



The Dun at Dorsey, Co. Armagh

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PAPERS AND PROCEEDINGS—PART I. FIRST QUARTER, 1898.

Papers.

THE DUN AT DORSEY, CO. ARMAGH.

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[Read JANUARY 12th, 1897.]

IN the county of Armagh, barony of Upper Fews, parish of Creggan, and townland of Dorsey, there are remains of a most extensive and remarkable earthwork.

It is marked "Ancient Intrenchment" on the Ordnance Survey Index Map of county of Armagh, and "Intrenchment" on Sheet No. 59, of 1-inch Ordnance Survey of Ireland; and it is set out as an irregular trapezoid one mile long and six hundred yards wide, on Sheet No. 28 of the 6-inch Ordnance Survey Map of county Armagh. The greatest length is from east to west. The west end is semicircular, while the south-east corner forms a wide blunt angle, and the north-east corner an acute angle. The remains at these several places happen to be those which are least altered, and there is no peculiar configuration of the ground to account for the variety of outline.

The simplicity of the ground plan and the peculiar situation point to this earthwork having been constructed at a much earlier date than any intrenchment or "ditches," such as were thrown up by armies in the field in comparatively modern warfare.

In some of the numerous Irish wars this ancient earthwork may have been temporarily used as a vantage point by one side or the other, but everything about it indicates its extreme antiquity. For example,

the stream on the east of it has in the lapse of centuries altered its course and cut almost right through the "walls."

There can be no doubt that this earthwork is or rather was an enormous dun or ancient earthen fortified residence, and, so far as is known, it is the most extensive in all Ireland.

The fortifications of this vast enclosure originally consisted of a rampart with deep fosses on both sides, and smaller ramparts or parapets outside the fosses: the whole wall measures 120 feet across; the outer ramparts are 5 feet high and 18 feet wide, while each fosse is 23 feet deep and 12 feet wide at the bottom.

Some portions still remain in such excellent preservation that we are able to realise what a great dun it once was, but the greater portion has been destroyed in the course of ages, and the work of destruction is still in progress. At one spot an industrious farmer has made very considerable alterations within the last three years. It is therefore thought advisable to put on record a full account of its present state.

In the preparation of this Paper the Ordnance Survey Map issued in 1837 has been compared with a copy of the new issue, and very considerable differences exist between these maps. The most noticeable being that in the four places where the lines of the "walls" pass through boggy or marshy ground; they on the former map are set out and described as constructed with "piles," whereas in the new map this is not noticed. O'Donovan noticed this feature when he visited the place, and there does not appear any reason to set aside the opinion of such an accurate scholar. It is a great liberty to take with the information he collected.¹

The locality lies to the west of, and yet quite close to the wild and picturesque neighbourhood of Forkill, just on the west verge of the steep and rocky hills that stand out like sentinels before the great round mass of Slieve Gullion, which, 1893 feet in height, towers up grandly above them all, at a distance of only four miles.

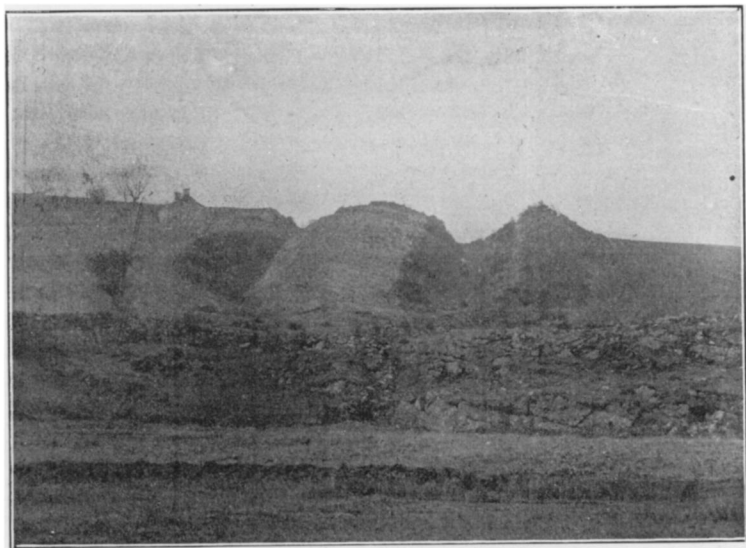
The space enclosed by this earthwork is now occupied by well cultivated farms, with the exception of a boggy band that runs north to south right through the middle, and a rocky bit to the east of this. The ground rises to the east, so that the east end is on a hill, while the west end takes in a portion of another hill called Drumill.

Five county roads, one being the leading road from Dundalk to Armagh, pass north to south through the dun, and two streams flow through it in a like direction, while a third stream runs parallel to the eastern ramparts.

In order to make a circuit of the dun we shall start from the point where the five roads meet at Drumill Bridge; as to this spot the visitor will travel by road.

¹ O'Donovan, in "O. S. MSS. of County Armagh."

From 1 to 2¹ the earthen "walls" run along the margin of a little glen, and are traceable west and east through arable fields. They then tend slightly to the south, and near the bridge on the edge of the bog turn at a right angle to the north-east. In the bog there is not a trace, but on the Ordnance Survey 6-inch Map the line is marked "piles." Passing across the bog and stream the "walls" are next found at the base of the hill at 3, where one hundred yards are in good preservation; of this a view from a photograph by Mr. Edgar Connor, of Newry, is given. The north fosse here is 14 feet deep, and the south 23 feet. The difference has been brought about by a partial filling of the north fosse, and a cottage has been built in it on the top of the hill. The section No. 1 was taken here a few yards west of the road which cuts through the ramparts. (Section c on map.)

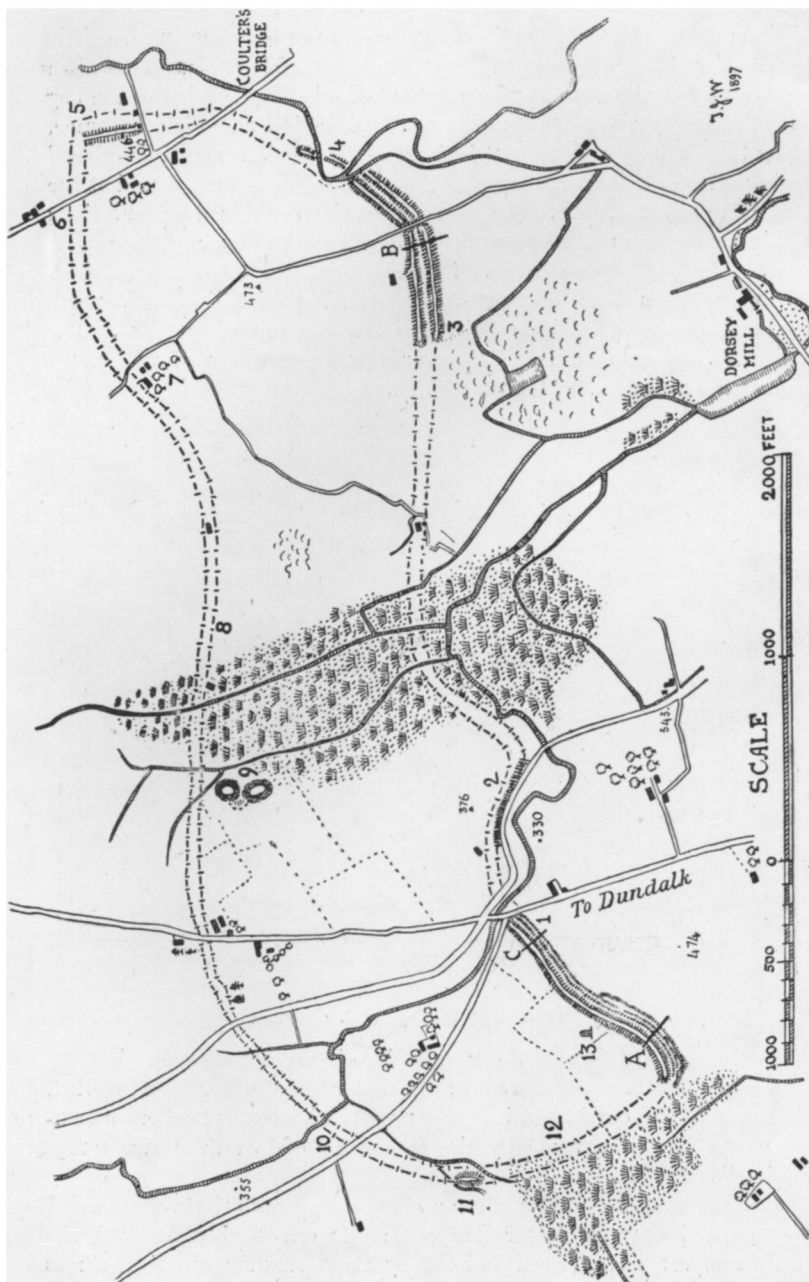


Wall of Dun at Dorsey, at 3 on Plan.

To the east of this road the "walls" go in a north-easterly direction down a hill, both fosses exist here; the inner rampart has been levelled, but that on the outside is in good preservation, except where a commencement has been made by the farmer to cart it away for "top-dressing" his fields.

At 4 a stream has made a curve and cut deeply into the walls, carried away a portion of the outer rampart, and worn its bed far into the central rampart, having been assisted by the formation of a weir across the stream.

¹ See plan on next page.



Plan of the Dun at Dorsey, Co. Armagh.

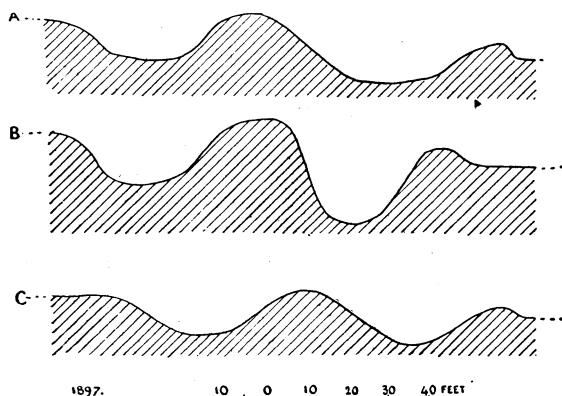
From 4 to the next road, there are but the merest traces left in the fields, and the same is the state for 100 yards after crossing the road.

At 5 the inner fosse exists for a distance of 200 yards, all the other portions having been "improved" away, and the occupier of the land is each year doing his best to obliterate what is left, by filling and leveling.

The "walls" next turn at an acute angle to the west, and up to 6 can be traced in a very wide depression along the north side of a fence.

When we get west of 6 the fortification is more visible though greatly altered. The rocky nature of the ground very likely made the earth of the original ramparts valuable and was early used to improve it for cropping.

From 6 to 7 it is faintly marked alongside a wide irregular fence. From 7 to 8 it is more distinct, a small portion of one of the fosses still remaining outside the fence of the garden of the farmstead near 7.



Sections of the Rampart.

The spot marked 8 is on the steep slope of a hill, and the "walls" run down to the bog across which again on the old 6-inch Ordnance Survey Map lines of "piles" were set out.

In the west of this bog are two small rocky elevations, the most northerly of them being a little the larger. The tops of both these hillocks have an irregular parapet formed of large stones round them. The visitor is at once struck with their resemblance to small "forts."

These were probably the citadels where the chief resided. They must have been very secure retreats, having been surrounded, except on the west, by water or impassable morass, for even now with all the advantages of modern draining and cutting out of the peat, the ground is unpleasantly marshy, and is liable to floods in wet weather. The entrance to these citadels was across a narrow valley on the west.

Up the rising ground from this bog at 9 to the next farm house the "walls" are all but untraceable, and after passing it not a trace is left in the fields of a highly cultivated and neat farm till we reach 10, where a portion of the centre rampart, about 30 yards in length, still exists with some very old white thorns or "fairy bushes" growing on it.

The number of such "fairy bushes" throughout the district is noteworthy. They abound and afford evidence of a surviving belief in the existence of the fairies, and this we found in conversation with the natives to be in full force. And a hint that the tales they told of the doings of the fairies might be explained as the effect of natural causes, only produced more assertions "of wise saws and modern instances."

Traces of the "walls" are found from 10 to 11. At 11 there is a small bit of one of the ramparts still left. It is to be observed that from 9 to 11 the line of the "walls" curves gently to the south.

From 11 the "walls" are distinctly marked along the edge of a very deep bog where large quantities of turf are now each year, as they no doubt have for centuries been, prepared for fuel.

In this bog the old 6-inch Ordnance Survey Map once more sets out a short line of "piles." And the natives tell of their having found oak "stakes" or "stabs" here with "collars" of oak fitted to them, and that "this was the way out to the country, and away through Ireland." On the 6-inch Ordnance Survey Map, dated 1836; at this spot is a bit of "piles" set out into the bog at right angles to the line of the "walls."

This bog is very deep; it is now a hollow basin, 30 feet lower than the ground inside the "walls" at 12; it is called Tonlislegh bog.

One of the few lisses in the district is on a hill in Creganduff townland, half a mile to the south of this spot.¹

We saw and measured a stump of an oak tree projecting in the boggy meadow here and found it to be 4 feet in diameter.

The fosses of the "walls" have been filled up and the ramparts levelled along the margin of this bog, but the double depressions are distinctly visible as they curve round in an easterly direction towards the foot of the hill.

The "walls" run up and over this hill to 1, in a north-easterly direction. Both fosses of this portion for 150 yards are distinct; the outer or southern rampart exists in several places, but the inner or northern rampart has been all removed. At one place a field road has been made across the "walls" by filling in the fosses.

On the descent of the "walls" towards 1, at the "Five roads," the fosses are deep and well preserved, and the whole is studded with very old "fairy-thorns."

¹ It is remarkable that there is almost an absence of the lisses, which are so common elsewhere, in the neighbourhood of this great dun. On Sheet 28 of Ordnance Survey 6-inch Map of county Armagh, there are only two.

The inhabitants of the district hold that this part of the fortifications is the peculiar haunt of fairies; they assured us that "it would be unlucky to cut down one of the thorns or so much as even a branch, and when the bridge below was being fixed three years ago Brian K—— would not let one branch be touched, and his son Owen would not lend his saw to cut a bit of one that was in the men's way. Nobody would take a chip off them thorns, and look how gay they be, and mind you, every one of them is hundreds and hundreds of years old. One night I sat up to watch the turf in the bog that was a stealing, and I saw and heard—but I would not do it again for all the turf that ever were. I sat among the bushes beyond there, and I will not tell why I wouldn't do it again. One evening we saw a funeral coming along the road from Dundalk, and it went up the rampart above there among the thorns, and they laid the corpse down and dug a grave, and put it in. The police got to hear of it, and they come and searched and searched the place everywhere but not a trace of anything did they see or find. And why should they, for sure it was not earthly. A girl who was herding the cows, and was at her sewing as she did so, saw a boy, her cousin, come along towards a gap in the fence near her. She bent her head a moment while hiding her sewing in her dress, and when she looked up, the boy was gone, and though she ran everywhere and called his name he was not there."

We asked a boy who happened to be herding cattle near the bog, had he heard of or ever seen a fairy. "I've heard of them, but I never saw one myself." "Would you like to be out at dark on the old rampart?" we inquired. "I would not like to be there by myself," was his reply.

Within the dun, on the highest point of this hill at 13, is a "Standing stone," 5 feet high, having in it several deep and curious marks like the impressions of a huge finger, which were pointed out to us as "Calliagh Beri's finger-marks." The stone is locally known as "the White Stone of Calliagh Beri," by whom the local tradition relates it to have been thrown into its present position from her lake on the top of Slieve Gullion. We found, as is mentioned by Professor Joyce in "The Chase of Slieve Gullion," in his *Celtic Romances*, that the natives of Dorsey hold to a belief in certain magical effects produced by the water of Lough Calliagh Beri. They would not tell us what would happen to anyone rash enough to bathe in it, but vaguely hinted that it would be something dreadful.

Dr. Joyce's account of the tradition is, that "Milucra, a daughter of Cuillenn, the smith of the Dedananns, who lived at Slieve Cuillinn (*i.e.* Slieve Gullion), brought all the Dedananns by a summons to meet her at Slieve Cuillinn, and there caused them to make her a lake near the top of the mountain, and she breathed a druidical virtue on its waters, that all who bathed in it should become grey."

The existence of the tradition about the "White Stone of Calliagh Beri" to a certain extent connects this dun with Cuillenn the smith, who is stated to have lived on Slieve Gullion, and given it his name. But a more unsuitable place for a residence could scarcely be found than the steep slopes of the great bleak mountain. No doubt Cuillenn lived somewhere near it, and visitors and customers or employers, whether friends or foes, coming to avail themselves of his great skill in metal work, would direct their journey towards the isolated mountain which



The White Stone of Calliagh Beri.

forms such a prominent landmark, and knew it as Sliab Cuillinn, or "Cuillen's Mountain," because not very far from its base was the abode of the artificer, while a generation later, somewhere thereabout, was the stronghold of the warrior Cuchulainn.¹

¹ O'Curry ("Battle of Mach Leana," p. 91) states that Sidh Cuillinn was the fairy mansion of the mountain Sliab Cuillinn, now Slieve Gullion, in the county of Armagh. He says that it received its name from Cuillenn Cairpthech, or the charioteer, son of the King of Britain, who was killed there by Congal Claringnech, monarch of Erin. The same author ("Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish," iii., p. 327) gives Sidh Findacha as a synonym of Sliab-g-Cuillinn. He also relates that this fairy mansion of Sliab Cuillinn was the residence of Ailean, the son of Midna, a famous chief of the Tuatha de Danann race, who was powerful enough to make an excursion into Meath, and burn Tara every year. It is told in "The Dialogue of the Ancient Men" (of Lismore) how the Palace of Tara was set on fire every November eve by this Ailean. He was accustomed to approach Tara playing one or more musical instru-

The remains of this gigantic dun at Dorsey are sufficient to demonstrate how powerful and numerous must have been the tribe or clan which required and was able to construct such an erection.

The natives now know the townland as Dorsey MacIvor, and gave "the clergy" as their authority, but they said the landlord called it "Dorsey-proper."

In Sir Charles Coote's "Survey of County of Armagh," p. 324, this fortification is mentioned:—"Near to this place (Newtownhamilton) are yet to be seen the lines of circumvallation of an encampment above a mile and a-half in circumference, where it is said the Irish army had hemmed in a large detachment of Cromwell's forces, and besieged them during an entire winter. This place is called Clogh-a-meather."¹

It is also mentioned in Lewis's "Topographical Dictionary," and in *Proc., R.H.A.A.I.*²

Most interesting and valuable notes on it are to be found in the O'Donovan MS., Ordnance Survey of Ireland, county Armagh, No. 1, dated Newry, April 22, 1835. O'Donovan says:—

"I next proceeded westwards (from Kilnasaggart, one mile north of Faughart, county Louth) to view a curious rampart in the townland of Dorsey, in the parish of Creggan.

"It resembles the Dane's Cast, except that instead of running directly across the country it forms a figure of a spheroidal form, consisting of a lofty rampart and two deep ditches. It is levelled in many places, but the peasantry point out how the ring was connected.

"It was about a mile and a quarter in the greatest diameter, and about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles in circumference.

"In the low and boggy parts of the townland the rampart was connected by means of a causeway formed of pieces of timber, morticed and connected by tenents.

"Some of the peasants say it is the work of the Danes, others hear that it was made during the *waars* of Ireland.

"The ancient road to Armagh passed through this rampart.

"The name of the townland is *óppa*, which the peasantry say signifies GATES, because there were many gates on the road passing through

ments, in such soft and soothing strains, as to throw the guards into a deep sleep, till he had accomplished his purpose, "for even women in labour, and wounded champions, would be put to sleep by the plaintive fairy music, and the sweetly-tuned strain of song which the skilful performers raised who burned Tara every year."

¹ On the map in Sir C. Coote's "Armagh" (Dublin, 1804), the "encampment" is not marked, but it gives "Dorcey's Mill," to the west of Silver Bridge, on the river "Ureagan," which enables us to identify the locality. We did not discover the existence of the name "Clogh-a-meather." This, no doubt, is Cloch-an-mhothair, "the stone of the ruined rath, or dun," and a synonym for the "white stone of Calliagh Beri."

² "Report on Ancient Monuments in the County of Armagh," by H. W. Lett.—Our *Journal*, 1883, vol. vi., p. 431.

this rampart. They sometimes call the townland *baile na nDórra*, i.e. *the town of the gates*, and sometimes *Dórra an Fcaba*, *the gates of the Fews*.

"My opinion respecting this gigantic fortification is, that it was erected by the chief of the territory for two purposes. 1. To serve as a fastness into which he might drive his cattle and convey his other property in time of war with his neighbours; and 2, to command the great and important pass into the North. That it was used by O'Neill in later times can scarcely be doubted; many leaden balls shot off the ramparts were found by the farmers."

We also heard of the finding of these bullets of lead in proximity to the "walls," but could not hear of any now in existence. Our informant as to this believed that the "ould intrinchments were made by the sojers who fired the bullets." An opinion which will have as much weight with antiquaries as that which makes out this gigantic dun to be a portion of "the Great Wall of Ullidia," commonly known as the "Dane's Cast," or *Gleann-na-muice-buibe*.¹

The district in which Dorsey is situated is connected with some of the most interesting of the ancient heroes of Ireland. It contains a small group of mountains which are partly in the counties of Armagh and Louth. Through them the Great Northern Railway now winds its iron track between Dundalk and Newry by the Moyry Pass. It may be roughly set down as twelve miles in length and seven miles in width. This was the haunt in ancient times of the sword-maker Cuillenn and of Cuchulainn the chief of the Red Branch, who lived about the date of the Christian era. Slieve Gullion, in the north-west extremity, records the name of Cuillenn the worker in metals of the Tuatha De Danaan, and Slieve Cuailgne (Cooley) in the south-east, now called Carlingford Mountain, takes its name from Cuchulainn.² The mountains known as Slieve Fuaid and Slieve Fidhe,³ from which the modern barony of Fews in county Armagh takes its name, are also in the same district, though neither is now reckoned to be within the boundaries of the barony, while Dundalk lies just within the district at its extreme south. Dr. Joyce⁴ considers that the name Dundalk "was originally applied not to the town of Dundalk but to the great fortress, now called the Moat

¹ For a full description of "The Great Wall of Ullidia," see the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vol. iii., New Series.

² The history of how Setanta received his name of Cu Culainn has been recently treated, in a romantic fashion, by Standish O'Grady, in his very readable volume, "The Coming of Cu Culainn."

³ The origin of the names Slieve Fuaid, and Slieve Cooley, is accounted for by the occurrence related by the "Four Masters," A.M. 3501:—"The battle was at length gained against the Tuatha de Dananns; and they were slaughtered whenever they were overtaken. There fell from the sons of Milidh, on the other hand, two illustrious chieftains in following of the rout, namely, Fuad at Sliabh Fuaid, and Cuailgne at Sliabh Cuailgne."

⁴ "Irish Names of Places," First Series.

of Castletown, a mile inland," which, he says, "there can be no doubt is the Dun Dealgan, or Dun-Delca, of the ancient histories and romances, the residence of Cuchulainn, and, according to O'Curry, it received its name from Delga, a Firbolg chief, who built it."¹

But large as this dun at Castletown may be compared with the ordinary duns and raths and lisses throughout Ireland, it is a mere doll's house in comparison with the dun at Dorsey. It could not have sufficed for the principal stronghold of such a chief as Cuchulainn with his numerous tribesman. It was probably a secondary fortress or outpost to protect the landing-place frequented by their boats.

Cuchulainn's principal abode must be looked for somewhere further inland. It is only a few miles to the gigantic dun at Dorsey. The heroes of those times were not so fastidious about distances as we have come to be, and Cuchulainn was fond of long excursions.

O'Curry relates that Cuchulainn made an expedition on one occasion into the county Kerry, where in Cathair Chonroi, on the river Finnghlais, to the west of the bay of Tralee, he killed Curoi Mac Daire, and returned laden with spoil, and accompanied by Curoi's wife, Blaithnaid, the daughter of Midir, king of Fírfalgia.

If Cuchulainn resided in the dun at Castletown, the question arises who owned the great stronghold at Dorsey? It is more reasonable to regard the latter as his abode, as it certainly was within his district. It is to be noted that the dun at Dorsey has in the lapse of centuries lost its appellation, for such an erection must surely at one time have been called a Dun, the appellation of Dorsey or "Gate" being merely descriptive of the position it occupied as holding the entrance into Ulidia. It would appear that Cuchulainn had several residences within his territory, for in a very curious and very ancient legend, which is a compound of Druidism and fairy lore, given in the "*Leabhar na-h-Uidhré*," it is related how the lady Emer, the most cherished of Cuchulainn's women, pined in grief and jealousy at her court at Dun-Delca. She was suffering because Cuchulainn, her husband, had fallen in love with, and had living with him the lady Fand, wife of Manannan Mac Lir, the famous Tuatha De Danann. And an account is given of the wonderful things that were done to and by all concerned. There was not room in such a comparatively small dun as that at Castletown for such events, while the great dun at Dorsey was capacious enough to have contained separate abodes for Cuchulainn and all his ladies and warriors, and their families and followers.

¹ J. O'Donovan, in "*Ordnance Survey MSS. of County Louth*," p. 47, writes:—"Dun Dealgan, i.e. the fort or fortress of Dealgan. Here the famous warrior Cuchulainn (called by Mac Pherson, in his "*Poems of Ossian*," Cuthullfen) held his principal residence. This celebrated fort has given name to the present town of Dundalk, which, in all our Irish MSS., is called *Tragh bhaile Duna Dealgan*, i.e. the strand-town near the fort of Dealgan."

O'Donovan¹ quotes an Irish story, entitled, "Toruidheacht Gruaidhe Grian Sholais," written by a native of the district of Cuailgne or Cooley, in county Louth. This distinctly mentions Slieve Fidhit and Slieve Feadha as two of the Cuailgne mountains. The following is an extract from this work:—"This district is thus situated; the noisy, fretting, wailing sea, and the flowing fierce brine on one side of it, and the lofty, towering, delightful mountain, full of white, foaming, pure-watered streams, of delightful green-sided valleys, and of smooth-skirted, waving woods on the other side." This is an excellent description of the region west of Carlingford Lough.

The territory known as Muirtheimhne comprised that part of the present county of Louth, which extends from the Cuailgne Mountains to the river Boyne, for Dundalk, Louth, Dromiskin, Faughard, and Monasterboice, are mentioned as being in it.²

The rich and fertile plain extending from Dublin to the mountains of Louth and Armagh was called, according to O'Donovan,³ *Maðbreað*, i.e. Campus Bregarum, and at the formation of Oriel that part of Moy Bra, which lies in Louth, was called *Maðcarpe Oirghiall*, or the plains of Oriel." This name arose subsequent to the formation of the Oirghiall, i.e. of the Orier county by the Clanna Rury, and the confinement of the Ulidians, or Ulstermen, to the east of the Great Wall of Ulidia, about A.D. 332.⁴

This plain appears to have had another name. In the "Annals of the Four Masters," at the year of Christ 1178, we have this entry:—"John De Courcy with his foreigners repaired to Machaire Conaille, and committed depredations there. They encamped for a night in Glenree, where Murrough O'Carroll, Lord of Oriel, and Cooley Mac Donslevy, King of Ulidia, made a hostile attack upon them, and drowned and otherwise killed four hundred-and-fifty of them. One hundred of the Irish, together with O'Hanvy, Lord of Hy-Meith-Macha, fell in the heat of the battle."

Here we have those ancient foes, the Ulidians and men of Orier, united in common cause against De Courcy, and punishing him somewhere in the valley through which flows the Glanrigh, or Glenree river, on which Newry is built.

Dr. O'Donovan's note to the above, in his edition of the "Four Masters," is as follows:—

"Machaire Chonaille, i.e. the plain of Conaille Muirthemhne, a territory comprising the level part of the present county of Louth, as appears from the ancient 'Lives of St. Bridget and St. Monenna,' and from the 'Festiology of Ængus,' and other Calendars, which place in this territory

¹ "Book of Rights," edited by John O'Donovan, p. 21.

² O'Donovan, in "Book of Rights."

³ "O. S. MSS. of County Armagh," p. 1222.

⁴ *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 1896-1897, vol. 3, pp. 65-82.

the churches of Faughart, Inniskeen, Kill Uinche, and Druim Ineas-clainn."

This district retained the name of Chonaille in the 17th century, as we learn from Archbishop Ussher, who, in his "Notices of St. Bridget and St. Monena," has the following notice of this territory:—

"Intra alterum autem a Dundalkiâ miliarium, in Louthiano comitatu et territorio olim Conayl-Murthemri et Campo-Murthemne (in quo Conaleorum gens maxime viget, de qua et ipsa Sanctissima Monenna procreata est: ut habet in libri secundi Vitæ illius initio Conchubranus) hodie Maghery Conall dicto, posita est villa Fochard, quem locum nativitatæ Brigidæ virginis habitum fuisse; et in Vita Malachiæ notavit olim Bernardum, et hodierna totius vicinæ traditio Fochardum Brigidæ eam appellantis etiam nunc confirmat."¹

The *Conaleorum gens* here mentioned were the descendants of Conall Cearnach, the most distinguished of the heroes of the Red Branch in Ulster, who flourished early in the first century of the Christian era.

According to the "Annals of Ireland"² there was a remarkable cairn on Sliab Fuaid, called Fionn-Charn na-foraire, *i.e.* "the white cairn of watching." The site of this cannot now be identified; no doubt the stones that composed it were ages ago used for building houses or the making of roads. The use of this cairn is described³ as follows:—"Cormac Connloingeas was the distinguished son of the celebrated king of Ulster, Connor Mac Nessa, who died in a fit of anger on the day of the Crucifixion of our Saviour, on learning from his druid that the Son of God was unjustly put to death that day by the Jews. The reason why Cormac Connloingeas was called the Champion of the Cairn, that is, the White Cairn of Watching, or Sliab Fuaid, was this:—At that cairn he was champion guarding his own province of Ulster." This points to the White Cairn of Watching having been near the pass into Ulster. It could hardly have been as near Newtownhamilton as some have supposed it; more likely it was somewhere near the White Stone of Calliagh Beri at Dorsey. The following passage from the "Tain Bo Cuailgne,"⁴ while not specifying the cairn, alludes to its position and use:—"Cuchulainn was nursed in the home of his father and mother in the plains of Muirthemhne, where he learned about the young warrior-knights of Emania. He longed to be with them, and at last his wishes were accomplished. And when the day came on which Cuchulainn was knighted and admitted amongst the youth of Emania (*i.e.* Navan or Armagh), he drove three times round Emania. Cuchulainn then asked his charioteer where the great road which passed Emania led to, and he

¹ Usher, "Primordia," pp. 705, 706.

² "Annals of the Four Masters," edited by J. O'Donovan, p. 26, note c.

³ "Coipanmann," MSS. T.C.D., H. 3. 18, page 594, quoted by E. O'Curry in "The Battle of Magh Leana."

⁴ "Book of Rights," edited by E. O'Curry, p. 58.

answered that it led to Ath-na-Foraire (*i.e.* the Ford of Watching) at Sliabh Fuaid. 'Why is this ford called the Ford of Watching?' said Cuchulainn. 'Because,' said Ibhar, 'there is an Ultonian chieftain constantly watching and guarding there in order that no foreigners should come into Ulster.' Cuchulainn is credited with the performance of many feats on the day upon which he first received the arms of a hero or knight at Emania, after which he set out to the border of the ancient Uladh or Ulster. And Cuchulainn said to his charioteer, 'Put pressure on the horses now.' 'In what direction?' said the charioteer. 'As far forward (*i.e.* from Emania) as the road reaches,' replied Cuchulainn. And so they drove till they came to Sliab Fuait, where they met Conall Cernach. It was to Conall, now, it happened to protect the province of Uladh that day. For one of the champions of Uladh used to take his day in turn upon Sliab Fuait, to protect anyone who came with a poem, or to fight with a man; so that it was there he would meet them, in order that none should go to Emania without being perceived."

Other copies of the "Tain" call this place "at na Popaípe, the Ford of Watchings," and add "that the champion who kept watch was bound to give combat to any hostile parties who approached Emania, and there can be little doubt that the White Watch-cairn was on the hill of old."¹

With the drying up of the old morasses by the cutting out of bogs in making fuel, and the reclamation of low-lying grounds, the fords have in this district all long since disappeared; but close to the east of the dun at Dorsey we still find a spot called Silver Ford, or Silver Bridge.

In the "Annals of the Four Masters," at the year A.D. 1607, is an account of O'Neill's adventure, in which this "Silver Ford" is distinctly mentioned:—"On the next day he went to Sraddbhaile-Duna Dealgain (*i.e.* Dundalk). He proceeded on Monday from Sraddbhaile, through Bealach-mor-an-Fhedha (the great road of the Fewes), to Bel-atha-an-Airgit (*i.e.* the town of the Silver Ford), across Sliab Fuait to Armagh."

¹ "The Battle of Magh Leana," edited by E. O'Curry, p. 58.