CROMLEACS IN CO. LIMERICK.
No. VI.

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LEABA ISCUR.

The series of illustrations of the Cromleacs of the County Limerick initiated by the photographic section of the Limerick Field Club, and commenced in No. 8, Vol. II. of its Journal is continued in this the first number of the Journal of the North Munster Archæological Society, Dr. George Fogerty, R.N., still continuing his valuable assistance with the camera.

The Cromlec we have selected for this number is one known as Leaba Iscur—Oscur's Grave. (1) There are many places in Ireland called Leaba-na-Féine, or bed of the Fianna, the heroes of one of our early historic cycles, of whom Finn Mac Cumhail, his son Ossian, and Oscur, son of Ossian, are the most famous champions. (2) The leaba is in the townland of Jamestown, but is not shewn on Ord. Map, No. 55; it stands in a valley of the Ballyhoura mountains called Glenminnaun, between two streams, which, meeting lower down, flows through the glen, and swells into the Awbeg river which joins the Blackwater south of Castletownroche.

Its situation at the end of the glen is commanding, it has an elevation of about 900 ft., and is surrounded on the south, east, and west by an amphitheatre, or coom, formed by the lower slopes of the Blackrock, and Carronmor, two peaks of the Ballyhoura range; while in the opening to the north and west the wide expanse of the rich lands of the County Limerick lie spread out in an almost unbroken plain, encircled by the silver streak of the Shannon.

(1) Joyce's names of places (p. 349—1st series)—Borlase's derivation of Iscur as from Scor, a champion (p. 785), has been described to me by a high authority as untenable.

(2) In this district all three are commemorated, Ossian in Glenosheen, and Finn in Scefin mountain.
Along the southern slope of the glen there is a mountain passage, which, rising from Ballyhigh to a height of about 1000 feet, reaches the boundary of the County Cork, and descends through the romantic glens on the other side—one of which is called Glenanaar, the valley of slaughter—into the Barony of Fermoy. (3) The river flowing through this glen is called the Ounanaar, or river of slaughter. There is a tradition of a battle having been fought here between the Clan Baskin, of the Fianna, and the Clan Morna. Along this mountain passage on the slopes of Glenminnaun the militant tribes of Hy Fidgente must have often travelled in their incursions into the territories of O Caoimh (O'Keefe), and O Dubhagan (O'Dugan), chieftains of the ancient Kingdom of Fera Mughhe, of which the Barony of Fermoy, County Cork, now forms part.

Cenn Febrath and Bolach Febrath, vulgarly called Ballahoura, are famous as the scene of many important events in early history, but the Cenn Febrath of history, I believe, extended beyond the Ballahoura hills and included Slieveriach in Cliu Maitl. (4) This opens up a wide and interesting subject for inquiry, outside the scope of this paper, and I hope to return to it in the near future.

This leaba is about a mile due south of the ruins of Mount Russell House at the opening of the glen, where a very interesting Ogham stone was discovered recently by Mr. H. S. Crawford, B.E., and described in the Journal of the R S.A.I. (Vol. xxxviii, p. 52)

This Cromleac is not included by Borlase in his "Dolmens of Ireland." My attention was directed to it by Dr. Joyce, M.R.I.A., in conversation some time since, when he informed me he had sketched it about 50 years ago. He was kind enough to send me his sketch, which is reproduced, by which it will be seen that except some weathering away of the soil at the east end, there has been little change in its condition, the two covering stones then in situ remain. It is a matter for congratulation that Leaba Iscur escaped the vandalism which prevailed in the last half century.

In this survey of the Cromleacs of the County Limerick we have illustrated various types under the generic term Cromleac. The first at Kilmallock (Vol. II., p. 282) was probably the ruin of what has been

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(3) Joyce, p. 116, 1st series.
(4) See Silva Gadelica, p. 118 et seq, Wars of the Gaedhil with the Gaill n cix.
generally understood as the Cromleac in Ireland, that is, one large stone resting on three or more pillar stones. The monument at Tinnakilla (Vol. III., p. 16) was a dolmen proper, or "table stone;" from the Breton daul a table, and maen a stone. The remains at Cromwell (Vol. III., p. 54) are a good example of the long wedge-shaped giant's grave or cist denuded of its envelope, so common in Munster. At Lough Gur (Vol. III., p. 131) portion of the covering remains. Duntryleague (Vol. III., p. 217) illustrates the remains of a chambered tumulus of fine proportions.

At Leaba Iscur we find something different from any of the monuments already described. Its plan, and the construction of the cyclopean side walls, with the corbel courses of smaller stones to take the covering stones (thus forming a rudely vaulted chamber), and the projecting stones at the western end forming the ante all mark a different type of monument and a distinct architectural development. However, Borlase, who defined all these sepulchral monuments as dolmens for the purpose of classification, found it impossible to separate these chamber structures from the series. (5)

I have prepared drawings from measurements to give some idea of the original construction, though the stones are now much disturbed. The north side is more perfect than the south, and from it I have measured the projecting courses forming the roof. The south side has fallen in a little, but by the dotted lines on the section I denote the probable original construction. Of course the floor level is approximate; fixed from clearings made in a few places. It is not to be imagined that the chamber is as clear as it appears on the drawings. The photographs shew the condition of ruin and disorder of the interior. It is built of the course red sandstone, or conglomerate of the district.

The leaba lies east and west. The east end is 3 ft. wide, increasing to about 4 ft. in the centre, it also shews a tendency to narrow towards the entrance on the upper courses, though this is not definitely marked in its present condition to be recorded as a feature. It is 14 ft. 2 in. in length, measured on the side walls. A clearing gave a height of 3 ft.

(5) Dolmens of Ireland, p. 425.
under the covering stone at the east end; I think this is close to the original dimensions. The covering stones rise towards the west end to a height of about 4 ft. 8 in. under the larger covering stone shown on the drawings, and probably increased in height at the entrance. The lower

courses of the sides were formed of large stones, some about 5 ft. long and 3 ft. wide, 18 ins. to 15 ins. in thickness. The corbel courses towards the west end were of smaller stones, it was reduced in breadth at the eastern end by large stones. The covering stone at the east end is 6 in.
thick; the larger covering stone is about 4 ft. by 4 ft. 10 in., and from
14 in. to 9 in. thick. The entire structure was no doubt covered with
stones, clay and sods.

A very interesting feature of the construction is the projecting stones
on the west end, these are known by the Latin name of ante—stones or
pillars guarding the entrance. In the ordinary wedge-shaped Cromleac
they are formed by continuing the upright stones forming the sides of
the chamber out beyond the entrance, thus forming the porch or ante.

In the cultus of the dead the ante was considered an important portion
of the structure, the cellae was the actual shrine. In this case there are
three stones standing, doubtless there were four, but the northern one is
missing. The outside stones marked the extremities of the west end, and
the development of this feature in architecture may be seen in the side
walls being continued out and projecting as pilasters at the ends in our
earliest Christian structures, as Leaba Molaga (illustrated), not far from
this place; MacDara Church in Connemara, and others.

This feature of the ante has given the name of antas to these
monuments in Spain and Portugal, said to be the Romance idiom for the
Latin word. In thus connecting these monuments with the ante
and cellae of the Roman temples, Borlase remarks (6) :

"A dolmen, wherever found, is no mere tomb to be closed for
ever on the remains within, or buried in a tumulus without an
approach being left to the central vault or cell; it was a temple as
surely and as truly as the temple of Artemis at Eleusis, or as those
of Teos, or Priene, or as any of the cellae memoriae of pagans first and
Christians afterwards. It either did contain the body, or was believed,
at all events, to contain the spirit of some person or persons who were dead, whether they had been merely famous as chieftains,
or priests, or whether (as in the case of the higher and more abstract
cultus attained by classic civilization) they had attained divine
honours. * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * In the
latter days of the Roman Empire the practice of constructing cellae
memoriae the direct successors of the cellae of the earlier temples
became a recognised institution in connection with the cultus of

(6) Dolmens of Ireland, p. 638 et seq.
LEABA ISCUR.—View of Entrance, West End.
LEABA ISCUR.—VIEW FROM SOUTH-EAST.
(From a pencil sketch by Dr. Joyce, M.R.I.A.)

LEABA MOLAGA.—VIEW OF THE WEST END.

[Photo by] G Fogerty, R.N.
the dead. * * * * * * The fabricæ, which, as late as the third and fourth centuries, Pope Fabricius was causing to be erected in cemeteries were doubtless genuine cellæ, and so, too, were those curious little buildings which are still to be seen in several of the graveyards around the sites of the earlier Irish churches as at Clonmacnoise."

In the boat-shaped plan of this structure and its interior sections there is a striking resemblance to the ship-like structures called Navetas to be found in Minorca. Borlase directs attention to this in connection with the peculiar Cromleac known as Labbacalle, near Fermoy; (7) had he the present example before him he would have seen a much greater resemblance. In the up-turned boat-shaped, primitive Christian oratories of Kerry, of which Gallarus is the most perfect example, we find the earliest development in this country of the main architectural features of this type of monument.

NOTE.

LEABA MOLAGA—St. Molaga's bed, one of the smallest and probably the earliest of the cellæ memoriae of Christian times, stands in an enclosure (now a graveyard, and but little cared for) about four miles south of Ballylanders, just outside the borders of the County Limerick, and nine miles east (as the crow flies) from Leaba Iscur. Within the cashel are the remains of an old church and a building attached, probably residential, south of the church is the structure known as St. Molaga's bed, of which very little remains. Internally it measures 13 ft. in length by 9 ft. 6 in. in breadth, and has the peculiar feature of the side walls projecting at either end as pilasters, which may be seen in the view of the west end. (8) The doorway is complete, but the walls are only a few feet high.

A stone is lying in the interior next the south wall, about 5 ft. in length, and 1 ft. 8 in. in breadth, which is said to mark the grave of St. Molaga. There is a hollow under the stone in which people used to

(7) Dolmens of Ireland, p. 701.
(8) The pilaster seen at the south-west angle is a repair, and not the original masonry.
lie as a cure for certain ailments. On this stone I found a perfect spiral, incised, of about 5 inches outside diameter, the outside groove forming the spiral is continued down the length of the stone about 12 inches, returning up again in a parallel line to meet the spiral, leaving about an inch between the sinkings. I do not find any mention of this incision in any previous notices of this tomb, though it certainly is not modern. The fact of finding a spiral ornament in such a situation is worth noting. (9) This stone may have been at one time portion of some prehistoric monument. In an adjoining field are five standing stones which Borlase states have all the appearance of a "giant's grave," defining a space about 24 ft. by 7 ft. Some of these stones, though greatly weathered, bear faint traces of circle markings.

St. Molaga was born in Fera Muighe, before referred to, and lived in the seventh century. He is said to have founded a monastery at Tulach Min, which is supposed to have been the ancient name of the place now known as Teampul Molaga, near Kildorrery. He travelled in Scotland and Wales, and, according to tradition, he is buried at Leaba Molaga.

Various places were dedicated to him; amongst others, Timoleague, in County Cork, which means Teach Molaga, house of Molaga.

In Lord Dunraven's "Notes on Irish Architecture," Leaba Molaga is illustrated with an interesting description of the place; also see O'Hanlon's "Lives of Irish Saints" (20th January) for some valuable notes on the life of St. Molaga.

(9) Borlase: Dolmens of Ireland, p. 8, p. 769.