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# The Érainn or Érna.

By LIAM Ó BUACHALLA.

As has been shown in a former article,<sup>1</sup> a section of the Érainn or Érna was included in the Féine Temrach—that is, the settlement of Goidels in the Tara district,—but from very early times the main portion of that people-group was located in Munster. Thus, the common term, Érna Muman. This group is also known in the epic tales and genealogies as Clann Dedaid, from Dedad, its deity ancestor. All early authorities agree that the entire group was at first settled in Leath Chuinn, or the northern half of Ireland, evidently about the lower reaches of the Boyne, in Meath and southern Ulster. These authorities also agree that a large portion of this group was driven into Munster at an early period by the Ulaid, or Ulstermen. This latter section was firmly established in Munster at the period of the Táin, that is, about the early part of the first century, A.D. The other portion remained in Meath—in Airther Breg, i.e., the coastal district between Dublin and Drogheda—until the third century, at which period it, too, migrated to Munster.

According to the early histories of the Érna, there were originally two great divisions: the Dál mBardine and the Dál Céde (Céte, Céide). Like most other great people-groups, each of these two divisions later broke up into a number of subdivisions, each bearing a separate name, and in early historical times the terms Dál Céde and Dál mBardine had all but become obsolete. The few paragraphs in the genealogies which group the Érna into Dál mBardine and Dál Céde divisions are included only as antique survivals.

This older portion of the Érna genealogy which appears at *Book of Lecan*, 242, *Book of Ballymote*, 139, etc., commences as follows: "Twelve chief septs (aíme) of the Érna and twenty-four subdivisions (forsloinnte), i.e., two subdivisions with each sept. The Dál Céde (i.e., the race of Céde, son of Dedad) consisted of twelve septs . . . The Dál mBardine, (i.e., the race of Aengus, son of Eochu, son of Bardine, son of Rigbard, from whom are the Martene) consisted of eleven septs after their extermination from Leath Chuinn, for until then it was an equal division between Dál Céde and Dál mBardine. For it was ten battles that the Érna won over the Ulaid and seven battles the Ulaid won over the Érna." This account indicates that it was the Dál mBardine section of the Érna that was first driven into Munster and that it was driven out of the northern half of Ireland by the Ulaid. Keating, in his *Forus Feasa ar Éirinn*, quotes the tenth century *Psalter of Cashel*, which says that the Érna first went to Munster in the time of Duach Dalta Deghadh and that the occasion of their settling there was the superior forces of the Clann Rudhraighe (i.e., the Ulaid), who routed them in eight battles and expelled them to Munster, where they were

<sup>1</sup> "The Féine or Goidels," *J.C.H.A.S.*, XLIX (1944), 28.

powerful until the time of Mog Nuadat (*i.e.*, the time of the rise of the Eoganachta to power). The Dál mBardine lands in the northern half of Ireland probably lay adjacent to those of the other Érna peoples who remained behind until some time in the third century, that is, Eastern Breg or the district between Tara and the sea. MacFirbis in his *Book of Genealogies*, p. 380, quotes an ancient source which connects the Dál Fiatach of the Ulaid with a branch of the Dál mBardine. The main portion of the Dál Fiatach was in early historical times located around Sliab Breg and Collon in the southern part of Co. Louth. Taking these considerations into view, it seems probable that the Dál mBardine were originally located about the Boyne, near Drogheda.

We will next deal with the subsequent history of the Dál mBardine in Munster. A note from some ancient source quoted by MacFirbis (*Book of Genealogies*, p. 369) says that the Dál mBardine consisted of the Clann Fir Cédne and the Clann Fuithe mhic Dedaid. I do not know who the Clann Fir Cédne were, as there seems to be no second reference to that sept, but references to the Clann Fuithe are, however, numerous and indicate that most if not all the groups belonging to the first Érna settlement in Munster belonged to that subdivision. The few short scraps of the genealogy of the Clann Fuithe<sup>1</sup> at *Book of Lecan*, 242, 454, etc., name Fuithe, or Eochu Fuithe, son of Dedad, as ultimate ancestor. The most important personage in the early part of this genealogy is Caithear mac Eterscéil "by whom Dún Cermna was made." The fort called Dún Cermna<sup>2</sup> was on the Old Head of Kinsale. At *Lecan*, 454, it is stated that there were three subdivisions of the descendants of Caithear mac Eterscéil (that is, of the Clann Fuithe), *viz.*, (1) the Érna of Dún Cermna "who are the most distinguished." (2) The Corca Duifne or Duithne and (3) the Érna Mór Meadon Muman, that is of Mid Munster.

We have already alluded to the Érna of Dún Cermna. In some of the genealogies and histories the people of Dún Cermna retain the more ancient name of the great branch of the Érna to which they belonged, under the form of Corco Bardine.<sup>3</sup> Another place connected with the Clann Fuithe on the south coast was Ard Nemid, which was on the Great Island in Cork Harbour, and about fourteen miles north-east of Dún Cermna. This was the home of the Clann Fuithe chieftain, Nemed mac Sroibcinn.<sup>4</sup> Nemed will again be mentioned later, as he played a prominent part in the third century struggle between the Érna of Munster and their conquerors—the Eoganachta.

The second branch of the Clann Fuithe mentioned in *Lecan*, 454, was the Corco Duifne or Duithne. This sept must not be confused with the Corco Duibne, a well-known Érna sept which settled in West Kerry at a later period. The only information we have of the Corco Duifne of the Clann Fuithe is, that they were located in what was later Muscridge Tíre, that is,

<sup>1</sup> Compare the Vodiae mentioned by Ptolemy. Ptolemy (c. 140 A.D.) puts a people named *Ieurna* (undoubtedly Érna) in West Munster. East of the latter he places the Vodiae, and a headland here he terms *Vodium Promontorium*.

<sup>2</sup> For a full history of that fortress see *J.C.H.A.S.*, XLIV (1939), 16–20.

<sup>3</sup> MacFirbis, p. 535; LL., 324.

<sup>4</sup> See LL., 292 and MacFirbis, 380.

the baronies of Ormond about Nenagh in the northern part of Tipperary. The *Calendar of State Papers* (1284) mentions Corco Dofeney in Ormond.<sup>1</sup> From another source we learn that (Corco) Duithne in Muscrige was occupied by a vassal sept called the "Tuath Cathbarr ocus Carra." They also occupied the adjoining Éile (about Thurles and Roscrea), and (Corco) Oiche.<sup>2</sup>

The third division of the Clann Fuithe was the Érna Mór of Meadon Muman or Mid-Munster. Although we have no second reference to this sept under the above name, there seems to be little doubt that it is the great Mid-Munster Érna people of the earlier period—the Dairfine (or Dairine), that is referred to here. This is the leading people of the Érna of Munster in the Táin epic—in it their great warrior is Cúroi mac Daire, and their fortress was at Temair Luachra on the eastern slopes of Sliab Luachra on the Limerick-Kerry border.<sup>3</sup>

When the genealogies were given a standard form, in the period extending from the tenth to the twelfth century, the old method of dividing the Érna into two main divisions—Dál mBardine and Dál Céde—had become obsolete. In setting out the genealogy of the Érna in the new fashion, the ancestor of each of the many subsepts that had arisen was represented as being son of Dedad mac Síu. An alternative version of the Érna genealogy places a personage named Ith mac Breogan in the place of Dedad at the head. All the leading branches of the Érna in historical times have pedigrees traced to both stems.<sup>4</sup> However, in later times the Dairfine are more usually traced to Ith mac Breogan, and the other great branches of the Érna—the Muscrige, Dál Riada, etc.—to Dedad mac Síu.

To return to the Dairfine—in the "Mesca Ulad," Cliú Máil mac Ugaine, that is, the plain of east and central Limerick, was in the land of Cúroi and his fortress, Temair Luachra, was on Sliab Luachra to the west. The *Coir Anmann* (p. 316) derives the Dairfine from Daire, son of Dedad. The *Book of Lecan* (p. 406) says the "Érna and Dairfine are from Daire mac Dedaid, i.e., from the father of Cúroi mac Daire." *Cormac's Glossary* (tenth century) and *Yellow Book of Lecan*, p. 30, refer to Daire as Daire Doimthig. The later standardised genealogies trace the Dairfine to Lughaid mac Itha mac Breoghain. The various subdivisions of that group are set out as follows in *Lecan*, 455:—"Lughaidh, son of Ith, son of Breoghain—five septs of Dairine, were sprung from him, i.e., the race of Daire Doimthig. (1) The Corco Laidhe (Laigde) from Lughaidh Laidhe. (2) The Callrige from Lughaidh Cal. (3) The Corprige, Dál Corppe Cliach and Dál nEachach from Lughaidh Corr. (4) The Coscrige who are with the Déise Mumhan from Lughaidh Cose. (5) Laigis Laighen<sup>5</sup> from Lughaidh Lu and (6) The Corco Oirche from Lughaidh Oirthe."

<sup>1</sup> *Onomasticon*, p. 293.

<sup>2</sup> *Genealogical Tracts*, I, pp. 71, 115, 117, 121.

<sup>3</sup> "Earthworks, Traditions and Gods of S.E. Limerick," *Proc. R.I.A.*, XXXIV (1918), 181.

<sup>4</sup> *Lecan*, 228.

<sup>5</sup> This was a small sept in Cuala, or North Wicklow, not the Pictish Laoighis of Co. Leix. (*Lecan*, 242).

Next it is proposed to examine the location of the above septs in historical times and see if it tallies with the "Mesca Ulad" statement that Cúroí's people occupied Cliú and Mid-Munster in general. First, we will take the Corprige (No. 3 above). The Dairfine genealogy at *Lecan*, 246, and BB, 112a, mentions the Corprige of Cliú an Maighe—possibly the part of Cliú about the Maigue river in central Limerick. Some of this group was also in Ciarrige Luachra, that is, North Kerry. The Ciarrige was an Ulster sept which ruled that territory from the fifth to the thirteenth century. Referring to a subsept of this people—the Cenél Conbráin—the Ciarrige genealogy (*Lecan*, 257) says that some accounts hold that they are of the Corprige, but that these were incorrect "as none of the Corprige survive but the Ua Fochartáin." It also says that the Corprige were *déise*, that is, a vassal-people. Portion of their territory apparently lay about Glenn Corbraighe<sup>1</sup> (now Glin) near the Kerry-Limerick border. This sept seems to be identical with the Carbraighe of Luchair, a vassal sept mentioned in *Book of Genealogies* (p. 55); and in the "Boyhood Deeds of Finn" (*Eriú*, I, 1904) there is a reference to Carbraighe<sup>2</sup> "which to this day is called Ciarraighe." In the same group of Dairfine as the Corprige above, are the Dál Corpre Cliach (i.e., Dál Corpre of Cliú or East Limerick) and the Dál nEachach. I cannot locate the latter.

The Corco Oirche or Oircthe of the Dáirfine (No. 6 above) may be identical with the Corco Airchend mentioned in *Beatha Barrae*.<sup>3</sup> The Corco Airchend were with the Dál Modula in Airther Cliach or eastern Cliú. Eastern Cliú seems to have extended into the county Tipperary in the direction of Cashel.

The Coscrige of the Dairfine were in historical times, as stated above, with the Dési Muman, they being one of the many remnants of the early Érna who aided the Dési when they conquered the Osrige in the fifth century, and occupied what is now the county of Waterford and a considerable strip of south Tipperary. The original location of the Coscrige is unknown.

The Callrige are also numbered amongst the Dairfine subsepts. In all the Dairfine genealogies (*Lecan*, 242, etc.) a group called Dartrige is said to be of the same kin as the Callrige. The Callrige-Dartrige group was one of the few Érna septs of considerable size located outside Munster in historical times. The Callrige were chiefly settled in Mayo, Sligo, Longford and Leitrim; the Dartrige in Leitrim and Monaghan. However, in the "Beatha Molaíse of Daimhinis" (*Silva Gadelica*, p. 17) we are told that the Dartrige were expelled from their native territory which extended from near Cashel to a river named Abha na hEchraidhe in Uí Chonaill Gahra; the latter included central and west Limerick. The Dartrige were thus spread over the great plain of Cliú in Mid-Munster. The time of their expulsion is not clear, but from the same source we learn that they were expelled on account of the enmity which they bore to the Eoganacht king of Cashel, and the

<sup>1</sup> Begley's *Diocese of Limerick*, vol. I.

<sup>2</sup> The septname Corprige appears under a number of different forms—Corbraidhe, Carbraighe, Coirprighe, etc., in the various MSS.

<sup>3</sup> *Onomasticon*, 334.

slaying by them of many of the Uí Chonaill Gabra which was likewise an Eoganacht sept. There is a reference to a group called Dartraidhe Femhin in MS. H.I. 15 (T.C.D.), p. 181.<sup>1</sup> Femhin was the plain south of Cashel. As to the Callrige, there was a small sept called Callrige Chaisil Muman in the neighbourhood of Cashel, according to the genealogies. In the genealogies they are, however, linked up with the Éile of the Ciannachta, a north Munster sept.<sup>2</sup>

The last and most important of the Dairfine septs was the Corco Laigde (Laidhe, Loegde). This was the only section of the first Érna settlement in Munster to retain its independence as a provincial state under the Eoganacht kings of Munster throughout the historical period. The Corco Laigde are in all the early tales and histories connected with the country about Ceann Abhrat or Sliabh Caoin, that is, the Ballyhoura range of mountains on the Limerick-Cork border. Their leading warrior was Lughaidh Mac Con, who played an important role in the third century struggle between the Érna Muman and Eoganachta for the supremacy of Munster, which resulted in victory for the newcomers. Referring to the territory of Fir Maighe Féine, which lay immediately to the south of the Ballyhoura range, a passage in the ancient tale "Forbhais Droma Damhghaire"<sup>3</sup> says: "Another name for it (Fir Muighe) was Corcaille Meic Con, and it was the rightful property of the Clann Dairine, and it is there Rosach na Riogh is. It was there also MacCon was until the Battle of Cenn Abhrat." Lughaidh MacCon and the Érna Muman were defeated in this latter battle. Rosach na Riogh is now Russagh, on the south side of the Ballyhoura mountains, near Doneraile. The Corco Laigde migrated to the south-west coastal district of Cork, apparently after their defeat at the hands of the Eoganachta. The little kingdom of Corco Laigde in historical times was roughly coterminous with the present Diocese of Ross which lies about Skibbereen, Baltimore and Timoleague. The Corco Laigde are called Dairfine in the tenth century *Book of Rights*.<sup>4</sup>

That the Corco Laigde were originally settled about the Cork-Limerick border, adjacent to the other Dairfine septs in Mid-Munster, is most likely, although doubt is sometimes cast on that matter now. Taking all the authorities quoted above, there seems to be no reason for not accepting the early tradition of the Ulster cycle tales as to the early location of the Dairfine.

This brings to a close our survey of the distribution of the first settlement of Érna—the Dál mBardine—over Munster. It will be noticed that the territory of the early Érna did not include the present county of Clare, which in these early times still belonged to the Fir Domhnaun province, west of the Shannon; neither did it include Waterford, or the greater part of the county of Tipperary.

<sup>1</sup> *Onomasticon*, 338.

<sup>2</sup> MacFirbis, *Book of Genealogies*, 668.

<sup>3</sup> *Book of Lismore*, O'Longan's copy, 176a.

<sup>4</sup> That a section of the Corco Laigde was settled in Osrige (Kilkenny and portion of Leix) is evident from the fragmentary annals published in *Silva Gadelica*. Under date 643 A.D., they state "Scandlán Mór, king of Osraighe expelled the Corco Laigde, finally from Osraighe." *Fragments of Irish Annals*, edited by O'Donovan say—"Seven kings of Corco Laigde assumed kingship of Osraighe, and seven kings of Osraighe assumed kingship of Corco Laidhe." See also *J.C.H.A.S.*, XIV (1908), 116-117.

The section of the Érna so far described held the supremacy of Munster until the early or middle third century when it was overcome by the Eoganachta, a powerful Gaelic sept which had then settled in Munster. It is not proposed to go into the early history of this latter people here, but they will have to be referred to for two reasons. Firstly, it was they who subdued the old Érna rulers here and secondly, a most curious fact, they were aided in their conquest mainly by that section of the Érna which up to that period was located about Tara in Breg or East Meath. This group has previously been mentioned when dealing with the Féine of Tara, it being one of the groups which went to make up the composite group of Goidels who occupied Meath in the early centuries of the Christian era. The chief subdivisions of the Érna here were the Muscridge, Corco Duibne, Dál Riada and Corco Baiscind; they are known collectively in the later genealogies as the Síl Conaire Móir, (that is, "the race of Conaire Mór"), from the leading hero of that people in the epic tales. It has been shown already that the very early records divided the Érna into two main divisions—Dál mBardine and Dál Céde—and that the first group to settle in Munster was the former. From this it would appear that the Tara group of Érna was identical with the Dál Céde but there is no positive proof of this, there being a very definite gap between the early Érna histories and their later genealogies.<sup>1</sup> In the case of the Dál mBardine, as we have already seen, the genealogists quote a few ancient scraps of tradition which act as a link between the earlier and later periods, but a similar link is missing in the case of the Dál Céde.

The great epic of the Síl Conaire Moir is the "Destruction of Dá Dearga's Hostel," which describes the elevation of Conaire Mór to the kingship of Tara, and his tragic death in the hostel. The other early accounts of this sept are contained in the tracts on their migration to Munster in the third century. There are two versions of the migration story: one called "De Maccaibh Conaire" (of the sons of Conaire) appears in *Book of Leinster*, 292a; the other acts as introduction to the Síl Conaire genealogy in all the great genealogical works. Both are probably versions of an ancient tale known as "The Migration of the Muscraige to Magh Breoghan," one of the 180 tales mentioned in *Book of Leinster*, 151a, which a *file* or poet of the highest grade was bound to be able to recite.

The race of Conaire Mór has Iar mac Dedaid as deity-ancestor in most accounts. Conaire's father, Eterscéil, is called "Eterscéil moccu Iair" in all early sources.<sup>2</sup> From this Iar came the general sept name, Érna or Érainn; Windisch in *Tain Bó Cuailnge* (index) cites *Iarna* as duplicate for Érna. Some of the later genealogies and histories place Conaire Mór and the early Síl Conaire in Munster, but this is not borne out by the more ancient material—the epic stories mentioned above, which we will proceed to examine.

<sup>1</sup> The latest references to the Dál Céde is in Ádhamhnán's famous *Life of Columba*, where "Tochannu Moccu Fir Cetea" is mentioned as one of the twelve who accompanied St. Columba to Iona and founded the diocese of Aberdeen among the Picts. "Fer Céde" is the eponymous ancestor of the Dál Céde in the few early scraps of genealogy remaining. *Vide*, Laud Genealogies, folio 104a.

<sup>2</sup> *Lecan*, 228; "Destruction of Dá Derga's Hostel."

According to the "Destruction of Dá Dearga's Hostel" (Toghail Bruidhne Dá Derga), which in its present form dates from the eighth century, Conaire Mór succeeded his father, Eterscél Moccu Iair, as king of Temair. This tale is related to those of the Ulster Cycle and no claim is made that the king of Temair (Tara) was Ardrí or high king of Ireland. Conaire was evidently king of Mag Breg, that is, the Féine Temrach country. Later, while on a visit to the Bruidhean Dá Derga, a famous hostel on the Dublin mountains, Conaire was slain when the hostel was attacked by a band of outlaws led by Incél, a native of Britain.<sup>1</sup> Many of the Táin heroes—Conall Cearnach, Dubthach Daeltengaidh, etc.—play a prominent part in this tale.

The race of Conaire Mór, as has been already stated, included the septs known as Muscrige, Corco Duibne, Corco Baiscind and Dál Riada. The *Book of Leinster* tract on the migration of these peoples to Munster, (LL 292a), derives them from the three sons of Conaire, viz., Cairpre Musc, Cairpre Baschain and Cairpre Righfhota (or Riada). By comparing the various histories and genealogies, it transpires that Cairpre Musc, son of Conaire, was the royal poet, Cairpre Finnmhoir Maccu Muscae, son of Conaire, and that both names are interchangeable.

It is this person, evidently, who is triplicated by the genealogists so as to provide ancestors for the various branches of the Síl Conaire. "Moccu Muscae" means that the person so titled belonged to the "Musca" people, that is, the Muscrige. This surname-like formula was used in early times by most Irish septs and had become obsolete as early as the eighth century. In it the term "moccu" (probably "descendant of") is followed by the name of the tutelary deity of the sept.<sup>2</sup> From the ancient surname-formula used in the case of Cairpre Finnmhoir above, it is evident that the real eponymous ancestor of the Muscrige was a deity named Musca. But the later Christian genealogists substituted the poet Cairpre Músc for the ancient pagan deity-ancestor.

To return to the *Book of Leinster* account of the migration to Munster, it is stated that the sons of Conaire and their kin (the Muscrige and Corco Duibne) were of the Féine in the Féine territory in Tara. It then goes on to tell of the defeat of the Érna of Munster by the Eoganachta, aided by the Síl Conaire. Although much of the detail is probably pure fiction, the main point of this story has undoubtedly an historical foundation. It says that Cairpre's mother, Sárail, after the death of her husband, Conaire, in the hostel, was with Nemed Mac Sroibcind, the Érna king in Árd Nemid, that is, the Great Island in Cork Harbour. Nemed has already been mentioned in connection with the Clann Fuithe of the south coast of Munster. He is stated in the present tract to have been king of the Érna "as far as Belach Fheda Máir," a place not identified but apparently in mid or east Munster. Cairpre Musc learned that Incél, the outlaw who had slain his father, Conaire, was in Nemed's house. He sent his brother Cairpre Righfhota (called Fiacha Righfhota here) to demand that Incél be expelled from Nemed's protection, as the sons of Conaire were desirous of pursuing

<sup>1</sup> In *Lecan*, fo. 228a, Incél is stated to have been of the Fir Domnann of Connacht.

<sup>2</sup> *Eriú*, III, 42; and "Early Irish Population Groups," (McNeill), *P.R.I.A.*, XXIX (1911-12), pp. 71, 81.



and slaying him in order to avenge their father's death. Nemed refused, and we next find Cairpre Musc and his brothers aligned with Dergthene of the Eoganachta who was then waging war on the Érna Mumhan. The term Dergthene is sometimes used as a sept-name for the Eoganachta and Dál gCais, but here and in the genealogies it is used as the name of an ancestor of that group. Cairpre Musc, the account continues, composed a poem for Dergthene: "Folta dar ési flatha," that is, "Lands for sovereignty." Both groups then proceeded to attack the forces of Nemed and the Battle of Belach Fheda Máir was fought, which resulted in the rout of Nemed's forces and the death of Incél the outlaw. The account states that the sons of Conaire then got extensive lands in Munster. Cairpre Musc and the Muscige obtained territories extending from Brosnach (that is the Brosna river on the Tipperary-Offaly border) to Dergmonai at Loch Léin (Killarney),<sup>1</sup> "so that each ridge that his people hold runs side by side with a ridge of the Eoganachta for sake of mutual assistance and friendliness with them for ever." Cairpre Righfhota and his people (Dál Riada) obtained Ciarrige Luachra, that is, the northern part of county Kerry. The Dál Riada, in historical times, were located in the northern part of Antrim and it was they who founded the Gaelic kingdom in Scotland in the fifth and sixth centuries. The genealogies say (*Lecan*, 240) that they migrated from Munster to the north, but it seems questionable that the Dál Riada were ever settled in Munster.

Cairpre Baiscind and the Corco Baiscind got "the country which his race still occupies," that is, Corco Baiscind in south-west Clare. The Corco Duibne are not separately mentioned here; in the genealogies they are represented as a sub-division of the Muscige. In early historical times their lands extended over all west Kerry—from Killarney to Caherciveen and the Dingle peninsula.<sup>2</sup>

The second tract on the migration of the Muscige from Mag Breg to Munster appears in the introduction to the Síl Conaire genealogies. The version of this tract from H. 2. 7. T.C.D. (col. 90) has been published with translation along with the *Book of Leinster* text in *Eriú*, vol. vi (pp. 130 ff.). This second tract includes a synopsis of the account already given. Cairpre Musc is here stated to have been of the Muscige Airthir Breg, that is, of the coastal district of Meath. The three Cairpres went to Munster and obtained the lands of the old Érna there. The lands described are approximately the same as those mentioned in the *Book of Leinster* account.

This second tract has also an account of the migration, which, although it differs from the above very much in detail, is in agreement on the main points, that is, that the Muscige came from Breg as allies of the Eoganachta and received a grant of lands in return for aid rendered in defeating the Érna. The leader of the Muscige in this latter account is named Gnathal, a contemporary of Art Oenfhir, father of Cormac Mac Airt. He fought

<sup>1</sup> In historical times there were six Muscige septs in Munster, *viz.*—Muscige Tíre in North Tipperary, the Brosna river being its northern boundary; Muscige Breoghan and Muscige Airthir Feimin, in South Tipperary; Muscige Trí Maige about Charleville; Muscige Liacc Tuill at Tullylease and Muscige Mitaine, now the baronies of Muskerry in Cork. For further particulars see the *Onomasticon*.

<sup>2</sup> Corkaguiney (Corco Dhuibhne) barony includes the Dingle peninsula.

with the Eoganachta in the battle of Cenn Abhrat against Lughaidh Mac Con and the Dairfine. This Gnathal appears in some of the Síl Conaire pedigrees.<sup>1</sup> There is an ancient tale—the “Cath Cinn Abhrat”<sup>2</sup>—dating in its present form from the tenth century which gives a description of that battle which is supposed to have been the last and decisive encounter between the Érna and Eoganachta. The leading figures on the Érna Muman side in this account are Lughaidh Mac Con of the Dairfine and Nemed mac Sroibcind, here described as “king of the Érna.” They were accompanied by a host of minor Munster and Leinster chieftains. Arrayed against them were the Eoganachta chiefs—Oilill Olum and his son, Eoghan Mór. Their allies were Cairpre Músc, his brothers and followers. Mac Con and the Érna suffered a decisive defeat in this battle, Nemed being slain. It is possible that the “Cath Cinn Abhrat” and the account of the battle of Belach Fheda Máir are different descriptions of the same encounter. Cenn Abhrat was on the Ballyhoura (Belach Abhrat) Hills, and Belach Fheda Máir may be Ballyhea close by.

From the various accounts quoted above, it may be safely concluded that the settlement of the Muscrige and other Síl Conaire septs in Munster was a concomitant of the rise to power of the Eoganachta. These likewise furnish an explanation of the puzzling difference in status which existed throughout the historical period between the Síl Conaire peoples and the other Érna groups in Munster.

When historical records were first committed to writing, the supremacy of Munster was firmly in the hands of the Eoganachta; they held eight extensive territories extending from Cashel to the Killarney district. The lands of the Muscrige and the kindred septs—Corco Duibne and Corco Baiscind—were likewise spread over the greater part of Munster and were almost as extensive as the Eoganachta territories. On the other hand the original Érna rulers of Munster were in very reduced circumstances. The only remnant of the latter which was then recognised as a provincial state was the Corco Laigde or O’Driscoll sept of south-west Cork. They, like the Muscrige and other powerful septs who were not of Eoganachta blood, paid a yearly tribute to the king of Munster, but were otherwise independent.<sup>3</sup> The independence of the Corco Laigde could be attributed to the fact that their territory was small, of poor quality and remote in its situation; also to the fact that they had gained some standing as a sea-faring people. The other remnants of the older Érna peoples of Munster appear in the later histories and genealogies among the groups of peoples called *déise*, *aítheachthuatha* and *forsloinnnte*, that is, vassal-peoples of the lower social and political order. We are told that these peoples belonged to the pre-Gaelic Fir Bolg. Thus in the list of battles said to have been fought by the famous Gaelic king of Tara, Tuathal Techtmhar, against the Fir Bolg peoples of Ireland we find: “The Battle of (Dún) Cermna against Caicher,”<sup>4</sup> evidently the Caithear of Dún Cermna of the Clann Fuithe

<sup>1</sup> Muscrige Mitaine genealogy, *Lecan*, 228.

<sup>2</sup> It appears in *Lecan*, 367, and C.I. 2, *R.I.A.*, fo. 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Book of Rights*.

<sup>4</sup> *Book of Genealogies*, p. 49.

mentioned above. Tuathal, also, according to this list fought "seven battles against the Érna" in Munster.<sup>1</sup> MacFirbis comments on the latter entry: "It is to be noticed that Eurna is a name given to the Fir Bolg and also Eurna to the Clann Deaghaidh and to other kindreds we mention hereafter. However, it is the seed of Oilill, from whom came Clann Deaghaidh, that is more usually called Eurna."

We have already seen that the section of the Dairfine called Corprige which was located in north Kerry (Ciarrige Luachra) was described as *déise* by the later genealogists (*Lecan*, 257). In a poem on the vassal-peoples (*aitheachthuatha*) of Ireland, which appears in Mac Firbis's *Book of Genealogies* (p. 55), this people-group appears as the Carbraighe of Luachair. In the topographical list of vassal-peoples which appears in all main genealogical works we find this people of Luchair and of Ciarrige Luachra called "Sean-Érna" or "Tuath Sen-Érann."<sup>2</sup> It is probable, therefore, that the term "old Érna" was used to denote the older Érna peoples in contradistinction to the "new" Érna, that is, the Muscrige and their kin, who had gained a more favourable political status as allies of the Eoganachta, and that the genealogical doctrine must be taken as often expressing political status rather than racial origin.

There is one other matter relating to the status of the Muscrige in Munster which cannot be overlooked. The leading man of the Muscrige at the time of their settlement in Munster was the royal poet (*ri-fhile*) Cairpre Finnmhoir, otherwise Cairpre Músc. The *filí*, or poets, held a very important position in the early days; they wielded great power and were often able to command a great influence over kings and chiefs, as is best told in the ancient tale, "Imtheachta na Trom-daimhe." The *Book of Leinster* tract quoted above states that Cairpre composed a poem for the Eoganacht king before the Battle of Belach Fheda Máir. In an account of the Muscrige settlement in MS. H. 2. 7. T.C.D. (p. 90) we learn: "Fiacha Mullethan (Eoganacht king at time of Cormac mac Airt) gave Cliú, north to Loch Deirceire (Lough Derg) to Cairpre Finnmhoir maceu Muscae,<sup>3</sup> 'poeta regius' and also Crich Aradh from Cláire to Lough Derg for a historical poem he recited at Áine Cliach." Finally, O'Curry in *Manners and Customs* (Vol. III, 208), quotes an ancient MS.<sup>4</sup> which he possessed, which states that the Muscrige Tíre, that is, the Muscrige of Ormond on the shores of Lough Derg, held the privilege of supplying the court of Cashel with poets and scholars.

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> *Genealogical Tracts*, I, pp. 107, ff., where the different versions of that list are published.

<sup>3</sup> In a version of this statement in MacFirbis 441, the poet's name is simplified to "Cairpre Musc."

<sup>4</sup> Apparently *Leabhar Buidhe Lecain*, 339.