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**Colonisation under early
Kings of Tara**

By *PROFESSOR EOIN MacNEILL, D.LITT.*

THE occupation of Tara by the kings of Connacht is shown to have been accompanied or followed by a plantation of colonies from Connacht to hold border territories which had previously belonged to the kingdom of Emain, that is, to Ulster.* The colonised territories are stated to have “extended along the coast from Ardee to Dublin and inland along the northern frontier of Meath to Loch Ramor.” Further examination of the data will be found to indicate that the plan of frontier colonisation extended also westward from Loch Ramor to the river Shannon, forming a continuous zone of colonised borderland along the northern frontier of the kingdom of Mide between the Shannon and the Irish Sea. All the colonies in this zone will be seen to have been formed by migration from Connacht. Let us consider their names and their geographical distribution from east to west.

I. CIANACHTA. They occupied the seaboard from Dublin northward. The northern section of their territory was

* MacNeill, *Phases of Irish History*, pp. 121, 122.

named Arda Cianachta, and the branch of the Cianachta who held it was named therefrom Fir Arda, a name preserved in that of the barony of Ferrard in the south of Co. Louth.* Their territory met that of the Ulaid in the hilly district of Druimne Breg or Sliab Breg. After the Norse occupation of Dublin, beginning in 841, the Norse colony of Fine Gall displaced the Cianachta along the seaboard to the north of Dublin. Earlier, their territory appears to have extended southward to the river Liffey, for in 770 we find them raiding across the river into Leinster and cut off in their return by the rising tide,—the crossing-place being therefore a tidal ford. Tirechan shows the family of St. Benignus, who was of the Cianacht gens, dwelling near the mouth of the river Ailbine, now called the Delvin river, at the northern limit of Dublin county.

The Cianachta were also seated in northern Connacht.† The genealogies show them near akin to the Luigne, Gailenga, and Saithne.

2. SAITHNE. Their territory lay to landward of the Cianachta, and probably varied in extent according to the power of their kings, especially in relation to the Norse colony of Fine Gall. Before the Feudal invasion, their kings bore the surname Ua Cathasaigh. O'Donovan, shows the land of Ua Cathasaigh‡ containing "Villa Ogari," probably Garristown (it may be relevant to note that the surname Ua Gadhra belonged to the ruling sept of the Gailenga in Connacht), Sanctum Nemus=Holly-wood, "capella quae dicitur Grat[i]as"=Grace-Dieu, "Villa Stephani de Cruces"=Cruicerath, "Villa Macdun,"=Ballymadun, "terra Rogeri de Waspeile"=Westpals-town, "Villa Radulphi"=Raoulstown=Rowlestown, "capella Richardi La Felde,"=Fieldstown. Between the Naul and Balbriggan is "Dallyhaysy," which seems to represent *Dáil Uí Chathasaigh. These names indicate a territory in those parts of County Dublin which border on County

* Irish *ard* in topography has two meanings, a height and also a foreland. It has probably the meaning of foreland in Arda Cianachta, Arda Ulad, Ard Eolaigh. Readers who are not students of early Irish may have to accustom themselves to recognise names of persons and places in spellings which vary in successive stages of the language and in documents accordingly. Thus the name *Lóiguire* of the oldest writings becomes in turn *Lóeguire*, *Lóegaire*, *Láegaire* or *Láigaire*, and finally *Laoghaire*. *Delbne* becomes *Delbnae*, *Delbna*, and *Dealbhna*.

† *Cianachta la Luignib Condacht*, *Lecan* 459, col. 4.

‡ Note to *Book of Rights*, p. 187.

Meath. Flann of Monasterboice, a prime authority for that region, shows that the overkingship of Brega in the line of Aed Sláine was suppressed by the high-king Mael Sechnaill in 995 but held later, in Flann's time, by Garbith Ua Cathasaigh, king of the Saithne, who died in 1061. To the intervening period belong all the notices of the Saithne, except one which is later still, in the *Annals of Ulster*. It is likely, therefore, that the Saithne dynasty was raised to prominence by Mael Sechnaill as a counterweight to the line of Aed Sláine.* O'Donovan† says that the Saithne "were a subsection of the Cianachta Breagh." This may have been true politically before the eleventh century, but genealogically the Saithne were a branch of the Gailenga, descendants of the eponymous Cormac Gaileng.‡

3. GAILING, GAILENGA. One of their septs was Ui Aeda of Odba, i.e. of Navan. The Gaileng territory comprised Machaire Gaileng,—“Morgallion” barony in Meath and Slébe Gaileng, the district of Sliab Guaire in the barony of Clankee, Co. Cavan. A branch of the Gailenga called Gailenga Becca was seated in the district of Glasnevin on the north side of Dublin city. In Connacht, the baronies of Gallen in Co. Mayo and Corran in Co. Sligo represent ancient Gaileng territory.

4. LUIGNI. In the baronies of Upper Kells and Lower Kells, Co. Meath. Their territory, like that of the Gailing, may have extended into Co. Cavan.§ Like the Saithne, they have Cormac Gaileng for ancestor, that is, in genealogical tradition they were a branch of the Gailing. In Connacht, the Luigne territory is represented by the barony of Leyny, Co. Sligo. Alike in Connacht and in Meath (Brega), there was a close political bond between the Gailing and the Luigni. They had distinct dynastic lines, but the annals at times show the kings of the Luigni ruling the Gailing, and the kings of the Gailing ruling the Luigni.

5. PARTRAIGE. A branch of these, called Partraige Becca, seated at Cenannus, Kells, in Meath, is named in Táin Bó Cuailngi. The main Partraige territory was in Connacht, in the district of Loch Mask and Cong and thence westward.

* *Archivium Hibernicum* II, p. 99.

† Loc. cit. *supra*.

‡ See B.B. 195a for the pedigree of Garbith.

§ *Annals of Ulster*, A.D. 846.

6. DELBNA. Their territory in Mide is represented by the baronies of Fore, Co. Meath, and Fore and Delvin, Co. Westmeath. In Connacht, the Delbna territories were on the north side of Galway Bay and in the south of Co. Roscommon, and adjoining the latter there were also Delbna territories east of the Shannon.

7. SOGAIN. The *tricha céd* of Delbna Mór included also the Sogain of Mide.* The main habitat of the Sogain was in Connacht, in the territories of Ui Maini and Delbna to east and west of the river Suck.

8. CORCU RÓIDE. The name of their territory in Mide is preserved in that of the barony of Corkaree in Westmeath. In Irish texts it is usually found in the Middle-Irish spelling Corca Raidhe. In Connacht, the principal territory of Corcu Róide appears to have been to the east of Loch Corrib. There their nobles, all but a few, were massacred at a feast by Uatu, grandson of Diarmait (+ 833), king of Connacht, with his sons and brothers. The territory, consequently, became part of the kingdom of Ui Diarmata, wrongly identified in the index to the *Annals of Ulster* with "Kilkerrin parish, Tyaquin barony, Co. Galway."†

9. GREGRAIGE. The *tricha céd* which comprised Corcu Róide in Mide comprised also Ui Beccon, Ui Fiachrach of Cúil Fhobair, and Gregraiqe. The Gregraiqe country must therefore have been in or near the barony of Corkaree. In Connacht, the Gregraiqe dwelt in the southeast of Co. Sligo and also, as the *Tripartite Life* shows, to the east of the estuary of the Moy.

10. CONMAICNE. They occupied the part of Co. Leitrim that lies east of the Shannon, Mag Réin. In my paper on the *Tripartite Life*,‡ I propose to connect the names Mag Réin, Conmaicne Réin, with the modern names of the river Rinn and Loch Rinn. A more probable connexion is with Loch Reane, near Fenagh. The main territories of Conmaicne lay in the baronies of Ballinahinch, Ross, and Dunmore, in Co. Galway, and Kilmaine in Co. Mayo.

These ten territories occupied the whole border region of the overkingdom of Mide (including Brega) on its northern side, except in two sections. Between Fir Arda (the

* *Archivium Hibernicum*, I, p. 6.

† For an account of the acquisition and extent of this territory, see B.B. 102, a30—b11.

‡ *Eriu* XI, Part I.

barony of Ferrard, Co. Louth) and Machaire Gaileng (the barony of Morgallion, Co. Meath), there was a strip of territory now comprised in the baronies of Upper Slane and Lower Slane. This was probably the territory of the sept *Ui Segáin*, who were a branch of the *Airgialla*.^{*} Between *Corcu Róide* and *Conmaicne Réin* were the territories of *Ui Maic Uais*, represented by the barony of Moygoish in Westmeath, and *Coirbbre*, represented by the barony of Granard in Co. Longford. *Ui Maic Uais* of Mide was a sub-division of a larger *Ui Maic Uais*, also a sept of the *Airgialla* and including the sub-sept *Ui Tuirtri*. Reference to the genealogies will show that the kings of *Ui Maic Uais* named in the annals were of the *Ui Tuirtri* sub-sept, a fact which has escaped the observation of modern editors.[†] The *Ui Maic Uais* of Mide are not reckoned as a kingdom in the *Book of Rights*. There was also in Brega another branch of *Ui Maic Uais*. The territory of *Coirbbre* was held by descendants of *Coirbbre*, son of Niall of the Nine Hostages. The septs of the *Ui Segáin* and *Ui Maic Uais* were of later origin than the overthrow of the kingdom of Emain, being descendants of *Colla Uais*, and the sept of *Coirbbre* was of later origin still. All three must have come into occupation of their territories on the northern border of Mide long after the planting of the aforesaid border colonies. They were offshoots of *Dál Cuinn*, the kin of the kings of Tara, and it is not unlikely that they were superposed on earlier colonies, and that before their time the zone of colonies formed from the subject folks of *Connacht* was continuous from the Shannon to the Irish Sea. In every region under the rule of *Dál Cuinn*, in *Connacht*, Mide, Brega, the *Foch'a* and *Airgialla*, the superposition of septs of *Dál Cuinn* over the *fortuatha* or tributary peoples can be traced progressively through a long succession of centuries.

In the genealogical synthesis[‡] the *Cianachta*, *Gailenga*, and *Luigni* have a Munster origin, from *Cian* son of *Ailill Olóm*. How they came into Brega is explained by the story of the battle of *Crinna*, won by *Tadg* son of *Cian*. This story appears to have grown out of an older story.[§]

* B.B. 114, col. 6.

† For the territories of *Ui Tuirtri*, at first to the west, and later to the north, of Lough Neagh, see *Eriu* XI, p. 28.

‡ e.g. *Z.C.P.*, VIII, 303, 24.

§ *Ibid.*, 314, 8.

It fails to explain how the kindred branches occupied territories in Connacht or how the other Connacht kindreds above mentioned were likewise settled along the frontier of Mide. It may be noted that, as shown on the accompanying map, these folks are distributed widely over Connacht, but their distribution in Mide, confined to a frontier zone, is consistent with a definite scheme of migration. The story of their origin from Munster, and from the chief dynasty of Munster, may be classed among the fictions of the genealogical synthesis, exemplified also in the instance of Dál Cais.*

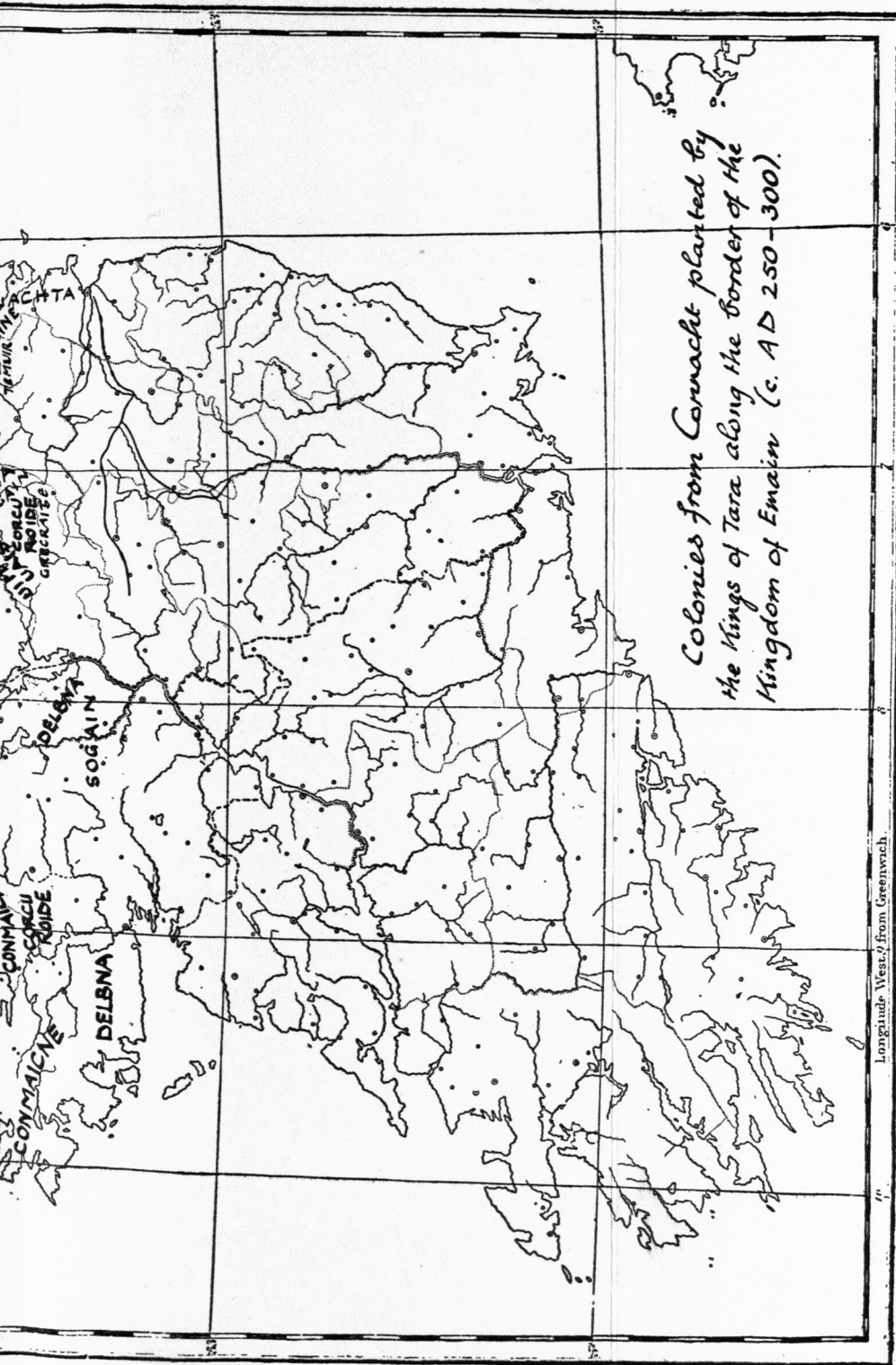
The existence of a zone of colonies from Connacht along the northern frontier of Mide adds weight and substance to the skeleton of tradition which shows the historical kingdom of Tara to have been an extension of the older kingdom of Connacht. The northern limits of this zone serve to mark the southern limits of the kingdom of Emain between the time of the occupation of Tara by Dál Cuinn and the overthrow of the kingdom of Emain, a period of three generations, or about a century, from the floruit of Cormac to the floruit of his great grandson Muiredach Tírech.†

No such zone of colonies can be traced as marking the boundary between the kingdoms of Mide and Leinster. Something like it, however, may be observed on the frontiers of Munster, protecting, as it seems, the augmented domain of the Eoganacht kings of Cashel, as the augmented domain of the Connacht kings of Tara was protected. A continuous zone of subject states of Munster faced the frontiers towards Leinster, Mide, and Connacht: the Déis Tuaiscirt on the border of Connacht, the Eli on the border of Mide and on part of the border of Leinster, Déisi Muman along the remaining part of the Leinster border.‡ We may note that, according to the genealogists, Cian, son of Ailill Olom, ancestor of the Cianachta, etc., aforesaid, was likewise ancestor of the Eli. The boundary between Mide and Leinster remained in dispute until 516 or 517, and before and after this the kings of Tara claimed Leinster as tributary territory. These facts may help to explain the absence

* *Eriu*, XI, 35-39.

† Regarding a traditional claim of the kings of the Ulaid to authority over Conmaicne Réin and Bréifne, see *Eriu*, XI, 14.

‡ As regards the Déis Tuaiscirt, its relation to Déisi Muman, and the significance of the word *déisi* in these names, see *Eriu*, XI, 35-40.



of border colonies on the southern side of Mide. The extension of the Cianachta and Gailenga along the eastern seaboard as far south as Dublin may have been designed as a safeguard against invasion by sea. In the third century, to which the plantation of these colonies may be assigned, the danger of invasion by the Romans must still have been a lively apprehension.

The Cianachta of Glenn Gemin, now represented by the barony of Keenaght, Co. Londonderry, appear to have come into that territory by way of an extension of the colonising policy of Dál Cuinn. Between them and the river Bann, on their east, was the territory of Lei or Lí, held by the Cruithin or Picts until, as a result of the battle of Móin Dairi Lothair in 563, it came into the possession of the Northern Ui Néill.

We have two accounts of this event, one in the *Annals of Ulster*, the other in Adamnán's *Vita Columbae* I, 7. The account in *AU* is as follows :—

“ Bellum Mona Daire Lothair for Cruithniu re n-Uib Néill in Tuaisceirt. Baetan mac Cinn co ndib Cruithnib nodfich fri Cruithniu. Genus Eugain et Conaill mercede conducti inna Lee ocus Airde Eolargg.”

Adamnán says that the battle, which he calls “ bellum quod dicitur Scotice Ondemone,”* was fought shortly after Columba first left Ireland, and that the victors were Ainmeri, son of Sétne, and Domnall and Forcus, sons of (Muirchertach) Macc Erce. With these, in a poem quoted at length in *AU* and composed, to judge from its metre and diction, not later than the seventh century, is associated Nainnid son of Dauí, of Cenél Conaill, the kin of Ainmeri : Domnall and Forcus (Forggus) were of Cenél Eogain. According to Adamnán, the defeated Cruithin were commanded by a king named Echodius Laib, whose son Euan, according to *AU*, died in 611.†

The account of the battle in *AU* shows scribal confusion. Its last sentence should have been originally a gloss on *Uib Néill in Tuaisceirt*. I find no other record of Báetan mac Cinn in the annals or in the genealogical accounts of the Irish Cruithin. The phrase *co ndib Cruithnib*, meaning apparently “ with two (of the) Cruithin,” is in my obser-

* Read *inde Mone* ? ‘ of the Bog.’ The old Irish genitive feminine of the article, *inna*, should go back to a somewhat older *(s)*inde*.

† His father's name in *AU* has genitive *Echach*, from nominative *Eochu*. Echodius would seem to represent nominative *Echoid*, but Adamnan gives fanciful forms in Latin for some Irish names.

vation unprecedented. I suggest that it originally stood *Báitán macc Echoch di Chruithnib*, perhaps in a crowded supplementary note, in which *c* was twice read as *ñ=nn*. Báitán macc Echoch king of Dál Araidi, the chief sept of the Cruithin or Picts of northeastern Ulster, was ancestor of the royal line of Dál Araidi.* According to the regnal list in *Laud* 610,† he succeeded Aed Brecc in the kingship of Dál Araidi. The poem cited in *AU* says that the defeated Cruithin were led by seven kings with Aed Brecc at their head. Báitán represents the southern branch of Dál Araidi. I interpret the statement in *AU* to mean that there was an internal dispute for headship between Báitán and Aed Brecc, and that Báitán called the Northern Ui Néill to his aid, the price of their alliance being the Pictish territories west of the lower Bann, Lei and Ard Eolarg. I take Ard Eolarg to be the ancient name of the territory north of Lei, projecting into Loch Febail at the place now called Magilligan Point. Under 1189, *AU* records the drowning of a headmaster of the school of Derry "between Ard and Inis Eogain." The territory should have taken its name from the foreland, later called Ard Meic Gillagáin—see above regarding the name Arda Cianachta. Not recognising that *árd* may mean a foreland as well as a height, Onom. Goed. seeks to explain "Ard Eolorg" as denoting "the *hilly* country between the baronies of Keenaght and Coleraine." A variant of the name Eolarg is found in the name Tuath Ebluirg.‡ Lei was bounded on the south by the river Bir, now called the Moyola River, and extended northward to Camus on the river Bann. The Cráeb, Fir na Cráibe, "from Camus to the sea" may be a later name for the territory of Eolarg.§ Ess Cráibe was the fall of the Bann between Camus and Coleraine, now called "the Cuts of Coleraine." The Cráeb is a kingdom under Ailech, but, its dynasty being a branch of Cenél Eogain, it pays no tribute to the king of Ailech.|| We have thus evidence that until 563 the territories north of the Moyola river, as far as the mouth of Loch Foyle, were held by the Picts. The Cianachta of Glenn Gemin, like the Cianachta of Brega, were thus a border colony of Dál

* *Z.C.P.*, VIII, 335, 14, 34).

† *Ibid.*, IX, 480, 4.

‡ Emloirge, Eolairg, Nebluirg, Nemluirg—see Onom. Goed., also under Carn Eolairg and Carrac Eolairg.

§ Onom. Goed.

|| *Book of Rights*, p. 124.

Cuinn. The first chief of the Cianachta to settle in Glenn Gemin, according to the genealogists* was Findchan, great grandson of Connla, who was the first of the sept to settle in Brega.† Whatever be the validity of these traditions, they are in accord with the times to which the two colonisations can be assigned, the time of Cormac and of his great grandson Muiredach, kings of Tara.

In a paper on "The Origin of the Tripartite Life of St. Patrick,"‡ I question the genealogical doctrine of the descent of the Corcu Ochlann sept, in the district of Elphin, from Brion, brother of Niall of the Nine Hostages. I may add here that the formula in which Corcu Ochlann is named is itself evidence of an earlier origin. Since that paper was written, I have noted a conflicting genealogical account of Corcu Ochlann. The alternative ancestor is none other than Díchu, celebrated in the history of St. Patrick :

B.B. 166b 46 : Dothfa§ mc. Aengusa mc. Er[c]a *Deirg* mc. Dichon mc. Trichim o builead Cenel Dófa* 7 Id mc. Aengusa 7 Onna mc. Aengusa 7 Corc mc. Aengusa o buil Corco Echlaind la hairt[h]er Connacht [acht] is do chlandaib|| Briain mc. Echach Muigmedóin iat ut alii dicunt.

Cenél Dobtha was the ruling kindred of Corcu Ochlann (written Corco Echlaind above). Their chief surname was Ua h-Ainli (englished O'Hanly). Id and Onna above are Ith and Hono in Tirechan's Breviarium, and so should be contemporaries of Díchu. Both accounts are equally fictitious, but they serve to show, in the case of such lines of secondary prominence, the anterior limits of authentic tradition. From the *Tripartite Life* we know that Ith and Hono belonged to a subsept of Corcu Ochland, the ruling subsept, named Cenél Maicc Erce. Macc Erce in each of the genealogical accounts becomes Erc Derg, an invention of a time when the once frequent forename (not patronymic) Macc Erce, Maqi Ercias of the oghams, had ceased to be familiar and was thought to mean the son of a father or mother named Erc.¶ This name was established

* B.B. 194b 46 and 195a 47.

† *Z.C.P.*, VIII, 314, 17.

‡ *Journal, R.S.A.I.*, Vol. LIX, part I, supplemented by an article on the *Tripartite Life* in *Eriu*, XI, part I.

§ Read Dobtha.

|| Chlandail *MS*.

¶ So, in the Index of the *Annals of Ulster*, the editor explains Macc Erce 543 or 548—the latest instance in *AU*), son of Ailill Molt, to be son of a mother named Erc, and also gives Erc as the mother of Muirchertach Macc Erce.

in the pedigree by the sept-name Cenél Maicc Erce, and was the limit of the recognised tradition, for the rival fictions make Erc son of Brion or son of Díchu, and take no account of the earlier ancestor from whom the larger sept Corcu Ochlann takes its name. The *Tripartite Life*, from the standpoint of a neighbour, describes Cenél Maicc Erce, about the end of the seventh century, as being the mightiest and firmest kindred in Connacht except the kindred of the overkings, yet we must infer that its genealogical record reaches no farther back than Macc Erce, the father of Ith and Hono and Dobtha, about the middle of the fifth century.* At that point we find "alii dicunt," the genealogical equivalent of "No Road."

I am strongly of opinion that, when we find genealogical accounts tracing to heroes of the Ulster sagas the origin of ruling or subordinate septs in Leinster, Connacht, or Munster, these accounts have usually arisen from a fixed practice of the early genealogists in substitution for older traditions of Pictish origin. There is evidence of such substitution in the case of the reputed descendants of Conall Cernach. I know of nothing in tradition, fact, or probability that would make credible an extensive emigration from eastern Ulster to various parts, including the most distant parts of southern and western Ireland in the post-heroic period, especially the migration of septs which afterwards ruled over territories, such as Ciarraige, Lóigis, Fír Maige Féne, Corcu Ochlann, etc.

II. THE COLONIAL FRONTIER OF THE KINGDOM OF TARA.†

On a blank map, I have roughly shown the position of colonies from Connacht planted in the territories bordering on the kingdom of Emain after its frontier had been pushed back as a result of the occupation of Tara by the kings of Connacht and the annexation of a belt of territory to their realm from the older kingdom of Emain. I have also indicated the territories in Connacht occupied by the parent stocks from which these colonies were drawn.

* For the date of origin of sept-names formes with *cenel*, see my paper on "Early Irish Population Groups," R.I.A. Proceedings, p. 86.

† In the present paper, two papers as originally written, are combined, with the result that there is a certain amount of repetition of details.

As the genealogies show, the septs of Ui Segain, Ui Maic Uais, and Cairbre are of later origin than the time of the frontier colonisation. They are branches of the dynastic sept of Connacht and Tara, and it is not unlikely that the positions occupied by them near the frontier were previously occupied, like the rest of this frontier region, by colonies of other Connacht septs. Connacht and the annexation of a belt of territory to their realm from the older kingdom of Emain. I have also indicated the territories in Connacht occupied by the parent stocks from which these colonies were drawn.

The Cianachta, of whom Fir Arda are a part, have no territory in Connacht recorded in the historical period, but the genealogies show them always to be of the same kin as the Luigne and the Gailenga. The Cianachta of Glenn Gemin (Keenaght barony, Co. Londonderry,) show the policy of frontier colonies continued after the fall of Emain. Their territory lay between the most northerly section of the Airgialla, Ui Maic Cairthinn in Tirkeeran barony, and the old Pictish territory of Lí or Léi, which was annexed by the Northern Ui Neill in 563.

The Connacht colonies east of the Shannon provide the best evidence of the southward limits of the kingdom of Emain in the period following the annexations by Cormac and preceding the Collas' invasion. The territories of Emain should have extended during this period to the present borders of Counties Leitrim, Longford, and Westmeath, but should have excluded a part of Co. Cavan, of undefined extent, to the north of Co. Meath, and should have included Co. Louth except the barony of Ferrard.

It is not necessary to suppose that the earthworks constructed to protect this territory coincided at all points with the territorial limits, but they should at least have had a very close relation to these. Kane's* method consisted virtually of ascertaining all traceable lines of earthwork within certain regions, and then trying to reconstruct on the map a continuous line of defence comprising all these. This method certainly set him wrong as regards the Dorsey and the Dane's Cast at Scarva. It is impossible to explain the Dane's Cast as a part of the defences of Emain, unless we suppose a hostile territory in Co. Down,

*W. F. de Vismes Kane, *the Black Pig's Dyke : the Ancient Boundary Fortification of Ula[i]dh*, Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, 1909.

and all the evidence is clearly to the contrary. In the story *Senchus Airgiall*, the country east of Glenn Rige is the final and secure refuge of the defenders of Emain, when Emain itself was lost. But the invaders also failed to conquer Muirthemne and Cuailnge. How then could the Dorsey form part of a frontier fortification? I think that the Dorsey can only be explained as a military station, a permanent camp, having the twofold strategic purpose of protecting the main approach to Emain from the south and stationing forces ready to operate on a wide section of the actual frontier at a distance.

It is not easy to understand how the Dúchnladh at Granard and the Worm Ditch at Clones could form parts of a single continuous fortified line. What I have said about the frontier colonies accords well with the position of the Dúchnladh, which extends between Loch Gowna and Loch Kinale. I have not been able to find the name of Loch Kinale in Irish, or its local pronunciation. The name strongly suggests an Irish form in Loch Cinn Fháil—"the lake at the end of the vallum." Bede gives Pen Fahel (a mixture of British Pen Gwawl and Irish Cenn Fáil) as the name in his time of the eastern end of Antonine's Vallum.

The relations of the older Breifne, later East Breifne, now Co. Cavan, to the surrounding regions are very obscure to me down to the time when the kingdom of Ui Briuin Breifni was established as a sub-kingdom of Connacht, not earlier than about A.D. 600. There is no region in Ireland about which I have been able to find so little information for the earlier periods. It must have been all comprised in the old kingdom of Emain at its full extent. It does not come into Cormac's annexation and it does not come into the story of the Collas and is not occupied by the Airgialla, though it is isolated by the Collas' invasion. There is evidence, as I have said, that the Luigne and Gailenga colonies extended well into County Cavan, perhaps they covered the baronies of Clankee and Castlerahan. Kane, in a supplementary paper to the "Black Pig's Dyke," said that he found remains of a line of earthworks having a roughly north and south direction in the district of Lavey in the middle of Co. Cavan. These might represent defences constructed after the Connacht colonisation, and if so they might just possibly form a kind of link between the Dúchnladh and the Worm Ditch. As Collingwood shows, such earthworks could only be an obstacle to raiding expeditions. Their winding length

would make them far less an obstacle to invasion in force than the Roman Walls in Britain. Much larger forces would be needed to defend them than to penetrate their defence, and their very existence along with all the other evidence points to a policy of defence against definitely superior hostile forces.

The meaning and relation of all the ancient earthworks in question cannot be properly studied without taking account of roadways. Even at present, were it not for roadways, in most parts of Ireland no armed force could make its way across country if opposed by local forces inferior in numbers but equal in armament, man for man. In ancient Ireland, abounding in woods and forests, cross-country raids or invasions would have been still more difficult. I have seen parts of the Continent where large forces with light equipment might march across the country in various directions for a hundred miles or more without using roads, but this was not possible in any part of ancient Ireland. Here no large expedition was ever made except along the line of an existing road, and no raiding expedition at a distance ever carried off its spoils except by such a line. A comprehensive study of the roads of ancient Ireland, written some years ago by Colm O Lochlainn as a post-graduate thesis, remains still unpublished. If it were published, it would supply a basis for the detailed study of the ancient roads in various regions. The amount of evidence for the mapping of the ancient roads, and not the scarcity of evidence, will be found the chief difficulty for anybody who undertakes the task.

Where there were no main roads leading from a distance and facilitating the rapid approach of large forces, defensive earthworks could serve no purpose except to prevent successful spoiling raids. So, in regard to earthworks such as the Dúncladh or the Worm Ditch, we have to inquire (1) whether there is evidence of any main road which they might have guarded, and (2) what particular territory they could protect against raids, and from what hostile neighbouring territory such raids were likely to come.

So far as my observation has gone, there are few long stretches of main road in Ireland that are not of remote antiquity. For Tirechan in the seventh century, it was a mere matter of course to tell how a party travelled in chariots from Tirawley to Tara and another party from Tara to Tirawley. The Norsemen made long raids across

Ireland from points on the coast such as Dublin and Annagassan, and got back with their spoils. The Anglo-Normans were able to make long military expeditions, but they are not recorded to have made any roads. Where we find main roads of modern construction, like the Antrim coast road, we can trace the old roads that made the connection before them.

We need the development of a special branch of Irish archæology for the study of the ancient roads, and I think that Colm O Lochlainn's work would lay a good foundation.

Regarding the Lavey earthworks, they are in the neighbourhood of a hilly tract named "Slieve Glah" i.e. Sliabh gCleath. In modern Irish *cleath* means a thin pole or wattle, but one of its old meanings is a stake of the kind used for making stockades on the top of earthworks, and I think that all the defensive earthworks, including the ordinary *dún* that protected every important homestead, were stockaded. Every Roman camp was stockaded, and stakes for the purpose were part of the impedimenta of the soldier on the march. A tract written before A.D. 750 expresses "the first people who occupied Tara" by the phrase "the first who set up stakes (*cletha*) in Tara." Cæsar tells that the Britons guarded their strongholds with stakes charred at the ends (*præustae*). Perhaps then Sliabh Cleath took its name from stockaded earthworks. The traces and position of the earthworks then should be investigated, to ascertain, if possible, which side of them was defended.

The paper on the *Vita Tripartita* cited above shows that Tirechan, a Connachtman, writing in the district of Cruachain, distinctly excludes Mag Réin, the southern part of Co. Leitrim, from Connacht. This would also exclude eastern Breifne, Co. Cavan, from Connacht. Tirechan wrote within a few years of A.D. 700. He included North Leitrim, Calraige Tremage, in Connacht. He therefore held to the traditional ancient boundary of the Shannon.

I have often argued in favour of Kane's view that the Ulster frontier, before the Airgialla invasion, ran from Loch Boderg to Loch Gowna, Loch Kinale, and Loch Sheelan, thence northward by Sliabh gCleath, until it joined the Worm Ditch at its western end, then bent eastward and south-eastward along the Monaghan-Cavan border, though I could never accept Kane's view that it turned again northward to join the Dorsey. I justified the supposed sector from south to north of Co. Cavan on the evidence

mentioned above, of an early extension of the Luigne-Gailenga colony into the eastern parts of Co. Cavan. This would imply that the kingdom of Emain, in the defensive period preceding its overthrow, had lost the eastern half of Co. Cavan but had retained control of the western half; in other words, that the kingdom of Tara had been able to seize and hold a wedge of territory with its base on the northwestern bounds of Co. Meath and its apex near Clones. However, for the reasons stated above, and until the remains of the existing earthworks are thoroughly surveyed and studied and the evidences (e.g. in place names) of formerly existing works are more fully investigated, we must be cautious regarding any minute delineation of the frontier line. Our most valuable evidence for the position of the frontier zone is to be found in the colonies which are the subject of this paper.

We have to consider the historical position of the region now comprised in Co. Cavan, as it stood in the period between the fall of Emain and the rise of the kingdom of Breifne.* The territory which in early times bore the name Breifne appears to have been co-extensive with Co. Cavan or nearly so. In the course of time, the kings of Breifne brought under their rule two smaller kingdoms, Calraige Tremaise and Conmaicne Réin, forming together the present county of Leitrim, and Breifne came accordingly to signify the whole territory now comprised in the counties of Leitrim and Cavan. The older division remained, however, and when the Breifne dynasty divided under two heads, under the respective chiefs of the families of Ua Ruairc and Ua Raghallaigh, the Cavan section remained distinct under Ua Raghallaigh, and the Leitrim section was ruled by Ua Ruairc, but often with the title of king of Breifne indicating a superior kingship over the whole region. Sometimes an Ua Raghallaigh was king of Breifne. In all the material known to me, there is an extraordinary paucity of details that might explain the origin and formation of this kingdom of Breifne. The earliest notice of it in the **Annals of Ulster* is in the year 792, and the same annal contains the latest notice of the kingdom of Calraige.

Tirechan, as I have said, writing within a few years of A.D. 700, shows that, in the tradition of the seventh cen-

* Since this was written, a beginning of the study of the early history of Breifne has been made by Mr. Michael P. Duignan in "The Uí Briúin Bréifne Genealogies," in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, June, 1934.

ture, Breifne and Conmaicne Réin were not parts of Connacht. The later kings of Breifne were of the same sept as the kings of Connacht, Uí Briuin, and were descendants of Connacht kings of the fifth and sixth centuries. Whether their line had already begun to rule in Breifne when Tirechan wrote, I have no evidence to show, but if they had, it would still be attested from the standpoint of Tirechan, who wrote in the region of Cruachain not far from Conmaicne Réin, that Breifne in his time was an external acquisition, as Wales became an external acquisition of the kings of England. The *Book of Rights*,* about A.D. 900, shows that the kings of Ulaid at that time, claiming to be successors to the ancient kings of Emain, maintained a theoretical right to the homage of Conmaicne Réin and Breifne. This shows that the older Breifne, now comprised in Co. Cavan, was traditionally part of the kingdom of Emain.† The Airgialla conquest and colonisation in the fourth century did not extend to Breifne, and consequently caused Breifne to be a detached region, a remnant of the old Fifth of the Ulaidh. At what time or by what means the Connacht sept of Uí Briuin acquired the kingship of Breifne, is not recorded in any document known to me. It should have been later than the middle of the sixth century when the Breifne line begins to branch out from the main line of Uí Briuin holding the kingship of Cruachain; and it is likely to have come about through a gradual encroachment, for the kings of Midhe and Ailech, holding alternately the high kingship of Ireland, would almost certainly have resisted any rapid and visible conquest which would have made the Cruachain dynasty a formidable rival. In fact, the dominant position acquired by the kings of Connacht in the half-century preceding the Anglo-Norman invasion can be seen to have been based in no small degree on the active support of Tigernán Ua

* See p. 246, last quatrain. Uí Briuin there signifies the Breifne sept, and not, as O'Donovan thought, Uí Briuin ar Chaill who were a sept of the Airgialla, whose relations to the king of Ulaidh, likewise theoretical, are the subject of the preceding quatrain.

† The traditional extent of the ancient kingdom of Emain is set forth in the poem cited above. It comprised Gailenga, Brega (north of the Boyne), Cuailnge, Northern Dál Araidi (under the king of Ráth Mór Maige Line) Southern Dál Araidi (under the king of Mag Coba) Tír Eoghain, Tír Conaill, Airgialla, Conaille, Uí Briuin (of Breifne), and Conmaicne. Dál Riada is not named, probably because the king of Ulaidh could not well claim the homage of a dynasty which had come to rule over the greater part of Scotland.

Ruairc, king of Breifne, who, by reason of this political advantage and the geographical position of his territory, became virtually overlord of Midhe.

Hence it appears probable that in the period immediately preceding the invasion of the Collas, the kingdom of Emain extended southwestward to a line approximately represented by the present boundary line separating Co. Cavan from the counties of Leitrim, Longford, and Westmeath, but that the Connacht colonies of Luigne and Gailenga projected from Co. Meath into the eastern half of Co. Cavan, perhaps as far north as the Co. Monaghan boundary south of Clones. Possibly a valid tradition of the extent of the kingdom of Midhe at that period is preserved in the verses cited in the tract published by Father Paul Walsh,* "from the confluence of Clones [on the north] to the confluence of Clonard [on the south]"; but, as I have said, I can find no support outside of the same tract and verses for the statement that the kingdom of Midhe extended in any sense or at any time as far as Sliabh Fuaid. This tract names as points on the boundary of Midhe for the time of Tuathal Techtmar, meaning thus the boundary between the overkingdoms of Midhe and Emain, Uachtar Achaidh ("Oughteragh," near Ballinamore, Co. Leitrim), then Druim Lethan ("Drumlane," about three miles N. by E. of Stradone, Co. Cavan), then the river Febal ("flowing southward from near Bailieborough, Co. Cavan, to Loch Ramor,") then the confluence of Clones. It will be evident to one who follows the indicated line from point to point on the map that the statement is very defective, probably because it arises from an attempt to combine other statements. It purports, however, to include within the bounds of Midhe so much of Co. Cavan as lies south of a point near Clones and east of two points on the eastern boundary of the barony of Upper Loughree. Further, Colgan is given as authority for a statement that Drumlane was on the border between the two Breifnes. Drumlane, being almost in the middle of Co. Cavan, could not be on the border between Breifne Uí Ruairc and Breifne Uí Raghallaigh. Colgan may have had knowledge of some ancient piece of topography, in which Breifne was not held to comprise the later Breifne Uí Ruairc, made up of Calraige Tremaige and Conmaicne, but was approximately

* *Archivium Hibernicum*, I, p. 3.

coextensive with Co. Cavan and was divided into two territories by a line passing through or near Drumlane. Such a line might well have divided the Luigne-Gailenga colony from the portion of Breifne which remained within the kingdom of Emain.

The tract in question furnishes additional evidence of the migration of Connacht septs to the kingdom of Midhe. The *tricha céd* which included Delbna Mór (the barony of Delvin) included also a branch of the Sogain, a Pictish tribe known also as Senchenél "the ancient kin," inhabiting the plain of the river Suck. The *tricha céd* which included Corcu Róide (the barony of Corkaree) and Ui Fiachrach ('on the shore of Lough Derrevaragh near Castlepollard") included also Ui Becon and Gregraije. The territory of the Gregraije sept in Connacht was partly in the barony of Coolavin, Co. Sligo, and partly on the eastern side of the Moy estuary in the same county—it was there, according to the *Tripartite Life*, that St. Patrick and Tirechan's ancestor Conall were attacked with stones by the Gregraije.

Since *tricha céd* is fairly certain to denote a continuous territory, it may be of service to set out here the thirteen *tricha céds* of which, in this tract, the kingdom of Midhe is said to have consisted.

1. Fir Cell ("the baronies of Fercal, Ballycowan, and Ballyboy") and Cinél Fhiachrach ("barony of Moycashel"). The barony of Fercal is also named Eglis.

2. Dealbhna Eathra ("barony of Garrycastle").

3. Cuircne ("barony of Kilkenny West").

4. Ui Maic Uais ("barony of Moygoish") and Ui Tigernáin ("in the barony of Magheradernan") and Cinél nEnda ("barony of Rathconrath") and Delbhna Beg ("barony of Fore, Co. Westmeath").

5. The Bredach ("between Clonard and Kinnegad") and Fir Bile ("barony of Farbill") and Fir Thulach ("barony of Fartullagh").

6. Crích na Cétach ("O'Fallon's country, in the barony of Warrenstown, King's Co., and parish of Ballinabracky, Meath diocese").

7. Corca Raidhe ("barony of Corkaree") and Ui Becon (of uncertain location) and Ui Fiachrach ("on the shore of Lough Derrevaragh near Castlepollard" in the barony of Fore, Westmeath,) and Gregraije (of uncertain location).

8. Magh Asail ("barony of Moyashel").

9. Delbna Mór ("barony of Delvin") and Sogain (of uncertain location, but in the same *tricha céd*).

10. Caille Fallamhain. (Father Walsh questions O'Donovan's statement "that C. F. is near Russogh in the barony of Moygoish"; with good reason if the territory of C. F. amounted to a *tricha céd*.)

11. Gailenga ("the barony of Morgallion [=Machaire Gaileng] retains the name") and Luigne ("held an extensive territory north of the Blackwater in Co. Meath") and Saithne ("held extensive territory in Bregia in East Meath").

12. Cairpre ("barony of Granard").

13. Tethba (Father Walsh says that "Northern Teffia is here meant, north of the river Inny"), and Bregmaine ("barony of Brawney . . . there was a Magh Bregmaine near Ballymahon in Co. Longford").

The text expressly excludes "the five *tricha céds* of Brega," which it does not name. It will be noted that the Midhe of these thirteen *tricha céds* (with the addition of Brega containing five *tricha céds*) is not the Midhe described by boundary points in the beginning of the same tract—it does not include Conmaicne Réin, and it does not extend northward to near Clones or to Sliabh Fuaid. I think that the Midhe which is said to have extended so far north is an imaginary region that existed only in some story of Tuathal Techtmar, for, so far as my reading has gone, we have nothing to indicate that any of the kings of Tuathal's line who succeeded him abandoned any part of the territories of Midhe. The list suggests that some of O'Donovan's identifications require still further revision. These, in some instances, make a *tricha céd* consist of a single barony or less, in others, of two, three, or four baronies. In Midhe especially, there is no such disparity of barren and fertile districts as in other parts of Ireland, to account for large differences in the extent of the *tricha céd*. It seems improbable or at least demands explanation, that one *tricha céd* should comprise the baronies of Fore and Rathconrath, Moygoish and Magheradernan, extending almost from end to end of Westmeath, and that the barony of Corkaree, situate in the middle of these, should form another *tricha céd*; and again that only two *tricha céds* should be indicated in Co. Longford, the single barony of Granard forming one of them. The identifications do not

account for the barony of Clonlonan in Westmeath. If the barony of Morgallion is included in Midhe and not in the five *tricha céds* of Brega, the barony of Fore or Demifore in Co. Meath should also have been part of Midhe. If Saithne formed part of the *tricha céd* which included Morgallion, it cannot well have been where O'Donovan places it, in Fine Gall. O'Donovan's great work in the study of ancient Irish topography is not free from grave errors in detail. He was sometimes misled by mere verbal semblances and sometimes failed to make allowances for changes in successive periods. On the other hand, the tract under discussion may contain inaccuracies. It is, however, a document of very great importance, and Father Paul Walsh, with his unequalled knowledge of the regional topography, would confer a boon on students of Irish history if he would thoroughly revise the identifications proposed by O'Donovan and furnish this text with a commentary showing how far it provides or fails to provide a complete account of the ancient territories of Midhe and their grouping under the denomination of the *tricha céd*.

I have endeavoured to show that, in the archæological study of the northern earthworks, as to their purpose and significance, chief regard must be had to the political developments that can be traced in the northern half of Ireland within a fairly defined period. This period begins with the occupation of Tara by the kings of Connacht and ends with the overthrow of the kingdom of Emain by the three Collas, grandsons of one of the Connacht kings of Tara. We have no assured basis for the dating of these events, but the evidence points to A.D. 250 and A.D. 350 as approximate limits of the period in question. In the same period, Irish raiding attacks on Roman Britain begin, leading in time to the settlement of Irish colonies at various points along the western British seaboard. These raids and colonies were partly a result of displacements in Ireland, due to internal conquests of territory, (e.g. the Déisi migration to Demetia), but partly also to expeditions directed and sometimes led by the kings of Tara and of Munster—piratical expeditions to acquire slaves and booty, like the Norse and Algerine expeditions in later times. They appear to have led to a further development of militant conditions in Ireland by familiarising the Irish with certain features of the Roman military regime in Britain. In particular, the abnormal institution of per-

manent military forces, the Fiana, under professional military chiefs, is seen to flourish in Ireland about this time.

Having got possession of the fertile midland region from the Shannon to the Irish Sea, the new dynasty of Tara adopted a steady policy of crushing the once powerful kingdom of Emain, and they achieved this in successive stages. Emain almost throughout is seen to be on the defensive against superior military power. The first main stage is the forcing back of the southern frontier of Emain and the plantation of colonies from Connacht in the territories thus annexed to Midhe.

The northern bounds of these colonies, where they can be ascertained, indicate the new frontier line. Their southern bounds, however, may not be equally indicative of the old frontier line, for the whole midland region was land of conquest and might be colonised afresh. The aims of the kings of Tara would be (1) to occupy the territories annexed from Emain with colonists capable of holding them, and (2) to provide the new colonies with lands sufficient to make them powerful, whether inside or outside of the older frontier.

The planting of these colonies should have followed immediately on the annexations, and may be assigned to the second half of the third century, 250–300. The natural sequel was a period of border raids on both sides. This led to the construction of long lines of earthworks, of which the special function was to make raiding risky and unprofitable. I think it likely that the example was found in the Roman Walls of Britain.

I think that it may be necessary to suspend the hypothesis that such earthworks formed part of one coherent scheme (in the engineering sense) of frontier defence. They could even have arisen from a single plan and policy, in the political sense, without having been worked out in structural continuity. There is no reason to suppose that autonomous tuatha, as in the later period did not exist throughout this early period. In the *Cu Chulainn* saga-cycle, a king of Fernmag, Eochu mac Luchtaí, is fairly prominent, his kingdom forming part of the overkingdom of Emain. The plan of defensive works adopted by a king of Fernmag might or might not be adopted by his neighbours in Muirthemne or Breifne. The superior king in Emain might or might not have the purpose or the power of imposing a single plan of defensive works on all his border

tuatha. Kane's tacit assumption of a single scheme of defence along the whole border is apt to induce us to ignore the probabilities. Like causes lead to like effects. The example of the Dúchladh could inspire the construction of the Worm Ditch or vice versa, the option probably belonging to the local territorial rulers and people. This would explain why such fortifications do not enter into the traditional accounts of the long struggle between Tara and Emain. If, on the contrary, a king of Emain had issued and been able to enforce an edict for the fortification of the entire frontier, this would have shaped a great single event of a kind which would strike the imagination of the people in its own time and afterwards, and would be likely to find a place, in an imaginative and exaggerated form, in national as well as regional tradition. We might also expect to find one name, at all events in literature, to designate the structure in all its parts. We might expect, for example, to read something of this kind: "Fiachra Araide reigned in Emain for n years. His fortress-builder was Clethchor son of Classach. He it was who dug and fortified Clad Ulad from Snám Dá En on the Shannon to Linn Luachainne in Muirthemne." If we find nothing of the kind, it may be because the fortifications were of piecemeal origin for the defence of their several localities, not the outcome of a single design and a single combined execution. We may be on a wildgoose chase in seeking to reconstruct a structural unity which may never have existed.

Again, if we revert to the position created by the frontier colonies, we may be carried away by the notion that, because the kingdom of Emain was manifestly on its defence against a recognised military superiority, therefore all defensive earthworks that can be traced as having relation to the frontier were constructed to defend the territories of Emain. The very fact of the plantation of frontier colonies indicates that the struggle had come for that time to a kind of equilibrium and standstill. Hostilities on a grand scale were suspended, but a state of potential warfare must have existed all along the border as in later times around the English Pale. In this state of things, the need for protection against raids would not have been confined to one side, and the means that were found effective on one side may well have been adopted on the other side. It should therefore be advisable, in the case of every stretch of earthworks that can be traced, to

examine whether their structure or position shows evidence of the direction from which hostility was expected.

In conversation with Mr. Kane, while he was engaged in the investigation of these earthworks, I learned from him that he had discovered an artificial embankment at Drumsna but on the Leitrim side of the Shannon. In my paper on the *Vita Tripartita*, I identify Drumsna (Druim Snámha) with Snám Dá En, where St. Patrick is said (as in Tirechan's Breviarium) to have crossed the Shannon from Mag Réin to Mag Glass. Mr. Kane afterwards published a description of the Drumsna earthwork.* He described it to me as a semicircular embankment with the ends of the arc at the riverbank. I asked him if there was a large gap in the middle of the arc. He said that there was, and added "But what made you think of that?" I said that such an earthwork must have been made to guard a ford, a guarded ford implied a road, and the purpose of the earthwork should have been to command the road, not to close it, therefore a gap should have been left in the embankment. This fortification was on the Leitrim side and was therefore constructed to enable the Connacht forces to hold the approach to the ford against attack from the northeastern direction. I mention this to show that in the long struggle between the kingdom of Emain and the Connacht and Tara dynasty the need for defensive earthworks may not always have been confined to one side, even though that side was in the main the losing side and the defensive side.

"The five *tricha céds* of Brega." This cannot mean all Brega, which comprised much more than five *tricha céds*.† Brega comprised all Co. Meath and the eastern seaboard from Dublin to the northern boundary of Ferrard barony, probably the most populous region in Ireland. I think that the text had in view only the territory added from Ulster to the kingdom of Tara, i.e. between the Boyne and Blackwater and the later boundary of Airgialla, which should have amounted to about five *tricha céds*. On the other hand, the text assigns to Midhe and not to Brega the territories of Gailenga, Luigne, and Saithne, and makes of these a single *tricha céd*. I know no other ancient writing

* *P.R.I.A.*, XXXII, chap. 20.

† See my *Irish Population Groups*, p. 107, showing 10 *tricha céds* each in Cenel Conaill, Cenel Eogain, Ui Maine, and Déisi Muman.

that puts these outside of Brega. They form that very part of Brega which is described in *Táin Bó Cuailnge* as visible from the cairn on Sliabh Monduirn. For this and other reasons, I think that the account of the *tricha céds* of Midhe in Father Walsh's text requires a critical examination before we can accept it as a safe authority. The Brega of this text may be the revived kingdom of Brega under Ua Cathasaig, king of Saithne.*

* See my edition of Flann's poems, *Archivium Hibernicum*, II, p. 99.

