

PAGAN ANTIQUITIES OF IRELAND.

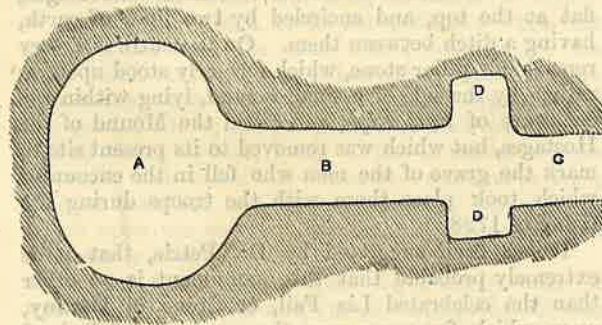
RATHS OR DUNS.

THE earthen raths or duns, called also forts, which are found in every part of Ireland, where stone is not abundant, often consist merely of a circular entrenchment, the area of which is slightly raised above the level of the adjoining land. But very often they present a steep mound, flat at the top and strongly entrenched, the works usually enclosing a space of ground upon which, it is presumed, the houses of less importance anciently stood, the mound being occupied by the dwelling of the chief. The annexed engraving represents the celebrated rath at Downpatrick, for-



merly called Rath Keltair, and will afford an excellent idea of the general appearance of the more remarkable of these remains. The mounds do not appear to contain chambers, but when the work consists merely of the circular enclosure, of which mention has been already made, excavations of a beehive form,

lined with uncemented stones, and connected by passages sufficiently large to admit a man, are not unfrequently found. These chambers were probably used as places of temporary retreat, or as storehouses, the want of ventilation, save that derived from the narrow external entrance, rendering them unfit for the continued habitation of man. These chambers are common only in the southern and western parts of Ireland; but subterranean works similar to those found in the forts of Connaught and Munster, have been found in Meath. An excavation which was a few years ago accidentally discovered in the vicinity of Navan, may be described as a good example.



The chamber A is of an oval form, and measures in length eleven, in height six, and in breadth nine feet; B is a passage or gallery, fifteen feet long, which has fallen in at C; DD are niches let into the sides of the gallery, which, like the chamber, is lined with uncemented stones, laid pretty regularly.

The celebrated hill of Tara, in the county of Meath, from the earliest period of which we have even traditional history, down to the middle of the sixth century, appears to have been a chief seat of the Irish kings. Shortly after the death of Dermot, the son of Fergus, in the year 563, the place was deserted, in consequence, as it is said, of a curse pronounced by Saint Ruadan, or Rodanus, of Lorha, against that king and his palace.

After thirteen centuries of ruin, the chief monuments for which the hill was remarkable are distinctly to be traced. They consist, for the most part, of circular or oval enclosures, and mounds, within or upon which the principal habitations of the ancient city undoubtedly stood.

The rath called *Rath Righ*,* appears anciently to have been the most important work upon the hill of Tara, but it is now nearly levelled with the ground. This rath, which is of an oval form, measures in length from north to south about 850 feet, and appears to have been in part constructed of stone. Within its enclosure are the ruins of the *Forradh*,† and of *Teach Cormac*‡ or the House of Cormac. The mound called the *Forradh* is of considerable height, flat at the top, and encircled by two lines of earth, having a ditch between them. On its centre is a very remarkable pillar stone, which formerly stood upon, or rather by the side of a small mound, lying within the enclosure of *Rath Righ*, and called the Mound of the Hostages, but which was removed to its present site to mark the grave of the men who fell in the encounter which took place there with the troops during the rising of 1798.

It has been suggested by Dr. Petrie, that it is extremely probable that this monument is no other than the celebrated Lia Fail, or Stone of Destiny, upon which, for many ages, the monarchs of Ireland were crowned, and which is generally supposed to have been removed from Ireland to Scotland for the coronation of Fergus MacEark, a prince of the blood-royal of Ireland, there having been a prophecy that in whatever country this famous stone was preserved, a king of the Scotie race should reign. It is certain that in the manuscripts to which Dr. Petrie refers, the oldest of which cannot be assigned to an earlier period than the tenth century, the stone is mentioned as still existing at Tara. After remarking upon the want of agreement between the Irish and Scottish accounts of the history of the Lia Fail, and on the questionable

* Pronounced *Rath-rec*.

† Pronounced *Forra*.

‡ Pronounced *Tah-Cormac*.

character of the evidence upon which the story of its removal from Ireland rests, Dr. Petrie observes: "That it is in the highest degree improbable, that, to gratify the desire of a colony, the Irish would have voluntarily parted with a monument so venerable for its antiquity, and deemed essential to the legitimate succession of its own kings."

If the Irish authorities for the existence of the Lia Fail at Tara so late as the tenth or eleventh century may be relied upon, and their extreme accuracy in other respects is sufficiently clear, the stone carried away from Scotland by Edward I., and now preserved in Westminster Abbey, under the coronation chair, has long attracted a degree of celebrity to which it is not entitled; while the veritable Lia Fail, the stone which, according to the early bardic accounts, roared beneath the ancient Irish monarchs at their inauguration, remained forgotten and disregarded among the green raths of deserted Tara.

The *Teach Cormac*, lying to the south-east of the *Forradh*, with which it is joined by a common parapet, may be described as a double enclosure, the rings of which upon the western side become connected. Its diameter is about 140 feet.

To the north-west of *Rath Righ*, three raths lie upon the slope of the hill, one of which, *Rath Grania* is said to have belonged to Grania, daughter of King Cormac MacArt, and wife of Finn MacCumal, the Fingal of Macpherson's "Ossian."

The ruins of the Banqueting-Hall of Tara, occupying a position a little to the north-east of the *Rath Righ*, consist of two parallel lines of earth, running in a direction nearly north and south, and divided at intervals by openings which indicate the position of the ancient doorways. These doorways appear to have been twelve in number (six on each side); but as the end walls, which are now nearly level with the ground, may have been pierced in a similar manner, it is uncertain whether this famous Banqueting-Hall had anciently twelve or fourteen entrances. Its interior dimensions, 360 by

forty feet, indicate that it was not constructed for the accommodation of a few, and that the songs of the old Irish bards, descriptive of the royal feasts of Teamor, may not be the fictions that many people are very ready to suppose them. If upon viewing the remains of this ancient seat of royalty, we feel disappointed, and even question the tales of its former magnificence, let us consider that since the latest period during which the kings and chiefs of Ireland were wont here to assemble thirteen centuries have elapsed, and our surprise will not be that so few indications of ancient grandeur are to be found, but that any vestige remains to point out its site.

Wakeman.

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 that 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.

CHRISTIAN ANTIQUITIES OF IRELAND,

PART I.

ANTIQUITY OF ECCLESIASTICAL REMAINS.

It must be admitted that the opinion expressed by Sir James Ware, as founded on the authority of St. Bernard's life of St. Malachy, that the Irish first began to build with stone and mortar in the twelfth century, would, on a casual examination of the question, seem to be of great weight and extremely difficult to controvert; for it would appear from ancient authorities of the highest character;* that the custom of building both houses and churches with oak timber and wattles was a peculiar characteristic of the Scotie (Irish) race who were the ruling people in this country from the introduction of Christianity till the Anglo-Norman invasion in the twelfth century. Before, however, these authorities are deemed invincible, let it be remembered that on similar evidences the antiquaries of England, till a recent period, came to the conclusion that the churches of the Britons, and even of the Saxons, were mostly built with timber; yet this opinion is now universally acknowledged to be erroneous.

It cannot, indeed, be denied that the houses built by the Scotie race in this country were usually of wood, or that very many of the churches erected by that people immediately after their conversion to Christianity, were not of the same perishable material; but it is also true that the earlier colonists in the country, the Firbolg and Dedannan tribes, which our historians bring hither from Greece at a very remote period, were accustomed to build not only their fortresses but even their dome roofed houses and sepulchres of stone without cement, and in the style now usually called Cyclopean and Pelasgic. This custom, as applied to their forts and houses, was continued in those parts of the country in which those ancient settlers remained, even after the introduction

* Venerable Bede; Book of Armagh: Life of St. Monenna, by Conchubran.