

## CROMLEACS IN CO. LIMERICK.

No. V.

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## DUNTRYLEAGUE.

The Cromleac selected for illustration in this number of the Journal is that on the hill now known as Duntryleague, in the barony of Coshlea, Ordnance Sheet No. 49. (1)

This hill in ancient times was known as Sliabh Claire. In the Annals of the Four Masters O'Donovan states (2): "Sliabh Claire is a considerable hill, on which stands a remarkable Cromlech, the tomb of Oilíoll Olum (3), King of Munster in the third century, situated a short distance to the east of the church of Duntryleague, in the barony of Coshlea and County of Limerick, and about three miles to the north-west of the village of Galbally." The Four Masters record (4) "The age of Christ 234. The eighth year of Cormac, Oilíoll Olum, son of Mogh Nuadhat, King of Munster, died."

These records carry us back to a time when even the sceptical student of Irish history finds himself reaching firm ground. In many of our early records the pagan deities are so mixed up with the heroes of real life, that some scholars have ignored our ancient history altogether, treating it for the most part as a mythological fable.

In a country whose early history has been preserved, as ours was, mainly by tradition, depending on memory and genealogies, it is easy to

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(1) The hill is outside the townland of Duntryleague and in the townland of Deerpark, in which this Cromleac is noted by Borlase (p. 49). He illustrates it from a sketch by Miss Stokes, but makes no mention of its peculiar construction or the traditions connected with it; nor is the description quite accurate.

(2) Vol. VI, p. 2150, A.D. 1600, n.

(3) Oilíoll is also spelled Olioll in some records. The spelling of Irish words when put into English form often varies.

(4) Vol. I, p. 113.



*Photo by*

DUNTRYLEAGUE CROMLEAC—VIEW FROM SOUTH-WEST.

*[G. Eggerly, R.N.]*

understand how—amongst a poetic race—in the lapse of time, a far-away ancestor of great renown passed from the possession of superhuman powers to community with the *Sídhe*, and ultimately to a place in the National Pantheon. Still it is only reasonable to suppose that some threads of genuine historical facts run through the entire story.

Tighernach—who died A.D. 1086—our most reliable early annalist, starts his historical epoch from the building of Emania, B.C. 305. Dr. Atkinson in his preface to the facsimile Book of Leinster, remarks on that starting point “as just as uncritical as to take the whole tale of kings from the very beginning . . . if the kings who are supposed to have lived about fifteen centuries before Christ are mere figments, which is tolerably certain, there is little more reason for believing in the kings who reigned after Christ prior to the introduction of writing.” (5) In this connection the contribution of that distinguished antiquary of the younger school, Mr. R. A. Stewart Macalister, M.A., to a recent number of the Journal of the R.S.A.I., on the Legendary Kings of Ireland (6) is worth noting. While not accepting the list as a complete historical record, he states “that to brush it aside as mere invention would be the height of unscientific scepticism.” The entire paper is of great interest to the student of Irish history, and it is satisfactory to find him arriving at the conclusion “that some of our early MSS. preserve far more early *historical* (as distinguished from *legendary*) material and more information on the society and religion of pre-Christian Ireland than many scholars have conceded.”

At one period two monarchs ruled in Ireland. Con of the Hundred Battles in the northern part, Leath Chuinn; and Mogh Nuadhat in the southern half, Leath Mhógha, with the Eisgir riadha dividing them. (7) Oiliol Olum was the son of Mogh Nuadhat (8), or Eoghan Mor. The Munster genealogies generally start with Oiliol Olum, as it is from three of his sons all the great families of Munster were descended. From Eoghan Mor, the eldest, descend the Eugenic line of Munster, whose

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(5) See Literary History of Ireland (Douglas Hyde), p. 42.

(6) Vol. XXXVIII, p. 1.

(7) Keating's History. Irish Texts Edition, p. 111.

(8) Servant or devotee of Nuadha.

chieftains were the O'Donovans and McCarthys, etc. From Cormac Cas descended the Dalcassians, whose chieftain was O'Brien; and from Cian the O'Carrolls of Ely. Oiloll Olum's chief seat was at Bruree, where his fine fort, Lis Oluim, still stands, on the banks of the Maigue, undisturbed, except by Time: for *bean-side* and *fer-side*, who are now in possession, must be permitted to hold their revels, even in this prosaic age.

The tales and folk lore of the Fenian Cycle in the second century mainly centre around Con and his battles with Mogh Nuadhat. They have been moulded and harmonized to suit the policy of the scribes of a later period, and romantic legends deftly woven around the threads of history. We even find Oiloll Olum disturbing the fairy revels on Knockany hill, on Samhain Eve, where his love episode with the fairy princess, Aine, and her revenge, wrought through Fer fi, result in the battle of Slibh Riach and afterwards in Oiloll Olum's disastrous defeat at Magh Mucramha (9); but still from these tales, even as they have come down to us, much historical and topographical information may be obtained.

One of the most interesting contributions to the Saga of the Fianna is "The Colloquy of the Ancients," where Cailte, the foster son and favourite of Finn, and some of his companions, are supposed to live on into the time of St. Patrick and meet the saint and his missionaries, when the conversation takes place (10). Cainen, the great-grandson of Eoghan Mor, questions Cailte: "Where was Olioll Olum, son of Mogh Nuadhat, slain?" And he answered: "On the summit of *Sliabh Claire* to the southward he died, of an apoplexy brought on by grief."

"And the battle of *Samhain*," said Cainen, "by whom was it fought and who perished there?" "Olioll Olum's son, Cormac Cas, it was that delivered it against Eochaid, Red-brow, King of Ulster, in the north. There Eochaid fell; and there was hit Cormac Cas, who for thirteen years lay under cure with his brain leaking away from him, and he for that period holding the rule of Munster. At *Dún ar Sléibh*, or '*Dún* on mountain,' he had a fort built, a good town, which was so that in its midst was a sparkling and translucent loch-well. About the Spring he had a great and royal house made; but immediately at its brink three

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(9) Silva Gadelica, p. 347.

(10) Silva Gadelica, 129.

huge pillar stones were planted, and there (with its head to the eastward, and betwixt said three columns of stone) the king's bed was set, while out of a *cuach*, or else a bowl, a confidential warrior of his people splashed water on his head continually. There, too, he died and in that fort was laid in subterranean excavation; whence *dún tri liag*, or 'fort of three pillar stones' by way of name is given to it." It is from this we have the name of Duntryleague.

There are no remains of this *dún* now. O'Donovan supposed the site to be around the present grave-yard. However, a well is there, still sparkling in a clear pool, now arched under the county road. It is a remarkably powerful spring, known as St. Patrick's well, of which there are no local traditions. The water is in general use.

The remains of Dun g-Claire, another of the Royal forts of Munster, stand above the glen (Glenbrohane), on the northern slope of Sliabh Riach. It was at this mountain Olioll Olum defeated his stepson, Lugaídh mac con, and in later times (at Bearnadhearg—a gap in the mountain) Mahon, the brother of Brian Borumha, was murdered by the O'Donovans, which led to the overthrow of the power of the Hy Fidgeinte (11) in the County Limerick to avenge the crime. I regret that the scope of this paper prevents me from noticing the many other historic land marks around the hill of Duntryleague.

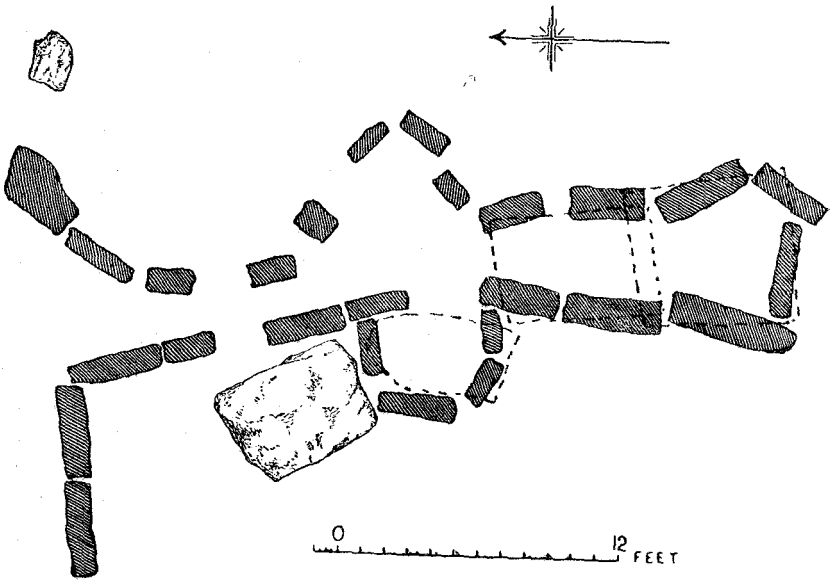
As the historic associations connected with this Cromleac are of more than ordinary interest, so, too, is its plan and construction.

When I undertook to supply plans and descriptions for the proposed illustrations of our Cromleacs by the photographic section of the Club, I had decided to treat all the remains under the generic term of Cromleac (perhaps I should have called them Dolmens), including such as some antiquaries might distinguish as kistvaens, or "giants' graves." This was the course adopted by Borlase in compiling his monumental work (12), and I felt I might safely follow such an authority. My own opinion (as stated before) is that there were very few, if any, of these sepulchres (I am not quite sure that I should except Burren) that were not covered over more or less with stones or clay. In the Colloquy with

(11) Annals of Four Masters, A.D. 1600.

(12) Dolmens of Ireland, p. 424.

the Ancients (13) we are told that "Patrick sat on a sepulchral mound compact of sods," which I think would be a fair general description of them. Ferguson (14), in support of his theory of sub-ærial construction, illustrates the Cromleac at Castlewelan and asks "can anyone conceive . . . any Irish farmer could ever have made such a level sweep of its envelope if it ever had one." Lanyon Quoit, a Cromleac near Penzance, is a much more imposing sub-ærial structure as it now stands than Castlewelan, and yet we know that a little more than 100 years ago a farmer cleared away its envelope for top-dressing. It was a visit to this Cromleac first caused me to doubt the theory of sub-ærial construction.

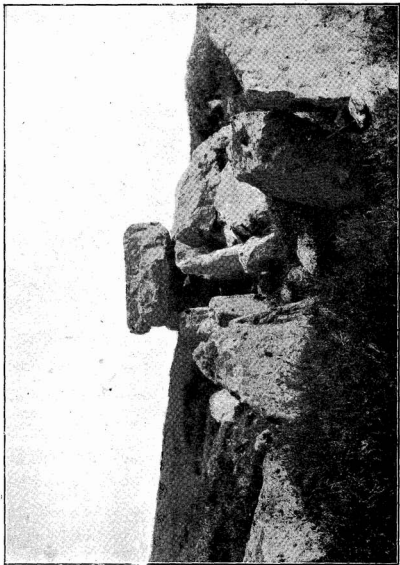


DUNTRYLEAGUE CROMLEAC—PLAN.

However, a study of the plan and construction of these remains

(13) *Silva Gadelica*, p. 126.

(14) *Rude Stone Monuments*, p. 45.



*Photo by*

DUNTRYLEAGUE CROMLEAC—VIEW FROM NORTH-WEST.

*(G. Egerton, R.N.*

shows it to be more the ruined chambers of a tumulus, than a dolmen. The main axis is north and south, the passage lies north by west. The plan shews that it was originally a cruciform structure; the stones forming the eastern chamber have been all displaced. The southern chamber, which was formed of four stones, narrowed to three feet wide at the entrance. It cannot be said to be covered by the large stone represented by the dotted lines on plan, as that does not rest completely on the side stones, and it is supplemented by the smaller stone appearing on the photograph from the S.W. This construction necessitated a filling up of stones on the side stones under the covering flags, and a covering of sods and clay, which differentiates it from the ordinary dolmen—though the chamber covering is much more primitive than the dome shape of the New Grange type. This chamber was about 6 feet high. The wedge shape passage outside this chamber is about 8 feet long and 4 feet 6 inches high. The side chambers were each covered by a stone, the western one is *in situ*, and this chamber is 3 feet in height. The passage was about 15 feet long and about 2 feet wide, getting wider towards the entrance as shown. The stone now prostrate, to the west, may have covered portion of this passage, leaving the remainder open. The large covering stone on the southern end is 19 inches thick, the second covering stone is 14 inches thick. The stones are a red sandstone conglomerate.

The plan and construction of this structure resembles that of cairn H at Lough Crew (15)—the length of which is given as 24 feet. The entire length of this structure is 30 feet. The decorative sculpture on the Lough Crew stones has been fully described by Mr. George Coffey in the Transactions of the R.I.A. (16).

The ancient records of Oiloll Olum's death would bring this structure into historic times, though it may have been a place of burial long before. Some writers assign these structures to the Neolithic period; but the stone carvings on the Lough Crew stones are said to belong to the Bronze age, which is supposed to have terminated in Britain about

(15) Dolmens of Ireland, p. 318.

(16) Vol. XXX, p. 1.



B.C. 300. It all remains a question for discussion. Ferguson, who gave the subject of rude stone monuments some consideration, held that most of them may be considered as belonging to the first ten centuries of the Christian era. These opinions leave a wide interval for speculation; but outside of that point it is only reasonable to suppose that the style and construction of the tomb of an early period may survive into succeeding ages, just as the Gothic or Classic styles of architecture are revived in our own time; or for the same reason that the tomb built by the Kerry mason of the present day in a rural grave yard, copied from some of those he sees around, will be found to closely resemble in general outlines the sepulchres of the early Roman Empire (17), though not so ornate.

The hill on which the ruin stands is overgrown with close heather, and it is difficult to trace the perimeter of the covering, but the ground rises visibly around the chambers, particularly to the eastern side, to which perhaps the covering may have been thrown.

There is no doubt these ancient burial places were plundered of the gold and silver ornaments they contained, in early times. In the Annals of Ulster it is recorded that the Boyne tumuli were plundered by the Danes, A.D. 836. In the present case there is evidence of an attempt at the destruction of the monument as well—possibly with a desire to outrage the feelings of the conquered tribe or race—for Time alone could not have caused the present ruinous condition of this ancient sepulchre on Duntryleague.

#### “CLOCHAVARRA.”

There is another Cromleac close to Sliabh Riach, in the townland of Ballyfroota, not far from Duntryleague (18).

This should rather be called the remains of a Cromleac, and stands on the side of a bye-road. It consists of only three stones as shewn in the photograph. The top stone was broken and is supported by a pier

(17) See Adams' Roman Antiquities, Plate V.

18' Marked on Ord. Map No. 49, and noted by Borlase, p. 50.

of rubble masonry. It was about 7 feet long by 2 ft. 8 in. wide, and about 7 inches thick. It stands about 3 feet over the ground. There is no doubt the stones are not now in their original position, it was probably disturbed in making the road.

It is called "Clochavarra," but I could learn little more about it. It is difficult to find what the termination (in English) varra, in this case means. (Cloch means a stone). O'Donovan, in Killeenavarra, in Galway, found a difficulty, but connected it with Beara. Borlase, in referring to the termination, suggests in such cases a connection with the fairy Bheara (19). The pronunciation would be the same.

These stones have been visited by people with pains in the back, to stoop under the covering stone being a cure; and perhaps it is to this charm we owe its repair, and the preservation of the monument in such an exposed situation.

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(19) Dolmens of Ireland, p. 799.

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