covering stone remains in position, it measures 9 feet by 6 feet, and 1 foot 3 inches thick. Another is bearing on the northern side only, its southern end is on the ground. It is probable the stone lying between the side stones at the western end was the closing stone of the chamber, the other stones at this end may have formed the *ante* or porch outside of it. The covering stones and sides at the eastern end are missing, some are almost covered up in the ground. The height of the side stones above the present surface is about 3 feet at the eastern end and about 3 feet 6 inches at the western end.
