ON THE
MANNERS AND CUSTOMS
OF
THE ANCIENT IRISH.

A SERIES OF LECTURES

DELIVERED BY THE LATE
EUGENE O'CURRY, M.R.I.A.,
PROFESSOR OF IRISH HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND;
CORRESPONDING MEMBER OF THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF SCOTLAND, ETC.

EDITED, WITH
AN INTRODUCTION, APPENDICES, ETC.,
BY
W. K. SULLIVAN, PH.D.,
SECRETARY OF THE ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY, AND PROFESSOR OF CHEMISTRY TO THE
CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, AND TO THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SCIENCE.

VOL. II.
LECTURES, VOL. I.

WILLIAMS AND NORRAGE,
14 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON,
AND 20 SOUTH FREDERICK STREET, EDINBURGH.
W. B. KELLY, 8 GRAFTON STREET, DUBLIN.
SCHIIBER, WELFORD, & CO., NEW YORK.
1873.

[All rights reserved]
OF MILITARY EDUCATION IN ANCIENT ERINN.

ceeded to muster the men of the northern half of Erinn, (that part known as Leath Chun, or Conn's Half); and at their head he marched into Leinster, penetrating as far as the Cumbhrais above mentioned, on the bank of the Bearbha.

The king of Leinster, who knew that he was to expect nothing less than such an invasion, was not idle in the meantime. He held at once a meeting of the chiefs of the province, to deliberate on the best course to be pursued in case of the advance of an army so much superior to his own as that of the monarch of all Erinn, to make an attack on him at his own door. The determination at which they arrived was, to invite Finn Mac Cumhail and his Fianna to the cause of the monarch to which service he was bound, and to join his forces to those of his immediate countrymen, (Finn being himself a Leinsterman), against the alleged unjust demands of the chief king. Breasal accordingly set out immediately to wait upon Finn, whom he found at his residence, at a place called Rinn Dubhain, on the east side of the river Bearbha, some distance below Teach Moling, (now Saint Mullin's, in the county of Carlow). There he received a hearty welcome, and at once proceeded to communicate to Finn his distress and the object of his visit, telling him that no person hated impost more than himself, and he then addressed him in the following verses:

"O Find! wilt thou come in friendship?
Wilt thou and the Leinstermen be of one accord?
If thou wilt come, arise! give battle
To the powerful hosts of Tara.

"Hast thou heard of the oppressive tribute
Which is carried from us to Conn's Half?
Thirty cows and nine thousand,—
Of beautiful Cows of one age.

"Hast thou heard how the men of Leinster
In crowds have fallen on the battle-plain?
Or hast thou heard that twenty kings
Have fallen for the first evil deed?"

"Oh! my inmost heart will burst
If I retort not my lofty pride
Upon the fierce, haughty Caireb Liffechoir.

"Woe is he who attempts the sea without a ship!
Woe is he who descends from a high to a low position!
Woe the house that is divided in two parts!
Woe that a noble race should be contemned!"

The first battle of Rath Hair.

"O son of Cumhail of renowned deeds!
Array thyself, and let us begone;
Grasp ye your arms with pleasure;
And arise, ye Fianna of Fin!—O Fin!"

Finn arose at once after this address, the eloquence of which seemed to have been irresistible, and accompanied by such of his Fianna as happened to be then about him, he marched northwards, keeping the river Bearbha on his left hand, until they reached Ros Broc, (in the ancient name of the place now called Saint Mullin's, in Carlow). Here resided three fellow pupils of Finn, the three sons of Conga, whose names were Moling the Swift, Ceallach, and Breas; and from them he received a hearty welcome. Having explained to those friends the cause of his march, and his intention to join the king of Leinster against the monarch, he was pressed by Moling the Swift, the eldest of the three brothers, not to hazard an attempt with his then small party to face the monarch with the muster of all the northern half of Erinn at his back. Now the number that Finn had with him at this time was fifteen hundred men, with an officer to every thirty of them. Therefore, when Moling the Swift saw that Finn's high spirit had got the better of his judgment, he begged of him to remain where he was at least until he had summoned the remaining part of his Fianna to his presence, who were dispersed over their native districts through the island, apparently in a way not unlike that in which a modern militia, disbanded during the pleasant times of peace, are scattered amongst the population of the country until the time comes for being called out again on the approach of war. Moling at the same time addressed Finn in a very curious poem (of thirty-one stanzas), offering the hospitality of his house until his troops had gathered around him from their different localities. And this account is particularly interesting, because in the
poem the writer names many of these localities, as well as of the chiefs and captains of the troops dispersed among them, such as Agurnn of Magh Echh, (in the west of Donegal); Dic­
choll of Druim-da-Chener; Donn Mac Doghar of Magh Adhair, in the present county of Clare); Caeman at Sliaob Crot, (on the borders of Limerick and Cork); Aedh, from the banks of the Boyne; Dubh from Druim Dael立; Lugard van Geind, (chiefs who are not named in connection with any particular place); Island, from Lethe (in Kerry); Garad, from Askeaton, in the county of Limerick; Breasal, the grandson of Baiscen, Finn's own brother, from Leinster; Crimthann and Dithrabh-ech, from the same country; Maelerund, from Creamhealaid; Maelugra; Flathachins the Valliant; and Cuan the Victorious, from other places, etc. And so Molling goes on to name the various Fein­nian chiefs.

Finn followed the advice of Molling, and delayed at the resi­dence of his friend, until all the captains whom he had sum­moned came up to him with their troops. As soon as all were assembled, he reviewed his little army, and then set forward to the place where he had heard the monarch was encamped; and this was at Rath Inilt, which was also called the Gathbhtadhmac, that is, the "Cruel Grave" of the two daughters of the monarch Tuathaí, who were here buried, at their death, two hundred years before, but whose bodies (we are told) were soon afterwards ex­humed by their valiant father and interred by him at Finncharn, or the "White Heap" (among the Fagan sepulchral mounds in the vicinity of New Grange on the left bank of the river Boyne).

Finn and his troops rested for the night at the Garbhthamhnach; and early on the following morning they marched to the en­campment of the king of Leinster, which was in the immediate neighbourhood. Both leaders then went forward at the head of their respective forces to Cnambahros, where those of the monarch Cairbre Liifechairs were drawn up in order of battle.

A hard and equally-well-contested battle was fought then between both parties. The monarch's forces, however, found themselves unable to withstand the vehement valour of the Leinstermen and their allies, and they were forced to give way and retreat in all directions, leaving, it is said, nine thousand men dead on the field of battle, as well as the monarch's three sons themselves, namely, Ecraidh, and Ecraidh Domlenn, and Fiacha Srathlenn.

The time of this battle of Cnambahros is not given by the An­nalists, and we have little to say farther of Finn Mac Cumhaill and his warriors till the battle of Ghabhra, which was fought in the year 284.

After this revolt of Finn Mac Cumhaill against the monarch, Cairbre Liffeachair, he lost all trust for ever in the fidelity and loyalty of the Fianna, and his confidence was transferred to Aedh Caemh, (Hugh "the beautiful"), of the Clanna Morna, captain of the Connacht Fianna, a brave hero, to whom the monarch then gave the chief command, not only of his own contingent, but also of such new levies or recruits as he might deem proper to add to their ranks.

It is recorded in the Annals of the Four Masters, at the year 283, that Finn MacCumhail was killed by Aichleach, son of Dubhedubh, at Ath Brea, on the Boyne.

There was at this time a violent feud existing between the Monarch Cairbre and Mogh Corb, son of Cormac Cas, king of Munster (the ancestor of the Daleassians of Thomond). This Cormac Cas had been married to Samair, the daughter of Finn Mac Cumhaill, by whom he had three sons, namely, Finn, Conna, and Mogh Corb; and when the estrangement took place between the monarch and Finn, and after the death of the latter, this Mogh Corb took his uncle Oisin the poet, who succeeded his father as commander of the Fianna, into his confidence and pay, together with his men. The Clanna Morna, who were now the monarch's favourite standing army, had long been jealous of the important hold which the Clanna Baiscen, that is, Finn Mac Cumhaill's clan, had so long held in the country, and being now in the monarch's favour, they induced him of the Fianna under the command of his uncle Oisin, he marched straight towards the seat of monarchy itself, and threatening the very household of the chief king, he encamped at Gabhra Aiitel (now the hill of Skreen, near Tara). To this place the monarch came out against them, and a fierce battle ensued.

Among the slain in this battle was Oscar, the famous son of Oisin, who was killed by the cast of a spear (cast from on horse-back, it is curious to observe), by the monarch Cairbre. Cairbre himself at the same time received a wound from Oscar; and he was soon after slain on the field of battle by Simeon the son of Corb, a warrior of the people of North in Leinster. Of the brave band of the veteran Fianna, who so often fought and won under the command of Finn Mac Cumhaill, and his father and grand­father, scarcely one survived the fatal battle of Gabhra[26].

[26] Some of the incidents of this battle are related in an ancient poem as...
It does not appear, as far as I can discover, that the Fianna Eireann, or Irish Militia, were ever afterwards embodied or maintained under the same conditions as formerly, after the death of Finn and Oscar and the fatal issue of the battle of Gabhra.

It would serve the purpose of these lectures but little to enter into any minute accounts or enumeration of all the other references to the existence of a permanent central military force in Ireland, supported under the direct control of the monarch, and for national purposes. Many such allusions are to be found; and all bear upon the existence of a regular military system, the nature of which can best be realized in the example already given of the institution in its best time, that of the Fianna of Finn and of Mac Morna. Nor was this system confined to the support of a central army or national militia; for there are abundant references to be found to the existence of a similar organization under the provincial and even minor kings, for the defence of each province and smaller division of the country.

A few instances of the employment of a regular army by the kings of Erin, an army commanded by professional officers, and organized in a permanent manner, may here be given, to prove that the institution by no means disappeared after the disaffection and destruction of the Fianna.

We have it on record in the Book of Ballymote, in a very ancient tract, that Niall, "of the Nine Hostages", who reigned as monarch of Erin from A.D. 979 to 405, sent an organized army into Munster; that this army fought a battle at Cuanraiadh, (now Kenry, in the county of Limerick), where they defeated the Munstermen, and returned with fifty hostages from among the nobles of that province; and that this army was commanded by Fachla, who was the monarch's own brother, as well as his "Tuatha Sidhe Catha", (Leader of his army in battle)—an office, apparently, such as that which we should now call "Commander in Chief", or "Commander of the Forces".

Again, we find, in an ancient tract, quoted in a former lecture, that the monarch Diarmaid, son of Ferghus Carbhtha, who died A.D. 558, had sent his stewards and his Fianna or standing army all through the country to collect his tributes, ceded to Osian, and preserved in the old Book of Lecoster, which has been lately published, with an English translation, by the "Ossianic Society," together with part only of another poem, much more modern indeed, but still ancient, on the same subject: and I may add that my learned friend the [late] Rev. William Hamilton Drummond, (the librarian of the Royal Irish Academy), has also lately published a spirited but very free translation in verse of the whole poem, in his "Ancient Irish Minstrelsy."

No instances of a regular army in Ireland after the battle of Gabhra:

Battle of Kildare:

Finn under king Diarmaid:

Fianna, or Mercenaries:

Ambuia, or Mercenaries:

Ambuia, or Mercenaries:

Instances of a regular army in Ireland after the battle of Gabhra:

To enforce the laws, and to maintain ancient important social customs; and this, it will be remembered, was the indirect cause that led to the abandonment of Tara as the royal residence of the monarchs of Erin ever since his reign.

And again, from the poem already quoted, on the death, in the year 454, of Raghallach, son of Ouchach, king of Connacht, we find him marching with the whole conclave of people who attended at the ancient public games and sports of his palace of Cruachan, in pursuit of the Ulstermen who selected that great day to enter his province for the purpose of plunder. And among this great concourse, the king's Royal Guard of a thousand regular soldiers was not the least important body, as may be seen from the following stanza of the poem:

"His royal Mercenaries around Raghallach:
Ten hundred champions with their shields;
The front of battle was theirs to maintain;
There was the first spear in the conflict*."

One thousand regular professional soldiers, who constantly attended on the king's command, and had their chief residence at his court, formed no trifling force at this remote time.

And lastly, we find in the detailed account of the battle of Almhain, (now the Hill of Allen in the county of Kildare), fought in the year 718, between the monarch Fergal Mac Maelduin, and the men of Leinster, that the monarch was killed there, with six thousand of his Ambuia or "Mercenaries", and a great number of the northern chiefs and warriors.

This was one of the last great battles which arose out of that long and fatal cause of domestic warfare, the Boromean Tribute. The monarch Fergal, who then resided at the provincial palace of Aileach, (near Derry), spent a long time in collecting a sufficiently strong force with which to march into Leinster to demand the Boromean Tribute, which if not paid him voluntarily, he was determined to raise by force from the king of Leinster, Murchadh, son of Brian Muirr. He set out on his march at length; but having employed bad guides, they led him through the most rough and difficult roads and passes of the country, until after much toil and fatigue they found themselves at last in the neighbourhood of Cluain Dolcain, (now Clondalkin in the county of Dublin), and here they pitched their camp in the immediate vicinity of the church.

See ante, p. 343.

*original - Reg aed corcor, mea cora recor; corpe corde corpo; corno e corcor, e corcor.

100, according to other accounts.