

THROUGH TARA'S HALL.

The recent excavations carried on at Tara, fruitless though they were, for reasons which shall be touched on later, have awakened popular interest in the traditions which attach to that storied spot. Most of us have no further knowledge of what Tara was than can be gleaned from Moore's exquisite lament over its departed glories. For the benefit of the readers of the "Visitor" we have tried to gather into a connected story the many references concerning the "navel" of Ireland, contained in Douglas Hyde's recently published History of Irish Literature.

It was Cormac Mac Art, the most striking figure among the pagan kings of Ireland, who built the palaces on Tara Hill. This hill was, till St. Ruadhan of Lothera solemnly cursed it, the scene of the great Feis, or assembly of the men of all Ireland. Every three years during the reigns of one hundred and thirty-six pagan and six Christian kings the chiefs, princes and bards of Erin met together on this most august spot in the whole land to promulgate laws universally binding upon the country, to test, purge and sanction the annals of the kingdom in the presence of all men, so that nothing untrue might creep in, and finally to register the same in the great national record, styled in later days the Saltair of Tara. The Feis began on the third day before Samhain—November day—and ended on the third after it. To accommodate the dignitaries who came to the great assembly Cormac Mac Art reared his mighty hall. The accounts we have of this building and of all the other buildings at Tara were written nine hundred years ago when the spot had been abandoned for four centuries. The great hall was used at once for a house of assembly, a banqueting room and a sleeping place. The descriptions given of it by the ancient authorities have been verified in every particular by the officers of the Ordnance Survey. The length of Cormac's Hall was seven hundred and sixty feet and its breadth was nearly ninety. There was a double row of benches on each side running the entire length of the interior, which would give four rows of men, if we remember that the guests were all seated on the same side of the tables, and which, if we allow three feet to each sinner, would accommodate just a thousand men. In the middle of the hall, running down all the way between the benches, was a row of fires, and just above, each fire a spit, on which joints of beef were roasted, was suspended from the roof. The High King sat at the southern end of the room. Each of the assembled worthies was attended by his own proper shield-bearer. Along the side walls there was placed a beam in which were fixed numerous hooks destined to support the shields, so that at the banquet all the lords and captains safe, each beneath his own shield.

The banqueting hall and all the other great buildings at Tara was of wood. Nor is the absence of stone building in itself a proof of low civilization, since, in a country like Ireland, abounding in timber, wood could be made to answer every purpose, as in point of fact it does at this day over the great part of the United States and in all northern countries, where forests are numerous. Down to the Danish invasion nearly all Irish buildings were constructed of wood, or of wood and clay combined, or of clay and un-mortared stones, and the strongholds were of wooden palisades planted upon clay earthworks. This is the reason why so few remains of prehistoric Irish buildings have survived, but it is no reason for believing that, as in Cormac's banquet hall, rude palatial effects were not really produced. It seems to have been constructed of the timbers of lofty trees planted side by side, probably carved in fantastic designs on the outside, while the inside walls were covered with a plaster spread over a network of slender rods. The plaster, when even and dry, was painted in bright colors, chiefly red, yellow and blue. The roof was formed of smooth joists and cross-beams, and was probably thatched with rods and rushes much in the same manner as the cottages of the peasantry are to-day. The floors were of earth, beaten and hardened and then covered with a coat of some kind of hard and shiny mortar. There were as many as seven raths, or "forts," around the royal hill of Tara, each containing many houses. The rath was in most cases protected by a wall of stakes planted around its summit. The finest house of all, painted in the gayest colors and planted in the sunniest spot, was reserved for the ladies. It is interesting to note that the ladies were never admitted to the banquet halls. They had a refectory of their own, in which they were separately

served, so that, perhaps, there is more fancy than truth in Moore's lines:

"No more to chiefs and ladies bright
The harp of Tara swells."

The last "Feis" of Tara was held in 554, according to the "Four Masters." But why it was the last they do not say. Tradition has it that the quarrel between King Diarmuid and St. Ruadhan is responsible for the cessation of the national assemblies. The Bishop and his clerics circled the hill of Tara, ringing their bells against it. Diarmuid returned for the feast, and stood his ground, but under his successor, as is probable, the palace was deserted forever. The abolition of the Feis was a blow from which the monarchy of Ireland never recovered—a blow which, by putting an end to the periodical conventions of the Irish race, weakened the prestige of the High King, increased the power of the provincial chiefs, segregated the clans from one another, and prevented a new source of faction and dissension throughout the land.

One of the most beautiful traditions connected with Tara is that which describes St. Patrick preaching in the palace on Easter Sunday of 433 before the King and his nobles and disconcerting the Magi or fire-worshippers. There is a beautiful hymn to be seen in Duffy's Irish Catholic Magazine for 1847, which is said to have been composed by the Apostle when he was on his way to preach at Tara. For centuries the Irish held this hymn in the highest esteem believing that all who recited it piously would be preserved from all dangers that would both threaten body and soul. It appears that down to a comparatively recent date verses of this hymn were repeated by the people as a part of their regular night prayers. We feel that a few stanzas of it from a translation, which is said to be "rigidly wonderfully literal" will be appreciated by our readers:

At Tara to-day, in this awful hour,
I call on the Holy Trinity!
Glory to Him who reigneth in power,
The God of the elements, Father and Son,
And Paraclete Spirit, which Three are the one,
The ever-existing Divinity!

At Tara to-day
May God be my stay!
May the strength of God now nerve me!
May the power of God preserve me!
May God the Almighty be near me!
May God the Almighty espy me!
May God the Almighty hear me!
May God give me eloquent speech!
May the arm of God protect me!
May the wisdom of God direct me!
May God give me power to teach and to preach!

May the shield of God defend me!
May the host of God attend me,
And ward me,
And guard me,
Against the wiles of demons and devils,
Against the temptations of vices and evils,
Against the bad passions and wrathful will,
Of the reckless mind and the wicked heart,
Against every man who designs me ill,
Whether leagued with others or plotting apart!

Christ as a light,
Illumine and guide me!
Christ, as a shield, overshadow and cover me,
Christ be under me! Christ be over me!
Christ be beside me
On left-hand and right!
Christ be before me, behind me, about me!
Christ this day be within me and without me!

Christ, the lowly and meek,
Christ, the All-Powerful, be
In the heart of each to whom I speak.
In the mouth of each who speaks to me!
In all who draw near me,
Or see me or hear me!
—Providence Visitor.

A TALE OF THE OLD DAYS IN IRELAND. CONTINUED FROM PAGE SIX.

"I seek your chief," replied the traveller, "and on a peaceful errand. But thou needst not fling thy pike so threateningly, Connall Cormac; I could handle a pike well once."
"What! you know me?" cried the sentinel, astonished.
"Yes, didst ever hear of Shaun na Pib, the Fighting Piper of the Glen?"
"You Shaun na Pib? out upon thee, man; thou hast a Saxon face and tongue."
"True," sighed the old man; "I have lived as servant for a kind lady for many a year, but my heart is with the Gael yet. But I wish to see the chief; lead me to him."
At the same moment a step was heard and Sir Richard Laughlin, old-

er and more worn than we have seen him, appeared.

"What would you with me?"
The old man's only reply was to place in the Knight's hand, a letter, fastened with a silken cord.

Hastily unrolling a torch, he tore the letter open, and by the flickering light read the contents. He sighed and scanned the face of the messenger.

"I will come," he said, "and you will accompany me."
He saddled his horse, arranged his dress, and having seen the old man mounted, they started for their destination.

It was morning when they stopped at the door of Sir Richard's former home, and when they had dismounted, the door was opened immediately, and the Knight of Garrauhill trod the ancient hall, unobscured and unannounced. A door stood open to his right, and he stepped within.

Lady Searle, the love of his youth, stood beside a table in the centre of the room, expectantly. Sir Richard bowed.

"I have come," he cried simply. She appeared agitated, then burst into tears.

"My husband," she cried, "has been dead some six months, and he urged me expressly to return thanks to you for the magnanimity you displayed toward him when in your power."

"He should have thanked you."
"True, Sir Richard. And oh! my heart is troubled daily and nightly at the consequence of my behavior to you that night of nights. It may seem unmanly in me to say, but I did not then appreciate the worth of the heart's love I threw away. If I can make amends for the past, I will do it. Sir Richard, leave this dangerous life; I have influence, you will be pardoned, and this your lost estate will be restored to you."
"Never!" cried the Knight.
"Say not so," she continued, earnestly, and rising, came forward and placed her fair white jewelled hand

on his shoulder; "for I will admit, though I should not do it, that since Sir Duncan's death I have more than an admiration for you; you have my heart, take my hand and with it the lost land of your forefathers. I conjure you, by the memory of that love you bore me in your youth, to let me make up for past offenses. Make us both happy."
She looked appealingly up to him, her eyes dim with tears.

Sadly he gazed upon her; but his iron will was not moved a jot. One awful spasm of heart pain passed over his countenance, and he was himself again.

"Girl of my heart!" he cried, and the bitter anguish in his tones frightened her. "This night, this scene, is the one bright spot in my blighted career. But it cannot be. My lot is cast. Never will I make peace with the Sassanachs. My life, my love, my all, I devoted to my country, and it is not meet that I should desert her now. I will hence from this land so full of bitter scenes, and under the sunny sky of France will await the dawning of another day for Ireland. God bless you! and farewell. I love you as no man ever loved; but my suffering, bleeding country, I love still more. To the blessed memory of those noble souls who have died for Ireland, I offer up this sacrifice of my life's hopes. I go to see you again, never, never, never!"

And the sound of his horse's hoofs as they struck the earth alone told her that she had seen the last of the Knight of Garrauhill.

At Fontenoy, when England's veterans reeled before the charge of Clare's dragons, and plucked the victorious laurels from the brow of the Wolf of Cumberland, the first to fall in that wild charge that swept the foe before it like a storm, and with the shouts of victory ringing in his ears, was Sir Richard Laughlin, Knight of Garrauhill—in the Celtic Mirror.

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