

A Folklore Survey of County Clare. (1)

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COUNTY CLARE from the fourth century of our era was united politically with North Munster, Tuath Mumhain, or Thomond, though separated from it by the broad waters of the Shannon. Standing thus by itself, “ isolated by the Sea, the River, and the enmity of Connaught,” it might be expected that it would preserve until modern times an unbroken tradition from the prehistoric past, and that a survey of its folklore would show many traces of ancient beliefs still surviving. The battle goddess *Catabodva* worshipped in antique Gaul, appears as the *Bodbh* of battle (*cath*) in the wars fought by the Princes of Clare in 1014 and 1317, and the spirit that washed the bloodstained clothes and limbs of the then living combatants still, I was told three years ago, foretells calamity by washing clothes in the same waters. [1] *Péists* or water snakes,—emblems, perhaps, of pagan islanders or devouring seas and lakes,—abound in the legends of a very early date, and are still reputed to seize the cattle, and even human beings, drowned in the lakes of Clare. The place names considered below will show to what an extent our present nomenclature records the mythology and sagas of early days, and I propose in the remainder of this first paper to deal with the banshee, the death coach, and the fairies. The bulk of the traditions since 1790 has been collected from the mouths of the people, and not from books nor from the notes of others, and I have tried, where possible, to gather various versions of the legends without the dangerous aid of “ leading questions.”

I. *Place Names and Legends of Places.*

Were we assured of the date of their origin, place names would be our most authentic, and perhaps our earliest, evidence of traditional beliefs and superstitions, but their first records only give a minimum date. To take a few examples :—if we may accept explanations earlier than A.D. 800, the name of Iniscatha, traceable from about 550, embodies the name of a monster, (probably the “ god or demon of the flood”), dispossessed by St. Senan, the missionary of the Corcavaskin district. [2] Again, Craganeevul near Killaloe recalls the belief in Aibhill, or Aibhinn, “ the beautiful,” the tutelary spirit of the ruling house of the Dalcassians, the later O’Briens. If the “ Life of St. Maccreiche” be early, it bears out a later belief that the cave of Poul nabruckee, in Inchiquin, commemorates no ordinary badger, but the formidable “ demon-badger,” killer of cattle and men. [3]

Following certain topographical lines I give the names as they occur, rather than as grouped according to beliefs. I must also premise that the Dalcassian tribes virtually covered the eastern Baronies of Bunratty and Tulla, with part of Inchiquin, from about A.D. 377 ; the Corca Modruad, (the royal line of the mythical Queen Maeve and Fergus mac Roigh), were in Burren and Corcomroe from still earlier times, beyond the range of even historical tradition [4]; while a third great independent line, the Corca-baiscinn, occupied the Baronies known down to Tudor times (and still as a rural deanery) as Corcavaskin,—now Moyarta and Clonderalaw, with the Barony of Ibrickan, (which takes its name from a settlement of fugitives from the Norman conquest in Leinster about 1180).

Burren.—Irghus or Eerish, a Firbolg in the oldest of Clare legends, [5] is commemorated by Caherdoonerish stone fort, [6] on Black Head. Finn MacCumhail gives his name to Seefin, on the same hills. The “silver bells” of Kilmoon church are said to be recalled by Cahercloggaun fort and Owenacluggan brook near Lisdoonvarna. In Kilcorney Parish we have two forts, Lisananima and Caherlisananima, named from ghosts; the first name is older than 1652. Beara, another Firbolg, brother of Irghus, gives his name, (found in a poem dating before 1014), to Finnavarra Point,—but not to Kinvarra, which is akin to Kenmare and Kinsale, “Head of the Sea” or “of the brine.” The name Bohernamish, or “way of the dishes,” with its legend of the miraculous rapine of King Guaire’s Easter banquet, about A.D. 630, is found in the mediaeval Life of St. Colman MacDuach. [7]

Corcomroe.—The reef of Kilstiffin, Kilstapheen, or Kilstuitheen has a legend of a sunken church and city, of which the golden domes appear once in seven years. The submerged forests and bogs inside the reef in Liscannor Bay, and the record of the great earthquake and tidal wave that split into three Inis Fitæ [8] on the same coast (A.D. 799-802), incline one to believe in a basis for the legend. In Nonghaval is a fort called Liskeentha, from “fairy songs” heard there. Not far away, in Kilfenora Parish, we have a Boughil or “petrified boy,” and in Carran Parish a Farbreag or “petrified man”; such names, originating in strangely-shaped rocks, are rather common. A third Firbolg brother, Daelach, gives his name to the little river Daelach and the townland Ballydeely. In Carran and Kilmanaheen the belief in the *phooka* or *púca*, a demon horse or goat, is stamped on the Poulaphucas, one of which has a fine dolmen; such monuments all over Ireland are found connected with the malignant prototype of Puck, Lisfarbeggommaun, “the fort of the little men (playing at) hurling,” commemorates fairy sports.

Ibrickan.—Poulaphuca in Kilfarboy is, so far as I know, the only mythic name, but Doolough Lake (Nigricantis) is named in the early “Life of Senan” [9] as the prison of the fearful “Cata” of Iniscatha, while the “Legend of the sons of Thorailbh mac Stairn” [10] locates the cavern whence the ferocious “Faracat” launched itself on the heroes’ spears, beside its waters. Dunbeg Bay is the scene of a curious merman story. [11]

Moyarta.—At Loop Head, the south-western extremity of the county, we find a Poul-napeiste and a line of forts,—Cahercrochain, Cahersaul, Dundahlin, and Cahernaheanmna,—connected with the monster killed by Dermot O’Duine and the brothers Crochaun, Sal, and Dahlin, whose sister (“the one (lone) woman”) gave her title to the last fort. [12] Iniscatha commemorates its dragon, and Lisnarka fort the “dances” of its fairy dwellers.

Clonderlaw.—Turning inland, up the Shannon and Fergus confluence, Tobersheefra (“elf’s well”) and Poulaphuca are named from the fairies and *púca*, and Clondegad from two druids who competed in magic, making “two gads” (or withes) to sail up the stream.

Inchiquin.—Passing on to the settlements of the Dalcassians, we find treasure legends at Cloghanairgid (“rock of the silver (money)”) and Skeaghvickencrowe (“MacEnchroe’s bush”). Cloghaphuca in Kilnaboy and Poul-nabrucee in Rath, with Toberatasha (“spectre’s well,” perhaps recording an apparition akin to that of Avenel), represent various supernatural beings. Seefin, Caherussheen, and Tirmicbrain near Corofin commemorate Finn, his son Oisín, and his dog Bran. The old pre-Norman Fenian tale of *Feis tighé chonain* is located on the high ridge over Inchiquin Lake, and connects Finn with the district and with a “hunting lodge” at Formoyle, but the first name (“seat of Finn”) has been lost since 1839. [13] In the weird terraced hills of bare crag behind Kilnaboy legend meets us at every turn. Slieve-naglasha, the Glasgeivnagh Hill, Mohernaglasha, Leabanaglasha, and Mohernagartan, “Smith’s Fort,” commemorate the Irish Vulcan, Lon mac Leefa (Liomhtha), and the wonderful “glaucous cow,” the *Glas*, whose hoof prints mark the rocks in every direction.

Inchiquin Lake has a beautiful swan-maiden tale, [14] but it “ names no name.” Still in Kilnaboy we find, near the tall brown peel tower of Ballyportry, a Cloughaphuca and the enchanted Lake of Shandangan. [15] Ruan Parish has Cahernanoorane, taking its name from “ fairy melody.” Lisheenvicknaheeha (“ the little fort of the son of the night”) seems ghostly, but the constituent is also an ancient personal name, Macnahaidche, in use down to at least 1084. In Dysert, Crush’banola and the basin stone near it are connected with a curious legend which I reserve. Banola or Manawla is really the historic Tola, living about A.D. 637. Drehidnavaddaroe Bridge may commemorate a ghostly “ red dog,” like the dogs of Cratloe and Ennistymon in this county, and the *Maelchu* of Kerry.

Islands.—This small district, although containing the “ capital” of Thomond from about 1220, is of little note in names. Poul-naclug contains the hidden bells of Dromcliff Round Tower. Knocknabohilleen probably had a “ Boughil” or “ Farbreag” (see *Corcomroe supra*). Fairyhill Fort in Kilmaley, and Music Hill, are connected with the “ good people.” Knock-ananima near Clare Castle, though superficially a ghost name, is said to be *Cnoc* (or *Cnock an) na h iomána* or “ Hurling-field Hill.”

Bunratty.—Taking the Upper and Lower Baronies together, both here and in Tulla, we find an oblique allusion to the fairies in Gortnamearacaun (“ foxglove field”), called also “ Thimble-town,”—the foxglove being the fairies’ thimble. Caheraphuca has a fine dolmen and haunted fort. Knocknafearbreaga derives its name and legend from the “ seven” (*recte* five) pillar stones, once the seven robbers who ill-treated St. Mochulla’s tame bull. It is noteworthy that the life of St. Mochulleus, (sought for vainly by Colgan about 1637 and only recently found in Austria and published), gives the *seven* soldiers and the slaying of the tame bull that ran errands for the saint. [16] In the Lower Barony the fairies are connected with Lissnarinka (“ fort of the dance”) in Clonloghan, and perhaps Caherfiogue (“ young man’s fort,” 1617), which is now forgotten. Moyeir, Moyross Parks, and Moyri are variants representing the ancient Magh Adhair, the settlement of another Firbolg chief and place of the inauguration of the kings of Thomond from at least A.D. 847 to Tudor times. Slieve suidhe an righ or Slieve oided an righ (“ king’s seat” or “ king’s death hill”), in Glennagross, was connected with a legend, probably historical, that King Criomthann died there in A.D. 377 poisoned by his sister, who drank before him to disarm his suspicion and secure the kingship for her son. [17]

Tulla.—In the mass of hills near the Shannon, Carrickeevul, Tobereevul, and Glennagalliach (“ hag’s glen”) commemorate banshees (see below). Knockaunamoughilly is named from a “ Boughil,” and other “ sham men” appear at the Farbreagas in Cloontra and Cloongaheen. Seefin in Kilseily is another “ seat of Finn.” Some names are more doubtful. Lough Graney, the river Graney, and Tomgraney, are attributed to a suspicious solar heroine, the lady “ Gillagreine” or “ Grainne of the bright cheeks.”

II. *Banshees.*

Above the Shannon gorge, overlooking a beautiful mass of mountains, the southern arm of Lough Derg, and the river and Killaloe with its weirs, rises the great brown and purple bluff of Craglea. Above the low earthworks and mound of stones that mark the ninth-century fort of Prince Lachtna ascends a rough lane. Further up on the east flank a little well, Tobereevul, gushes out from under a low rock amid the ferns, [18] and on the west side,—up a lonely valley, a long-forgotten battlefield, “ Crag Liath where shields were cleft,” in one of Brian Boru’s earlier combats with the Norsemen,—rises a high crag called Craganeevul. The names of both well and crag commemorate the tutelary spirit of the House of Cass, Aibhill or, more correctly, Aibhinn, “ the lovely one,” once, it may be, the goddess of the House.

On Good Friday, A.D. 1014, Brian, the aged monarch of all Erin, knelt in his tent praying for victory, while the battle raged over the low ridge now crowded by the houses of northern Dublin and on to the weirs of Clontarf. News came that his brave son's standard had fallen, and his page entreated him to ride back to the camp. "Oh, God! thou boy," cried Brian, "retreat becomes us not, and I myself know that I shall not depart alive, for Aibhill of Crag Liath came to me last night, and she told me that I should be killed today." [19] How many centuries of faith lay behind the king's fatalism, who can say? As the Gauls worshipped another banshee, Catabodva, as their war-goddess, [20] so, before the baptism of King Cairthinn, (first Christian Prince of his House, about A.D. 430), the ancestors of the Dal-cassians may have worshipped Aibhinn on her holy hill, and her equally lovely sister Aine, crowned with meadowsweet, on the tamer mound of Knockaney. Whether, if so, they found her already enthroned at Craglea on their conquest of the district, or whether the conqueror Lugad consecrated the mountains to his patroness, it is now impossible to guess. Aibhill, as banshee, held her own. We find her even usurping the place of the "Sybil" in a translation of the *Dies Irae*, [21] in unwonted companionship with King David, and she was a commonplace of local threnodies during the eighteenth, and even the nineteenth, century. In the lake below Rathblamaic in Inchiquin she has down to recent years been seen, with the twenty-five other banshees of Clare that call her their queen, washing clothes before any impending disaster.

The next appearance of a banshee in local history is of a very different spirit three centuries later. The *Cathreim Thoirdealbhaigh* ("Triumphs of Torlough") was written probably about A.D. 1350 by Seean mac Craith, the hereditary historian. [22] It contains accounts of three spirit women,—one, the "Sovereignty of Erin," being of surpassing loveliness, and the two others, (if not the same,—"Dismal" and "Water Dismal") of loathsome hideousness. The hags, however, probably survive while the "Sovereignty" has perished. Bronach ("the sorrowful or dismal one") of Ceann Boirne was known as the "Hag of Black Head" from the modern name of the older Ceann (or Rinn) of Burren. She was in full repute in 1839, and I have heard of her vaguely about 1885 or 1887. In August, 1317, she was able to appear in "the dark before sunrise" and foretell destruction by words and hideous action. The supporters of Prince Murchad O'Brien, (then absent in Dublin), under his brother Dermot invaded the territory of his rival Prince Donchad O'Brien. The latter got together an army, "even the man in a souter-rain (*uamh*) of a fort" being summoned, and marched round the site of the modern village of Ballyvaughan, his foe having sheltered in Corcomroe Abbey, in a nook of the bare hills some miles to the north-west. Approaching Lough Rasga, (still known as Rask), "they looked on the shining mere, and there they saw the monstrous and distorted form of a lone, ancient hag, that stooped over the bright Lough shore. She was thatched with elf locks, foxy grey and rough like heather, matted and like long sea-wrack, a bossy, wrinkled, ulcerated brow, the hairs of her eye-brows like fish hooks; bleared, watery eyes peered with malignant fire between red inflamed lids; she had a great blue nose, flattened and wide, livid lips, and a stubbly beard." [23] The writer adds detail on detail (some 90 in all), many too disgusting to copy. The hag was washing human limbs and heads with gory weapons and clothes, till all the lake was defiled with blood, brains, and floating hair. Donchad at last spoke. "What is your name and race, and whose kin are those maltreated dead?" She replied,—"I am Bronach of Burren, of the Tuatha Dé Danann. This slaughter heap is of your army's heads; your own is in the middle." The angry men raised their javelins, but she rose on the wind, yelling more and more words of woe till she vanished. "Heed her not," said Donchad, "she is a friendly *Bodbh* of Clan Torlough" (his opponents). The army hurried on to the ridge of the Abbey, where Donchad and all his kindred, save one brother, were slain before evening.

Not to the Irish alone did the banshee foretell ruin. In May, 1318, Richard de Clare, leader of the Normans, was marching to what he supposed would be an easy victory over the O'Deas of Dysert. The English came to the "glittering, running water of fish-containing

Fergus,” when they saw a horrible beldam washing armour and rich robes till the red gore churned and splashed through her hands. [24] Calling an Irish ally to question her, De Clare heard that “ the armour and clothes were of the English, and few would escape immolation.” “ I am the Water Doleful One. I lodge in the green fairy mounds (*sidh*) of the land, but I am of the Tribes of Hell. Thither I invite you. Soon we shall be dwellers in one country.” Next day De Clare, his son, and nearly all his English troops lay dead upon the fields near the ford of Dysert for miles over the country in their flight.

The belief of the early eleventh and fourteenth centuries is still extant, for local legend near Dysert tells how Aibhill and twenty-five banshees washed blood-stained clothes in Rath Lake before “ Claraghmore” (De Clare) fell, and that they still do so when mischief is afoot. [25]

For nearly 300 years there is no other Clare banshee tale, till the famous one of 1642 in the *Memoires of Lady Fanshawe*, (published in 1665). [26] It is so well known that a brief abstract will suffice. Her Ladyship, staying with some of the O’Briens, was sleeping in a room, of which the window overhung water at some height, at a castle, perhaps Bunratty or Castle Lake. She was awakened by a horrible scream, and saw a girl outside the window. The apparition was pale, rather handsome, and with her reddish hair hanging dishevelled over her shoulders. After some time the unwelcome visitor vanished, with other ghastly shrieks. In the morning Lady Fanshawe, telling her tale, was told of the death of a relative of the family whose illness had been concealed from her. The spirit was that of the peasant wife of a former owner of the castle, drowned in the moat by her husband and of evil omen to his descendants.

The next story was told in my own family and, I understand, in that of the Ross Lewins. I have traced it to a daughter of Jane Ross Lewin, one of the girls who saw the banshee. It related to Jane’s father, Harrison Ross Lewin of Fortfergus, who probably died in 1776, as his will, dated November, 1775, was proved in March, 1777 ; but I have hitherto been unable to verify the circumstances or place of his death. Mr. Ross Lewin had gone to Dublin on business, the journey at that time taking five days, and the several stages being Limerick, Nenagh, Mountrath, Kildare, and Dublin. In his absence the “ young people” went to a friend’s house for the evening. The road passed an old church (Kilchrist), which was unenclosed, standing in an open field. As the party returned under bright moonlight, they were startled by loud keening and wailing from the direction of the ruin. Coming in sight, all clearly saw a little old woman with long white hair and a black cloak running to and fro on the top of the side wall, clapping her hands and wailing. The young men, leaving the girls together on the road, sent some of their number to watch each end of the building, and the remainder entered and climbed up on the wall. The apparition vanished as they approached the church, and, after a careful search, could not be found. The party, thoroughly frightened, hurried home, and found their mother in even greater terror. She had been sitting in the window when a great raven flapped three times at the glass, and, while she told them, the bird again flew against the window. Some days later, news arrived from Dublin that Ross Lewin had died suddenly on the very evening of the apparition and omen.

It is curious that an English family, no matter how long settled in Ireland, should have acquired the ministrations of a banshee, but, besides the Ross Lewins, both the Stammers and the Westroppes were so endowed in Clare. [27] The Westroppes had also death warnings in the shape of a white owl and the headless coach. This bird last appeared, it is said, before a death in 1909, but it would be more convincing if it appeared at places where the white owl does *not* nest and fly out every night. The banshee has been conspicuously absent of late years, although on the death of my father, the late John Westropp, at Attyflin, in 1866, keening and weird lamentation, (probably of some of the country folk who held him in deep affection), were heard the same night by the servants and some of the family. When Mrs. Stamer died at

Stamer Park, Ennis, in January, 1883, the banshee and death coach were also supposed to have been heard,—though far more satisfactory explanations of the noises were forthcoming. The popular belief in Clare is that each leading Irish race had a banshee, Eevul, the banshee of the royal O'Briens, ruling over twenty-five other banshees always attendant on her progresses. The stream from Caherminaun to Dough, (the Daelach), was called the "Banshee's Brook," and when, as sometimes happens after an unusually dry summer, the water gets red from iron scum, everyone is on the alert to hear the rustling flight of the banshee, (not apparently Eevul), and her attendants through the air. In the prevailing suspense someone generally succeeds, and then there is unrest and fear until a death removes the uncertainty. There are many other modern tales of banshees. Mr. Casey of Ruan heard a banshee cry at the death of his father. The late Dr. MacNamara of Corofin was similarly honoured ; indeed, when his family lived at Ballymarkahan, near Quin, there were numerous "authentic instances" recorded. The Corofin banshees, however, did not lag behind the age by maintaining aristocratic prejudices, for one, at least, used to sit near the cross road leading to the workhouse and foretell the deaths of the poor inmates. [28]

The most recent visit of a banshee told to me was in 1905, [29] and is sadly tame when compared with the stories of MacCraith and Lady Fanshawe. Some scattered cottages form a sort of suburb to Newmarket-on-Fergus at a temporary lake (or *turlough*) called Lough Gaish. The inhabitants were greatly alarmed by the loud and ghastly wailing of some unknown being on several successive nights. Local panic spread, and few ventured out after dark. Had any tragedy happened, the reputation of the banshee would have rested on a rock of belief for another generation ; but nothing occurred, and it is now doubted "whether it was a banshee at all, at all."

III. *The Death Coach.* [30]

The "headless Coach" or "coach a bower" seems of far later date than the banshee. Ghostly chariots such as that of Cuchulain figure in very early tales, but neither their appearance nor their sound foretold death. [31] In Clare, at sight or sound of the coach, all gates should be thrown open, and then it will not stop at the house to call for a member of the family, but only foretell the death of some relative at a distance. [32]

I collected five stories, three of well-defined character, and give them in order of time as the dates can be fixed. The first appearance, on the night before June 18th, 1806, was related to my three informants [33] most solemnly by their fathers and uncles. Two told it in a general and confused way, but varied from the story of the third, which I give, only by omissions. Ralph Westropp, of Attyflin and Lismehane,—the latter place is in Clare, but I never could learn where he died,—lay sick unto death. His sons in the late dusk waited on the steps for the arrival of the doctor. Suddenly they saw and heard a large coach drive into the paved court before the house. One of them stepped down to open the door, but the dark object rumbled past and drove down the long, straight avenue, which was fenced on both sides. Two of the watchers ran after it, hearing it ahead of them. The noise stopped, and they expected to find the coach at the gate. They ran full tilt against the bars, the gate being closed and locked. They called up the lodgekeeper, and he was found to have been asleep with the keys still beside him. The sick man died the next morning.

Lismehane, under its later name of Maryfort, afterwards became the residence of the O'Callaghan family, its present occupants. On the night of April 29th, 1821, two servants,—one of whom was "Matty Halloran" who died not long ago at an advanced age, and the other was a butler named Richard Burke,—were sitting up to receive a son of the family, Cornelius O'Callaghan, who had travelled for his health in vain and was returning home. Halloran, who told the tale with fearless faith and weary frequency, said that the heavy rumble of a coach

roused them. Burke stood on the top of the long flight of steps with a lamp, and sent Halloran down to open the carriage door. He reached out his hand to do so, saw a skeleton looking out, gave one yell, and fell in a heap. When the badly-scared Burke picked him up, there was no sign or sound of any coach. A little later the invalid arrived, so exhausted that he died suddenly in the early morning. The present generation seems to have got the story from Halloran alone.

On the night of December 11th, 1876, a servant of the MacNamaras was going his rounds at Ennistymon, a beautiful spot in a wooded glen, with a broad stream falling in a series of cascades. In the dark he heard the rumbling of wheels on the back avenue, and, knowing from the hour and place that no "mortal vehicle" could be coming, concluded that it was the death coach and ran on, opening the gates before it. He had just time to open the third gate and throw himself on his face beside it, at the bank, before he "heard a coach go clanking past." It did not stop at the house, but passed on, and the sound died away. On the following day Admiral Sir Burton MacNamara died in London. [34]

A man living at Annaghneale was returning from Tulla late at night. As he reached the corner of Fortanne demesne he heard a heavy rumbling behind him, and horses trotting. Surprised after a time by its not coming nearer, he looked back and saw a large dark mass with a figure on the box. It came no closer to him, and in a fright he hurried on. At a bend in the road he ventured to stand at the fence and look again. This time he saw the horses and carriage drive over the wall and ditch into Fortanne. He fell, nearly insensible with terror, but, hearing and seeing nothing more, hurried home. This was told to a steward at Maryfort about twenty years ago, and happened "long after the sale of Fortanne" to its present owner in 1879. The present tradition of Fortanne says that the coach was heard at the deaths of certain Westropp's after 1873, but nothing happened after its last appearance.

The phantom of a coach and horse was seen not far from Corofin, at Cragmoher, not long since, but it is agreed that no death took place after the apparition. An equally vague story was told about 1870 at Attyflin by a very old woman, Norry Halloran, whom the sound of the coach pursued one dark evening for a long way, but it did not pass her door, and nothing happened afterwards.

IV. *Fairies and Fairy Forts and Mounds.*

MacCraith, in the *Triumphs of Torlough*, in describing the prognostics of the death of Prince Donchad early in the fourteenth century says that "lights shone on the fairy forts," and it has already been noted that the *sidhs* or fairy mounds were lodgings of appalling apparitions, like Bronach when not at her proper residence in the lower deep. The *Dindsenchas*,—that early encyclopædia invaluable for everything but the reliable account of the origin of place names which it purports to be,—describes how a lady dwelling in such a mound sprang out at her would-be lover in the form of a dragon. [35] Probably such beliefs, and the consequent fear of irate and deadly beings in earthworks, have helped until recent years to preserve the residential earthen "forts," although the ring walls were destroyed with but little scruple. Nevertheless the son of a farmer named Nihill told me in 1892 that, after some days wreck-age and removal of the outer wall of the fine triple stone fort of Cahercalla, near Quin, his father was stricken with acute pain, and only recovered from his illness when the work was stopped,—whence this interesting ruin has been preserved to the present day. A certain land-lord, still living, nearly lost the use of one eye from the dust of an explosion when blasting a rock in an earth fort which was being removed, and this incident has upheld the faith and fear of the fairies in north-eastern Clare. A locally famous "astronomer" and weather prophet tried, many years ago, to blast a dolmen in Inchiquin Barony, and a splinter hit his hand, which was badly injured and afterwards festered. The wreckage of the dolmen

was lying un-touched on the ground a few years ago. The collapse of a calf shed on its occupants followed the demolition of Templenaraha oratory for building the unstable structure ; [36] this might be ascribed to a more sacred anger than that of the fairies, but the oratory stood in a ring fort. Another case of supposed vengeance occurred near Lehinch on the Atlantic. Some workmen were employed to level the earthworks of Dooneeva, [37] a fort on a low cliff at the end of the bay and near the modern Protestant Church. The man who originated this outrage was dig-ging at the mounds when he fell to all appearance dead. The news was at once taken to his wife, a reputed “ wise woman,” and she ran to a “ fairy spot” and “ did magic.” She then went to her apparently lifeless husband, and ordered the fairies in a peremptory way to restore him at once and take his stick. Then, before everyone, the stick vanished, and the “ dead man” sat up none the worse for his “ rapture to the land of faery.” [38] The date of this event could not be fixed, but it seems to be attributed to the period before 1840, and Dooneeva seems to have been in its present condition in 1839.

Two forts named Lissardcarney and Ballyhee in Templemaley Parish were in 1839 reputed strongholds garrisoned by troops of fairies. The songs of the fairies were heard in Cahernanoorane in Inchiquin, and Leskeentha near Noughaval. [39] They danced in the Lisnarinkas, played “ hurley” in Lisfearbegnagommaun, and laid in wait to worry the belated traveller in Rathfollane and a small fort near the rectory, to the south of it, near Newmarket-on-Fergus. Fairies haunted the well of Tobesheefra, while even at the holy well of the powerful and vengeful St. Mochulla at Fortanne milk was once offered to them. The butter had refused to “ come,” and the mistress of the house, (a Protestant woman of good birth and fair education), as she told me herself about 1878, took some of the refractory milk to the well, made the sign of the cross over it, said the Lord’s Prayer, dug a hole in the mud at the well with her left heel, and went away without looking back. As might have been expected, the butter had “ come” by the time she had got home again, and she used to quote the case as “ proof positive.” Besides the forts and wells, the dolmens are believed to have been fairy homes, but in my enquiries since 1892 I have never been able to authenticate a case of offerings at them of milk and butter, although small basins like the Swedish “ elf mills” are found in the covers of more than one of these structures, and large bullauns or basins at others, such as Ballyganner Hill near Noughaval, Cappaghkennedy on the hills above Corofin, and Newgrove and Kiltanon near Tulla in eastern Clare. Food and drink, however, have been, until at least the present century, set out in plates and cups in Inchiquin and Moyarta Baronies, and in the latter, on the Shannon bank, the slops were thrown out and clean plates, water, chairs, and a well-swept hearth left by a punctilious servant for fairy guests in 1888 or 1889.

The greatest fairy monarch in Clare was “ Donn of the Sand-hills” (now the golf links), near the old castle of Doogh, (*i.e.* Dumhach or Sand Dune), near Lehinch. He, or one of the other fairy princes named Donn, appears in a list of the divine race of the Tuatha Dé Danann, [40] and is therefore of the family of the Dagda, and, it may be presumed, a lineal descendant of the ancient Ana, Mother of the Gods. A well-known Irish scholar and antiquary, Andrew MacCurtin, before 1730 addressed a political petition to Donn of Dumhach complaining, like most Irish antiquaries, of the neglect of the gentry, and praying for any menial post at his Court. [41] As there was none that answered, the petitioner had to rest content with the hospitality of the MacDonnells of Kilkee and the O’Briens of Ennistymon. Donn’s heartless conduct met poetic justice, for he has ever since “ lacked a sacred bard,” and, save for a slight uneasiness in a few poor old people passing across the sandhills after the golfers have left and the sun has set, he is now all but forgotten. In another poem of MacCurtin’s, on a monk’s horse “ overlooked” and killed by the evil eye, or by the look of a red-haired woman, or by “ the stroke of a fairy,” the poet recommends the holy man to get the aid of a local practitioner of renown, Peter the Fairy Killer. [42]

In recent years I have met only one sign of true respect for the “Sheevra” race. A small patch of land was left untitled in the midst of a cornfield at the end of the steep descent from Carran old church to Eanty in the Burren, It was left for three years amidst the tillage, and then the field was allowed to return to grass. The owners obviously disliked to explain the matter, but the act was clearly understood in the neighbourhood as a concession to the spirits of the field when the grass land was broken up for the first time in human memory. [43]

The appearances of the fairies also seem now very rare indeed. At Newmarket-on-Fergus, a centre of much folklore, we find that, besides the two forts named above and a low earth mound (perhaps sepulchral), only one spot has been honoured by an actual apparition in the last ten years. In this case a man walking on the Ennis road, not far from Lough Gaish, saw a very little man neatly dressed in green and walking on the path. Suspecting the green man to be a *leprechaun*,—and hence an owner of gold,—the Clare man tried to grasp him, but the sprite vanished out of his hands. [44]

The “literary movement” will probably affect the folklore very soon, as it is already affecting historical tradition,—which is shown by the variations in certain legends collected at long intervals at the same sites. By some the Danann have been identified with the Danes as “fort builders.” If this were so, why did Dane’s fort become Caher Loghlanach, (Caher Loglin, 1652), and similar forms? The people once knew better, for forts were attributed to all sorts of times and races, not only to members of the Tuatha Dé Danann, but also to Firbolgs and mythical persons such as Aenghus, Eerish, Eir, Farvagh, and Croaghan, and Celts such as Lachtna (A.D. 820-840), and Brian Boru (A.D. 980-1014). In one notable instance, King Conor (A.D. 1242-69) is the reputed builder of the great stone fort of Dun Conor in Aran, which in the eleventh-century legend is evidently connected with Conchiurn or Conchraed the Firbolg,—a relation accepted in 1685 by Roderic O’Flaherty, although he called its hero “Conquevar” (*i.e.* Chonchobhar or Conor). Any modern allusion to the Danann is therefore “suspect.” Many visits to the recesses of the hills in Burren from 1878 onwards,—and I may add that the same is true of the rest of Clare,—only gave me, in 1905, one direct reference to the Danann. [45] At the natural moat crowned by the small stone ring wall of Croaghateeaun, near Lisdoonvarna, we were told to cross ourselves as a protection against the Danann. The place was, nevertheless, undoubtedly regarded by the older people living near it as a most dangerous fairy fort, and we were told how certain badger hunters,—(who brought drink with them),—after a long festival on its summit got benighted there; they eventually returned home sobered by fright, as they suddenly “saw the whole fleet” of “them” coming up the mound, and escaped only just in time.

The “whirlwinds” along dusty roads and sudden gusts were not long ago everywhere supposed to be caused by the progress of fairy beings. The older folk believed, and trembled,—crossing themselves, or saying a word of prayer,—while the younger folk, more than half in jest, raised their hats, as is still sometimes done to the unlucky “single magpie” and the weasel.

I know of two cases of reputed changelings. My second sister, whose delicacy, when an infant, excited remark, was, about 1842, taken out by a servant to be exposed on a shovel on the doorstep at Carnelly. The angry and hasty intervention of another servant saved the child, but the would-be “exposer” was convinced of the propriety of her attempt “to get back the real child” from the fairies. A very old woman, Kate (Geerin) Molony, a henwife at Maryfort, near Tulla, whom I faintly remember in 1869, was many years before anxious about her little daughter’s failing health, and went to a “wise woman,” who assured her that the child was “changed.” She spoke of this on her return, and unfortunately the patient was old enough to understand the fearful decision. The poor child turned over on the bed with a groan, and was a little later found to be dead.

- [1] Cf. the *lavandières de nuit*, discussed by Sébillot, *Le Folk-lore de France*, Tome iii.
- [2] Colgan, "Vita S. Senani," *Acta S.S. Hib.* (March 8).
- [3] This I suspect to have been really a belated bear, as that formidable beast, whose bones so abound in Clare caverns, perished at an unknown date, leaving his name "Mathgamhan," or Mahon, to his human enemies, and his remains as his only monument. Certain MacMahons, however, affected to believe that they were Normans originally named Fitz Urse, in the same way as the MacNamaras were supposed to be Mortimers (*de Mortuo Mari*) by Spenser and others in the time of Elizabeth.
- [4] An account of a curious episode found in the legend of St. Mochulla, whose "Life" had been lost or taken from Ireland before 1637, has been preserved orally until recent years (*see Bunratty infra*). The legends of the Armada on the coast, heard by me down to 1878, have been since confirmed by the publication of long-forgotten letters. So historical tradition, even under the unfavourable conditions of recent centuries, has kept wonderfully accurate versions of events. The continuity of the schools and families of the hereditary bards and *ollamhs* favoured still greater accuracy in early times. Ireland had "books and philosophers" in the fourth century, according to Ethicus of Istria (*Social History of Ireland*, vol. i., p. 403), and, possibly for the same period before Christianity as the Armada lies behind our own time, history was handed down truly, at least in its broad outlines.
- [5] "Legend of Carn chonaill," "Dindsenchas," *Revue Celtique*, vol. xv. (1894), pp. 478-80.
- [6] "Fort" in this paper means one of the entrenched residences, (usually circular,) of the early inhabitants. These are called in Irish *rath*, *liss*, and *dun*; the dry stone equivalent is *caher*.
- [7] *Mish* also means an altar in early works. Cf. *Tripartite Life of St. Patrick*, (ed. W. Stokes).
- [8] Now Inniscaeragh or Mutton Island, Illaunwattle, Inismatail, or Mattle Island, and Carrickaneelwar. The first two are named Iniskereth and Inismatail in a charter of 1216.
- [9] Colgan, *op. cit.* (March 8).
- [10] A romance of about 1750, by Michael Comyn.
- [11] Crofton Croker, *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland*, 1825, vol. ii., p. 31, (The Soul Cages).
- [12] "Adventures of the sons of Thorailbh"; see also *Ordnance Survey Letters*, Co. Clare, Killballyowen Parish, (MS., R.I. Academy).
- [13] *I.e.* lost so far as I know. Many names supposed to be lost prove, however, still to exist, especially amongst old persons, but should never be asked for directly, as the demand usually creates the supply. This precaution is too little heeded by enquirers in Ireland.
- [14] Given by Dr. George U. MacNamara in *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol. xxxi., p. 212.
- [15] Its curious and unusual changes of colour give it the reputation of enchantment.
- [16] *Analecta Bollandiana*, xvii., p. 135.
- [17] S. H. O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, vol. ii.
- [18] It still exists, though marked only "site of" in the new Ordnance Survey maps.
- [19] *Wars of the Gaedhil with the Gaill* (Ed. Dr. Todd, Rolls Series).
- [20] Cf. *Revue Archéologique*, N.S., vol. xviii. (1868), p. i; Sir Samuel Ferguson's paper, from the Irish point of view, in *Dublin University Magazine*, Oct 1834. p. 463; W. M. Hennessy, "The War Goddess of the Ancient Irish," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. x., p. 425.
- [21] Mss., Royal Irish Academy, 23.M.47.
- [22] As yet only in manuscript,—one copy of A.D. 1509, and another probably from one of 1449. For its age see *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. xxxii., p. 139.
- [23] I have to thank Mr. Standish Hayes O'Grady for this and other extracts from the work, the translations in the Hbrary of the Royal Irish Academy being, (it is understood), very crude.
- [24] Another "washer of the ford" appears in "Da Choca's Hosel," *Revue Celtique*, vol.

- xxi. (1900), p. 157, and she is also a Bodbh.
- [25] Told me by Prof. Brian O’Looney in 1890, and I have heard more recently of the existence of the belief.
- [26] *Loc. cit.*, pp. 83-6.
- [27] Among families with banshees, Thomas Crofton Croker (*op. cit.*, ed. 1862, p. 115,) names old Englishry such as the Burkes, Rices, Husseys (the Norman, not the Gaelic, name), Trants, and Keatings. The FitzGeralds of Kerry and Limerick had also a banshee. Of the Clare families the Westropp came from Yorkshire, the Stammers from Essex, and the Lewins probably from Durham. Some banshees may have been acquired by marriage, for the three latter families were related to O’Briens, MacNamaras, and O’Gradys, to name only a part of their Celtic connections.
- [28] Told to Dr. G. U. MacNamara at Caherminane and Corofin.
- [29] By Mrs. and Miss Neville and Miss G. C. Stacpoole of Newmarket.
- [30] Cf. “ Irish Folklore from Cavan, Meath, Kerry, and Limerick,” vol. xix., pp. 320-1 ; vol. X., p. 119.
- [31] Is not the death coach, and not the Hellequin, the “ hell waine” of Reginald Scot’s list of spirits in *The discoverie of witchcraft*, Bk. vii., cap. xv. ?
- [32] Cf. Herefordshire belief about corpse candles.
- [33] The late Capt. Ralph Westropp of Coolreagh (in 1879), and the late Mrs. Wilme and Mrs. Pitcairn, whose fathers were present.
- [34] From Mr. R. Twigge, F. S.A. , whose wife is a daughter of the House of Ennistymon.
- [35] *Revue Celtique*, vol. xv., p. 441.
- [36] Told to Dr. G. U. MacNamara about 1907.
- [37] *Not* Doonmeeve as on the Ordnance Survey maps.
- [39] Told to Miss Diana Parkinson. I heard it locally, but more vaguely, in 1907.
- [40] Local traditions, 1904, 1908.
- [40] *Cath Finntraga* (ed. Kuno Meyer), p. 15.
- [41] Mss. Royal Irish Academy, 23. M. 47.
- [42] *Ibid.* 23. K. 10.
- [43] It was certainly not the darker belief that in Scotland dedicated an offering to the one called euphemistically “ The Goodman,” nor like the sheaf sometimes dedicated to Brigit and other saints in West Munster, or, indeed, in other parts of Ireland.
- [44] Collected by Miss Katherine Neville. The sprite was, of course, proved not to be a *leprechaun*, as that being can be held by the eye alone.
- [45] Apart from Lon, at Slievnaglasha, and the “ hags.”

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