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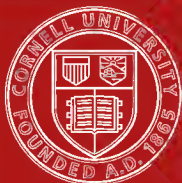
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# The Cuchullin Saga in Irish Literature

Being a Collection of Stories  
relating to the Hero

## CUCHULLIN

Translated from the Irish  
by various Scholars: Com-  
piled and Edited with  
Introduction and Notes, by

Eleanor Hull

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1898  
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TO THE FRIENDS  
WHO  
HAVE HELPED ME



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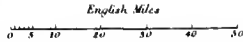
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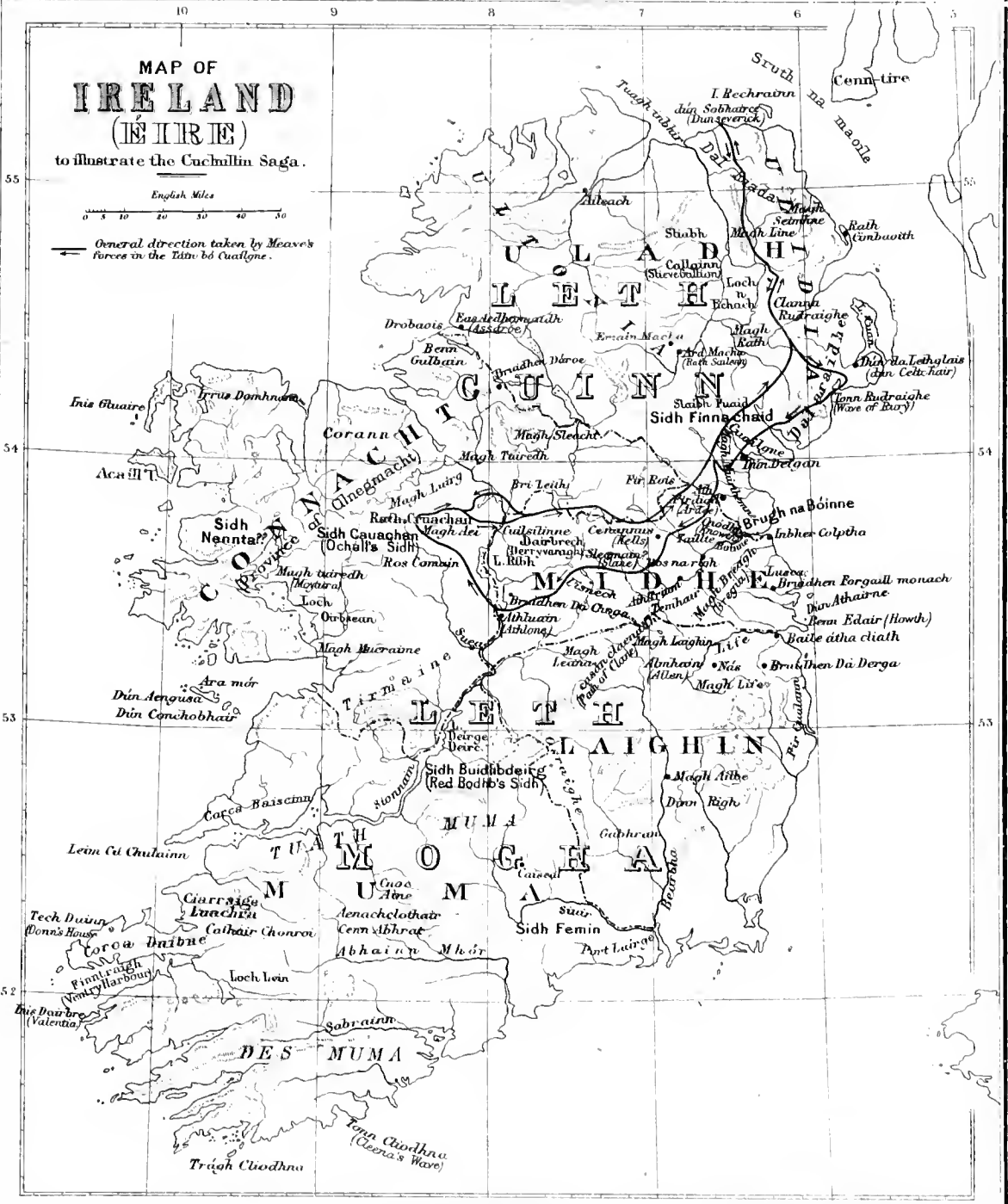
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# MAP OF IRELAND (THE IRLE)

to illustrate the Cuchullin Saga.



General direction taken by Meave's forces in the Tairn bó Cualgine.



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# INTRODUCTION



## INTRODUCTION

### (a) *Literary Qualities of the Saga*

A RECENT American essayist, Mr. Godkin, has said that 'no country retains the hearty affection of its educated classes which does not feed their imagination.' Patriotism, that is to say, does not rest to any large degree upon a natural pride in the physical beauty of the country that gave us birth, nor yet on a legitimate satisfaction in its commercial or industrial prosperity; it rests upon what we may call the historic imagination. It connects itself with certain events in the past history of our country, or with occurrences, sometimes of a semi-legendary character, that have stamped themselves upon the mind of the nation in a series of vivid mental pictures, and have fostered a just pride in the deeds and epochs of their forefathers.

Countries that have their history still to make, or that have risen rapidly to greatness by colonisation from outside, without any background of romantic legend or heroic action, are lacking in the first elements that call a pure and elevated patriotism into existence. The memory of great deeds; the slow growth of ideas, expressed either in literature or in the constitution of the country; the mysterious and always attractive twilight of romance, out of which a nation has

emerged into the broad daylight of historic life: all these are wanting. The consciousness of a greatness rooted firmly in the past is gone.

The history and the literature of Ireland should, perhaps in a greater degree than that of any other country, feed and stimulate the love of her inhabitants. Her long and varied and pitiful story should draw to her the affection of her people; while of the imaginative creations of poet and romanticist she has an almost unequalled wealth. There is hardly a bay, a plain, or a hill in Ireland around which romance, pagan or Christian, has not woven some tale or legend. It was, indeed, a special pleasure of the early writers to throw across each spot the halo of invention. Many of the longer pieces of ancient Gaelic literature are composed entirely of the local traditions belonging to special districts. Such are the 'Colloquy with the Ancients' and 'The Dinnsenchas' tracts, which may be compared with 'Kilhwch and Olwen' in Welsh literature; but even apart from these geographical collections of tales, there is no country in the world that has preserved so many legends connected with special places as Ireland has done. The tradition of these tales is fast being lost among the people; wherever politics and the newspaper enter, folklore dies out: naturally, too, wherever the English tongue has superseded the older speech in which the tales were handed down, their memory falls away. And as the recollection of the great names and great deeds of her ancestors fades into a faint tradition, patriotism sinks into a mere pass-word of demagogues; as the old tales dwindle into folklore and are gradually forgotten, the light of fantasy is lost from the hills and plains of Ireland. To the traveller

in Ireland, the imaginative loss is grievous; to the Irish man and woman it is irreparable.

The Sagas of Ireland, though they have not as yet taken their natural place beside the Epics of the Nibelungen, of Charlemagne, or of Arthur, will bear comparison in their scope and originality with any of these, and will add to them, moreover, some new elements.

The fact that Irish is, to a large extent, a dead language has invested the literature enshrined in it with a lively interest for scholars. The old literature of Ireland is being rediscovered, and a host of philologists are devoting their best endeavours to its elucidation. The moment is a critical one. Up to the present, with very few exceptions, the interest which it has inspired is purely linguistic and comparative. Antiquarians and philologists have used the material as a repository of ancient customs and a battlefield for linguistic contests. The time is fast approaching, however, when it must be considered in a quite different aspect—namely, as pure literature. The Sagas of Ireland must be placed beside the Sagas of the North and the epics of mediæval Europe, and their qualities and defects weighed together. Very interesting results are likely to be obtained, and much light will probably be thrown thereby on the literary connection of Ireland with other countries.

The isolation of Ireland from the great movements of European thought has been too much insisted upon. Although Ireland escaped the domination of Rome during the period of her early literary activity, and thus her literature remains as an almost solitary example of a Western culture developing along native lines and unchanged by Latin influence, yet at

the later period, during which her mediæval bardic output was being gathered together and written down, Ireland, so far from occupying an isolated position, was in intimate relationship, not only with England, but with Northern, Western, and Central Europe. Her intellectual intercourse extended, not to the schools of England, France, and Italy only, but, through her monasteries, to Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, and a constant intercommunication was kept up between these foreign establishments and the mother country. In all these countries we find to-day traces of Irish learning and Irish art. Even Spain shows signs of Irish influence, while the long centuries of association with Scandinavia left deep traces upon the national life and the national literature of both countries. It was during this epoch of great outward activity and movement towards foreign countries that we may surmise the great mass of Irish pagan romance to have undergone the process of moulding into its final form, and it is impossible to suppose that some modifications were not introduced into it from its contact with foreign romance and foreign methods of thought. These modifications, though comparatively slight, have to be taken into account in any examination of Irish pagan romance, and the frequency or rarity with which we meet with ideas foreign to the Irish mind and imagination, may help to determine both the age of the particular version of any tale we are examining, and the measure of its popularity. Those stories that were universal favorites, and therefore frequently repeated, will naturally show a greater assimilation of foreign ideas than those which fell out of popular favour. It is to these latter tales that we must look to

find the Irish imagination in its pure and native form, untouched by outside influences.

Equally important is it for us to remember that, though most of the tales of the Cuchullin Saga, if not all of them, bear marks of a pre-Christian origin, yet they come down to us transcribed by monkish hands and preserved in monastic libraries. The early monasteries were the storehouses of the literary life of the nation; monks and saints were the copyists and compilers. The *Leabhar na hUidhre*, or 'Book of the Dun Cow' (so called from the parchment on which it was inscribed), the oldest existing book in which tales of the Cuchullin Saga have been preserved, was begun and partly, at least, arranged and written out by a religious of the monastery or 'family' of Clonmacnois. The Book of Leinster was transcribed by Finn mac Gorman, Bishop of Kildare. It is of immense interest to find that while the monks naturally gave a large place in their work to the lives of saints and to religious literature, they felt it their duty to preserve and transmit with equal care, not only the historical and genealogical records of their native country, but also the great body of pagan romance that they heard recited and sung around them. There appears to have been no moment of decisive break between the bardic and Christian systems, and in all matters that concerned the literature and laws of their country, brehons and monks laboured side by side. The monks seem to have set themselves in many ways to carry on the system of the bards, and it appears certain that, so far from feeling any fanatic hatred against the old pagan romance literature, they desired to incorporate such of its ideas as they could assimilate with those of

Christianity into their own teaching. They did this consciously, in the same manner and of the same set purpose as that which led St. Patrick to adopt the pagan festivals and associate them with Christian events. Thus we find that it is St. Ciaran, one of the most noted saints of Ireland, who, at the tomb of Fergus mac Róich, writes down the epic of the Táin Bó Cuailgne; Mongan comes back 'from the flock-abounding Land of Promise' in the unseen world to converse with Colum Cille;<sup>1</sup> it is to St. Patrick that Ossian details the adventures of his compéers; and, in every case, although the saint is represented as denouncing the fierceness and pagan beliefs of the old heroes, he listens with eagerness to the recital of their deeds. Once more, it is St. Patrick who calls up before the pagan monarch of Tara the vision of Cuchullin in his chariot, and this for the express purpose of persuading King Laegaire of the truth of Christianity.

This frequent association of pagan and Christian personages and ideas is not without meaning; it shows that not only no strong prejudice existed against the ancient literature, but, on the contrary, that a curiosity and an appetite was felt with regard to it; and a desire was experienced, so far as was possible, to reconcile the two systems. For the finer among the Cuchullin stories and those of independent origin, such as the 'Voyage of Maelduin,' the 'Bruidhen dá Derga,' etc., they seem to have had a regard that led to the careful preservation of them; nor is there, in these tales,

<sup>1</sup> *Voyage of Bran*, Kuno Meyer and Alfred Nutt, vol. i., Grimm Library (iv.), and 'Colloquy of Columcille,' printed in *Zeitschrift für Celt. Phil.*, vol. ii. No. 1.



any trace of the contentious wrangling between the opposed systems of belief that is found in many of the Ossianic poems. Such stories as that of the conjuring up of Cuchullin's chariot before Laegaire, to which we have referred above, point to a special reverence for the earlier hero, such as is not displayed towards Finn and his champions.

Nevertheless, the passage of the legends through monkish hands was not without an effect upon the final form in which the tales have come down to us; clerical handling has denuded the old romances of some of their pagan characteristics, and has modified certain features inconsistent with the later teaching. Christian interpolations have been added, and, in some instances, pagan and Christian epochs have been synchronised.

Bearing in mind these two causes of modification, the influence of foreign intercourse and the influence of Christian redaction, the changes that have taken place in the tales of the Cuchullin cycle may roughly be classed as follows: first, changes due to deliberate interpolation; secondly, changes due to deliberate suppression; thirdly, alterations brought about through the ignorance or carelessness of copyists; and finally, those that have arisen through the assimilation of foreign ideas or through the desire to glorify the hero by comparison with classical champions or the heroes of other nations.

In considering the variations due to deliberate interpolation, it is well to be on our guard against the error of supposing that the longer form in which any story has come down to us is of necessity the latest. Though in the larger number of instances it is undoubtedly the case that the story has been adorned and expanded by

the poetic fancy of the bards through whose hands it has passed ; though frequently it has gathered accretions from foreign and classic sources, and though descriptions of dress and general appearance were likely to be lengthened as time went on, we have to set against all this the consideration that many of the tales, as we have them, are mere outlines, to be filled up by improvised description at the time of recitation.

The bard, though he was prohibited under stringent regulations from altering the facts of a story,<sup>1</sup> was permitted to use his fancy in filling in the outline, and adding such details as appeared to him to enhance the beauty of the tale. A mere sketch of the incidents was, therefore, all that he needed to get by heart, and doubtless some of these sketches have been preserved to us. If, for instance, we compare the version of the 'Wooring of Emer' (*Tochmarc Emire*), published in the *Revue Celtique*, vol. xi. p. 442, with the fuller form of the story which we reproduce here, it will be seen that a number of incidents are merely suggested in the shorter recension, of which we get the full details in the longer form. To take an example. In the passage describing Cuchullin's journey across Alba to seek tuition from Scathach, we read, 'Then he encountered some dreadful beast like a lion, which fought with him, but did him no harm. And the foul play of the youths who laughed at him. On the fourth day the beast parted from him.' These abrupt phrases read like a *memoria technica* to remind the narrator of the outline of facts, which he was to fill up at the moment of recital. There is no explanation whatever of the laughter of the youths,

<sup>1</sup> MacFirbis's *Book of Genealogies*. Introduction. (Quoted O'Curry, *MS. Mat.*, pp. 220-221, and see p. 242.)

though the scribe was evidently familiar with the cause. In the longer recension the passage is filled in thus: 'While he was there, he beheld a terrible great beast like a lion coming towards him, which kept regarding him, but did not do him any harm. Whichever way he went, the beast went before him, and moreover it turned its side towards him (*i.e.* inviting him to mount). Then he took a leap and was on its back. He did not guide it, but went wherever the beast carried him. Four days they went on this wise, until they came to the bounds of human habitation, and to an island where some lads were rowing on a small loch. The boys laughed at the unwonted sight of the savage beast doing service to man. Then Cuchullin leaped off, and the beast parted from him, and he bade it farewell.' It is evident that all these omitted details were present to the mind of the scribe. The opening of the story is entirely lost in the shorter version, which begins with some broken phrases that are quite incomprehensible as they stand, but which we learn from the longer story were the close of the explanation of the intentionally obscure and mystical conversation that took place between Cuchullin and Emer, on the occasion of his visit to her father's fortress. If, as Professor Kuno Meyer, the translator of both these versions, points out, the shorter story is the older in point of language, and may be of pre-Scandinavian origin, it is yet certain that even at that age the whole story, including the quaint form of speech used by the lovers, and supposed by some to have been introduced from Scandinavia into Irish literature, was in existence also and familiar to the story-teller.

While, therefore, it is probable that in numerous in-

stances the simpler form in which a tale has come down to us is the older, we are by no means to take it for granted that this is always the case. When we meet with a tale given in a very condensed form, it is at least necessary to consider whether it may not have been transcribed merely in outline for the convenience of professional story-tellers.

The general style of the stories belonging to this Saga is terse, grave and balanced: they are singularly free from literary blemishes. There are few redundancies of expression, and there is a strong sense of poetic fitness shown in their form and development. The long adjectival descriptions, which are a feature of much Irish mediæval writing, and which do not appear to be entirely confined to its later period, are rare in this cycle. From a literary point of view these tales rise high above the larger number of the stories of the Ossianic or Finn cycle; their purpose is better defined, they possess a dignity not always to be found in the Ossianic literature. The Finn stories, again, are old; the Cuchullin tales are archaic. The difference between paganism and Christianity is more than a mere lapse of time; it is the difference between an extinct and a surviving civilisation.

It has been unfortunate for the literary reputation of the old Gael that the Ossianic tales and not those of the Cuchullin Saga, or the fine old romances which, like the 'Bruidhen dá Derga' or the 'Voyage of Maelduin,' are independent of both, have been kept before the public as typical of the literary genius of ancient Ireland. The Ossianic Legends, which were evidently more widely known in later times than those of the earlier cycles, have undergone large modifications and become thoroughly popularised; few of them probably

retain their original form. A large number of episodes from the Cuchullin cycle have been introduced into them.

The ousting of the earlier cycles from their place in the popular affection, has to a large extent had the effect of preserving the Cuchullin tales from those unconscious changes that grow up in the course of centuries of repetition and variation of sentiment and fashion ; those that were the least popular have retained all their barbaric wildness and splendour, untouched by mediæval influence. Except in a few of the more favourite recitals, those changes that do occur appear to have been made deliberately, and with a definite purpose. Let us consider what this purpose was.

We find, in the first place, that interpolations are frequently made in order to add a Christian flavour to pagan recitals, or to enhance the dignity of the hero by synchronising events in his career with facts drawn from Biblical history. The birth and death of Conachar are made to coincide with the dates of our Lord's Nativity and Crucifixion, and the King is made to meet his doom in endeavouring to avenge the death of Christ, of which he has been informed by a druid. Prophecies before his birth foretell his fate, and the glories of his reign are foreshadowed as being parallel to those of our Lord.

Cuchullin, again, when going forth to die, sees the heavenly host descending over Emain Macha and Rath Sailenn (afterwards Armagh), and he is cheered and inspirited by the vision. After his death his soul appears floating over Emain Macha in his spirit-chariot chanting a mystic song of the Coming of Christ and the Day of Doom.

Long afterwards, when he appears to King Laegaire, he calls upon him to repent and believe on God and St. Patrick. We can see at once that all these additions have been made by the monkish scribes in order to adapt the favourite tales of paganism to Christian ears, and they strike a curiously incongruous note in their barbaric setting.

But the redactors went beyond this. Not only did they make additions to the narrative, they also deliberately suppressed portions of it.

This may in part have arisen from their incapacity to grasp the ideas belonging to a state of things that had to a large extent passed away, but there is no doubt that it arose also from their disapproval of some of the teachings of paganism, and their disinclination to incorporate them into their own work.

This disinclination is especially visible in those tales that embody the doctrine of re-incarnation, a doctrine which clashed with the teaching of the Church and was therefore carefully suppressed.

The tales of the genesis of Conachar and Cuchullin, in which this doctrine is embodied, have come down to us in so confused and mutilated a form, that it is impossible to reconstruct out of them any consecutive narrative that will tally at all points with other versions. The recensions differ so seriously, and the tales have so evidently been altered in transcription, that they have become not only confused but contradictory; we have lost the clue to the meaning of parts of them. In the Book of Leinster account of Conachar's birth, which, substantially, is the form given below, all reference to any mystery connected with the monarch's origin is omitted; so also in one of the two Egerton

versions of the 'Generation of Cuchullin,' there is no reference to him as being a re-incarnation of the Tuatha god Lugh *lamfada*, although this is elsewhere distinctly stated. It is only in those pieces which, being less important and less popular, have escaped the improving hand of the scribe, that we find the doctrine plainly set down. In the *Chophur in da muccida*,<sup>1</sup> for instance, the descent of the famous Brown Bull or Donn, around which the Epic of the Táin bó Cuailgne revolves, is distinctly traced from personages belonging to an inferior rank among the race of earlier gods, who have sunk, through a series of transmigrations, from higher to lower forms. All the principal actors in the Saga, Conachar, Cuchullin, Conall *cernach*, and Celtchar mac Uitechar, appear to be re-incarnations of Tuatha dé Danann, and are thereby set outside the scope of ordinary human affairs: their acts partake of a divine significance. The separate tales relating to the generation of the two latter personages have unfortunately been lost, but the birth-story of Conall *cernach* in *Cóir Anmann*<sup>2</sup> 'Fitness of names,' bears out the supposition. It is just possible that some of these tales may have been suppressed as giving support to a form of belief that Christianity had set itself to abolish in Ireland.

Besides these apparently intentional omissions and additions made by the compilers, we have to take into account the alterations accidentally introduced through

<sup>1</sup> *Irische Texte*, edited Windisch and Stokes, dritte Serie, pp. 230-278.

<sup>2</sup> *Irische Texte*, dritte Serie, Heft 2, § 251. Since the above was written the subject has been treated at some length by Mr. Alfred Nutt, in his *Voyage of Bran*, vol. ii. (Grimm Lib. Series). His general conclusions are in accord with those stated above.

the ignorance or negligence of copyists, or through attempts made by them to correct or explain difficulties met with in the texts they were transcribing. Additions and explanations originally made by scribes on the margin of the manuscripts have frequently crept into the text and become an integral part of it.

An example of this will be found in the 'Tragical Death of Conachar,' where the scribe has added, as a conjecture of his own, that Altus the Consul brought the news of Christ's death to the King, though the account in the manuscript from which he was copying said that Bacrach the Druid did so. He evidently could not imagine a pagan druid showing so much interest in the death of our Lord. Probably, had the tale been re-copied, the original form would have been omitted altogether, and the conjecture of the twelfth century scribe would have taken its place. No doubt many anomalies have been introduced into the tales in some such manner. O'Curry notices that this particular scribe must have been of an impatient temperament, as he omits altogether to mention the chief point of his tale, the death of the king.

Lastly, we have to consider the variations brought about by the effort to glorify the hero by comparison with classical and other personages, by the introduction of ideas borrowed from classical, Oriental, northern and romance literature, and also changes that arose naturally out of variations in fashions and manners. These last, though not the least important, may be rapidly dismissed. All romantic literatures are subject to such changes. English romance of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, though frequently dealing with the



tales of semi-barbaric days, has so modified the outward details of manners and clothing, as well as the tone of thought that, but for their names, we should hardly recognise in them the heroes of the olden time. The northern tales of Ireland have to a large extent escaped this gradual process of modification, possibly because they were replaced in later times by the Ossianic Saga, which was less lofty, more lively, humorous, and popular than its predecessors. Nevertheless, we have only to place one of the less-well-known tales side by side with one of those which, by retaining its place in popular favour, became subject to modification during centuries of recital, in order to see at once how considerably the tone of the story, and in some points its detail also, has been modernised. Compare the fierce barbaric flavour of such pieces as the 'Siege of Howth,' the 'Debility of the Ultonian Warriors,' or of some of the wild tales which are called *remscéla* or introductory tales to the *Táin bó Cuailgne* with the tone of such favourite recitals as the 'Tragical Death of the Sons of Usnach,' or the 'Feast of Bricriu.' The difference will be perceived at once. The last-named, while in some parts retaining its ancient wildness and dignity, has in other parts been softened, modernised, and stripped of its uncouth grandeur. Incidents reminiscent of romantic and classic literature have been introduced; the heroes no longer fight in chariots but on horseback; Cuchullin is found in single combat with Herakles, his prototype in classic mythology. These things are incongruities which the change of fashion and the advance of knowledge demanded of the reciter. The heroes of Ireland had to be brought into competition with the great figures of other nations; in order to hold their

place they must prove themselves superior to them in prowess.

It is impossible in the present state of our knowledge to determine how far those similarities which we find between Irish and Continental romance literature have been introduced from abroad, and how far they have sprung up independently in Ireland. It is comparatively easy in some cases to trace their origin, in others it is impossible to know whether parallel ideas have had a separate growth, or have been imported from without. In many instances the Irish form is undoubtedly the oldest. Let us take, for example, the incident of the judgment of Terrible in the tale to which we have just referred, viz.: the 'Feast of Bricriu.'<sup>1</sup> There had been a contest for superiority in valour between the three chief champions of Erin, Conall *cernach* 'the Victorious,' Laeghaire *buadach* 'the Triumphant,' and Cuchullin. One of the arbitrators is Terrible, who dwells beneath a lake. Terrible proposes a test of courage. The three heroes are to cut off his head to-day and he will cut off theirs to-morrow. Conall and Laegaire decline the bargain: they say that they have not power to re-vivify after their execution. Cuchullin, as is usual with him, accepts, on condition that he shall be hereafter acknowledged as prime champion of Erin. Conall and Laegaire say that he may have the honour and welcome if these are the terms upon which it is to be won; and they swear that they will henceforth renounce the quest. The hero then concludes the bargain with Terrible; and he, after uttering an incantation over his blade, puts down

<sup>1</sup> This fine tale has been translated into French by M. D'Arbois de Jubainville and published in his *Epopée celtique en Irlande*.

his head and allows Cuchullin to cut it off. Rising immediately, the decapitated warrior takes up his head in one hand and holding it against his breast, he lifts the hatchet in the other and plunges beneath the lake.

Next day Terrible returns resuscitated, and Cuchullin, faithful to his bargain, lays his head on the block. Terrible makes believe to bring down the axe three times over his head and back. Then, satisfied of his valour, he bids the hero rise, for he has proved himself to be Erin's prime champion. The same story, with some slightly different details, is told of Cuchullin, in a tale called *Cennach ind Ríanado* or the 'Bargain of the Strong Man.'<sup>1</sup> In this, the giant is called Munremar, and the scene takes place in the house of the Red Branch, but the circumstances are otherwise identical. The *denouément* is, however, different. Cuchullin, spurred on by the taunts of his comrades, awaits in deep dejection the return of the strong man. He stretches out his head upon the block only to find that it is so large that his neck reaches but half-way. 'Stretch out your neck, wretch!' cries the man. 'I cannot slay you, what with the shortness of your neck and of your side.' Then Cuchullin stretched out his neck so that a grown man's foot would have fitted in between every two ribs of his, and he stretched his neck till it reached the block on the other side. The giant, who turns out to be Cuchullin's foe, Curói mac Daire, King of Munster, come in disguise 'to fulfil the word he had given Cuchullin,' raises the axe to the roof-tree of the house, but brings it down on the

<sup>1</sup> It is published with translation by Professor Kuno Meyer in *Rev. Celt.*, vol. xiv. ; see also vol. xiii. pp. 22, 28-31.

blunt side. He then awards the champion's portion to Cuchullin.

Now this story is found in all its salient features in the fourteenth century North of England romance, 'Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight.' Although the motive is dissimilar, the contention for the champion's portion or seat being a characteristically Irish feature, the general outline of the story is the same. Shortly, it is as follows. On Christmas Day, in presence of King Arthur and his Court, Sir Gawaine cuts off the head of the Green Knight. The Knight stops, picks up the head and, remounting his horse, bids Sir Gawaine meet him a year hence at the Green Chapel, where he will give him blow for blow. He sets out, but finds himself presently in a new country, where he is well cared for during three days at a splendid castle. The hostess, a beautiful woman, entertains him royally; she woos him, kissing him thrice, but he gives the kisses each day to the hunter in return for spoils of the chase. He is, however, weak enough to retain a jewelled belt that she has presented to him. On the fourth day he meets the Green Knight, and kneels before him to receive the mortal blow. Instead, he only gets a slight scar, the punishment for having kept the belt. Had he not given away the kisses of the lady (who is 'Morgan the Fairy') he would have received a mortal wound.<sup>1</sup>

Another close resemblance to an incident in the Arthurian legend is found in the tale of Cuchullin's death. In the Book of Leinster version,<sup>2</sup> a very fine

<sup>1</sup> 'Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight,' edited by R. Morris, Early English Text Soc., 1864. Miss J. L. Weston has recently worked out the whole subject in vol. vii. of the Grimm Lib. Series.

<sup>2</sup> Published with translation by Dr. Whitley Stokes in *Rev. Celt.* vol. iii. and *infra*, pp. 253-263.

and simple piece of writing, we read that after the hero's death 'his soul appeared to the fifty queens who had loved him, and they saw him floating in his spirit-chariot over Emain Macha, and they heard him chant a mystic song of the Coming of Christ and the day of doom.' This passage has its parallel in the queens who bore away Arthur in the barge across the lake after his final battle. The passage in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* runs thus: 'Than syr Bedwere toke the Kyng vpon his backe and so wente wyth hym to that water syde / & whan they were at the water syde / euyng fast by the banke houed a lytyl barge wyth many fayr ladyes in hit / & emonge hem al was a quene / and al they had blacke hoodes / and al they wepte and shryked whan they sawe Kyng Arthur /

¶ 'Now put me in to the barge sayd the kyng and so he dyd softelye / And there receyued hym thre quenes wyth grete mornyng and soo they sette hem doun / and in one of their lappes Kyng Arthur layed hys heed / and than that quene sayd a dere broder, why haue ye taryed so longe from me / Alas this wounde on your heed hath caught ouermoche colde / And soo than they rowed from the londe / and syr bedwere behelde all tho laydes goo from hym /<sup>1</sup> . . .'

We may take as another example of ideas common to both cycles, but which seem to have had an independent and spontaneous origin in Ireland, and of which we find there the oldest existing examples, the beautiful poetic symbolism of the two trees springing from the tombs of lovers and intertwining above their graves, the outward sign of union in death. This is

<sup>1</sup> *Le Morte Darthur*, by Syr Thomas Malory. Caxton edition, ed. by H. Oskar Sommer, Ph.D., vol. i. Text, p. 849, ll. 23-36.

a very widely diffused idea: it is found not only in several English ballads, such as Fair Margaret and Sweet William, Lord Lovell, the Douglas Tragedy, Earl Brand, etc., but in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Germany; in Magyar, Afghan, Kurd, Portuguese, Servian and Breton romance. It forms an appropriate close to the unhappy loves of Tristan and Iseult. In Ireland we find this symbol of constant and enduring affection connected with two of the finest of the old love stories, the tale of Deirdre<sup>1</sup> and the tale of Baile the Sweet-Spoken.<sup>2</sup> At the close of the tale of the Sons of Usnach, O'Flanagan tells us that the following traditional relation is always added. King Conachar, incensed that the lovers should even in death be laid together, ordered their graves to be separated, and stakes of yew driven through the bodies to keep them for ever asunder. These yew-stakes, however, sprang into trees which grew so tall that they embraced each other over the Cathedral of Armagh. This addition is evidently of later date than the tale itself, and might easily have been imported from outside. The other story, however, is certainly ancient and has some features that are peculiarly Gaelic. Two lovers, separated from each other, and dwelling one in Ulster and one in Leinster, fall dead on learning each of the death of the other; the false news having been conveyed to them by a horrible apparition. Out of the grave of Aillinn, the lady, sprang an apple-tree which bore on its top the shape of Aillinn's head. Out of her lover's tomb grew a yew, which on its top bore the

<sup>1</sup> See *infra*, p. 53, the 'Sorrowful Death of the Sons of Usnach.'

<sup>2</sup> This charming tale has been translated by Professor Kuno Meyer in *Rev. Celt.* vol. xiii.

shape of the head and form of Baile. At the end of seven years these trees were cut down and poet's tablets made of them, in which most appropriately the 'visions and feasts and loves and wooings' of Ulster and of Leinster were severally written. The tale then goes on to say that the famous King of Tara, Art mac Conn, on the occasion of a great feast caused these tablets to be brought before him; but hardly were they taken into his hands than they sprang together, twining one around the other 'as the woodbine round a branch, nor was it possible to sever them. And they were kept, like any other jewel, in the treasury of Tara.' The circumstances of this tale are so ancient and curious, that it is impossible to suppose that it had any other than an Irish origin.

Among Oriental parallels, in which it is impossible that one story can have influenced the other, we may take the story of Cuchullin and his son Conla (or Connaeche) as an example. It bears a remarkable resemblance to the Persian story of Sohrab and Rustem. When Cuchullin parts from Aife, the warrior-woman in Alba, he leaves with her a ring to be placed on the finger of the son who should be born to them, so soon as he can wear it.<sup>1</sup> The child is to follow him to Erin and seek his father, but he is put under *gessa* never to refuse combat to any who offer it, and above all never to reveal his name. The youth eventually went to Ireland and unwittingly engaged in single combat with his own father, by whose hand he was slain. It was only at the

<sup>1</sup> 'Wooing of Emer,' *infra*, p. 79. For a discussion of the subject, see a paper entitled 'Problems of Heroic Legend,' by Alfred Nutt, International Folklore Congress, 1891. M. d'Arbois de Jubainville considers that the Irish version of the legend is older than either the Persian or Teutonic one.

moment of death that the unhappy parent recognised the ring that he had given to his son.

The Persian story is almost identical. Rustem, following the traces of his horse, which has been stolen from him during his sleep, becomes entangled in a wood, but is received with great hospitality by the King of Semengam, who gives him his daughter in marriage. When they separate on the morrow, Rustem leaves with Tehmine a pearl which is to be worn as a token and bestowed upon her child, should it prove to be either son or daughter. It will endow the wearer with invincible courage. Sohrab is born some time afterwards and, like Conla, develops with marvellous rapidity the strength and valour of a warrior. Conla is only seven years old when he departs to find Cuchullin; Sohrab, at the age of ten years, defeats all his comrades, and forces from his mother the name of his sire. He then determines to become king of Iran by dethroning Kawas; but in destroying the White Castle defended by a warrior princess, he enters into single combat with his father and is mortally wounded by him. As he falls, Rustem recognises on the arm of his son the pearl that he had left with Tehmine.

Of classic parallels several examples may be cited. In reading the 'Wooing of Emer' (*infra*), for example, the account of Dervorgil, daughter of Ruad, seated on the seashore awaiting the coming of the Formorian pirates who are to carry her off in unholy tribute, will call up to the reader classical analogies, though it would be difficult to decide whether the story is an imitation. We incline to think that the story of Dervorgil is in some points so completely Irish that it must have originated quite independently.



Norse and Teutonic myth probably exercised some influence over early Gaelic literature. This would be only the natural outcome of centuries of close intercourse and inter-marriage, and the debt was richly repaid by Ireland in her influence over the Northern Saga and Edda. At the present moment the exact nature and extent of this influence is undergoing investigation by German and English scholars, and it is too early to pronounce upon the subject.<sup>1</sup> Whether the large claims made by Zimmer and his followers for Scandinavian literary domination over Irish romance will be ultimately accepted cannot at present be foreseen. Yet when we have taken into account all these changes brought into the tales from without, the fact remains that in all their broader general features these old legends are purely Irish, and that such characteristics as may have been impressed upon them through contact with other literatures are of very small importance when compared with the whole mass of the romance which to a slight degree they effected. We are here speaking only of the older heroic Sagas, which were preserved from about the eleventh or twelfth century in writing; that is to say, the cycle of the Tuatha dé Danann gods, and the Conchobar-Cuchulainn cycle, with the tales more or less closely connected with the latter and partaking of the same literary character. The third cycle, that of the Ossianic or Finn Saga, is of a wholly different character and cannot be treated on the same lines. It seems to have had a continuous growth and development through a long space of time, and has undergone great modifications. Much of it was handed

<sup>1</sup> Zimmer, *Keltische Beiträge*, iii. *Zeitschrift für deutsches Alterthum*, Berlin, 1891.

down orally, and even to the present day, the peasants relate the deeds of Finn and his heroes. It is probable that many stories, originally independent, have become united to this cycle, in the same manner as the Arthurian Saga gathered into itself many tales having an independent origin. Many elements that were not part of the ancient legends have entered into them. Moreover, these tales do not show any continuity: it would be much more difficult to construct a satisfactory Saga of a connected kind out of the Finn stories than it is to do so out of the Cuchullin stories, and this, not from lack of material, but because of its abundance, and because the diversity of style and tone that is to be found in these tales would not allow of their producing the required effect of homogeneity. They are the literature of a long series of centuries, and they bear all the marks of the varied conditions under which they came into existence.

The Cuchullin Saga, on the other hand, is singularly complete and homogeneous. It exceeds the other Gaelic cycles in the fulness and orderliness of its conception, as it exceeds them in dignity and in polish of style and sentiment.

We have, too, the singular good fortune to possess by far the larger number of the tales belonging to this Saga, as a glance at the chart at the beginning of this work will show.

Almost all the larger and more important tales have come down to us, and it is possible that future research may yet fill up some gaps. Of some of the more popular tales as many as eight copies exist; indeed, we can judge pretty correctly of the comparative degree of favour accorded to the tales by the number of manuscripts we have of them. The 'Sorrowful Death of the

Sons of Usnach,' for instance, was evidently a very favourite tale: M. D'Arbois gives a list of twenty-one versions of it, some in quite modern copies; of the 'Wooring of Emer' there are remaining eight copies; of the 'Battle of Muirthemne,' twenty-three; of the 'Bruidhen dá Derga,' nine.

This preservation of the tales, due in part to their early redaction and in part perhaps to their loss of favour before the Ossianic Saga, is the more satisfactory, because the tales are so intimately connected together that the loss of any important story leaves a gap in the continuity of the whole. They form so complete a series that we might almost suppose the entire Saga to have been invented and thrown together by a single brain. The plot develops in the various tales with the regularity and sequence of successive chapters in a novel. We can trace the career of the chief figures in the drama from birth to death through a series of adventures that are mutually interdependent. We become as familiar with each of them as with the friends around our own fireside. Every detail of their lives is laid before us; every adventure that they encounter has its own proper place in the Saga; every personage, be he good or evil, reaps in his lifetime his due reward.

Although the cycle exists, and apparently always has existed, in a number of isolated tales, to the minds of the bards it must have presented itself as a connected whole. No character is lost sight of; and the strong sense of poetic justice that denominates Irish legend, requires that the final judgment should be accurately meted out to each according to the laws of a just retribution.

What is more singular still is the uniform dignity of

thought and style preserved in the various stories, and this in spite of the fact that they have been handed down to us by a large number of scribes writing at different periods and in various places.

A few of the tales show a marked contrast to the rest; such are the 'Death of Fergus mac Leide,'<sup>1</sup> one of the few purely humorous folk-tales belonging to this cycle; some recensions of the Deirdre story; and the second 'Feast of Bricriu,' which M. D'Arbois tells us was composed on an occasion when the guests, wearied of the older and more familiar form of the story, demanded something new, whereupon the reciter invented on the spot a bombastic variation of the original theme.<sup>2</sup>

As a rule, however, we experience no shock in point of style in passing from one story to another: though some are older and some are simpler than others, the general manner of recital is the same throughout; and above all, the characters keep their own individuality strongly marked and unimpaired in all the stories. They have to a very large extent escaped the modernisation consequent upon oral repetition.

In his recently published preface to the Yellow Book of Lecan, Dr. Atkinson makes some charges against ancient Irish Literature which, coming from such a source, may seriously militate against the public appreciation of it, and delay its acceptance as one of the important mediæval romance literatures of the world. Speaking of the imaginative work of the

<sup>1</sup> Standish H. O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, vol. ii. pp. 269-285.

<sup>2</sup> *Épopée celtique en Irlande*. The author does not give his authority for this statement. Dr. Windisch has published the original in *Irische Texte*, zweite Serie, 1. Heft.

bards, he makes the three following statements. First he says: 'There is no solid ground for supposing that the tales current at the time of our earliest manuscripts were much more numerous than the tales of which fragments have come down to us: the facsimiles published by the Academy probably contain a large proportion of all that ever existed; and here it is astonishing how little there really is, considering the number of pages occupied by the writing. There are so many repetitions of certain tales, there is so much of mere metrical sawdust and technical scaffolding, so many pages taken up with genealogical fact and speculation . . . that the whole mass, when sifted, furnishes in reality but a very small quantity of what may be called imaginative literature.' Secondly, he says: 'As to their knowledge of classic literature or of any form of such scholastic lore as was cultivated in the Middle Ages, we can scarcely assert anything but of a negative kind. The Irish writer in general seems to have had no resources save the recollection of his oft-told tales. These were *de rigueur* and he could not alter them. The movements of the world affected him but little, and its great models probably never reached him. Hence in all the enormous mass of Irish manuscript preserved, there is absolutely nothing that in the faintest degree rivals the splendours of the vernacular literature of the Middle Ages.' Again, ' . . . The Irish writers do not often sin by grossness of speech, probably never by licentiousness of thought, but there is an utter absence of any elevation of thought or dignity about them.'

Here are three accusations against the Irish writers of romance. First, paucity of material; secondly,

ignorance of classic and foreign mediæval literatures; thirdly, an 'utter absence of elevation of thought or dignity.' These are very serious strictures: if they are true, Ireland certainly is possessed of no literature worthy the name. With regard to the question of paucity of material, it is difficult to see how, with the Yellow Book of Lecan before him, the writer could have come to this conclusion. A very large proportion of the contents of that book are pure romance, and it contains some of the finest romances in the language. Take the list of contents. It opens with the 'Voyage of Maelduin,' the 'Voyage of Snedgus and MacRialga,' the 'Navigation of Bran,' and the 'Adventures of Concla.' Except a 'duan'-poem all the pieces in the first division are therefore pure romance. Division II. opens with a fragment of the Táin bó Cuailgne, and contains the Táin bo Dartada, Táin bo Regaman, Táin bo Regamna, Táin bó Fraich, and Táin bo Aingen, successive romances. Then, mixed indeed with some homilies, tales of saints, and historical fragments, we find the 'Destruction of the Court of Da Derga,' the tale of the 'Sons of Usnach,' the 'Feast of Bricriu,' the 'Wooing of Becfola,' the 'Slaying of Curói mac Daire,' a number of Cuchullin stories, and some of the more important tales of the Ossianic literature. Altogether there are upwards of thirty semi-historic and romantic pieces of importance in this one manuscript alone, of which a good number belong to our Saga.

Of the great mass of Gaelic literature that has come down to us, a goodly portion is taken up with pure story-telling. But while it is true, and fortunately so, that several copies of the more important tales remain, and in many cases supplement each other, and while it is

probable that we possess some fragments at least of the majority of those most commonly in use for recitation, it is far from correct to say that there have come down to us almost all that ever existed. Take the Book of Leinster catalogue of romances. This twelfth century manuscript contains a most valuable list of one hundred and eighty-seven tales known to the writer as Prime Tales, or those of the first importance. Of these only about sixty-eight remain in any complete form, though about twenty-five more are known through Keating, or are incorporated into other tales. Since O'Curry first republished the list, several tales unknown to him have been discovered, and others may yet be unearthed by a more thorough examination of the manuscripts. Nevertheless, the fact that out of a list which contains only 'Prime Stories,' or those considered by the bards to be of the greatest importance, only about one-third have been preserved, and only about half are known at all, is sufficient proof that a large number even of the most popular tales have been lost to us. Now a fully equipped poet was said to have at his command 'five times fifty' of these Prime Stories besides twice fifty Secondary Stories (*i.e.* three hundred and fifty in all), and there is no reason to doubt the truth of the statement. We see from it that the long catalogue given in the Book of Leinster forms by no means a complete series even of the Prime Tales, while it does not mention the Secondary Stories at all. The immense mass of Ossianic literature is hardly noticed in it; the Fenian stories, except the 'Elopement of Diarmuid and Grainne,' not having yet apparently made for themselves a place in the *répertoire* of the bardic 'prime' romances.

Nearly all those mentioned in the list belong to the

earlier cycles, or are of a semi-historic character. Of the cycle of the Tuatha dé Danann there is hardly any doubt that tales were known to the people which have disappeared, and were probably never committed to writing at all; and of our own cycle, although it is perhaps the most complete of any, certain tales are not forthcoming.<sup>1</sup> The Battle of Magh Rath (Moyra), which is a late semi-historical epic, mentions a number of well-known Ultonian fights, of which even the names are unknown to us, but which were evidently familiar to the writer and his hearers at the time at which the tract was written.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Atkinson's first statement is not, we think, borne out by an examination of the question.

The second statement, that the scribes were ignorant of classic and foreign literatures and of scholastic lore, does not much concern us here; but to the final accusation, viz., that the Irish romanticist was deficient in imagination and elevation of thought, we are prepared to give a direct denial, and we hope the republication of this collection of tales belonging to the Cuchullin Saga will confirm our view in the minds of our readers. We believe that Irish romance may take its place fearlessly beside the Arthurian legend, the French and Provençal romances, or the Northern Sagas in the same stage of their development, and that it will be found to possess some of the best qualities, and to be comparatively free from some of the worst defects, of other mediæval literatures. Dr. Atkinson has done Irish story-telling justice in saying that it seldom sins by grossness of speech, and still less often by licentiousness of thought. In the general purity of its tone and

<sup>1</sup> See Chart.

<sup>2</sup> Pp. 211-215.



language, it compares very favourably with the mediæval literatures of the south of Europe. Such blemishes as we find in the stories arise seldom or never from looseness of thought or language on the part of the story-teller; they arise out of certain primitive habits of life and certain tribal regulations that, though repellent to modern ideas, were not so in the age in which they arose; or out of attempts to explain the great mysteries of life and change and renewal before which the savage mind has always bowed in instinctive awe; or out of a simpler and more naturalistic mode of expression than modern taste allows. All archaic literatures reveal the primitive mind brought face to face with the, to it, inexplicable puzzles of the variations, the decay, and the rebirth of nature; of human birth and death; of the connection between man and that invisible world into which, one by one, his fellows have departed, never to return. Two problems, above all, confronted him continually, and in the presence of both he was struck dumb, namely, the daily renewal of the sun, and the perpetual reproduction of life. Before both he felt that awe which is the beginning of worship, and to explain both he invented myths that seem to us inadequate, confused, and often repulsive, but which were the only means whereby the uncultured mind could express its wonder and curiosity. Those things that we have learned by long experiment or by scientific inquiry were all unknown to him; moreover, those rules of life which experience has taught us to be beneficial or to be harmful to society, he had to learn to be so only by repeated experiment; even those dictates of sound judgment which we call moral laws and think to be implanted in our nature from without,

have originally been reached by our ancestors only through a long series of experiences, whose results have proved certain acts to be injurious and others to be beneficial. Such myths and such naturalistic expressions, however, do not merit the reproach which belongs to intentional grossness of idea and of speech. They have nothing whatever in common with it; and though we have thought it well, in a book intended for general reading, to omit a few passages that might wound modern susceptibilities, we would have it to be understood that these passages are not only very few in number, but that they are generally the outcome of an ancient simplicity of life and thought, and seldom arise from any coarseness or indecency of design. For in reading the majority of these tales we must remember that we are dealing with ideas springing from a very primitive stage of civilisation: they arose in days when warriors appeared in full dress with the skulls of their conquered foes dangling from their waist-belts; when one of the three Royal Halls of Emania was adorned with the same ghastly trophies; and when no champion of repute thought that he had achieved his day's work unless he had slain his enemy. In the halls of the Red Branch it was necessary to hang up the champions' swords and shields in a separate house, lest the warriors should spring to arms in the course of a friendly banquet. In battle, noted champions fought with sling-stones made from the brains of their enemies. The fierce barbarism of the period comes out in such scenes as that in the 'Siege of Howth,' where, in time of war, the milk from the cows driven into the centre of the headland was cast down the cliffs, rather than that it should be given to the wounded and

dying troops; in the curious dialogue between Cuchullin and the Morrighu or goddess of war; in the brutality of the king in the tale of the 'Debility of the Ultonian Warriors'; or in almost any passage from the Táin bó Cuailgne.'

We naturally expect, with this primitive civilisation, to meet with a corresponding barbarity of thought. But here we find ourselves again at variance with the preface to the Yellow Book of Lecan, for the tales are remarkable, not only for purity of thought, but for a certain elevation and dignity that impresses us with the conviction that we are dealing in them with men of honour and delicacy. The heroes are always gentlemen, their appeal is to noble motives; their chivalrous generosity to their enemies is only equalled by their devotion to their friends. Classic literature contains nothing more pathetic and more full of the true spirit of chivalry than the combat between Cuchullin and Ferdia,<sup>1</sup> once bosom friends and fellow-pupils, now urged into death-combat by the wiles of Meave. Remark their noble estimate of each other's prowess; their sorrowful memory of old friendships; the fine lament of Cuchullin over his fallen friend. Each night, when the combat is over, they throw their arms round each other's necks and embrace. Their horses are put up in the same paddock and their charioteers sleep beside the same fire: each night Cuchullin sends to his wounded friend a share of the same herbs that are applied to his own wounds, while to Cuchullin, Ferdia sends a fair half of the pleasant delicate foods supplied to him by the men of Erin. Generosity was carried to an extraordinary pitch between enemies, and many of

<sup>1</sup> See *infra*, Táin Bó Cuailgne, sec. 79.

the Irish conceptions of honour were founded upon exaggerated ideas of generosity. When the satirist, Cú Cuilleg, demands from Cuchullin the gift of his spear with which he intends to kill its owner, Cuchullin immediately grants it, though in such a manner that in casting it towards his adversary, it slays him and his companions. So far from taking pleasure in the death of his wily enemy, Cuchullin, in one version of the tale, bemoans the loss of his own honour, in having inadvertently compassed his death; nor will he, though the spear is lying on the ground, consent to pick it up again. 'Nay,' he says, when his charioteer would recover the weapon, 'never have I sought to recover a gift that I had bestowed, neither seek I to retrieve this one'; and this, although Cuchullin knows that it is by this spear that his own death will befall.<sup>1</sup> Again, in the 'Siege of Howth' and the 'Death of Cuchullin' we find another instance of singular chivalry between foes. In the former story we have a combat described between Mesgregra, King of Leinster, and Conall *cernach*; in the second a similar single combat between Conall *cernach* and Lugaid to avenge the death of Cuchullin. In both cases Conall's adversary has lost a hand in a former fight, and in order to equalise his strength with that of his enemy, Conall consents to have one of his own arms bound to his side that he may have no unfair advantage.<sup>2</sup> We find the same high idea of honour in warfare all through the romances. See, for instance, the conversation between Fergus and Cuchullin about the death of the rash youth, Etarchomal, who went

<sup>1</sup> From the 'Great Defeat on the Plain of Muirthemne' (MS. Brit. Mus., Egerton 132, fol. 1).

<sup>2</sup> See 'Death of Cuchullin' and 'Siege of Howth,' *supra* pp. 92, 262.

against Cuchullin when under the safe escort of Fergus;<sup>1</sup> or notice the reply of the messenger, who enters uninvited the Speckled Palace where Cuchullin lies sick, in the tale called the 'Sickbed of Cuchullin.' When asked his errand, the unknown replies: 'Were he well who now lies here, he would be a guarantee for my safety against all Ulster; since, however, he is in sickness and in evil plight, so much the more is he a security against them,' *i.e.* they would take no advantage of Cuchullin's illness to harm a friend of his, but would, on the contrary, so much the rather receive and welcome him on that account. Truly we are dealing with savages whose feelings are the feelings of gentlemen. In all things they act up to the spirit of Cuchullin's exclamation when his friends would restrain him from going forth to his last fight, knowing that in that battle he must fall, 'I had rather than the whole world's gold and than the earth's riches that death had ere now befallen me, so would not this shame and testimony of reproach now stand recorded against me; for in every tongue this noble old saying is remembered, "Fame outlives Life."'

While the Saga with which we are now dealing has escaped almost entirely the exaggerations and the grotesque buffoonery of some of the later Ossianic stories, it is by no means devoid of humour. On the contrary, there is a constant play of bright and witty conversation, and a frequent introduction of lively incidents which prevents even the longer romances from becoming tedious. Even in the *Táin bó Cuailgne*, composed in large part of the description of a series of hand-to-hand combats, the fresh invention of the

<sup>1</sup> *Táin bó Cuailgne*, 'Combat of Etarchomal,' secs. 47, 48.

writer and the constant introduction of humorous passages so breaks up the tale that it never becomes monotonous. How delicious is the conversation of the frightened youth, who is sent to cut down chariot-poles by Meave, about the terrible champion, Cuchullin, of whom he stands in so great terror! Little is the timid woodcutter aware that it is to the hero himself that he is expressing his fears! How delightfully human is Cuchullin in spite of his prodigious strength and valour! There is indeed something of the happy carelessness of boyhood, with its easy humour and good-nature, all through his career. Throughout the whole Saga there is a strong element of gaiety and of quaint or grim humour. Of the latter there can be no better example than the description of the raven that in stooping down to drink the dying hero's blood got entangled in his gore and overset. 'Then,' says the tale, 'Cuchullin, knowing well that it was his last laugh, laughed aloud.' The episode is worthy of a Northern epic. This lightness of touch, energy, and variety are almost peculiar to Irish Celtic romance; the Arthurian cycle, especially, is deficient in humour.

Again, we would point out the exquisite tenderness of the tales. As it belonged to Celtic romance to impose upon the mind of Europe a new type and ideal of womanhood, the type of Iseult and Elaine, of Guinevere and Enid, so it belonged to Ireland to create some of the earliest love-tales of Western Europe, the love-tales of Deirdre and Emer, of Etaine and Grainne. The love-tales of Ireland are not alone among the most ancient in Western Europe, they have also a purity, a tenderness, and a charm hardly to be found elsewhere.

They are indeed a special production of the Gael. These sprightly, winsome, very human maidens belong to an order of things as unlike the Titanic women of the Northern Saga as they are unlike the morbid, luxurious ladies of Southern romance. The Irish Saga holds an intermediate place between the two; it is more heroic than the one, more tender and human than the other. Two of these tales play a prominent part in our Saga. The 'Wooing of Emer' tells how Cuchullin won his bride. The story of the 'Sons of Usnach' tells the tale of Naisi's perils and sufferings in consequence of his abduction of the promised wife of Conachar, Deirdre. Both tales show the high estimate that was placed in Ireland upon woman's influence. An interesting comparison might be instituted between the character of Deirdre in her extreme youth and before her flight with Naisi in the very early form of the tale published by Dr. Windisch in *Irische Texte*, vol. i. pp. 67-81,<sup>1</sup> and a modern version, recently published with an English translation, by Dr. Douglas Hyde, in the *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*. The touch of savagery that enters into her wooing of Naisi in the ancient form of the tale has been softened into the coy shyness of the romantic girl of a later date. There is a scene in the later version that might well rank with the famous scene between Juliet and her nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*. In the shortened form of Part I. given below, many of these details are omitted, but Part II., which differs much less seriously in various

<sup>1</sup> A French translation of Windisch's text will be found in *Revue des Traditions Populaires*, tome iii., avril 1888; and a version, substantially identical, made by O'Flanagan from an unknown MS., in the Transactions of the Gaelic Society. Dublin, 1808.

versions than Part I., shows Deirdre as resourceful as she was constant and gentle. Her spirit is as fine as Emer's, and her foresight and watchfulness on behalf of her husband would, had they been heeded, have preserved him from all perils.

The character of Emer unfolds itself in a series of stories in which she plays her part. We know her from the moment that she comes before us in her girlhood, sitting on the lawn before her father's fort at Lusk, 'accomplished in the six arts of perfect womanhood,' to the time when, having watched in vain for the return of her husband to his home at Dundalk, she rouses all the reserved forces of her nature to stir up vengeance for his death. One of the quaintest scenes in any old literature is the 'Contest of the Women,'<sup>1</sup> in the Feast of Bricriu, in which Emer loftily claims precedence of the women of Erin on account of the superior valour of her husband. She is a type of woman altogether Irish. The Arthurian women are as gentle, but they lack the charming sprightliness, the spirit and self-respect, that add so much piquancy to the character of Emer and the rest. Notice in the 'Wooring of Emer' the delightful capriciousness of her conversation with her lover, her gay retorts, her provoking allusion, just at the moment when he believes her about to yield, to the habits of her country, where a younger sister may not be married before an elder. She is quite ready, she maliciously assures her wooer, to introduce him to her sister, who doubtless will value his attentions, and who is very 'expert in needlework.' There is much of the modern woman in Emer; she

<sup>1</sup> M. D'Arbois de Jubainville gives a French translation of this text in *Épopée celtique en Irlande*.



never gives herself away, and she chooses that her future husband, with whom she is nevertheless already in love, shall appreciate her value and prove himself worthy of her. So she recites before him her talents, her parentage, her beauty, her noble womanhood; and when, stung by her seeming scorn, he declares that he also is of noble birth and upbringing, and that in valour and honour no warrior in Ulster can dispute with him, she says that no doubt 'for a tender boy' he has not done badly, but that strangely enough she has never so much as heard his name. And she sends him away with no further certainty of success than the promise that if he shall prove his prowess in a series of difficult feats she will not then refuse him. Thus she pricks on her lover to worthy deeds. Once won, she is the faithfulest of wives. Her pride in him, her grief at his loss, prove her in every way a mate fitted for a hero.

We can hardly call the story of Macha<sup>1</sup> a love-tale, but as the history of a woman's heroic self-sacrifice on behalf of her husband, it would be hard to find its equal.

Macha is superhuman; she is one of the early deities come back, as they so often did, to share the sorrows and pains of men; but this does not detract from the splendour of her resolve, the womanly dignity of her character, the pity of her suffering, the heroism of her endurance. It is a splendid tale. The dignity of her rebuke to the bystanders, 'It is not becoming that in my condition I should be rudely gazed upon'; her last anguished appeal to their humanity, 'a mother has borne each one of you,' can only be equalled in the finest dramatic literature. It is akin to the spirit of Hermione and Cordelia, of Constance

<sup>1</sup> 'Debility of the Ultonians,' *infra*, pp. 95-100.

and the mother of Coriolanus. The brief simplicity with which her tale is told enhances its force.

(b) *Historical Aspect of the Saga*

In spite of much that has been written to the contrary, there does not appear to be any solid ground for believing that most of the characters belonging to this cycle are historical personages, or that the cycle as a whole has any place in the Annals of Ireland. Like the Teutonic Saga, it is slightly connected with the history of the country that gave it birth, but, like that Saga, its most important figures and its general scope and purpose are purely mythological. Cuchullin and Emer, like Sigurd and Brynhilde, are the offspring of poetic imagination.

Nevertheless, there is an evident effort made to give the Saga an appearance of historic probability by connecting its central figures with actual historic personages. King Conachar is said to be the son of Fachtna *fathach* (*i.e.* the Wise or Prudent) who, according to the Four Masters, ascended the throne of Ulster in the Age of the World 5042 (B.C. 152). Here is the entry:

'A.M. 5042. The first year of Fachtna *fathach* in the sovereignty of Ireland.' This is immediately followed by the announcement of his death fifteen years later:

'A.M. 5057. Fachtna *fathach*, son of Rossa, son of Rudhraighe, after having been sixteen years in the sovereignty of Ireland, was slain by Eochaid *feidhleach* (*i.e.* the constant sighing).' It was in the time of the latter monarch that the division of Ireland into twenty-five parts, originated by Ugaine mór three centuries earlier, was rescinded, and the division into five provinces made.

One of these divisions was governed by Fergus mac Leide,<sup>1</sup> who ruled Ulster as tributary to Eochaid *feidhleach* and whose name appears occasionally in connection with our Saga. There is no mention whatever of Conachar in the Annals of the Four Masters although he is casually and doubtfully mentioned in the Annals of Clonmacnois with other princes belonging to our Saga. It has been attempted to identify him with a king named Conchobhar *adhradhruadh* (i.e. Conor of the red eyelashes or eyebrows) son of Finn *file*, son of Rossa *ruadh*, who was sovereign of Ireland for one year in A.M. 5192 or about B.C. 3 (see Annals IV. Mast. A.M. 5192). Though the date would agree pretty well, the resemblance begins and ends at this point. He was king only one year, and reigned over all Erin, not over Ulster only; he is said to have been killed by Lugaid of the Red Stripes, King of Erin, who had no hand in the death of the King of Ulster. In fact, though O'Flaherty<sup>2</sup> accepts the whole of the Red Branch Champions, with Conachar at their head, as actual personages, there is no place for them to be found in the Annals. The mortal parentage of Conachar also is ascribed in most of the tales to Cathbad the druid, and it would appear to have been a later idea, introduced by the historians, to connect him with Fachtna *fathach*. In the poem, of which we have quoted a portion in the text (see 'Glories of

<sup>1</sup> According to the curious tale entitled the 'Death of Fergus mac Leide' (*Sil. Gad.* trans. pp. 269-285), Fergus became King of Ulidia (i.e. the south-eastern division of Ulster). In the tale of the 'Destruction of the Bruidhen Dá Choga' the people propose to elect him king of the whole province on the death of Conachar.

<sup>2</sup> O'Flaherty's *Ogygia*, part iii. chaps. xlvi.-xlviiii., Eng. trans. by J. Hely.

Conachar's Reign'), the stanzas are contradictory, some making him son to Cathbad and some to the king of Ireland. Nor was Fachtna a fortunate sovereign on whom to have fixed as the human father of the Ulster king, for Fachtna died, as we have seen, B.C. 136, whereas the birth of Conachar is everywhere synchronised with the date of the birth of our Lord. Out of the three remaining accounts of the generation of Conachar only one (Stowe MS. No. 992) connects him with Fachtna *fathach*, and that as if by an after-thought, for the very same piece elsewhere distinctly calls him Cathbad's son. It would seem that when once his royal descent from a known king of Erin had been popularly accepted, it was thought necessary by the scribes to introduce it into his birth-stories. The dates of his death do not agree any better than those of his birth, for Conachar is said to have died at the moment of our Lord's Crucifixion, in grief for His death; yet in the fragment of the Annals of Tighernach, preserved in Trinity College, Dublin, his death is dated B.C. 48. O'Flaherty, evidently observing the inconsistency, says 'the king *came near* committing suicide, but lived fifteen years after.'

Among the characters who appear both in the romances and in the Annals, are Conaire, son of Ederscel, slain in the destruction of Bruidhen dá Derga; Lugaid *Sriabh nDearg* 'of the Red Stripes' who married Dervorgil, daughter of Ruad, liberated by Cuchullin from imminent danger on Rathlin Island ('Wooing of Emer,' *infra*, p. 81) and who is said to have died of grief on his wife's death.<sup>1</sup> This Lugaid

<sup>1</sup> 'He reigned twenty-five years, and died of a concept he took of the death of his wife Dervorgil,' Ann. Clonmacnois.

is represented as the close friend of Cuchullin. At the moment when he was called to occupy the vacant throne of Tara he is found watching by the sickbed of the hero, who thereupon rises to instruct him in the duties of a prince (*infra*, p. 231).

Tales relating to different personages of the same name have evidently become associated with Lugaid, as it is impossible to reconcile the conflicting characteristics ascribed to him. He is probably distinct from Lugaid son of Curói who slew Cuchullin, certainly from Lugaid mac Nois, although the scribe in the 'Wooring of Emer' appears to confuse them.

These, with Fachtna *fathach* and Congal *cláringnech* (A.M. 5016-5031), are the only members of the cycle mentioned in the Annals of the Four Masters.

Possibly we may add to our list of real personages Meave, the powerful and magnificent Queen of Connacht. She was daughter of Eochaid *feidleach*, the King of Erin who made war upon and slew Fachtna *fathach*. The stories concerning her are much confused. She seems to have been thrice married, *i.e.* to Conachar and to two Ailells. At the time of the Táin bó Cuailgne she is wife of Ailell or Oilioll, prince of Connacht, and is bent upon revenging herself upon her former husband, Conachar. For this purpose she invited Fergus with many Ultonian princes to her court when he was driven from the kingdom of Ulster. She was one of a large family, her brothers being Breas, Nar, and Lothar; her sisters Mumhain, Eile, Deirdre, Clothra, and Eithne. The legends of their deeds and intermarriages are as confused as those of the earlier Greek deities. Meave's own family was even more numerous, and some powerful tribes

claim descent from her. The character and personality of Meave are drawn on the largest and boldest lines. Beautiful, ambitious and imperious, she is equally fearless in forming her designs, and unscrupulous in executing them. She is a splendid type of the barbarian chieftainess, ruling her people with the craft of an Elizabeth, and leading them to war with the courage of a Boadicea. Though the conception of her has probably expanded with time, it is difficult to believe that she had no original in actual life. Curiously enough, this terrible personage is remembered by the Irish as the queen of the fairies. She is probably the Queen Mab of *Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet* and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*.

The Annals of Clonmacnois, which are specially explicit on matters relating to the district through which the Shannon runs, give a lengthy account of Meave.

### (c) *Mythology*

Nevertheless, though a few of the personages mentioned in our tales are to be met with in the ancient semi-historic records, it is plain that we are dealing with a purely mythological cycle, some of the heroes of which have been loosely connected with the history of the country, but for whose achievements and careers, as a whole, there is no place in the Annals of Ireland.

What is even of more importance is to note that the pedigree of all the chief heroes is traced up to the Tuatha dé Danann,<sup>1</sup> and over and above this, that a special interference of these gods is recorded in the birth-stories of the greater champions of the cycle. From the accompanying table it will be seen that both Cathbad and Ross *ruadh*, from whom the larger number

<sup>1</sup> Yet, according to the Annals, there is a lapse of 1500 years between the epoch of the Tuatha dé Danann and that of the Ulster cycle of heroes.

of the heroes are descended, are directly connected with the earlier gods by their marriage with Maga, daughter of Angus na Brugh, son of the Dagda.

### THE RED BRANCH.

TABLE I. (Descendants of Maga by Ross *ruadh*, 'the Red.')

Head of the House, Rudhraigh (Rory or Rury).

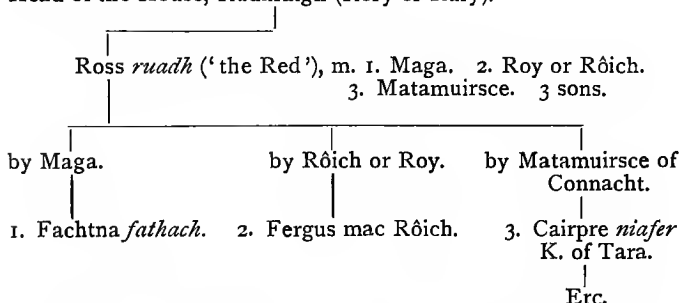


TABLE II. (Descendants of Maga, d. of Angus na Brugh, by Cathbad.)

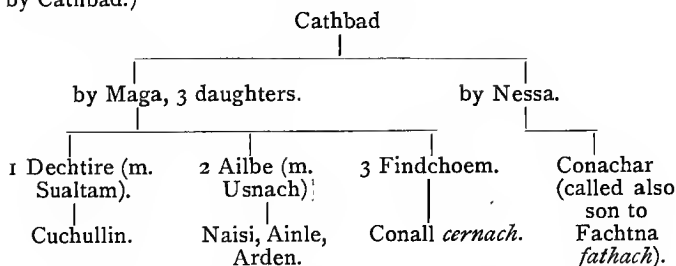


TABLE III. (Descendants of Maga by Cairbre *cendearg*.)

Cairbre cendearg, 'Red-head.'

4 sons.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Old Poem in *Irische Texte*, zweite Serie, p. 178, and Gaelic Soc. Pub., 1808, pp. 26-27, and *Sil. Gad.*, Extracts XII. xxv., p. 527.

Conachar is called a *día talmaide* or terrestrial god of the Ultonians in LU. 101 *b.*; and Dechtire, his sister, the mother of Cuchullin, is called a goddess; Cuchullin *mc dea dechtiri*, 'the son of the goddess Dechtire,' LL. 123*b.*

Cuchullin is, throughout his career, placed under the direct care of Lugh *lamfada* just as later, in Ossianic legend, Diarmuid O'Duibhne is represented as under the special guardianship of Angus, who watches over his career and succours him in time of danger. But more than this, Lugh appears to Dechtire, Cuchullin's mother, and tells her that he himself is her little child; *i.e.* that the child is a re-incarnation of himself. In the version of the story which we give below, Lugh is represented as the father of the boy, but it amounts to the same thing. An expression applied to Cuchullin in the 'Wooing of Emer' affords us a clue to the popular belief regarding the re-birth of demi-gods. The people of Ulster, it is said, wished to provide a wife for Cuchullin, 'knowing that his re-birth would be of himself,' *i.e.* that only from himself could another such as he have origin.

When Cuchullin is inquired of by Emer, in the same piece, as to his birth and rearing, he makes no mention whatever of Sualtach or Sualtam his reputed mortal father, but points proudly to his honourable descent from Lugh.

Though, as we have already pointed out, the accounts have become confused and some have been lost, there is no doubt at all as to the purpose of these tales. They agree in setting the champions outside the course of ordinary human existence, and point them out as beings of supernatural origin and possessed of divine powers. The significance of Cuchullin's association



with Lugh *lamfada* 'long-hand' cannot be overlooked. Without wishing unduly to press the tales into the service of mythological speculation, the position of Lugh among the early gods is clear. The subject has been treated at great length by Professor Rhys,<sup>1</sup> and whether the whole of his mythological theories be accepted or not, the Welsh and Irish tales which he has thrown together regarding this important and impressive personage leave no doubt at all as to the manner in which the early romanticists regarded this god. Let us take two passages from the Irish tales belonging to the first or Tuatha dé Danann cycle in which Lugh figures prominently. In the 'Fate of the Children of Tuireann,' we read that 'One day a fair was assembled by the king of Eire upon the hill of Balor, now called Uisneach, and they were not long there when they saw an army and a goodly host coming towards them directly, and in the van there was one young man high in authority over all; and like to the setting sun was the radiance of his face and forehead, and they were unable to gaze upon his countenance on account of its splendour. And this is who it was, Lugh *lamhfhada loinnbheimionach*, "the long-handed, of strong blows," and the fairy cavalcade from the Land of Promise, and his own foster-brothers, namely, the Clann Manannain.' He is represented as riding on the steed of Manannan mac Lir (*i.e.* the sea-god), which was 'swift as the bleak cold wind of spring,' and clad in the armour and the helmet of Manannan, so that he could not be wounded under, over, or through it; and 'when the Cathbarr was off him the appearance of his face and front was as brilliant as the sun on a dry summer's day.' Lugh is represented as having been

<sup>1</sup> See *Hibbert Lectures* for 1886, pp. 390-431.

brought up in the court of Manannan, here called the Land of Promise. Further on in the same tale we read that when Lugh went forward westward from Tara to meet the Formorians, 'then Breas, the son of Balor, arose and said, "I wonder that the sun is rising in the west to-day, and in the east every other day." "It were better that it were so," said the druids. "What else (than the sun) is it?" said he. "It is the radiance of the face of Lugh *lamfada*," they said.'<sup>1</sup>

In this extract the meaning is clear. Lugh's brilliance, and his coming out of the Land of Manannan (*i.e.* the sun rising from the ocean), with his daily appearance in the east, point him out definitely as the Sun-god. His power in smiting his enemies, his contention with the 'grim and ill-looking band' who so long had oppressed Erin, and of whom all stood in such dread, is evidently the bursting of the sun-rays through the mists and vapours lying over the land.

The account of Lugh in the 'Second Battle of Moytura' confirms this belief. There came to the door of Tara in the reign of Nuada of the Silver Hand a young warrior, fair and shapely, with a king's trappings on him, in front of a band of followers. The doorkeeper asks, 'Who is there?' 'Here is Lugh *lonnannslech*, son of Cian, son of Dian-cecht and of Ethne, daughter of Balor.' He goes by the name of Samildánach, *i.e.* 'one possessing many arts at once.' The doorkeeper then questions him on his powers; 'for,' he says, 'no one without an art enters Tara.'<sup>2</sup> One by one the

<sup>1</sup> The 'Fate of the Children of Tuireann,' Soc. for the Preservation of the Irish Language, pp. 70, 71, 82, 83.

<sup>2</sup> 'Second Battle of Moytura,' ed. W. Stokes, *Rev. Celt.* vol. xii. Compare the Stories of Kilhwch and Olwen, and Manawyddan, son of Llyr, in Guest's *Mabinogion*, pp. 244, 400-401.

visitor claims the knowledge of every art known to his day, and protests his complete mastery over them all. His pretensions having been put to the test and proved, he is brought in and soon after placed in the kingly seat in order that he may give counsel to the assembled nobles. Here we have the Sun-god in his familiar aspect as the bringer of arts and knowledge to men ; sometimes identified with and sometimes distinct from the bringer of fire and light. The connection between fire and knowledge, that is, between physical and intellectual light and heat, is a natural one.

Cuchullin is the offspring of Lugh ; or rather he is an avatar of Lugh, for he is, in a sense, Lugh himself re-born.

He possesses many of the attributes of Lugh, and is endowed beyond all other heroes of the cycle with beauty of person, strength, dexterity and prowess.

Already in his early childhood he is singled out by his extraordinary and precocious developments ; there is, indeed, throughout his whole life, a strange mixture of the child and the hero in the god-man. His first boy-feats are performed at the age of seven, when already he is able to combat and destroy warriors of renown ; his fight with the fierce hound whence he derived his name was accomplished at six years ; his age during the lengthened and exhausting contest of the Táin Bó Cuailgne is usually given as seventeen years. Llew in the Mabinogion stories<sup>1</sup> has the same abnormal development. As a new-born babe he flings aside the sheet that enfolds him ; at a year's growth he has the size of a child of two years ; a year later he is a big lad. As Lugh is endowed with excellence in all

<sup>1</sup> See 'Mâth ab Mathonwy,' Guest's *Mabinogion*, p. 422.

arts, so Cuchullin has been taught the best lore of his time, and skill in every accomplishment.<sup>1</sup>

But besides these things which he shared, though in an excessive degree, with other heroes of the Saga, there are peculiar and very extraordinary appearances and qualities assigned to him alone. It is noteworthy that, when unmoved by any special cause of excitation, Cuchullin is represented as of unimposing appearance. He did not attract notice from those who met him casually, and, until they felt his power, the champions of the adverse party-were often inclined to jeer at and deride his pretensions to prowess. In the *Táin* we find him at one time obliged to blacken a moustache with blackberry juice in order to present a more manly appearance; the wood-cutter chats to him about 'that terrific hero, Cuchullin,' without the least suspicion that he is holding converse with the hero himself; Natch-rantal scoffs at the idea of taking out weapons to fight with a beardless boy; Meave is visibly disappointed when she first comes face to face with the champion who has been holding her forces at bay through weeks of combat, and killing them by the hundred merely with his look.

We should be satisfied to ascribe this insistence on his youthful and harmless appearance merely to the desire to heighten the effect of his valour and exploits by contrast; but the same impression is also conveyed in other tales where there is no occasion for any such device. In the *Mesca Ulad* (p. 29), for instance, he is called 'a little black-browed man, greatly resplendent'; and in the 'Wooing of Emer' he is described as 'a sad, dark man, comeliest of the men of Erin.' In striking

<sup>1</sup> See 'Wooing of Emer,' *infra*, p. 66.

contrast to this description of him is his appearance when under strong excitement or in the presence of a powerful enemy: then his whole person undergoes an extraordinary change; his very look destroys his foes, not by ones nor twos, but by hundreds; his person expands until his own friends cannot recognise him; he grows prodigious, terrific; he is known as 'the Distorted,' 'the Madman' from Emain Macha. This distortion comes upon him whenever he is confronted with an obstacle that he appears to be unable to overcome, as, for instance, when he tries three times to cross the bridge leading to the abode of Scathach; or else in presence of a foe apparently too strong for him. In the 'Great Defeat on the Plain of Muirthemne' we read that as he circled round the men of Erin before delivering his fearful onslaught 'upon the kingly champion, upon Sualtach's son, Cuchullin, his frenzy and distortion came. He made of himself a fearful and a terrible being: like a tree standing in a swollen stream his sinews quivered, and from crown to sole every limb and joint trembled like a bulrush in mid-torrent. A fearful cry of anger rang out from him. His heels, his calves, his hams, turned and came in front of him; his feet, his shins, turned and were behind him.' This strange conception of the body twisted behind before seems to have been a common Irish expression denoting great bodily swiftness or energy; we find the same description applied to Lebarcham, the swift messenger of Conchobar, in the 'Siege of Howth,' and to Dornolla or 'Bigfist' in the 'Woing of Emer.' The prodigious expansion of the body seems, however, to be a peculiarity of Cuchullin alone, as is also the special word *riastradh* used to denote it. In the Táin bó Cuailgne

(sec. 68) a full and fearful description is given of his distortion. It is therefore unnecessary to repeat it here. It should be carefully compared with the account of his ordinary appearance given in the passage immediately following. It is evident that neither of these exaggerated descriptions is applicable to any ordinary man, nor is there anything like them in the passages relating to the Tuatha dé Danann. Cuchullin, the Sun hero, holds a place intermediate between human beings and gods; and his powers and appearances, though more prodigious than either, were as peculiar to himself as were the prodigies of Herakles in Greek legend. The contrast between the sun on an ordinary day, set solitary in the universe, small of body, yet flooding the world with light, and of his appearance when bursting forth in summer glory, or rising and setting in the radiant hues of dawn or evening, could hardly be more poetically set forth than in the account of Cuchullin as a 'little dark man' who is yet 'comeliest among the men of Erin,' and such a description as the following from the Táin of his glory at special moments: 'Over his head, among the aërial clouds, poured showers and sparks of ruddy fire, the manifestations of the seething of his savage wrath. Round about it, his hair became tangled, as it had been the branches of a red thorn-bush stuffed into a strongly-fenced gap . . . Out of its centre a dusky jet of blood shot upward: taller than the mast of a great ship it arose, and was scattered to the four quarters of the heaven; it formed on high a magic-mist of gloom like to the smoky pall that drapes a regal dwelling what time a king at night-fall of a winter's day draws nigh to it.'

We are expressly told that it was at eventide that

the hero assumed this 'magic-wrought disguise' and that in full splendour he appeared next day before the women of Erin.

Take again the poetic description of the sun shining in his mid-day strength, symbolised by Cuchullin's appearance before the women. The three crowns of hair are a fine poetic simile expressive of the brilliance of the sun's noon-tide rays. 'Three crowns of hair he had: next his skin, brown; in the middle, crimson; that outside formed, as it were, a diadem of gold, for like the shining of yellow gold was each glittering, curling, beauty-coloured thread as free and loose it fell down and hung between his shoulders. About his neck were an hundred linklets of red gold that flashed again, with pendants hanging down from them.'<sup>1</sup>

Beside this we may put the remark so often made of Cuchullin that 'blindness befell all women who loved him,' which may possibly have reference to the difficulty of gazing directly at the brilliant face of the sun.

It will be noticed that this distortion of Cuchullin is associated with Lugh: 'some do say that there Lugh mac Ethlenn fought for Cuchullin.' We must now refer to another passage in the Táin in which Lugh interferes directly for the benefit of his prototype and descendant. In the shades of evening, after a fight more terrific than usual, Lugh descries a splendid warrior approaching them. He passes right athwart the camp of the men of Erin, unperceived by any. Cuchullin recognises in the advancing warrior one of his fairy kin come to succour him. He is right; it is Lugh mac Ethlenn, who, conscious of the greatness of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the description of Sûrya, a Vedic sun-god, Rig-Veda, i. 35, 2, 10; *ibid.* x. 139, 1.

his travail and the length of time during which he has taken no rest, is come for three days and three nights to occupy his place while Cuchullin takes much needed slumber. For three days accordingly 'Cuchullin slept a torpid sleep'; 'for from the Monday immediately before Samhain to the Wednesday next after the feast of Bridget (*i.e.* from November to February), save for a brief watch at mid-day, he never slept; and even that was taken as he leant upon his spear, his head resting on his fist, and his fist closed round his spear-shaft, as it lay upon his knee.'

The restlessness and continual movement of the sun seems to be here referred to, while the long torpor of the champion, which was immediately succeeded by his most terrific distortion, might well embody a savage conception of the sun under eclipse, followed by the strange appearances that it assumes when passing out of it and returning to its normal condition. Eclipses of the sun have always deeply impressed the savage mind.

Notice also that Cuchullin's most deadly fight in the Táin bó Cuailgne is with the twenty-seven sons of Calatin, after slaying whom, we read elsewhere, he never feared enemy again. He is indeed very nearly overcome by them. Howbeit, in the final battle of Muirthemne he was again brought face to face with the same deadly foe; six sons and a daughter having been born to Calatin after the destruction of the others. These hideous and crooked beings, docked by Meave's order of their right legs and left arms, surround and endeavour to entrap the hero. We read that 'the three gloomy, black, and ever-grumbling, crazy things did speedily and with alacrity, in company with the wind's swift



clouds, travel to Emain. There, out of light and fluttering grass-stems of the noxious puff-balls and of the bonny-coloured oaken foliage, they upon the plain evoked armies and battalions, so that Cuchullin heard their marshalled armies shout, as it were spoiling the fort and destroying it.'

It is hardly possible not to see in this paragraph a description of the struggle between the rays of the sun and the noxious vapours, dense clouds, and threatening mists that surround and endeavour to extinguish it. The gathering of the 'armies of the storm,' apparently formed out of nothing, 'fluttering grass-stems and noxious puff-balls,' is most imaginatively pictured, and the dense gloom that settled over Cuchullin's spirit as he sought, but was withheld, from dissipating the intangible foe, is a very poetic description of the sun's efforts to dispel a heavy vapour. It is an even more original and realistic conception than that of Beowulf fighting the dragon of the Marsh-lands, in its Anglo-Saxon parallel.

Bearing upon the same idea is the frequent mention of the terrific heat given off in times of excitement from Cuchullin's body. In the Táin we read that after a great fall of snow which had reduced the whole district to one dead level, Cuchullin is found spending the morning refreshing himself, in very much reduced clothing, by allowing the wind and sun to play upon his body. 'He had discarded the twenty-seven cunningly prepared under-shirts which with cords and ropes were secured about him; and this he did to escape the difficulty that would arise in throwing them off should his paroxysm come to boiling-point and he still clothed in them. Anon, and for thirty feet round

his body, the snow melted with the intense heat generated in the hero's person; his charioteer durst not indeed come nigh him.' Again, when Cuchullin is returning to Emain Macha at the close of his day of boy-feats, they are obliged to seize him and plunge him into three successive vats of water, so great is the physical heat of his frame. 'In the first vessel, the heat generated by his immersion was such that both staves and hoops flew asunder instantly. In the second, the water escaped by boiling over; in yet a third, the water still was hotter than one might bear with ease.' After the third immersion, his fury having died down within him, he blushes a beautiful pinky red all over from crown to sole. If we were inclined to drive the theory far, we should regard this as the symbol of the sinking Sun passing beneath the waters of the ocean and re-appearing in the gentler hues of dawn, but there is always a danger of pushing an allegory beyond its natural limits. It is remarkable also that one among Cuchullin's *gessa* or 'tabus' was 'to see the horses of Manannan mac Lir (the Irish sea-god), or to hear the harp of Maner's son play soothingly and sweetly.' This reference to the ocean-god seems a most poetic manner of expressing the approaching extinction of the sun when, overcome at last by the aerial warfare of Calatin's children, the fierce offspring of cloud and storm, he sinks down at night beneath the ocean wave.

In dealing with a very early and primitive mythology, such as that which meets us in these tales, we must, however, beware of systematising overmuch. We must carefully remember that the savage had no system; he did not construct a theory and write stories to instil

it into the minds of his race. On the contrary, the contradictions and inconsistencies that we meet with in the early mythology of every nation show how confused was the primitive conception of life, and of its connection with the visible and invisible world. The savage, facing the great problems of existence, was unable to construct any theory that would satisfactorily account for them. A few momentary suggestions of the ways and causes of nature, scant glimmerings of an analogy between animate and inanimate things, were all that he possessed ; nor shall we help to elucidate these crude and simple ideas by reading backwards into them the mythological ideas of nations in an advanced state of philosophical thought. The tales with which we are dealing are not put forth by the brain of a philosopher to support a system ; they are fragmentary legends, never meant to be part of a definite theory of life, but woven by different poets around certain familiar personages, who represented to them only in a dim and uncertain way mythological ideas.

Nevertheless, almost all nations have passed through stages of development running broadly along the same lines, and if we can reach by any means the conceptions of savage nations at similar points in their growth, we shall find certain parallel ideas common to a large number of them. Surrounded by much the same conditions of life, provided only with the same limited equipment of knowledge, intermixing little with nations more advanced than themselves, tribes and peoples, like children, start with a stock of ideas that is almost uniform all the world over. They have no accumulations of varied wisdom reaped from books or from

intercourse with the outer world ; they have only the maxims, often inaccurate and always meagre, learned by their forefathers in the school of practical experience.

Thus, without any forcing of a theory, we can discover in the early tales of all nations certain broad and simple guesses at the meaning of things, and certain shrewd analogies as to their nature which have a similarity to those of other nations at the same stage of intellectual advance. Therefore in treating of Cuchullin as an impersonation of the sun, or, in the technical terms of mythology, as a Sun Hero, we are but presenting him in a light that the very early mythology of all nations has familiarised us with, and that seems clearly borne out by a consideration of his extraordinary personality and of the abnormal events of his career. It is only when we try to press into the service of our theory all or a too large number of the episodes of the cycle, that the analogy is apt to lead us astray. A Saga grows irregularly, it is not made upon a plan ; nor do its parts always tally exactly one with another.

Before we leave the vague subject of Irish mythology, we permit ourselves on these general lines to hazard a guess as to the significance of its main outline—a guess suggested by the beliefs of other Aryan peoples at an early stage of growth.

It is difficult for dwellers in towns, on whom street lamps shed a brighter light than the stars of heaven, to conceive of the large space occupied in the early imagination of mankind by the broad expanse of the sky spread over his head. The multitudinous host of heaven and the ever-changing moon by night ; the restless course of the sun by day, shining above him

unimpeded by the innumerable objects that in urban and civilised life distract our gaze, these things assumed to man in the pastoral stage an importance that we can now hardly realise. On the mind of a roving people, pasturing their flocks and herds across unbroken stretches of country, passing their days in tending cattle, their nights beneath an open sky, the two ideas of the heavens above and the flocks below became deeply engraven. On these two things their whole existence depended.

A comparison, simple and natural, sprang up between them.<sup>1</sup> The sky by day, presided over by a beneficent deity who fructified, warmed, and cheered the earth, fulfilling the two primal needs of existence, light and warmth, they likened to a powerful productive bull; the sky by night, glittering with its thousand stars, shedding upon the parched earth soft fertilising dews, and presided over by a mild and gentle goddess, they likened to a milk-giving cow. In reference to this conception of the luminous aspect of the sky as a sea of milk, we speak still of the Milky Way.

As time went on, these simple primary ideas subdivided themselves, and became more complex. The sun, powerful as he was supposed to be, suffered at times strange variations; the clouds and mist, so thin and feeble in themselves, when they gathered together their forces against him, stripped him of his glory and his strength: before them he sank into decrepitude, he became almost extinct.<sup>2</sup> At times, rare indeed, but

<sup>1</sup> The Greek word *gē* for 'earth' and the Sanskrit *gō* for cow were probably identical. The Sanskrit word *vrishabha*, i.e. 'a bull,' is derived from a root which indicates fertility.

<sup>2</sup> See the fine descriptive passage in the Book of Job xxxvi. 27-33;

recurring at unknown intervals, and therefore the more terrific to the savage mind, the sun suffered for a time a more or less complete eclipse; their god disappeared in sudden darkness. Beyond all this, there was the regularly recurring phenomenon, in itself most mysterious and awful, of day becoming night, the sinking of the sun in fiery splendour across the prairie or into the waters of the ocean, with its re-appearance in an opposite quarter of the heavens at break of day. All these things, to which the unscientific mind had no clue although they were constantly repeated before the eyes, were to the primitive man as daily miracles, filling him with fresh awe at the greatness and mystery of his deity. By degrees, in his efforts to explain these complex phenomena, his deity became more defined; we find a black and a white bull, or a black bull and white heifer, as the presiding genius of day and night respectively. In the head of the bull are a thousand eyes, the sparkling stars of night; in his hand are flashing swords, and his voice is as the sound of thunder; these are the rays of the sun, and the bolts and lightnings of heaven. The gods of light and darkness are engaged in deadly conflict: unceasingly they contend for mastery, pursuing each other round the world.

In Indian mythology,<sup>1</sup> Indra, the sun, is represented in one aspect as a great bull. He leads forth the cows, *i.e.* the days, each day being conceived of as a cow, dark or bright-coloured. They walk slowly across

xxxvii. 1-24 (Revised Version), of the coming up of a storm and the re-appearance of the sun after its dispersion.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Mythologie Zoologique*, par Angelo de Gubernatis, tome i. chap. i., 'La Vache et le Taureau.' Paris, 1874. Max Muller's *Chips from a German Workshop*, p. 100, and *Origin and Growth of Religion*, pp. 201-212, 240-241, 279, 290; Rig-Veda, iii. 31, 6; *ibid.* x. 75, 3, 4; *ibid.* i. 54, 4.

the bright pasture-ground of the earth and sky, dropping from their udders a fertilising milk upon the thirsty earth. Indra's powers are prodigious: he can eat at one time enough food and drink to arrive at the plenitude of his powers. The hunger and thirst of the heroes is always proportioned to the magnitude of the deeds they have to perform. The sharpened horns of Indra are the thunder, and he bellows like the wind. As a bull he has a thousand horns, and the thunder of Indra has a thousand points.<sup>1</sup>

Now, the great Irish epic of the *Táin bó Cuailgne* is a contest in which two powerful Bulls, the *Donn* or *Brown* (dark) Bull, and the *Finnbennach* or *White-horned* play the chief part. An exactly parallel description is given of the *Donn*, to that which Indian mythology gives of *Indra*. The *Donn* is of terrific strength and size. On his back fifty little boys could every evening play their games. He moves about accompanied by fifteen or fifty heifers. His ferocity and violence are so great that when he is driven into a narrow pass, he revenges himself by trampling his keeper to death, and treading his body thirty feet down into the earth. He has frequent meetings with the *Morrighu*, or goddess of war, who gives him counsel.

Associated with him is a *White-horned Bull* of almost equal powers. Why, when first we meet with these symbolic cattle, the *Finnbennach* should be found in the west among the cattle of *Meave*, and the *Dark Bull* in the east among the kine of *Fiachna*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the *Dagda's* big feast in the 'Second Battle of *Moytura*'; the huge size of *Conachar's* vat; the food-capacity of *Fergus mac Rôich*, etc. *Cuchullin's* rapid development corresponds to that of *Indra*.

mac Daire is an anomaly that we do not attempt to explain.

The account of the final battle of these two Bulls, given at the close of the Táin, is terrific. The Donn, after trampling the Finnbennach to death, scatters its parts over the provinces of Ireland, and returns, head in air, to its original owner and home. Here, after striking terror into the minds of all who encounter him, and destroying all who come in his way, the Bull, placing his back to a hillock, with fearful bellowing, vomits up his heart through his mouth, and so expires, pouring out 'black mountains of dark-red gore.'

How Fiachna and Meave came into possession of these two remarkable Bulls is related in the curious old tale, called the 'Generation of the Two Swineherds,'<sup>1</sup> in which the transmigrations of these two wonderful kine are set forth.

Once they had been swineherds belonging to the Tuatha dé Danann gods, Bodb or Bove, king of the *sidh* of Munster, and Ochall *ochae*, king of the *sidh* of Connacht, respectively. They had been successively transformed into two ravens, two sea-monsters, two warriors, two demons, two worms or animalculæ, and finally into two kine. As animalculæ they had taken to the water, one in Brunnen Narán Garad in Connacht, the other in Glais Cruind in Cualgne. There they were found respectively by Queen Meave and Fiachna mac Daire, admired, preserved, and nourished by them. The beautifully coloured beast which Meave holds in her hand, having caught him up in a vessel of water, speaks to her, and tells her that he has been transformed

<sup>1</sup> 'De Chophur in da Muccida,' *Irische Texte*, dritte Serie, Heft i. pp. 230-278.



into numerous shapes. He concludes by bidding her marry Ailell, promising that he shall not get the upper hand over her. The same day Fiachna converses with the other animal, who tells him that in their future form as oxen a great war will take place between him and the other creature. All which falls out as he has said. The piece ends with a florid description of the splendour of these two Bulls. None like them had ever before been seen in Ireland: their horns were adorned with gold and silver; their bellowings exceeded those of any other kine. A song in their praise concludes the tract. After asserting the fury and power of the Bull of Cuailgne, it continues:

‘ With bull-like front,  
With the pace of a billow,  
With the pride of kings,  
With the loose plunging of bears,  
With the fury of dragons,  
With the impetus of robbers,  
With the savagery of lions,’ etc.

And of the Finnbennach:—

‘ An ox was this white-headed, white-footed  
Savage, red, blood-red,  
As though he were dyed in red,  
As though he were bathed in blood,  
As though he were rubbed in crimson,’ etc.

Now the central point in the heroic mythology of Ireland is the long-continued struggle between the forces of Meave in alliance with the south and centre of Erin, against the forces of Ulster, for the possession of the Dark Bull. ‘The kine of Ulster are mine,’ says Cuchullin, and the Bull also came from his country; nevertheless Meave determines to carry off the Bull, and

she finally, after months of warfare, succeeds in doing so. Such a warfare for such an object seems on merely natural grounds inadequate as the central point of an old mythology, even taking into consideration the importance attached in purely pastoral epochs to the possession of cattle ; but, as a symbol of the struggle between day and night, or between summer and winter, it assumes a new meaning. We incline to the latter supposition, as coinciding with the advance of Meave's forces, the forces of darkness and destruction, from the western land, the land of death, during the winter, a time generally avoided by Irish armies in setting out for a campaign. It also explains the length and tediousness of the struggle, and in this light the long debility of the warriors of Ulster may have a significance as suggesting the decay and sleep of nature during the winter season, and the solitary and continuous struggle of the sun, represented by Cuchullin, to break up its chains.

It is, perhaps, worth remarking that one of the five prohibitions of the King of Ulster, mentioned in the Book of Rights, is 'to celebrate the feast of the flesh of the Bull of Daire-mic-Daire,' which might possibly refer to some permanent festival that had been established in connection with the Raid for the possession of the Bull.

Let us look once again at Indian mythology and see how close in many respects is the analogy. The feeling of sacredness attaching to cows grew so strong that it became in India a crime to kill a cow ; black cows appear in dreams and are sacrificed in the funeral ceremonies of the Indians ; the dark realms of Yama, king of the dead, contained black cows that gave milk.

In the Vedic heaven are three sorts of cows, the storm-cow, moon-cow, and dawn-cow.<sup>1</sup> The dawn-cow is red and horned, it sheds prosperity upon man. The pastoral-god, Krishna, is black during the night, but fair in the dawn. He is the most popular of the Brahminical gods.<sup>2</sup> Râma accomplishes the same feats as Indra; he gives proof of extraordinary strength in youth, and slays the monster. The combat of Râma is the struggle between day and night, and also between summer and winter. Râma in the opening of the *Râmâyana* says to his brother, 'See, O Lakshmana, Mârica is come with his following, making a noise like thunder and accompanied by the visitor of night, Subâhu; you will see them to-day like a mass of heavy clouds, which in an instant I shall disperse as the wind dissipates the clouds.' At times the Bull disappears: he is represented by a young man, or the Bull is led or slain by the man. The bull, Indra, is often figured as a beautiful young man; Mitra<sup>3</sup> also, in Vedic mythology, is in one aspect represented as a handsome youth holding in his left hand the horns of a bull, and in his right the sacrificial knife. Had the early Gael put forth his mythological ideas in sculpture like the Greek, or painted them in frescoes and pictures like the Egyptian or Indian, he would probably have represented Cuchullin in exactly the same manner, but without the knife; for there is no mention in these romances of prayer or of sacrifice of any kind. Other nations share the same legends, in

<sup>1</sup> Rig-Veda, vii. 77.

<sup>2</sup> Gubernatis, *Mythologie Zoologique*, tome i. p. 68. The word Krishna means black.

<sup>3</sup> Mitra is the day or the morning sun. Atharva-Veda, xiii. 3. 13. Rig-Veda, v. 62. 8.

which a bull and a heifer appear under the anthropomorphosed forms of a handsome young man and a beautiful girl, but we need not here follow them in detail. The same characteristics belong to the hero in nearly all these legends. They are precisely the characteristics of the personality of Cuchullin, 'the Champion of the Kine of Magh Breagh.' Throughout he appears as the Solar Hero. He reaches his full development at an unnaturally early age, and even as a boy of seven years he conquers heroes and performs the feats of a prime champion. Small, but comely of person, he waxes in conflict to a prodigious size, a halo shines from his head, the 'bird of valour' flutters over him, a furious heat exudes from his body; he destroys armies by his look, he has power in his eyes to blind the women of Ulster when they look on him with love. His feats are terrific; he is irresistible both in war and in love. He is bound by his *gessa* to rise before dawn falls on Emain Macha; he is seldom at rest, for his energy is untiring. He rides a chariot drawn by a black and a grey horse, symbols of day and night. He himself has caught these famous steeds, which have emerged from a magic lake and return thither on the death of their master. On them when caught he scours the plain and rises at a leap over the mountains. Three times without pausing for breath they carry their tamer round the entire circuit of Erin. Such is the Irish conception of the Solar Hero.

Apart from him we find the dark Bull. He careers over the earth followed by herds of cows, *i.e.* night accompanied by clouds. His bellowing is heard from far, his stamping is like the tread of a host in battle. The uncivilised man cannot always dissociate cognate

ideas ; at times, as in the legend of Europa, he places his hero or heroine upon the Bull, or he is leading him by the hand. At other times the Bull has disappeared and the hero stands alone, but retaining some of his bestial capacities and powers. In Irish myth this is the case, but Cuchullin fights with the powers of darkness for possession of the Bull, and the powers of darkness for the time prevail. After all his struggles and heroic deeds Meave wastes Ulster up to the gates of Emain Macha and carries off the Bull. But the powers of ill succeed only by treachery, and Cuchullin falls at last the victim of unworthy wiles, for in fair fight none can conquer him. He 'sees the horses of Manannan mac Lir, which was *geis* to him : he heard the harp of Manar's son play soothingly and sweetly, which was *geis* to him.'



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I have also to thank Dr. Sigerson for permission to reproduce his rendering of 'Cuchullin's Lament for Ferdia,' published in *Bards of the Gael and Gall*; and to acknowledge the courtesy of M. D'Arbois de Jubainville and Madame Bouillon in consenting to the reproduction of work published in the *Revue Celtique*. Mr. Alfred Nutt has made many suggestions while the work has been passing through the press, for which I have to thank him.





THE BIRTH OF CONACHAR

ABRIDGED and adapted from the longer of the two main accounts of the birth of the king, the version followed being that preserved in MS. Stowe 992, edited and translated in full by Professor Kuno Meyer (*Rev. Celt.*, vi. pp. 173-182). The version of the Book of Leinster is substantially the same as the portion of the Stowe MS. here given, with omission of the poems.

The various accounts (three in all) which have come down to us respecting the birth and parentage of Conachar are briefly summarised and discussed by Mr. Alfred Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, vol. ii. pp. 72-74.

The one here given was probably that favoured by the story-telling class, while the antiquaries preferred that which connected him with the historical annals by making him the son of Fachtna *fathach*. There are distinct hints that there existed an older version than either, ascribing his origin to the intervention of the god Lugh *lamfada*, the divine parent of Cuchullin, but pains have been taken by the transcribers to suppress the account of his supernatural origin. Professor Kuno Meyer has courteously furnished me with a revised translation of the lay, 'Welcome the Stranger.'

# THE CUCHULLIN SAGA

## I

### THE BIRTH OF CONACHAR

CONACHAR<sup>1</sup> MAC NESSA was the son of Cathbad the Druid, or, as some say, of Fachtna *fathach*, king of Ulster. He was a great and admirable king, and well indeed he might be, for the hour of his birth was the hour of the birth of Christ in Palestine. For seven years before his birth had the prophets foretold that on the same night that Christ should be born, a notable chief should be born in Erin. And this is the prophecy of his father, of Cathbad, on the night on which he was born, to Nessa his wife :—

O Ness, thou art in peril ;  
Let every one rise at thy birth-giving,  
Beautiful is the colour of thy hands,  
O daughter of Echaid *buide*.  
Be not sorrowful, O wife,  
A head of hundreds and of hosts  
Of the world will he be, thy son.

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<sup>1</sup> We have usually adopted the Scottish form of the name, in preference to the Irish form, Conchobhar or Conchubhar, as suggesting the pronunciation to the English reader. The modern Anglicised form, Conor or Connor, accords ill with the antique tone of the tales.

The same propitious hour  
 To him and to the King of the World.  
 Every one will praise him  
 For ever to the day of Doom ;  
 The same night he will be born.  
 Heroes will not defy him,  
 As hostage he will not be taken,  
 He and Christ.

In the plain of Inis thou wilt bear him  
 Upon the flagstone in the meadow.  
 Glorious will be his story ;  
 He will be the king of grace,  
 He will be the hound of Ulster,  
 Who will take pledges of knights :  
 Awful will be the disgrace  
 When he falls.

Conachar his name  
 Whoso will call him.  
 His weapons will be red ;  
 He will excel in many routs.  
 There he will find his death,  
 [Even] in avenging the suffering God.  
 Clear will be the track of his sword  
 Over the slanting plain of Laim.<sup>1</sup>

Conachar was called from the name of his mother, mac Nessa. But her name in the beginning had been Assa, 'docile' or 'gentle,' and it was on this manner that it was changed to Niassa, 'ungentle.' She was daughter of Echaid Yellow-heel, king of Ulster, and by his desire she had been trained up by twelve tutors, to whom she was ever docile and full of teachableness.

<sup>1</sup> See 'The Conception of Conachar,' translated by Prof. Kuno Meyer, from Stowe MS., No. 992. *Rev. Celt.*, vol. vi. pp. 173-182.

But in one night the entire number of her tutors fell by the hand of Cathbad the Druid, who from the southern part of Ulster went on a martial expedition through Erin with three times nine men. He was a man of knowledge and of druidical skill ; moreover, he was endowed with great bodily strength. Now the girl had no knowledge who they were who had slain her guardians, but from that moment she turned woman-warrior, and with her company set out to seek the author of the deed. In every district of Erin she destroyed and plundered, so that her name was changed to Niassa (Nessa) after that, because of the greatness of her prowess and of her valour.

Once upon a time, she had gone upon a quest into a wilderness, and her people were preparing food. And seeing a clear beautiful spring of water, the maiden went off alone to bathe. Now while she was bathing Cathbad passed by and saw her. And he bared his sword above her head, and stood between the maiden and her dress and weapons. 'Spare me!' she cried. 'Grant then my three requests,' replied the Druid. 'They are granted,' she said. 'I stipulate that thou be loyal to me, and that I have thy friendship, and that for so long as I live thou wilt be my one only wife,' said he. 'It is better for me to consent than to be killed by thee, and my weapon's gone,' said the maiden. Then they and their people unite in one place. In a favourable hour, Cathbad proceeded into Ulster, and the father of the maiden made them welcome and gave them land, namely, Rath Cathbad in the country of the Picts near the river Conachar in Crith Rois. By-and-by she bore him a son, namely Conachar mac

Cathbad. Cathbad took the boy to his bosom, and gave thanks for him and prophesied to him ; and it was then that he uttered this lay :

Welcome the stranger that has come here !  
They have told it to you  
He will be the gracious lord  
The son of gentle Cathbad.

The son of gentle Cathbad,  
And of Ness the young  
Above the fortress of Brig na m-Brat  
My son and my grandson.

My son and my grandson,  
Grand ornament of the world,  
He will be King of Rath Line,  
He will be a poet, he will be generous.

He will be a poet, he will be generous,  
He will be the head of warriors beyond the sea,  
My little bird from the Brugh,  
My kid,—welcome !

HOW CONACHAR GAINED THE  
KINGSHIP OVER ULSTER

ADAPTED from the Book of Leinster account of the glories of Conachar's reign (of which O'Curry has given a summary in MS. Mat. p. 274, and Appendix clvi. p. 636), with interpolations from other sources descriptive of the prosperity of the kingdom under Conachar, and the causes that led to the defection of Fergus mac Rôich. In the war of the Táin, Fergus will be found in the camp of Meave the Connacht queen, with whom he took refuge after vainly endeavouring to recover his kingdom; but his affection for Ulster is shown in his unwillingness to conduct the forces of the enemy against the land of his birth. This portion of the work does not correspond to any definite Irish text.



## II

### HOW CONACHAR GAINED THE KINGSHIP OVER ULSTER

Now, while Conachar was still a lad, his mother Ness being then a widow, and still beautiful, Fergus mac Rôich, who was king of Ulster at that time, desired to make her his wife. 'Give me then my conditions,' said she; 'namely, that for one year my son reign over Ulster, in order that his posterity may be called the descendants of a king.' And the officers of the kingdom advised Fergus to agree to this, and to resign the kingdom for one year into the hands of Conachar. Now when Nessa had gained her point, she set to work so to instruct her son that he should win over to himself the most influential of the nobles and the chiefs of the province. She supplied him with wealth, which was distributed secretly among the people, and in such wise did he win over the Ultonians that at the year's end, when Fergus demanded back the sovereignty, the chiefs refused to allow Conachar to part with it, alleging that Fergus having consented to barter the kingdom as a dowry to his wife, had, in fact, actually resigned it. And they held that to Fergus should be left only what he already possessed, namely, his wife; and that Conachar should retain the sovereignty of Ulster. Now this was the appearance of the king, of Conachar,

son of Fachtna *fathach*, the famous, worthy king of Ulad, the full-eyed, royal, gigantic warrior. 'Comparable to a moon in its great fifteenth was his countenance, his visage, and his face. His beard was forked, fair, and pointed; his bushy, reddish-yellow hair was looped to the slope of his poll (*culad*). A purple-bordered garment encircled him, a pin of wrought gold fastening the garment over his shoulder. Next to the surface of his skin was a shirt of kingly satin. A purple-brown shield, with rims of yellow gold, was beside him. He had a gold-hilted, embossed sword; in his white firm right hand he held a purple-bright, well-shaped spear, accompanied by its forked dart.'<sup>1</sup> On earth was there not a man wiser, nor stronger, nor more champion-like than he. And in his reign the province was a fountain of desire and of wealth, so that there was not a residence waste or empty, from the one end of the province to the other, without a tenant, serving his hereditary lord. And in the king's house at Emain Macha was great state kept up; moreover, on his accession the king had promulgated a law that every champion should for one night entertain Ulster, and the king seven nights or four nights, so that each of the chiefs in turn practised hospitality towards the king and the nobles of Ulster. And the kingdom prospered, and in his time was peace and fatness, wise laws and promulgation of justice, and great deeds of championship by Cuchullin and the Heroes of the Red Branch.

But Fergus did not willingly submit to his exclusion from the sovereignty; he gathered a great army and swore to be avenged on Conachar; but ultimately he

<sup>1</sup> This description is taken from the tale known as *Mesca Ulad*, p. 29, R.I.A. Todd Lecture Series.

was defeated and driven into Connacht. And there he dwelled a long time in the courts of Ailell and of Meave, king and queen of Connacht; and there existed long war and hostility between the men of Connacht and the men of Ulster, until Meave stirred up all Erin against Conachar in the great Cattle spoil of Ulster which is called the Táin bó Cuailgne. Fergus, although he was greatly embittered against Ulster and against the king on account of the breach of compact and on account of the illegal seizure of the sovereignty, as also for the matter of the children of Usnach's exile, yet found it hard to be severed from his own people, and he thought it not well to lead the forces of Meave against the Ultonians, as will be seen in the Táin.<sup>1</sup> Now the description of Fergus is this: he was of high stature, and his strength was as that of seven hundred men; seven hogs and seven vats and seven kine he used to consume; and his sword would stretch to the length of a rainbow when he wielded it.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Táin bó Cuailgne, sec. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Fergus was son of Ross the Red, who was father of Fachtna *fathach*, the father of Conachar. He was called Fergus mac Rôich or Rôig (pron. Roy) after his mother. Professor Rhys compares this story with the usurpation of the kingdom of Cronus by Zeus, *Hibbert Lectures*, pp. 139 and 647.



THE ORIGIN OF CUCHULLIN

THERE are two main accounts of the hero's birth. The one here given is one of two preserved in MS. Egerton 1782, a MS. of the 15th century. I have followed, with some small omissions and modifications, the French translation of M. Louis Duvau, which will be found in *Rev. Celt.* vol. ix. pp. 1-13. A few touches added from the other versions are marked by square brackets. Although the account here given is found in a comparatively late MS., there is a far earlier recension preserved in the oldest surviving Irish profane MS., the Book of the Dun Cow (LU.), copied from other MSS. at the end of the 11th century. This recension agrees in the main body of the tale with the account of Cuchullin's generation given in the second form of the story preserved in MS. Egerton 1782, but there are suggestions in it which tend to show that both forms were even then known. The discussion which follows the birth of Cuchullin as to his upbringing is also found in LU.

Mr. Alfred Nutt has given a summary of the various accounts in the *Voyage of Bran*, vol. ii. pp. 39-47, and has added a discussion as to the age and nature of the legend.

### III

## THE ORIGIN OF CUCHULLIN

CONACHAR had a sister, Dechtire by name. She and fifty young maidens, her companions, disappeared one day from Emain Macha without warning to the king or the Ultonians. For three years nothing was heard of them. Then a flock of birds began to frequent the plain of Emania; they consumed everything before them, until not a blade of grass was left. The birds were Dechtire and her maidens, who sought to attract and to draw away the chiefs of Ulster.<sup>1</sup> The Ultonians, beholding the devastation wrought by the birds, were filled with vexation. They yoked nine chariots to follow the birds, for hunting birds was a custom among them. Among those that went were Conachar and Fergus, Amargin and Blai *briugu*, Sencha and Bricriu.

The birds flew before them towards the south, across Sliab Fuad, by Ath Lethan, by Ath Garach and Magh Gossa, between Fir Rois and Fir Ardai (*i.e.* towards the fairy dwelling of Brugh on the Boyne, the home of the gods Lugh *lamfada*, and Angus óg). [There were at that time in Ireland neither ditches, fences, nor walls; the plain on every side was unbroken. Graceful

<sup>1</sup> Compare the 'Sick-bed of Cuchullin' and the 'Story of the Children of Lir,' and see Grimm's *Teut. Myth.*, ed. *Stallybrass*, vol. i. pp. 426-429.

and beautiful was the flock of birds. There were nine times twenty of them, yoked together two and two by a chain of silver; they flew in companies of twenty, and there were nine groups of them; at the head of each group flew two birds in varied plumage united by a yoke of silver. Three birds flew separately till night-fall before the warriors right across country. As darkness approached a thick snow fell. Conachar commanded his followers to unyoke their chariots and to go forward to seek some habitation.]<sup>1</sup>

Fergus departed in quest of a shelter where they could put up.<sup>2</sup> He arrived at a little house, where he found a man and a woman who bade him welcome. 'You will bring your companions here and they will be welcome.' Fergus went out and rejoined them; then he brought them back with him, the men and their chariots, and they took shelter in the house.

Briccriu went out and heard something; a feeble cry. He knew not whence the sound came, but going in the direction from which he heard it, he saw before him a spacious and handsome house. He looked in and saw the master of the mansion, a young warrior of splendid appearance and noble mien,<sup>3</sup> who spoke to him. 'Enter, O Briccriu,' he said; 'why do you look about?' 'You are truly welcome so far as I am concerned,' said his wife. 'Why does your wife salute me?' asked Briccriu. 'It is on her account

<sup>1</sup> This passage is not found in our version, but in both LU. and the second version contained in MS. Egerton 1782. From this point the two versions differ essentially.

<sup>2</sup> The original text is here much confused.

<sup>3</sup> The noble young warrior is explained in the other versions to be an incarnation of the Tuatha dé Danann god, Lugh mac Ethnenn, or Lugh *lamfada* 'long-handed.'



that I myself bid you welcome. Have you missed any one from Emain Macha?' 'We have, verily,' replied Bricriu; 'fifty young maidens have been lost to us, and that for three years.' 'Would you recognise them if you saw them?' asked the man. 'If I did not recognise them, it would be because of the changes wrought in them during three years; these might make one hesitate.' 'Try then to recall them,' replied the man; 'the fifty young girls are in this house: this woman here with me is their mistress: her name was Dechtire. It was they who, changed into birds, flew to Emain Macha to draw the Ultonians hither.' The woman bestowed on Bricriu a purple mantle with golden fringes; and he set forth to rejoin his comrades.

Bricriu, during his walk back, pondered thus with himself: 'Conachar would give large treasures in order to find the fifty lost maidens. I will conceal from him that I have discovered them with his sister. I will merely say that I have seen a house full of beautiful women, and nothing more.' The king asked Bricriu for news of his exploration. 'What tidings do you bring, O Bricriu?'

'I found myself at a brilliant and beautiful mansion,' he replied. 'I have seen a princess, noble, gracious, of truly royal demeanour, with beautiful ringlets; with her a group of women, graceful and richly clothed; the master of the house, bountiful and brilliant.'

Conachar, delighted with this description, expressed a desire to see the noble lady, and bade some one go and fetch her to him. Fergus, reluctantly consenting, took the king's message to the woman; but she, complaining that she was ill, requested a delay.

Fergus returned her message to the king, and all retired to rest for the night. In the morning, when they arose, they found in the hut a little baby boy, but just born, who bore a strong resemblance [?] to Conachar.

‘Take thou this child, Finnchoem,’<sup>1</sup> said Conachar to his sister. She received the child with joy. ‘Already my heart goes forth to this little child,’ she cried; ‘he will be for me a second Conall *cernach* (the Victorious).’ ‘There is but little difference between them,’ said Bricriu; ‘this child is son of thine own sister Dechtire; the fifty young girls lost to us for three years are here.’

‘Take the child to thee, O Finnchoem,’ repeated Conachar to his sister.

‘It is not she who shall rear it up,’ said Sencha; ‘it is I. For I am strong, I am dexterous, I am skilful in combat. I am learned, I am a man of wisdom, I am not forgetful. I speak before all men in the presence of the king. I am his counsellor; I arbitrate in the kingly combats before Conachar the Victorious. I am judge among the Ultonians, but I do not execute my own decisions. None can dispute with me the tutelage, save Conachar himself.’

Then arose Blai *bringu* ‘the hospitaller,’ and protested his services as chief almoner. The child, he said, if intrusted to him, would neither suffer through negligence nor fail of sustenance. He should have the rearing of the king’s nephew.

But Fergus replied, ‘What presumption! It is I alone who should bring up the child. I am strong, I am adroit. I am the envoy of the king. None can

<sup>1</sup> Finnchoem was sister to Conachar and Dechtire, and mother to Conall *cernach*, Cuchullin’s cousin and the avenger of his death.

dispute with me in honours or in wealth. I am hardened to combats and to warfare. I am a good craftsman. I am worthy to be the guardian of youth. I am the protector of all the unfortunate. I am the terror of the strong, the support of the oppressed.'

'And now, since you at length are silent, listen to us,' said Amargin. 'I am capable of rearing up my pupils as though they were kings. In me men extol courage, bravery, honour, wisdom. They praise my good fortune, my years, my eloquence, my renown, the valour of my race. Though I am a warrior, I am also a poet. I seek favour of none, save of Conachar himself; I obey none other than the king.'

Thus each in turn sets forth his qualifications, and so unanswerable are they that, at the suggestion of Sencha the judge,<sup>1</sup> it is finally decided to postpone the matter until their return to Emain Macha, when Morann can be consulted: Finnchoem, meanwhile, taking charge of the boy. On their arrival, Morann pronounced judgment, giving to each a share in the rearing of the child befitting the special functions of his office.

'It is Conachar's work,' he said, 'to render the child illustrious: for he is near of kin to Finnchoem. Blai *bringu* shall charge himself with his sustenance; Fergus shall bear him on his knees; Amargin shall be his tutor; Finnchoem shall nourish him at her breast with Conall the Victorious, her own son, his fellow.' Then Morann broke out in prophecy of the future greatness of the child, and of his prowess on behalf of Ulster.

<sup>1</sup> See the charming description of this aged counsellor in *Mesca Ulad*, R.I.A. Todd Lecture Series, vol. i. pt. i. pp. 38-39.

'His praise,' he cried, 'will be in the mouths of all men; charioteers and warriors, kings and sages will recount his deeds; he will win the love of many. This child will avenge all your wrongs; he will give combat at your fords; he will decide all your quarrels.' Then all agreed to the decision of Morann. Amargin and Finnchoem carried away the babe, and he was nurtured by them in the fort of Breth, in the Plain of Muirthemne.<sup>1</sup>

Readers who wish to follow the career of Cuchullin in consecutive order should here read the passage called 'Cuchullin's Boy-deeds' in the *Táin bó Cuailgne* (*infra*, pp. 135-155), in which are related his childish adventures.

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<sup>1</sup> In *Mesca Ulad* we learn (pp. 2-3) that in Conachar's time the district of Uladh or Ulidia (*i.e.* the eastern portion of Ulster) had been divided into three parts, of which the portion extending from Usnach in Meath northward to Dundalk, his own home, *i.e.* the portion called Conaille Muirthemne and Cuailgne (pron. Cooley), belonged to Cuchullin. Part of Meath thus appears to have belonged to Cuchullin, but the ordinary boundary of the province on the east was from the mouth of the Boyne on the north to the mouth of the Liffey on the south. (See map.)

THE TRAGICAL DEATH OF THE  
SONS OF USNACH

THE most famous legend of the Ultonian cycle and the one which has best retained its vitality down to the present day. It has undergone successive modifications in the course of repetition. The oldest recension, preserved in the Book of Leinster, has been translated into French by M. Louis Ponsinet (*Revue des Traditions Populaires*, vol. iii. 1888, pp. 199-207), and a very similar version will be found with an English translation by O'Flanagan in *The Transactions of the Gaelic Society* for 1808, pp. 147-177.

What may be called the mediæval version is represented by that found in the so-called Glenn Masáin MS., preserved in the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh. It has been edited by Dr. Whitley Stokes in *Irische Texte*, zweite serie, 2 Heft, pp. 153-177, and by Dr. Alexander Cameron in *Reliquiæ Celticæ*, vol. ii. pp. 421-461. A closely allied version is printed and translated by O'Flanagan, *loc. cit.* pp. 5-135.

The translation here adopted is founded on that of Dr. Whitley Stokes, but some modifications and additions have been introduced from O'Flanagan's rendering. Where these are important, they are marked by square brackets. Deirdre's lament for Naisi, adapted from M. Ponsinet's French translation of the LL. version, has been added. A 17th century Irish version of the tale exists in the Belfast Museum. Dr. Douglas Hyde has printed the earlier portion of the tale in *Zeitschrift für Celt. Philologie*, vol. ii. pp. 138-155. It differs both in spirit and style from the more ancient forms. A Scoto-Gaelic version, taken down from oral recitation, was contributed by Mr. A. Carmichael to vol. xii. of the *Transactions of the Inverness Gaelic Society*, and a modified abridgement of his English rendering may be found in Mr. Joseph Jacobs' *Celtic Fairy Tales*.

For the last two hundred years at least, perhaps for a much longer period, this story, the 'Tragical fate of the Children of Lir,' and the 'Tragical fate of the Children of Tuireann,' have been known as the Three Sorrowful Tales of Erin.

## IV

### THE TRAGICAL DEATH OF THE SONS OF USNACH

#### PART I

A KING renowned, exceeding mighty, became chief of the Province of Ulster. His name was Conchobar, son of Fachtna *fathach*, son of Capa, son of Ginga, son of Rury the Great from whom the Clan Rury are named. . . . And that valiant, victorious over-king went to enjoy a banquet and a feast, to the house of Fedlimid, son of Dall, Conchobar's own tale-teller. For thus was the feast of Emain Macha enjoyed at that time, to wit, three hundred threescore and five persons was the number of the knight's household that was computed in the house of each man of them. And while they were enjoying the banquet, Fedlimid's wife brought forth a daughter. Cathbad the Druid, who entered the assembly at that moment, uttered forebodings and prophecies about the girl, namely, that much evil and calamity would befall the province on her account. And when the warriors heard that, they desired to kill her on the spot.

But Conchobar said, 'It shall not be so done; but I will bring her with me, and put her to fosterage, so that she may be my own one wife.'

Cathbad, the Druid, named her Deirdre; and the king placed her in an enclosure apart, with a fosterer and a nurse to rear her. And none of the province durst go near her save her fosterer and her nurse and a female satirist called Levarcham, and Conchobar himself.

And thus she lived until she was ripe for marriage, and she outwent in beauty the women of her time.

Once on a snowy day it came to pass that her fosterer killed a calf for her dinner: and when the blood of the calf was poured upon the snow, a black raven swooped down to drink it. When Deirdre took heed of that, she said to Levarcham that she would desire a husband having the three colours which she beheld, namely, the colour of the raven on his hair, the colour of the calf's blood on his cheeks, and the colour of the snow on his skin.

'Even such a man is there in the household of Conchobar,' saith Levarcham, 'and he is called Naisi, son of Usnach, son of Conall Flatnailed, son of Rury the Great, of whose race came also Conchobar, as we said above.'

'If that be so, O Levarcham,' saith Deirdre, 'I beseech thee to bring him to converse with me, no one knowing of it.'

Levarcham disclosed that matter to Naisi. Then came Naisi secretly to meet Deirdre, and the girl declared to him the greatness of the love she had for him, and entreated him to take her away in flight from Conchobar. And Naisi consented, though he was slow to do so from dread of Conchobar.

Then Naisi and his two brothers, to wit, Ainle and Ardan, and a troop of thrice fifty warriors with them,



journeyed to Scotland, where they found maintenance of quarterage from the king of Scotland, and there they remained until the king heard a description of the beauty of Deirdre, and sought her as a wife for himself.

Great wrath took hold on Naisi when he heard that, and he fared forth with his brothers out of Scotland to a sea-girt isle, fleeing with Deirdre after many battles had been fought between themselves and the followers of the king on every hand.

## PART II

AN exceeding beautiful and mighty feast was prepared by Conchobar, son of Fachtna *fathach* 'the wise' and by the nobles of Ulster, in smooth-delightful Emain Macha. And the worthies of the province came unto that feast. Wine was dealt out to them until they were all glad, cheerful, and merry. Then arose the men of music and playing and knowledge, to recite before them their lays and songs and chants [to sound their melodious harps and sweet strings, and their bright, splendid timpan; to sing their poetic strains] their genealogies and their branches of relationship.

These are the names of the poets who were present at the feast, namely, Cathbad [the Generous Druid], son of Congal Flatnailed, son of Rury, and Genan Bright-cheek, son of Cathbad, and Genan [Black-knee], son of Cathbad, and Sencha the Great, Fercertne the Poet, and many others.

And it was thus that they enjoyed the feast of Emain, to wit, a special night<sup>1</sup> was set apart to each man of Conchobar's household. This is the number of Conchobar's household, even five and threescore and three hundred. They were sitting [at feasting and enjoyment] until Conchobar uplifted his loud king's voice on high, and this is what he said: 'I would fain know, O warriors, have you ever seen a household that is braver than yourselves in Ireland or in Scotland or in the great world<sup>2</sup> beside?' 'Truly have we never seen a better,' say they, 'and we know not if there be such.'

'If so,' said Conchobar, 'do you know of any great want that lies upon you?' 'We know not, O high king,' say they. 'But I know, O warriors,' saith he, 'the great want that we have, to wit, that the three Lights of Valour of the Gael, the three sons of Usnach, Naisi and Ainle and Ardan, should be separated from us on account of any woman in the world. Naisi for valour and prowess was the making of an over-king of Ireland [and sons of a king indeed are they]; by the might of his own arm hath he gained for himself a district and a half of Scotland.'

'Had we dared to utter that, O royal soldier, long since would we have said it. And, moreover, were these three alone in Ulster and none other with them, they would defend the province of Ulster against every other province in Ireland. For they are sons of a border-king; and heroes for bravery and lions for might and courage are they.'

'If it be so,' said Conchobar, 'let messengers and

<sup>1</sup> Or 'seat.'—O'Flanagan.

<sup>2</sup> The *domun nór* means the Continent.

envoys be sent for them into the fair regions of Alba (Scotland), to Loch Etive, and to the strongholds of the sons of Usnach [to solicit their return].'

'Who will take that message?' said they all.

'I know,' said Conchobar, 'that it is Naisi's prohibition, to come into Ireland in peace, save with one of three, namely, Cúchulainn son of Sualtach, and Conall *cernach* son of Amargin, and Fergus mac Ross; and I will now discover unto which of these three I am dearest.'

He took Conall into a place apart, and asked him, 'What would be done, O royal soldier of the world, if thou wert sent for Usnach's sons, and they should be destroyed in spite of thy safeguard and thy honour—a thing I attempt not?'

Said Conall, 'Not the death of one man only would result therefrom, but every Ulsterman who should do them harm, and upon whom I should lay my hand, he would not escape from me without death and destruction and slaughter being inflicted upon him.'

'True it is, O Conall,' saith the king. 'Now I perceive that I am not dear to thee.'

And he put Conall from him, and Cúchulainn came before him, and he questioned him in the same manner. 'I pledge my word,' said Cúchulainn '[that if you should ask that of me, and that they should be brought home to you to be slain], I would not take the greatest bribe of the globe from thee, though it be sought eastward as far as India itself, in lieu of thy own head to fall for that deed.'<sup>1</sup> 'That is true, O Cúchulainn, [I understand that thou also hast but little love for me].'

<sup>1</sup> This passage is imperfect in the manuscript. I make a guess at its meaning.

And he put Cúchulainn from him and Fergus was brought to him. And he asked the same thing of him. And Fergus said: 'I promise not to attack thine own flesh or blood; yet there is not an Ulsterman whom I should catch [doing them hurt], but he should have death and destruction at my hands.'

'Thou it is who must go for the Children of Usnach, O royal soldier,' said Conchobar. 'Set forward tomorrow, for they would come with thee. And on thy return from the east betake thee to the fortress of Borrach son of Annte, and pledge thy word to me, that [whether] they arrive in Ireland [by night or day], neither stop nor stay be allowed them, so that they may come that night to Emain Macha.' Then they came in together, and Fergus told the others that he had undertaken the safe-conduct of the Children of Usnach. . . . And they bore away that night.

Then Conchobar addressed Borrach, son of Annte, and asked him, 'Hast thou a feast prepared for me?' 'I have,' said Borrach; 'but though I was able to prepare it for thee, I was not able to bring it to thee to Emain Macha.' 'If it be so,' said Conchobar, 'bestow it instead upon Fergus, for one of his prohibitions is to refuse a feast.' And Borrach promised, and they bore away that night in safety.

And, on the morrow, Fergus arose early, and took with him neither troops nor attendants, save his own two sons, Illann the Fair and Buinne the Ruthless Red, and Fuillend, the lad of the Iubrach,<sup>1</sup> and the Iubrach.

And they moved forward to the fastness of the sons of Usnach, and to Loch Etive in Alba. Now thus were

<sup>1</sup> A galley belonging to Fergus. O'Flanagan's version has, 'and Callon who was his shield-bearer, and the shield itself.'

the sons of Usnach. Three spacious hunting-booths they had ; and the booth in which they did their cooking, in that they ate not, and the booth in which they ate in that they slept not.

And when Fergus came into the harbour he sent forth a mighty cry, so that it was heard throughout the farthest part of the districts around them. And Naisi and Deirdre were seated together with Conchobar's draught-board between them, and they playing thereon. Naisi said : ' I hear the cry of a man of Erin.' Now, Deirdre had heard the cry, and knew that it was the cry of Fergus, but she concealed it from them. [ ' It was not the cry of a man of Erin,' said Deirdre, ' but the cry of a man of Alba.' ] Again Fergus sent forth a cry, and Naisi said : ' I hear another cry, and it is the cry of a man of Erin.' ' Not so,' said Deirdre, ' [let us play on]. Not alike are the cry of a man of Erin and the cry of a man of Alba.' Fergus sent forth a third cry, and the sons of Usnach knew that this of a certainty was the cry of Fergus. Naisi bade Ardan go and meet him. Then Deirdre told Naisi that she had known the first cry of Fergus. ' Why didst thou conceal it, damsel ?' said Naisi. ' Because of a vision I saw last night,' said Deirdre, ' to wit, that three birds came to us out of Emain Macha ; and in their bills three sips of honey ; the sips of honey they left with us, but they took with them three sips of our blood.' ' How is thy rede of the vision, O damsel ?' said Naisi. ' It is this,' said she : ' Fergus hath come from our own native land with peace ; for not sweeter is honey than (a false) message of peace ; and the three sips of blood that have been taken from us, they are ye, who will go with him and will be beguiled.'

And they were sorry that she had spoken so. ['Let that pass,' said Naisi. 'Fergus is long in the port, go therefore, Ardan, and meet him, and bring him with thee.'] So Ardan went, and he gave him three kisses fervently, loyally, and brought them with him to the stronghold of the sons of Usnach, wherein were Naisi and Deirdre; and they, too, gave three kisses lovingly and fervently to Fergus and to his sons. And they asked tidings of Erin, and of Ulster in special. 'These are the best tidings that I have,' said Fergus, 'that Conchobar hath sent me for you, and that I have entered into covenant for your safeguard, for I am ever loving and loyal to you, and my word is on me to fulfil my covenant.'

'It is not meet for you to go thither,' said Deirdre, 'for your own lordship in Alba is greater than Conchobar's lordship in Erin.' 'Better than everything is one's native land,' saith Fergus; 'for poor is every excellence and prosperity to him who sees not his native land.'

'That is true,' said Naisi; 'for dearer is Erin to myself than Alba, though I should obtain a greater share of Alba's goods.' 'My word and my warranty are firm to you,' said Fergus. 'Verily, they are firm,' said Naisi, 'and we will go with thee.' But Deirdre consented not to what they said, and she strove to hinder their going. But Fergus pledged his word that if all the men of Ireland should betray them, the protection of their shields and swords and helmets should avail them little, for he would overcome them all.

'We know it,' said Naisi, 'and we will go with you to Emain Macha.'

They bore away that night till the bright dawn of

early morning on the morrow. And Naisi and Fergus arose and sat in the galley, and they passed over the sea and the mighty ocean until they arrived at the fortress of Borrach, son of Annte. And Deirdre looked behind her at the coasts of Scotland, and she cried, 'My love to thee, O land of the east! It is sad for me to leave the sides of thy havens and thy bays, thy smooth-flowered, delightful, lovely plains, and thy bright green-sided hills. Little need had we [to leave thee!]' And she sang this lay:

DEIRDRE'S FAREWELL TO ALBA.<sup>1</sup>

A lovable land is yon eastern land,  
Alba, with its marvels.  
I would not have come hither out of it,  
Had I not come with Naisi.

Lovable are Dún-fidga and Dún-finn,  
Lovable the fortress over them;  
Dear to the heart Inis Draigende,  
And very dear is Dún Suibni.

Caille Cuan!  
Unto which Ainle would wend, alas!  
Short the time seemed to me,  
With Naisi in the region of Alba.

Glenn Láid!  
Often I slept there under the cliff;  
Fish and venison and the fat of the badger  
Was my portion in Glenn Láid.

Glenn Masáin!  
Its garlic was tall, its branches white;  
We slept a rocking sleep,  
Over the grassy estuary of Masáin.

<sup>1</sup> Compare Sir Samuel Ferguson's metrical version in *Lays of the Western Gael*, and that of Dr. Sigerson in *Bards of the Gael and Gall*. (T. Fisher Unwin.)

Glenn Etive !  
 Where my first house I raised ;  
 Beauteous its wood :—upon rising  
 A cattle-fold for the sun was Glenn Etive.

Glenn Dá-Rúad !  
 My love to every man who hath it as an heritage !  
 Sweet the cuckoos' note on bending bough,  
 On the peak over Glenn Dá-Rúad.

Beloved is Draigen,  
 Dear the white sand beneath its waves ;  
 I would not have come from it, from the East,  
 Had I not come with my beloved.

After that they came to Borrach's stronghold ; and Borrach gave three kisses to the sons of Usnach, and made welcome to Fergus and his sons. And Borrach said : ' I have a feast for thee, O Fergus ! and a prohibition<sup>1</sup> of thine is to leave a feast before it shall be ended.'

When Fergus heard that [he reddened with anger] from sole to crown. ' Ill done is it of you, O Borrach !' said Fergus, ' to put me under prohibitions, for I am under promise to Conchobar to bring the sons of Usnach to Emain Macha on the very day that they land in Ireland.'

' I lay you under prohibitions,' saith Borrach, ' even prohibitions that true heroes will not endure, that thou come to partake of the feast.' And Fergus asked Naisi what he should do as to that. ' Do,' said Deirdre, ' what is desired of thee, if thou dost prefer to forsake the sons of Usnach and to consume the feast. How-

<sup>1</sup> The Irish word is *geasa* or *gessa*. These prohibitions could not be broken or avoided without loss of honour,



beit, to forsake them is a good price to pay for a feast.<sup>1</sup>

‘I will not forsake them,’ said Fergus, ‘for I will send my two sons with them to Emain Macha, even Illann the Fair, and Buinne the Ruthless Red, and my own word of honour, moreover.’ ‘We give much thanks for that,’ said Naisi, ‘since no hands but our own have ever defended us in battle or in conflict.’ And Naisi turned in great wrath from the place, and Deirdre followed him, and Ainle and Ardan, and Fergus’s two sons. But that plan was carried out in opposition to Deirdre’s wishes.

Fergus remained sunk in gloom and sadness. But of one thing he felt certain: if the five great fifths<sup>2</sup> of Erin should be on one spot, and all of one counsel together, they would not be able to destroy his safeguard. As to the sons of Usnach, they passed onward by the shortest and clearest way that they could go.

And Deirdre said: ‘I would give you good counsel, though you would not carry out my advice.’

‘What counsel hast thou, O girl?’ said Naisi.

‘Let us go to-night to the island of Cuilenn<sup>3</sup> between Erin and Alba, and let us remain there until Fergus has concluded his feast; so will the word of Fergus be fulfilled, and the days of your pryncedom will be prolonged.’

‘To us that is an evil counsel,’ said Illann the Fair

<sup>1</sup> The copy is here imperfect. This seems to be the drift of Deirdre’s words.

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.* the inhabitants of the five provinces into which Ireland was anciently divided.

<sup>3</sup> O’Flanagan’s MS. has ‘Rachlin,’ *i.e.* Rathlin Island, off the coast of Antrim.

and Buinne the Ruthless Red. 'It is impossible for us to carry out that advice. For even were the might of your own good hands not with us, and the plighted faith of Fergus sworn to you, ye would not be betrayed.'

'Now is woe come upon us by means of that plighted word of Fergus,' said Deirdre, 'when he forsook us for a feast.'

And she was in grief and in deep dejection because they had come into Erin relying on the faith of Fergus, And then she said :

*Deirdre.* 'Woe that I came at the word  
Of Fergus, the rash son of Róich ;  
[I will utter only lamentation on account of it.]  
Alas and bitter is my heart !

My heart as a clot of sorrow  
Is to-night under great shame.  
My grief, O goodly sons !  
Your last days have come.'

*Naisi.* 'Say not, O vehement Deirdre,  
O woman, that art fairer than the sun !  
[Fergus would not to the eastward have come  
To us, for our destruction.]'

*Deirdre.* 'Alas, I am sad for you,  
O delightful sons of Usnach !  
To have come out of Alba of the red deer,  
Lasting shall be the woe of it !'

After that they went forward to the White Cairn of the Watching, on Sliab Fuad, and Deirdre remained behind them in the glen, and sleep fell upon her there. And they did not at first perceive that, till Naisi observing it, turned back to meet her at the moment when she awoke out of her sleep. 'Wherefore didst thou stay there, O Queen?' said he. 'I fell into

a sleep,' said Deirdre; 'and a vision and a dream appeared to me there.' 'What was that dream?' 'I beheld each of you,' said Deirdre, 'without a head, and Illann the Fair headless also, but Buinne the Ruthless Red with his own head upon him, and his assistance not with us.' And she made the staves: 'Sad is the vision that appeared to me . . .' Thence they went forward to Ard na Sailech 'the Height of the Willows' which is called Armagh<sup>1</sup> to-day. Then said Deirdre, 'Sad is my heart, O Naisi, for I perceive a cloud above your head, a cloud of blood; and I would give you counsel, O sons of Usnach!' 'What counsel hast thou?' said Naisi.

'To go to-night to Dún Delgan (Dundalk) where Cúchulainn dwells and to abide there until Fergus come, or else to go under the safeguard of Cúchulainn to Emain.'

'[Since we are not afraid] we will not follow that advice,' said Naisi.

And the girl sang:

'O Naisi, look at the cloud  
Which hangs above thee in the air!  
I see over green Emain  
A mighty cloud of crimson blood . . .'

After these staves, they went forward by the shortest way till they beheld Emain Macha before them. 'I will give you a sign,' said Deirdre, 'if Conchobar should intend to work treachery upon you.' 'What is that sign?' said Naisi. 'If you are invited into the house wherein are Conchobar and the nobles of Ulster, the king intends no evil against you. But if ye are sent to

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* Ard Macha, 'the height of Macha.'

the house of the Red Branch<sup>1</sup> while Conchobar stays on in the house of Emain, then treachery and guile will be wrought upon you.'

And they went forward in that wise to the door of the house of Emain and they [struck a loud stroke of the hand-wood<sup>2</sup> at the door] and asked that it should be opened for them. The doorkeeper answered and demanded who was there. They told him that without were the three sons of Usnach and Fergus's two sons, and Deirdre. This was told to the king and he called his servants and attendants and asked them how stood the house of the Red Branch as to food and drink. They said that if the five battalions of Ulster should be gathered there they would find sufficiency of food and drink. 'If that be so,' said Conchobar, 'let the children of Usnach be taken into it.' This was told to the sons of Usnach. Then said Deirdre, 'Alas, Naisi, great hurt hath befallen you through neglect of my counsel. Let us even now go [back?]'

'We will not do so,' said Illann the Fair, son of Fergus, 'and we protest, O girl, that great is the timidity and cowardice thou dost suggest to us in saying that. 'We will go to the house of the Red Branch,' saith he.

'Assuredly we will go,' said Naisi. And they moved forward to the house of the Red Branch; and servants and attendants were sent to them, and they were supplied with noble sweet-tasted viands,

<sup>1</sup> One of the three royal courts of Conchobar. The other two were called the *Craebh Ruadh* or 'Royal Branch,' and the *Teite Brec* or 'Speckled Branch.' In the *Craebh Derg* or Red Branch were kept the spoils and trophies and the skulls taken from the enemies of Ulster. *Craebh Ruadh*, now Creeveroe, is the name of a townland near the River Callan, not far from Emania (the Navan Fort, near Armagh).

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.* the knocker.

and with sweet, intoxicating drinks, till every one of their servants and attendants was drunk and merry and loud-voiced. But they themselves partook not of food and drink from the weariness caused by their travel and journey; for they had neither stopped nor stayed from the time they left the fort of Borrach, till they came to Emain Macha.

Then said Naisi: 'Let the 'Fair-head'<sup>1</sup> of Conchobar be brought to us, so that we may play upon it.' The 'Fair-head' was brought to them, and its men were placed upon it, and Naisi and Deirdre began to play.

At the same hour Conchobar said, 'Which of you, O warriors, will bring me tidings whether her own form and shape remain on Deirdre; for if she is unchanged, there is not among the race of Adam a woman whose form is more beautiful than hers.' 'I myself will go thither,' said Levarcham, 'and I will bring tidings.' Now Naisi was dearer to Levarcham than any other in the whole world, and often she had gone [abroad] to seek Naisi, and to bear tidings to him and from him. Then she went forward to the place wherein were Naisi and Deirdre.

Thus were they, with the 'Fair-head' of Conchobar between them, and they playing on it. And Levarcham gave the sons of Usnach and Deirdre kisses of loyalty, lovingly, fervently; and she wept showers of tears, so that her bosom and her breast were wet. And she spake and said, 'It is not well for you, O beloved children, to

<sup>1</sup> The 'Cennchaem,' Conchobar's draught or chess-board. Chess was a favourite game in Ireland from very early times. The chess-boards and men were sometimes made of the precious metals and were used as articles of tribute. See *Book of Rights*, ed. O'Donovan, p. 35, and Introd. p. lxi, and *Táin bó Fraich*, Pro. R.I.A. vol. i. pt. i. p. 141. Comp., Lady Guest's *Mab.*, 1877, p. 445.

have with you that which the king is most loath to lose and you in his power. For it is to see whether her own form and shape remain upon Deirdre that I am sent to visit you. Grievous to me is the deed that they will do to-night in Emain, the treachery and shame and breach of troth practised upon you, O darling friends. And till the world's end Emain will not be better for a single night than it is to-night.' And she made this lay :—

'Sad to my heart is the shame  
Which is done in Emain to-night ;  
And owing to this deed henceforward  
It will be an Emain of contentions . . .'

Levarcham told the sons of Fergus to shut the doors and the windows of the house of the Red Branch. 'If ye be attacked, victory and blessing be with you! Defend yourselves well and defend [manfully] your charge, and the charge of Fergus.' After that she went forward gloomily, sadly, unhappily [weeping quick-trickling showers of tears] to the place where Conchobar was; and the king asked tidings of her. She said: 'I have evil tidings for thee and I have tidings that are good.' 'Tell me them,' said the king of Ulster.

'These are the good tidings that I have,' said Levarcham: 'the three whose form and make are best, whose motion and throwing of darts are best, whose action and valour and prowess are best in Erin and in Alba, and in the whole great world beside, have come to thee, and henceforth against the men of Erin thou wilt have but the driving of a flock of birds, since the sons of Usnach go with thee. That is the best tidings that I have. And the worst tidings that I have are these: that the woman whose form and make were the best in

the world when she went from us out of Erin, her own form and features no longer remain upon her.'

When Conchobar heard that, his jealousy and bitterness abated. And they drunk a round or two after that, and the king asked again: 'Who will go for me to discover whether her own form and fashion remain upon Deirdre?'

Thrice he asked the question before he had his answer.

Then said Conchobar to Tréndorn, 'O Tréndorn, knowest thou who slew thy father [and thy three brothers]?'

'I know that it was Naisi, son of Usnach, who slew them.'

'If so,' said the king, 'go and see whether her own shape and form remain on Deirdre.'

And Tréndorn moved forward, and came to the hostel, and found the doors and the windows shut; and dread and great fear seized upon him, and he said, 'There is no proper way to approach the sons of Usnach, for wrath is upon them.' But he found a window that was left unclosed through forgetfulness in the hostel, and he began to watch Naisi and Deirdre through the window. Now Deirdre, who was the most quick-witted, saw him there, and she nudged Naisi, and Naisi followed her eye and caught sight of that man.

And thus was he, having a dead man of the men of the draught-board, he made thereof a fearful successful cast, so that it landed in the young man's eye, and his eye fell out on the young man's cheek, so that he returned to Conchobar having only one eye. And he told him tidings from beginning to end, and said, 'The woman whose form and feature are loveliest

in the world is there, and Naisi would be king of the world if she were left to him.' [When Conchobar heard that, he was filled with jealousy and envy, and he proclaimed to the troops that they should go forward and assault the house of the Red Branch.] And Conchobar and the men of Ulster came round the hostel and uttered many mighty shouts without, and cast fire and fire-brands into the house. [When the children of Usnach heard the shouts] they asked who were about the Red Branch.

'Conchobar and the men of Ulster,' say they.

['It is like that it is Fergus's safeguard you mean to break,'] said Illann the Fair.

'By my troth,' said Conchobar, 'you and the sons of Usnach are like to rue that you have my wife with you.'

'That is true,' said Deirdre, 'and Fergus hath betrayed you, O Naisi.' 'By my troth!' said Buinne, '[if] he hath been treacherous we will not be so.' And Buinne the Ruthless Red came forth and slew three fifties at that onset, and he quenched the fires and the torches, and confounded the troops with that shout of doom.

Conchobar asked, 'Who causes this confusion to the troops?'

'I, Buinne the Ruthless Red, son of Fergus.'

'Take a bribe from me,' said Conchobar, 'and desert the children of Usnach.' 'What bribe?' said he.

'A cantred of land,' said Conchobar, 'and my privacy and counsel.' 'I accept,' said Buinne, and he took those bribes; but through God's miracle that night, the cantred became a desolate moorland, whence it is called the Moorland of Buinne's portion. And Deirdre heard that parley. 'My conscience!' she said; 'Buinne



hath deserted you, O sons of Usnach, and the son is like his father.'

'By my own word,' said Illann the Fair, 'I am not like to leave them so long as this hard sword is left in my hand.' And Illann came forth and made three swift circuits of the house, and slew three hundred of the Ulstermen without, and re-entered the place where Naisi was playing draughts with Ainle the Rough. And Illann made a circuit round them and drank a drink, and carried a [torch] alight with him out upon the green and began cutting down the troops, so that they dared not close round the hostel. [A generous youth] was Illann the Fair, son of Fergus! Jewels and treasures he refused to none; he took no stipend from any king nor did he accept a cow save only from Fergus.

'Where is my own son, Fiacha?' said Conchobar. 'I am here,' said he.

'By my troth, on one and the same night thou and Illann the Fair were born. And he hath his father's arms; do thou take my arms with thee, even the Bright-rim and the Victorious, and the Gapped spear, and my sword; and do thou with them valiantly.'

Then the two youths approached each other; and Fiacha advanced straight to Illann, and Illann asked, 'What is thy desire, O Fiacha?' 'A combat and a conflict I wish to have with thee,' he said.

'Thou doest not well,' said Illann, 'for the sons of Usnach are under my safeguard.'

Then they attacked each other and they fought a combat warlike, heroic, bold, daring, rapid. And Illann got the better of Fiacha, and made him crouch beneath the shadow of his shield, and the shield roared at the

greatness of the need wherein he lay.<sup>1</sup> And the three chief waves of Erin answered to that roar, even the wave of Cleena, the wave of Tuag Inbir, and the wave of Rury.<sup>2</sup>

Conall the Victorious, son of Amargin, was at the time in Dunseverick and he heard the thunder of the wave of Rury. 'True it is,' said Conall, 'Conchobar is in danger, and we should do amiss not to go to him.' And he took his arms and went forward to Emain, and found the fight [on the lawn], Fiacha, son of Conchobar having been overthrown, and the shield roaring and crying, for none of the Ultonians dared to interfere to rescue him. And Conall came up to Illann from behind and thrust his blue-green spear 'the Culghlas' through him [even through his heart].

'Who hath wounded me?' said Illann. ['And whoever did it, by my hand of valour, he would have got battle opposite my face from me, though he hath pierced me at my back.']

'I, Conall,' saith he; 'and who art thou?'

'I am Illann the Fair, son of Fergus, and ill is the deed that thou hast done, for the sons of Usnach are under my protection.'

'Is it so indeed?' saith Conall. 'True it is,' said he.

'Ah, my sorrow,' saith Conall; 'by my word Conchobar shall not bear off his own son [alive] from me in vengeance for that deed.' And with that he

<sup>1</sup> Comp. 'Táin bó Cuailgne' (sec. 115), and *Battle of Ros na rígh*. R.I.A. Todd Lecture Series, vol. iv. pp. 51, 89.

<sup>2</sup> These three famous waves, which responded sympathetically in moments of distress, were respectively in the Bay of Clonakilty, Co. Cork; at the mouth of the River Bann, Co. Antrim; and in Dundrum Bay. For the origin of the names, see S. H. O'Grady's *Silva Gadelica*, vol. ii. Extracts XII. xxx.



gave a stroke of a sword to Fiacha the Fair and shore his head from his body, and he left them.

Then came the weakness of death upon Illann and he flung his arms into the hostel, and he called on Naisi to do valiantly, for he himself was slain unwittingly by Conall the Victorious.

Then came the men of Ulster round the dwelling, and cast fires and fire-brands into it; and Ardan came forth and quenched the fires, and slew three hundred of the host outside. And the second third of the night went Ainle forth to protect the dwelling; and he slew an innumerable multitude of the Ultonians, so that they retired with loss from the hostel.

Then Conchobar began to hearten the host, and at length came Naisi forth [for his third of the night], and it is not possible to number all who fell by his hand. Then the Ultonians gave the battle of the morning to Naisi, and with his single hand he inflicted on them a three hours' rout.<sup>1</sup>

Then Deirdre arose to meet him, and she said, 'Victorious is the conflict that thyself and thy two brothers have made, and do ye valiantly henceforward. Ill is the counsel that you took to trust in Conchobar and the Ultonians, and sad it is that you did not do as I counselled.'

Then the children of Usnach linked each other's shields together; and they put Deirdre between them, and set their faces against the host [and they gave three bounds, actively, as birds, over the walls of Emain outwards] and slew three hundred at that onrush.

<sup>1</sup> Here is inserted in O'Flanagan's text one of those hyperbolic descriptions of the multitude slain by him, so common in Irish writing of the later period.

Then Conchobar sought out Cathbad the Druid; and he said, 'O Cathbad, stay the children of Usnach, and work enchantment upon them, for if they escape from the men of Ulster at this time, they will destroy this province for ever. And I pledge my word moreover, that I will not harm the children of Usnach [provided they be of my accord.]'

Cathbad believed those sayings of Conchobar, and he went about to restrain the children of Usnach, and he cast spells about them, for he put a great-waved sea along the field before the children of Usnach. Two feet behind them pressed on the men of Ulster [though they dared not approach them until their arms fell from their hands] and before them was the great sea overwhelming them, and Naisi uplifting Deirdre on his shoulder lest she should be submerged.

Then the king cried out to kill the children of Usnach, but all the men of Ulster refused to do it. For there was not one man in Ulster who had not wages from Naisi.

There was a youth there with Conchobar whose name was Maine Red-hand, the son of the King of Norway.<sup>1</sup> Now Naisi had slain his father and his two brothers, and he said that he himself was ready to behead the children of Usnach in vengeance for that deed. 'If so,' said Ardan, 'let me be the first to die, since I am the youngest of my brothers [that I may not see my brothers die.]'

'Not so,' said Ainle, 'let me be slain the first.'

'It shall not be so,' said Naisi; 'behold the sword of Manannan mac Lir which he himself gave to me. It

<sup>1</sup> Other versions say that it was Eogan, son of Durthacht, who killed the children of Usnach.

leaves no relic of stroke or blow behind. Let us three be struck by it at once, so that none of us may see his brother beheaded.' Then these three noble ones stretched forth their necks on one block; and Maine gave them a sword-blow, and shore the three heads at one stroke from them on that spot.

And each of the Ultonians at that grievous sight gave forth three heavy cries of grief.

As to Deirdre, while each of them was attending to the other she came forward on the green of Emain, fluttering hither and thither from one to another, till Cúchulainn happened to meet her. And he took her under his safeguard, and she told him tidings of the children of Usnach, from beginning to end, how they had been betrayed.

'That is sad news to me,' said he; 'and dost thou know who put them to death?' 'Maine Red-hand, son of the King of Norway,' she said. Then came Cúchulainn and Deirdre to where the children of Usnach lay, and Deirdre dishevelled her hair, and began to drink Naisi's blood,<sup>1</sup> and the colour of [burning] embers came into her cheeks, and she uttered this lay:

'Great these deeds in Emain,' etc.

Then Deirdre said, 'Let me kiss my husband.' And she kissed Naisi and drank his blood and she sang thus:<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This curious and horrible custom seems to have continued in Ireland into historical times. See Spenser's *View of the State of Ireland*, Poems, Globe Ed., p. 636. In Laud 610, the Blessed Virgin Mary is said to have drunk her Son's blood when He was hanging on the Cross.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Samuel Ferguson's fine adaptation of this lament will be found in *Lays of the Western Gael*, p. 133, and that of Dr. Sigerson in *Bards of the Gael and Gall*. (Sealy, Bryers and Walker, 1888.)

‘ Long the day without Usnach’s children  
 It was not mournful to be in their company  
 Sons of a king, by whom [sojourners were entertained]  
 Three lions from the Hill of the Cave.

Three dragons of Dún Monaid<sup>1</sup>  
 The three champions of the Red Branch :  
 After them I am not alive :  
 Three that used to break every onrush.

Three darlings of the women of Britain,  
 Three hawks of Slieve Gullion  
 Sons of a king whom valour served  
 To whom soldiers used to give homage.

Three heroes who were not good at homage  
 Their fall is cause of sorrow—  
 Three sons of Cathbad’s daughter,  
 Three props of the battalion of Cualgne.

Three vigorous bears,  
 Three lions out of Lis Una,  
 Three heroes who loved their praise,  
 The three sons of the breast of the Ultonians.

Three who were fostered by Aifé,  
 To whom a district was under tribute :  
 Three columns of breach of battle,  
 Three fosterlings whom Scathach had.

Three who were reared by Boghmain,  
 At learning every feat ;  
 Three renowned sons of Usnach :  
 It is mournful to be absent from them.

That I should remain after Naisi,  
 Let no one in the world suppose :  
 After Ardan and Ainle,  
 My time would not be long.

<sup>1</sup> A mountain range in Scotland.

Ulster's over-king, my first husband,  
I forsook for Naisi's love.  
Short my life after them :  
I will perform their funeral game.

After them I shall not be alive—  
Three that would go into every conflict,  
Three who liked to endure hardships,  
Three heroes who refused not combats.

A curse on thee, O Wizard Cathbad  
That slewest Naisi through a woman !  
Sad that there was none to help him  
The one King that satisfies the world !

O man, that diggest the tomb  
And puttest my darling from me,  
Make not the grave too narrow :  
I shall be beside the noble ones.

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Much hardship would I take,  
Along with the three heroes ;  
I would endure without house, without fire,  
It is not I that would be gloomy.

Their three shields and their spears,  
Were often a bed for me,  
Put their three hard swords  
Over the grave, O gillie !

Their three hounds, and their three hawks,  
Will henceforth be without hunters—  
The three who upheld every battle,  
Three fosterlings of Conall the Victorious.

The three leashes of those three hounds  
Have struck a sigh out of my heart ;  
With me was their keeping,  
To see them is cause of wailing.

I was never alone  
 Save the day of making your grave,  
 Though often have I been  
 With you in a solitude.

My sight hath gone from me  
 At seeing Naisi's grave :  
 Shortly my soul will leave me,  
 And the folk of my lamentation remain not.

Through me guile was wrought upon them,  
 Three strong waves of the flood !  
 Sad that I was not in earth  
 Before Usnach's children were slain !

Sad my journey with Fergus,  
 To deceive me to the Red Branch :  
 With his soft sweet words  
 He ruined me at the same time.

I shunned the delightfulness of Ulster  
 Many champions and friends.  
 Being after them alone,  
 My life will not be long.

After that, Deirdre flung herself upon Naisi in the tomb and gave three kisses to Naisi, and died forthwith, [and stones were laid over their monumental heap; their Ogham names were inscribed, and their dirge of lamentation sung]. And Cúchulainn went onwards to Dundalk sadly and mournfully.

Then Cathbad the Druid cursed Emain Macha, in vengeance for that great evil. Cathbad said, moreover, that neither Conchobar nor any of his race should possess that stead [from henceforth to all eternity. And this has been verified, for neither Conchobar nor any of his race possessed Emain from that time to this.]<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> O'Flanagan's version ends here.



As to Fergus, son of Ross the Ruddy, he came, on the morrow after the slaying of the Children of Usnach, to Emain Macha. And when he found that they had been slain in breach of his safeguard, he and Cormac *conloingeas*, son of Conchobar, and Dubhtach *dael ultach* with their troop, gave battle to Conchobar's household, and Maine, son of Conchobar, fell by them, and three hundred of his household together with him. Emain Macha was burnt and destroyed, and Conchobar's women were slain by them. And the number of their host was three thousand warriors. And from that they proceeded to Connacht to Ailill the Great, who was King of Connacht at the time, and to Maive of Cruachan, where they found welcome and support. As to Fergus and Cormac *conloingeas*, with their warriors, after they had reached Connacht they were not a single night without sending out marauders destroying and burning Ulster, as had been done to them. So that the district of Cuailgne was subdued by them, a deed from which came abundance of difficulties and robberies between the two provinces. And they spent seven years, or, according to some others, ten years thus without a truce between them for a single hour . . . so that the destructions and the hardships which they wrought one against the other were so great that the books written on them are tedious to read.

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OF DEIRDRE'S DEATH HERE

As to Deirdre, she was a year in the household of Conchobar, after those deeds had come to pass. And

though it might be a little thing to raise her head, or to bring a smile over her lip, never once did she do it through all that space of time. [She took not sufficiency of food, drink, or sleep, nor raised her head from her knee. When musicians went to her mansion, she would break out into a lament for Naisi.]

Splendid as in your eyes may be the vehement heroes—who re-enter Emain after a war-like foray—More brilliant yet was the return—Of the heroic Sons of Usnach to their home.

Naisi bearing in the mead was truly noble—I bathed him in water warmed by the fire—Arden brought an ox or a boar of excellent size—Ainle a fagot on his stately back.

Sweet though the excellent mead be found—Drunk by the son of Ness (Conachar)—I, in a time that is past, have found more agreeable—An abundant sustenance that was yet more sweet.

When in the forest the noble Naisi—Had laid on the hearth logs hewn by the warriors—More pleasant than all other provant—I found the game taken in chase by the Sons of Usnach.

Though they give forth a sound of melody—The pipes and flutes that month by month are played before you—It is mine in truth to tell you to-day—I have heard sounds sweeter far than these.

In the house of Conachar they are delightful—The flutes and horns played by the musicians—Yet found I greater pleasure hearkening to the songs—Famous and enchanting, sung by the sons of Usnach.

Like the sound of the wave the voice of Naisi—Was a music that wearied not the listener—Ardan was a good barytone—The tenor of Ainle resounded through the house.

Naisi is laid in the tomb—A sad protection was that he received from the three, Fergus, Dubthach and Cormac—From the action of these three Naisi received—The poisoned cup of which he died.

Lovely ! beloved ! bewitching was his beauty—Noble man ! flower alluring—The root of my pain is that henceforth—Never shall I await the coming of the sons of Usnach.

Well beloved ! of the mind firm and upright—Well beloved ! warrior noble and yet modest—After passing with him through the woods of Ireland—Gentle with him was the repose of night.

Dear the grey eye, a woman's love ! But to his enemies a formidable foe—After crossing the forests we gathered to the trysting-place—Welcome his tenor notes across the sombre woods.

No more I sleep—No more I stain my finger-nails with red—Joy enters not my soul—For the sons of Usnach return no more.

I sleep not—Half the night in my bed—My mind wanders among the crowds—I eat not neither do I smile.

For me there is to-day no instant of joy—In the assemblies of noble Emain—There is nor peace, nor pleasure, nor repose—Fine houses and splendid adornments are not pleasing to me.

Splendid as in your eyes may be the eager heroes—Who re-enter Emain after a warrior's march—More brilliant yet was the return—Of the heroes, the sons of Usnach, to their home.

When Conachar sought to soothe her, she replied :—

What, O Conachar, of thee?—For me, nought but sorrow and lamentation hast thou prepared—Such will be my life so long as it remains to me—Hardly thy love for me will last.

He who under heaven was fairest to me—He who was so dear—Thou hast torn him from me, great was the crime !—Never till I die shall I see him more.

His absence is the secret of my grief—In place of the forms of the sons of Usnach,—I see only a dark tomb : it covers a white body—Well known to me and more to be desired than every other !

His ruddy cheeks, most beautiful !—Red lips ; lashes like the chafer, black—His teeth shining like pearls—Pure white as snow.

Well have I known the faultless warrior's garb—By which he was distinguished among the warriors of Alba—Mantle of crimson that so well combined—With the fringe of red gold on its borders.

His tunic of silk of costly price—On it a hundred pearls could be counted, goodly the number!—For its embroidery had been used, I ween it well,—Fifty ounces of white bronze.

A gold-hilted sword in his hand—With his two spears terrible wounds were inflicted—The border of his shield was of yellow gold—The boss in the centre, of silver.

How many the woes brought upon us by noble Fergus—In inducing us to cross the sea!—He has sold his honour for a feast;—The glory of his high deeds is tarnished.

If there were marshalled on the plain—The warriors of Ulster in presence of the king—All of them would I give without exception—To see again the face of Naisi, son of Usnach.

Break not my heart to-day—I expect ere long my early grave;—Stronger than waves of the sea is my grief—Dost thou not know it, O Conachar?

What, O Conachar, of thee?—For me, nought but sorrow and lamentation hast thou prepared—Such will be my life so long as it remains to me, Hardly thy love for me will last!

When Conchobar saw that neither amusement nor mildness roused her, and that neither jesting nor pleasant exaltation put courage into her nature, he gave notice to Eogan, son of Durthacht, prince of Ferney: some historians say that it was this Eogan who had slain Naisi at Emain Macha. When Eogan had come the king said to Deirdre [‘What is it you hate most of all you see?’ ‘Thou thyself, and Eogan, son of Durthacht,’ she said. ‘Thou shalt be a year in Eogan’s power then,’ said Conchobar. And he gave her over to Eogan, and they drove the next day to the assembly of Muirthemne

(or of 'Macha,' LL.). She was put behind Eogan in a chariot. She looked down towards the earth, that she might not see her two tormentors.] And when Conchobar perceived this, for he was watching her and Eogan, he said to her in jest, 'Ah, Deirdre, it is the glance of an ewe between two rams, that you cast between me and Eogan!' When Deirdre heard that, she started up, and gave a leap out of the chariot, and struck her head against the rocks that were before her, and dashed her skull to pieces, so that her brain fell suddenly out. And thus came to pass the death of Deirdre.<sup>1</sup>

O'Flanagan tells us that at the conclusion of the tale, a traditional relation was always added. It is said that King Conchobar was so incensed that Naisi and Deirdre should even in death dwell in the mansion of the grave together, that he ordered them to be laid far apart in the burial-ground. Every morning for some days, however, the graves would be found open and Naisi and Deirdre found together in one of them. Then Conchobar ordered that stakes of yew should be driven severally through their bodies, in order to keep them asunder. But two yew-trees sprang from these two stakes, which grew to such a height that they embraced each other over the cathedral of Armagh.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is substantially the version found also in the Book of Leinster. It is probably the older of the two.

<sup>2</sup> See Introduction, and compare a similar incident in 'Scél Baili Binnbérlaig,' ed. by Dr. Kuno Meyer, *Rev. Celt.* xiii., and O'Curry, *ms. Mat.* Appendix, pp. 465-6.



THE WOOING OF EMER

TWO versions are known of this fine tale (*a*) That edited and translated by Dr. Kuno Meyer from the Bodleian ms. Rawl. B. 512, and published by him in *Rev. Celt.*, xi. pp. 442-453. From the presence of old-Irish verbal and synthetical forms and the simpler form of the incidents, the editor assigns it to the eighth century. It is incomplete, the whole of the opening being wanting, and is obviously much abridged. It was probably a mere outline, to be expanded by the bard at the time of recitation. (*b*) The fuller version here given, of which a fragment is found in LU. and a complete copy in Stowe ms. 992, edited and translated in full by Dr. Kuno Meyer in the *Archæological Review*, vol. i. 1888. Dr. Meyer has had the kindness to revise the translation for the present work.

I have omitted a few incidents of minor importance in accordance with the views expressed on p. xlii of the Introduction.

The 'Woing of Emer' is mentioned in the Book of Leinster list of prime stories, and also in the Introduction to the *Senchus mór*. It is associated with three other of the most famous tales of Ireland in the 'Vision of Mac Conglinne' edited by Dr. Kuno Meyer (D. Nutt, 1892), where the *fáthliaig* who cures MacFingine of his voracity is described as having 'the Táin bó Cuailgne and Bruidhen dá Derga in the shoe that was on his right foot; Tochmarc Etaine and Tochmarc Emere in the shoe that was on his left foot.'

It is sometimes reckoned as one of the *remscéla* or Introductory tales to the Táin bó Cuailgne.



## V

### THE WOOING OF EMER

#### PART I

THERE lived once upon a time a great and famous king in Emain Macha, whose name was Conchobar, son of Fachtna *fathach*. In his reign there was much store of good things enjoyed by the men of Ulster. Peace there was, and quiet, and pleasant greeting; there were fruits and fatness and harvest of the sea; there was sway and law and good lordship during his time among the men of Erin. In the king's house at Emain was great state and rank and plenty. On this wise was that house, the Red Branch of Conchobar, namely, after the likeness of the house of Tara's 'Meadhall.' Nine compartments<sup>1</sup> were in it from the fire to the wall. Thirty feet was the height of each bronze partition<sup>2</sup> that was in the house. Carvings of red yew therein. A board (*i.e.* wooden ceiling) beneath and a roofing of tiles above. The compartment of

<sup>1</sup> Literally 'beds'; but they could not have been sleeping-couches in a banqueting hall. As many as twelve could repose in one such 'bed.' The banqueting hall at Tara, to which this building is compared, was 300 feet long and had fourteen doors opening from the longer walls which ran east and west. (See Additional Note.)

<sup>2</sup> Literally 'front'; it probably means the partition-walls of the separate compartments.

Conchobar was in the forefront of the house, with boards (*i.e.* ceiling) of silver with pillars of bronze. Their headpieces glittering with gold and set with carbuncles, so that day and night were equally light therein, with its plate (or gong) of silver above the king to the roof-tree of the royal house. Whenever Conchobar struck the plate with his royal rod, all the men of Ulster were silent.<sup>1</sup> The twelve divisions of the twelve chariot-chiefs were round about the king's compartment. Yea all the valiant warriors of the men of Ulster found space in that king's house at the time of drinking, and (yet) no man of them would press upon the other. Splendid, lavish, and beautiful were the valiant warriors of the men of Ulster in that house. In it were held great and numerous gatherings of every kind, and wonderful pastimes. Games and music and singing there, heroes performing their feats, poets singing, harpers and players on the *timpan* striking (up) their sounds.

Now, once the men of Ulster were in Emain Macha with Conchobar, drinking the *iern-gual*.<sup>2</sup> A hundred fillings of beverage went into it every evening. Such was the drinking of the *iern-gual*, which at one time (*i.e.* sitting) would satisfy all the men of Ulster. The chariot-chiefs of Ulster were performing on ropes stretched across from door to door in the house at

<sup>1</sup> Compare a similar passage in the Second Feast of Briccriu, M. D'Arbois de Jubainville's *Épopée Celtique en Irlande*, p. 151.

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.* 'the iron-coal.' This was a hugh copper wine-cask, so called, according to LL., p. 258 b. 'because there was a coal-fire in the house at Emain when it was drunk.'—Translator's note. Compare the description of Conchobar's '*aradach*' or ladder-vat in 'Das Fest des Bricriu,' *Irische Texte*, zweite serie, 1 heft, p. 164. For the history of the vat, see Cóir Anmann, § 160, *Irische Texte*, dritte serie, 2 heft, p. 359.

Emania. Fifteen feet and nine score was the size of that house. The chariot-chiefs were performing three feats, viz., the spear-feat, the apple-feat, and the sword-edge feat. The chariot-chiefs who performed those feats are these, Conall the Victorious, son of Amargin; Fergus, son of Rôich, the Over-bold; Laegaire the Triumphant, son of Conna; Celtchar, son of Uitechar; Dubhtach, son of Lugaid; Cúchulainn, son of Sualtach; Scel, son of Barnene (from whom the Pass of Barnene is named), the warder of Emain Macha. From him is the saying 'a story of Scel's,' for he was a mighty story-teller. Cúchulainn surpassed them all at those feats for quickness and deftness. The women of Ulster loved Cúchulainn greatly for his dexterity in the feats, for the nimbleness of his leap, for the excellency of his wisdom, for the sweetness of his speech, for the beauty of his face, for the loveliness of his look. For in his kingly eyes were seven pupils, four of them in his one eye, and three of them in the other. He had seven fingers on either hand, and seven toes on either of his two feet. Many were his gifts. First, his gift of prudence until his warrior's flame appeared, the gift of feats, the gift of *buanfach* (a game like chess or draughts), the gift of draught-playing, the gift of calculating, the gift of sooth-saying, the gift of discernment, the gift of beauty. But Cúchulainn had three defects: that he was too young, for his . . .? had not grown, and all the more would unknown youths deride him, that he was too daring, and that he was too beautiful. The men of Ulster took counsel about Cúchulainn, for their women and maidens loved him greatly. For Cúchulainn had no wife at that time. This was their counsel, that they should

seek out a maiden whom Cúchulainn might choose to woo. For they were sure that a man who had a wife to attend to him would less spoil their daughters and accept the love of their women. And, besides, they were troubled and afraid that Cúchulainn would perish early, so that for that reason they wished to give him a wife that he might leave an heir; knowing that his rebirth would be of himself.<sup>1</sup>

Then Conchobar sent out nine men into each province of Erin to seek a wife for Cúchulainn, to see if in any dún, or in any chief place in Erin they could find the daughter of a king, or of a chief, or of a hospitaller, whom it might please Cúchulainn to woo.

All the messengers returned that day a year gone, and had not found a maiden whom Cúchulainn chose to woo. Thereupon Cúchulainn himself went to woo a maiden that he knew in Luglochta Loga, 'the Gardens of Lugh,' namely, Emer, the daughter of Forgall the Wily. Cúchulainn himself, and his charioteer Laegh, son of Rianganbar, went in his chariot. That was the one chariot which the host of the horses of the chariots of Ulster could not follow, on account of the swiftness and speed of the chariot, and of the chariot chief who sat in it. Then Cúchulainn found the maiden on her playing-field, with her foster-sisters around her, daughters of the land-owners that lived around the dún of Forgall.<sup>2</sup> They were learning needlework and fine handiwork from Emer. Of all the maidens of Erin, she was the one maiden whom he

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* That only from himself could another such as he have origin.

<sup>2</sup> The dún, or fort of Forgall the 'Wily' was at Lusca (now Lusk), north of Dublin. It was one of the six famous Courts or *Bruidhens* of Ireland, and was noted for hospitality. It was also a place of sanctuary.

deigned to address and to woo. For she had the six gifts: the gift of beauty, the gift of voice, the gift of sweet speech, the gift of needlework, the gifts of wisdom and chastity. Cúchulainn had said that no maiden should go with him but she who was his equal in age and form and race, in skill and deftness, who was the best handiworker of the maidens of Erin, for that none but such as she were a fitting wife for him. Now, as Emer was the one maiden who fulfilled all these conditions, Cúchulainn went to woo her above all.

It was in his festal array that Cúchulainn went forth that day to address Emer, and to show his beauty to her. As the maidens were sitting on the bench of gathering at the dún, they heard coming towards them the clatter of horses' hoofs, with the creaking of the chariot, the cracking of straps, the grating of wheels, the rush of the hero, the clanking of weapons.

'Let one of you see,' said Emer, 'what it is that is coming toward us.'

'Truly, I see,' said Fiall, daughter of Forgall, 'two steeds alike in size, beauty, fierceness, and speed, bounding side by side. Spirited (they are) and powerful, pricking their ears: their manes long and curling, and with curling tails. At the right side of the pole of the chariot is a grey horse, broad in the haunches, fierce, swift, wild; thundering he comes along, taking small bounds, with head erect and chest expanded. Beneath his four hard hoofs the firm and solid turf seems aflame. A flock of swift birds follows, but, as he takes his course along the road, a flash of breath darts from him, a blast of ruddy flaming sparks is poured from his curbed jaws.

‘The other horse jet-black, his head firmly knit, his feet broad-hoofed and slender. Long and curly are his mane and tail. Down his broad forehead hang heavy curls of hair. Spirited and fiery, he fiercely strides along, stamping firmly on the ground. Beautiful he sweeps along as having out-stripped the horses of the land; he bounds over the smooth dry sward, following the levels of the mid-glen, where no obstacle (obstructs his pace).

‘I see a chariot of fine wood with wicker work, moving on wheels of white bronze. A pole of white silver, with a mounting of white bronze. Its frame very high of creaking tin (or copper), rounded and firm. A strong curved yoke of gold. Two firm plaited yellow reins. The shafts hard and straight as sword-blades.

‘Within the chariot a dark sad man,<sup>1</sup> comeliest of the men of Erin. Around him a beautiful crimson five-folded tunic, fastened at its opening on his white breast with a brooch of inlaid gold, against which it heaves, beating in full strokes. A shirt with a white hood, interwoven red with flaming gold. Seven red dragon-gems on the ground of either of his eyes. Two blue-white, blood-red cheeks that breathe forth sparks and flashes of fire. A ray of love burns in his look. Methinks, a shower of pearls has fallen into his mouth. As black as the side of a black ruin each of his eyebrows. On his two thighs rests a golden-hilted sword, and fastened to the copper frame of the chariot is a blood-red spear with a sharp mettlesome blade, on a shaft of wood well fitted to the hand. Over his

<sup>1</sup> So in *Mesca Ulad*, p. 29, Cúchulainn is called ‘a little black-browed man, greatly resplendent.’

shoulders a crimson shield with a rim of silver, ornamented (*i.e.* chased) with figures of golden animals. He leaps the hero's salmon-leap into the air, and does many like swift feats. (This is the description of) the chariot chief of the single chariot.<sup>1</sup>

'Before him in that chariot there is a charioteer, a very slender, tall, much freckled man. On his head is very curly bright-red hair, (held by) a fillet of bronze upon his brow which prevents the hair from falling over his face. On both sides of his head patins (or cups) of gold confine the hair. A shoulder mantle about him with sleeves opening at the two elbows, and in his hand a goad of red gold with which he guides the horses.'

Meanwhile, Cúchulainn had come to the place where the maidens were. And he wished a blessing to them.

Emer lifted up her lovely face and recognised Cúchulainn, and she said, 'May God make smooth the path before you!'

'And you,' he said, 'may you be safe from every harm!'

'Whence comest thou?' she asked. 'From Intide Emna,' he replied. 'Where did you sleep?' said she. 'We slept,' he said, 'in the house of the man who tends the cattle of the plain of Tethra.' 'What was your food there?' she asked. 'The ruin of a chariot was cooked for us there,' he replied. 'Which way didst thou come?' 'Between the Two Mountains of the Wood,' said he. 'Which way didst thou take after that?' 'That is not hard to tell,' he said. 'From the Cover

<sup>1</sup> Compare the description of Cúchulainn and Laegh in the 'Phantom Chariot of Cúchulainn.' And see Additional Notes on that tale.

of the Sea, over the Great Secret of the Tuatha dé Danann, and the Foam of the two steeds of Emania; over the Morrigan's Garden, and the Great Sow's Back; over the Glen of the Great Dam, between the god and his prophet; over the Marrow of the Woman Fedelm, between the boar and his dam; over the Washing-place of the horses of Dea; between the King of Ana and his servant, to Mondchuile of the Four Corners of the World; over Great Crime and the Remnants of the Great Feast; between the Vat and the Little Vat, to the Gardens of Lugh, to the daughters of Tethra's nephew (*i.e.* Forgall), the king of the Fomori. And what, O maiden, is the account of thee?' said Cúchulainn.

'Truly, that is not hard to tell,' said the maiden. 'Tara of the women,<sup>1</sup> whitest of maidens, the (paragon?) of chastity, a prohibition that is not taken, a watcher that (yet) sees no one.<sup>1</sup> A modest woman is a worm,<sup>1</sup> . . . a rush which none comes near.<sup>1</sup> The daughter of a king is a flame of hospitality, a road that cannot be entered. I have champions that follow me to guard me from whoever would carry me off against their will, without their and Forgall's knowledge of my act.'

'Who are the champions that follow thee, O maiden?' said Cúchulainn.

'Truly, it is not hard to tell,' said Emer. 'Two called Lui, two Luaths; Luath and Lath Goible, son of

<sup>1</sup> There are old glosses to explain some of these passages:—

*Gloss., i.e.* As Tara is above every hill, so I am above every woman.

*i.e.* I am looked at by everybody for my beauty, and I look at nobody.

*i.e.* When a worm is seen, it goes into the depth of the water.

*i.e.* For her beauty. (See Additional Note on 'Kennings.')



Tethra ; Triath and Trescath, Brion and Bolor ; Bas, son of Omnach ; eight (called) Condla ; and Cond, son of Forgall. Every man of them has the strength of a hundred and the feats of nine. Hard it were, too, to tell the many powers of Forgall's self. He is stronger than any labourer, more learned than any Druid, more acute than any poet. It will be more than all your games to fight against Forgall himself. For many powers of his have been recounted (and prowess?) of manly deeds.'

'Why dost thou not reckon me, O maiden, with those strong men?' said Cúchulainn. 'If thy deeds have been recounted, why should I not reckon thee among them?' 'Truly, I swear, O maiden,' said Cúchulainn, 'that I shall make 'my deeds to be recounted among the glories of the strength of heroes.' 'What then is thy strength?' said Emer. 'That is quickly told,' said he. 'When my strength in fight is weakest, I defend twenty. A third part of my strength is sufficient for thirty. Alone, I make combat against forty. Under my protection a hundred are secure. From dread of me, warriors avoid fords and battle-fields. Hosts and multitudes and many armed men flee before the terror of my face.'

'Those are goodly fights for a tender boy,' said the maiden, 'but thou hast not yet reached the strength of chariot-chiefs.'

'Truly; O maiden,' said he, 'well have I been brought up by my dear foster-father Conchobar. Not as a churl looks to the heritage of (*i.e.* strives to bring up) his children, between flag and kneading-trough, between fire and wall, nor on the floor of the single larder (?) have I been brought up by Conchobar ; but ✓

among chariot-chiefs and champions, among jesters and Druids, among poets and learned men, among the lords of land and farmers of Ulster have I been reared, so that I have all their manners and gifts.'

'Who then were they who brought thee up in all those deeds of which thou boastest?' said Emer. 'That, truly, were easily told. Fair-speeched Sencha has taught me, so that I am strong, wise, swift, deft.<sup>1</sup> I am prudent in judgment, my memory is good. Before wise men, I (make answer to) many; I give heed to their arguments. I direct the judgments of all the men of Ulster, and, through the training of Sencha, (my decisions) are unalterable.'

✓ Blai, the lord of lands, on account of his racial kinship took me to himself, so that I got my due with him. I invite the men of Conchobar's province with their king. I entertain them for the space of a week, I settle their gifts and their spoils, I aid them in their honour and their (honour) fines.

✓ 'Fergus has so fostered me, that I slay mighty warriors through the strength of valour. I am fierce in might and in prowess, so that I am able to guard the borders of the land against foreign foes. I am a shelter for every poor man, I am a rampart of fight for every wealthy man; I give comfort to him who is wretched, I deal out mischief to him who is strong: (all this) through the fosterage of Fergus.

✓ 'Amargin the poet, to his knee I came. Therefore I am able to praise a king for the possession of any excellency; therefore I can stand up to any man in valour, in prowess, in wisdom, in splendour, in clever-

<sup>1</sup> The long passage following closely corresponds to the final part of the 'Origin of Cúchulainn.'

ness, in justice, in boldness. I am a match for any chariot-chief. I yield thanks to none, save Conchobar the Battle-Victorious.

‘Finnchoem has reared me, so that Conall *cernach* is my foster-brother.

‘For the sake of Dechtire, Cathbad of the gentle face hath taught me, so that I am an adept in the arts of the god of druidism, and learned in the excellencies of knowledge.

‘All the men of Ulster have taken part in my bringing up, alike charioteers and chariot-chiefs, kings and chief poets, so that I am the darling of the host and multitude, so that I fight for the honour of them all alike.

‘Honourably have I been asked (?) by Lugh, son of Cond mac Ethlend,<sup>1</sup> . . . of Dechtire to the house . . . of the Brugh. And thou, O maiden,’ said Cúchulainn, ‘how hast thou been reared in the Gardens of Lugh?’

‘It is not hard to relate that to thee, truly,’ answered the maiden. ‘I was brought up,’ said she, ‘in ancient virtues, in lawful behaviour, in the keeping of chastity, in rank equal to a queen, in stateliness of form, so that to me is attributed every noble grace of form among the hosts of (Erin’s?) women.’ ‘Good indeed are those virtues,’ said Cúchulainn. ‘Why, then, should it not be fitting for us both to become one? For I have not hitherto found a maiden capable of holding converse with me at a meeting in this wise.’ ‘Yet one question,’ said the maiden. ‘Hast thou a wife (already)? . . .’ ‘Not so,’ said Cúchulainn.

<sup>1</sup> This seems to be a reference to Cúchulainn’s descent from Lugh *lamfada*. The passage is imperfect. Perhaps it means ‘Noble,’ or ‘Distinguished is my descent from Lugh,’ etc.

Said the maiden, 'I may not marry before my sister is married, for she is older than I;<sup>1</sup> namely, Fial, daughter of Forgall, whom thou seest with me here. She is excellent in handiwork.'

'It is not she, truly, with whom I have fallen in love,' said Cúchulainn. 'Nor have I ever accepted a woman who has known a man before me, and I have been told that yon girl was once Cairpre *niafer's*.'

While they were thus conversing, Cúchulainn saw the breasts of the maiden over the bosom of her smock. And he said: 'Fair is this plain, the plain of the noble yoke.' Then the maiden spake these words: 'No one comes to this plain, who does not slay as many as a hundred on such ford from the Ford of Scennmenn at Ollbine to Banchuing Arcait, where swift Brea breaks the brow of Fedelm.'

'Fair is this plain, the plain of the noble yoke,' said Cúchulainn. 'No one comes to this plain,' said she, 'who has not achieved the feat of slaying three times nine men at one blow, O calf of the cow, . . . (yet) so as to preserve one man in the midst of each nine of them alive.'

'Fair is this plain, the plain of the noble yoke,' said Cúchulainn. 'None comes to this plain,' said she, 'who does not, from summer's end to the beginning of spring, from the beginning of spring to May-day, and again from May-day to the beginning of winter meet Benn Suain, son of Roscmelc.'

'Even as thou hast commanded, so shall all by me be done,' said Cúchulainn.

'And by me thy offer is accepted, it is taken, it is

<sup>1</sup> Compare a similar passage in 'The Tribute,' ed. by S. H. O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, vol. ii. p. 402.

granted,' said Emer. 'Yet one question more. What is thy account of thyself?' said she.

'I am the nephew of the man<sup>1</sup> that disappears in another in the wood of Badb,' said he. 'And thy name?' she said. 'I am the hero of the plague that befalls dogs,'<sup>2</sup> said he.

After those notable words, Cúchulainn went from thence, and they did not hold any further converse on that day.

While Cúchulainn was driving across Bregia, Laegh, his charioteer, asked him: 'Now,' said he, 'the words that thou and the maiden Emer spoke, what didst thou mean by them?'

'Dost thou not know,' answered Cúchulainn, 'that I am wooing Emer? And it is for this reason that we disguised our words, lest the girls should understand that I am wooing her. For, if Forgall knew it, we should not meet with his consent.'

Cúchulainn then repeated the conversation from the beginning to his charioteer, explaining it to him, to beguile the length of their way.<sup>3</sup>

Cúchulainn went driving on his way, and slept that night in Emain Macha.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* Conchobar.

<sup>2</sup> *Gloss.*, That is true, for wild fierceness, that is the plague that befalls dogs.

<sup>3</sup> We omit the lengthened explanation of the conversation between Cúchulainn and Emer. It is full of curious details and mythological allusions, now obscure, but then evidently well understood. (See Additional Note on 'Kennings'.)

<sup>4</sup> The earlier version begins here; but the tale is preceded by the final sentences of Cúchulainn's explanation to Laegh, which looks as though the 'Kennings' had originally formed part of it.

Then their daughters told the land-owners of the youth that had come in his splendid chariot, and of the conversation held between him and Emer: that they did not know what they had said to one another; and that he had turned from them across the plain of Bregia northward.

Then the lords of land relate all this to Forgall the Wily, and tell him that the girl had spoken to Cúchulainn. 'It is true,' said Forgall the Wily. 'The madman from Emain Macha has been here to converse with Emer, and the girl has fallen in love with him: that is why they talked one to another. But it shall avail them nothing. I shall hinder them,' he said.

Thereupon Forgall the Wily went towards Emain Macha in the garb of a foreigner, as if it were an embassy from the king of the Gauls<sup>1</sup> that had come to confer with Conchobar, with an offering to him of golden treasures, and wine of Gaul, and all sorts of good things besides. In number they were three. Great welcome was made to him. When on the third day he had sent away his men Cúchulainn and Conall and other chariot-chiefs of Ulster were praised before him. He said that it was true, that the chariot-chiefs performed marvellously, but that were Cúchulainn to go to Donall the Soldierly in Alba (*i.e.* Britain or Scotland) his skill would be more wonderful still; and

<sup>1</sup> This sentence is translated from the earlier version and shows that it dates from a period when the word *gall* signified for the Irish an inhabitant of Gaul, *gallus*. By the time the second redaction was made the word had changed its significance, and was applied to the stranger *par excellence*, the Norseman. The copyist of the second redaction found in his model *fin Gall*=wine of Gaul; *Gall* for him meant Norse, and as he knew wine did not come from Norway he made of the two words one: Finngall=Norsemen. (See *Rev. Celt.* xi. 438.)

that if he went to Scathach to learn soldierly feats, he would excel the warriors of all Europe.

But the reason for which he proposed this to Cúchulainn was that he might never return again. For he thought that if Cúchulainn became her friend, he would come to his death thereby, through the wildness and fierceness of yonder warrior. Cúchulainn consented to go, and Forgall bound himself to give Cúchulainn whatever he desired, if he should go within á certain time.

Forgall went home, and the warriors arose in the morning and set themselves to do as they had vowed.

So they started; Cúchulainn and Laegaire the Triumphant, and Conchobar; and Conall *cernach*, some say, went with them. But Cúchulainn first went across the plain of Bray (Bregia) to visit the maiden. He talked to Emer before going in the ship, and the maiden told him that it had been Forgall, who in Emania had desired him to go and learn soldierly feats, in order that they two might not meet. And she bade him be on his guard wherever he went, lest Forgall should destroy him. Either of them promised the other to keep their chastity until they should meet again, unless either of them died meanwhile. They bade each other farewell, and he turned towards Alba.

## PART II

### CÚCHULAINN'S EDUCATION IN CHAMPIONSHIP

WHEN they reached Donall, they were taught by him to blow a leathern bellows under the flagstone of the

small hole. On it they would perform till their soles were black or livid. They were taught another thing on a spear, on which they would jump and perform on its point ; this was called 'the champion's coiling round the points of spears,' or 'dropping on its head.'

Then the daughter of Donall, Dornolla (*i.e.* Big-fist) by name, fell in love with Cúchulainn. Her form was very gruesome, her knees were large, her heels turned before her, her feet behind her ;<sup>1</sup> big dark-grey eyes in her head, her face as black as a bowl of jet. A very large forehead she had, her rough bright-red hair in threads wound round her head. Cúchulainn refused her. Then she swore to be revenged on him for this.

Donall said that Cúchulainn would not have perfect knowledge of their learning until he went to Scathach, who lived to the east of Alba. So the four went across Alba, viz., Cúchulainn, and Conchobar, King of Ulster, and Conall *cernach*, and Laegaire the Triumphant. Then before their eyes appeared unto them in a vision Emain Macha, past which Conchobar and Conall and Laegaire were not able to go. The daughter of Donall had raised that vision in order to sever Cúchulainn from his companions to his ruin. Other versions say, that it was Forgall the Wily who raised this vision before them to induce them to turn back, so that by returning Cúchulainn should fail to fulfil what he had promised him in Emania, and thereby he would be shamed ; or that were he peradventure in spite of it to go eastward to learn soldierly feats, both known and unknown, of Aife, he should be still more likely to be

<sup>1</sup> The same account is given of Levarcham in the 'Siege of Howth.' The description seems in Irish romance intended to denote great strength or swiftness of body.



killed, being alone. Then, of his own free will, Cúchulainn departed from them along an unknown road, for the powers of the girl were great, and she wrought evil against him, and severed him from his companions.

Now, when Cúchulainn went across Alba, he was sad and gloomy and weary for the loss of his comrades, neither knew he whither he should go to seek Scathach. For he had promised his comrades that he would not return again to Emain, unless he either reached Scathach or met his death (*i.e.* he would not return unsuccessful, but would either find Scathach or die in the attempt).

He now, seeing that he was astray and ignorant, lingered; and while he was there, he beheld a terrible great beast like a lion coming towards him, which kept watching him, but did not do him any harm. Whichever way he went, the beast went before him, turning its side towards him (*i.e.* inviting him to mount). Then he took a leap and was on its back. He did not guide it, but went wherever the beast liked. In that wise they journeyed four days, until they came to the uttermost bounds of men, and to an island where lads were rowing on a small loch. The lads laughed at the unwonted sight of the hurtful beast doing service to a man. Cúchulainn then leaped off, and the beast parted from him, and he bade it farewell.

He passed on, and came to a large house in a deep glen, wherein was a maiden fair of form. The maiden addressed him, and bade him welcome. 'Welcome thy coming, O Cúchulainn!' said she. He asked her how she knew him. She answered that they both had been dear foster-children with Wulfkin the Saxon, 'when I was there, and thou learning sweet speech from him,'

said she. She then gave him meat and drink and he turned away from her. Then he met a brave youth who gave him the same welcome. They conversed together, and Cúchulainn inquired of him the way to the dún of Scathach. The youth taught him the way across the Plain of Ill-luck that lay before him. On the hither half of the plain the feet of men would stick fast; on the farther half the grass would rise and hold them fast on the points of its blades. The youth gave him a wheel,<sup>1</sup> and told him to follow its track across one-half of the plain. He gave him also an apple, and told him to follow the way along which the apple ran, and that in such wise he would reach the end of the plain. Thus Cúchulainn (eventually) did go across the plain; afterwards proceeding farther on. The youth had told him that there was a large glen before him, and a single narrow path through it, which was full of monsters that had been sent by Forgall to destroy him, and that his road to the house of Scathach lay across terrible high strong districts (*i.e.* mountain fastnesses). Then each of them wished a blessing to the other, Cúchulainn and the youth Eochu *bairche*. It was he who taught him how he should win honour in the house of Scathach. The same youth also foretold to him what he would suffer of hardships and straits in the Táin Bó Cuailgne, and what evil and exploits and contests he would achieve against the men of Erin.

Then Cúchulainn, following the young man's instructions, went on that road across the Plain of Ill-luck and through the Perilous Glen. This was the road that

<sup>1</sup> On the symbolism of the wheel, see an interesting study by Prof. H. Gaidoz, 'Le Dieu Gaulois du soleil et le symbolisme de la roue,' *Études de Mythologie Gauloise*, 1886.

Cúchulainn took to the camp where the scholars of Scathach were. He asked where she was. 'In yonder island,' say they. 'Which way must I take to reach her?' said he. 'By the Bridge of the Cliff,'<sup>1</sup> say they, 'which no man can cross until he has achieved valour.' For on this wise was that bridge. It had two low ends and the mid-space high, and whenever anybody leaped on one end of it, the other head would lift itself up and throw him on his back. Some versions relate that a crowd of the warriors of Erin were in that dún learning feats from Scathach, namely, Ferdia<sup>2</sup> son of Daman, and Naisi son of Usnach, and Loch *môr* son of Egomas, and Fiamain son of Fora, and an innumerable host besides. But in this version it is not told that they were there at that time.<sup>3</sup>

Cúchulainn tried three times to cross the bridge and could not do it. The men jeered at him. Then he grew mad,<sup>4</sup> and jumped upon the head of the bridge, and made 'the hero's salmon-leap,' so that he landed on the middle of it; and the other head of the bridge had not fully raised itself up when he reached it, and threw himself from it, and was on the ground of the island.

He went up to the dún, and struck the door with the shaft of his spear, so that it went through it. Scathach was told. 'Truly,' said she, 'this must be some one who has achieved valour elsewhere.' And she sent her

<sup>1</sup> See Additional Notes on this tale.

<sup>2</sup> For Ferdia, see 'Combat of Cúchulainn and Ferdia,' T. B. C. (sec. 79); for Naisi, see 'Death of the Sons of Usnach'; for Loch *môr*, see T. B. C. (sec. 58).

<sup>3</sup> A scribal note incorporated into the text.

<sup>4</sup> 'He grew mad,' *i.e.* his *riastradh* or distortion (of face and body) came upon him; see T. B. C. (sec. 68) and note.

daughter Uathach to know who the youth might be. . . .<sup>1</sup> Then Uathach came and conversed with Cúchulainn. On the third day she advised him, if it were to achieve valour that he had come, that he should go through the hero's salmon-leap to reach Scathach, in the place where she was teaching her two sons, Cuar and Cett, in the great yew-tree; that he should set his sword between her breasts until she yielded him his three wishes: namely, to teach him without neglect; that without the payment of wedding-gifts he might wed Uathach; and that she should foretell his future, for she was a prophetess.

Cúchulainn then went to the place where Scathach was. He placed his two feet on the two edges of the basket of the *class*, and bared his sword, and put its point to her heart, saying, 'Death (hangs) over thee!'

'Name thy three demands!' said she; 'thy three demands, as thou canst utter them in one breath.' 'They must be fulfilled,' said Cúchulainn. And he pledged her. . . . Uathach then was given to Cúchulainn, and Scathach taught him skill of arms.

During the time that he was with Scathach, and was the husband of Uathach her daughter, a certain famous man who lived in Munster, by name Lugaid<sup>2</sup> son of Nos, son of Alamac, the renowned king and foster-brother of Cúchulainn, went eastwards with twelve chariot chiefs of the high kings of Munster, to woo twelve maidens of the men of Mac Rossa, but they had all been betrothed before.

<sup>1</sup> We have omitted some minor incidents in the latter part of the tale.

<sup>2</sup> This Lugaid, who is mentioned in the *Táin Bó Cuailgne* (sec. 56), is not to be confused with Cúchulainn's pupil, Lugaid of the Red Stripes.

When Forgall the Wily heard this, he went to Tara, and told Lugaid that the best maiden in Erin, both as to form and chastity and handiwork, was in his house unmarried. Lugaid said it pleased him well. Then Forgall betrothed the maiden to the king; and to the twelve under-kings that were together with Lugaid, he betrothed twelve daughters of twelve landed proprietors in Bregia.

The king accompanied Forgall to his dún for the wedding.

When now Emer was brought to Lugaid, to sit by his side, she took between both her hands his two cheeks, and laid it on the truth of his honour and his life, confessing that it was Cúchulainn she loved, that Forgall was against it, and that any one who should take her as his wife would suffer loss of honour. Then, for fear of Cúchulainn, Lugaid did not dare to take Emer, and so he returned home again.

Scathach was at that time carrying on war against other tribes, over whom the Princess Aife ruled. The two hosts assembled to fight, but Cúchulainn had been put in bonds by Scathach, and a sleeping-potion given him beforehand to prevent him going into the battle, lest anything should befall him there. She did this as a precaution(?). But, after an hour, Cúchulainn suddenly started out of his sleep. This sleeping-potion, that would have held anybody else for twenty-four hours in sleep, held him only for one hour. He went forth with the two sons of Scathach against the three sons of Ilsuanach, namely, Cuar, Cett, and Cruife, three warriors of Aife's. Alone he encountered them all three, and they fell by him. On the next morning

again the battle was set, and the two hosts marched forward until the two lines met, face to face. Then the three sons of Ess Enchenn advanced, namely, Cire, Bire, and Blaicne, three other of Aife's warriors, and began to combat against the two sons of Scathach. They went on the path of feats. Thereupon Scathach uttered a sigh, for she knew not what would come of it; first, because there was no third man with her two sons against those three, and next, because she was afraid of Aife, who was the hardest woman-warrior in the world. Cúchulainn, however, went up to her two sons, and sprang upon the path, and met all three, and they fell by him.

Aife then challenged Scathach to combat, and Cúchulainn went forth to meet Aife. (Before going) he asked what it was she (*i.e.* Aife) loved most. Scathach said: 'What most she loves are her two horses, her chariot, and her charioteer.' Cúchulainn and Aife went on the path of feats, and began combat there. Aife shattered Cúchulainn's weapon, and his sword was broken off at the hilt. Then Cúchulainn cried: 'Ah me, the charioteer of Aife, her two horses, and her chariot have fallen down the glen, and all have perished!' At that Aife looked up.

Then Cúchulainn went up to her, seized her under her two breasts, took her on his back like a shoulder-load, and bore her away to his own host. Then he threw her from him to the ground, and over her held his naked sword. 'Life for life, O Cúchulainn!' said Aife. 'My three demands to me!' said he. 'Thou shalt have them as thou breathest them,' she said. 'These are my three demands,' he said, 'that thou give hostage to Scathach, nor ever afterwards op-

pose her, that thou remain with me this night before thy dún, and that thou bear me a son.' 'I promise all this to thee,' said she. And in this wise it was done. Cúchulainn went with Aife<sup>1</sup> and remained with her that night. Then Aife said she was with child, and that she would bear a boy. 'On this day seven years I will send him to Erin,' she said, 'and leave thou a name for him.' Cúchulainn left a golden finger-ring for him, and told her that the boy was to go and seek him in Erin, so soon as the ring should fit on his finger. And he said that Conla was the name to be given him, and charged her that he should not make himself known to any: also, that he should not turn out of the way of any man; nor refuse combat to any. Thereupon Cúchulainn returned back again to his own people.

As he went along the same road, he met an old woman on the road, blind of her left eye. She asked him to beware, and to avoid the road before her. He said there was no other footing for him, save on the cliff of the sea that was beneath him. She besought him to leave the road to her. Then he left the road, only clinging to it with his toes. As she passed over him she hit his great toe to throw him off the path, down the cliff. He noticed it, and leaped the hero's salmon-leap up again, and struck off the woman's head. She was Ess Enchenn, the mother of the last three warriors that had fallen by him, and it was in order to destroy him that she had come to meet him.

<sup>1</sup> This Amazonian princess was the mother of Cúchulainn's son, Connlaech or Conla. He was slain in ignorance by his own father, owing to his obedience to the command not to reveal his name. This is one of the 'Tragical Deaths' of Irish story. See Keating's *History* and Miss Brooke's metrical rendering in *Reliques of Irish Poetry*.

After that the hosts returned with Scathach to her own land, and hostages were given to her by Aife. And Cúchulainn stayed there for the day of his recovery.

At last, when the full lore of soldierly arts<sup>1</sup> with Scathach had been mastered by Cúchulainn—as well the apple-feat as the thunder-feat, the blade-feat, the supine-feat, and the spear-feat, the rope-feat, the body-feat, the cat's-feat, the salmon-feat of a chariot-chief; the throw of the staff, the whirl of a brave chariot-chief, the spear of the bellows (*gae bulga*), the *boi* of swiftness, the wheel-feat, the *othar* feat, the breath-feat, the *brud geme*, the hero's whoop, the blow . . . , the counter-blow; running up a lance and righting the body on its point; the scythe-chariot, and the hero's twisting round spear points—then came to him a message to return to his own land, and he took his leave.

Then Scathach told him what would befall him in the future, and sang to him in the seer's large shining ken, and spake these words: <sup>2</sup>

' Welcome, oh victorious, warlike . . .  
 At the Lifting of the Kine of Bray [Bregia],  
 Thou wilt be a chariot-chief in single combat.  
 Great peril awaits thee. . . .  
 Alone against a vast herd. . . .  
 The warriors of Cruachan, thou wilt scatter them.  
 Thy name shall reach the men of Alba. . . .  
 Thirty years I reckon the strength of thy valour.  
 Further than this I do not add.'

<sup>1</sup> See a long note on these feats by O'Beirne Crowe, *Kilkenny Arch. Journal*, 1870-72, pp. 432-448.

<sup>2</sup> This prophecy, of which the above are a few lines, foretells the part that Cúchulainn will play in the Táin bó Cuailgne. Compare the Morrighu's forewarning in 'The Last Appearance of the Morrighu.'



Then Cúchulainn went on board his ship, to set out for Erin. These were the voyagers in the ship: Lugaid and Luan, the two sons of Lôch; Ferbaeth, Larin, Ferdia, and Durst son of Serb. They came to the house of Ruad, king of the Isles, on *samhain*-night.<sup>1</sup> Conall *cernach*, and Laegaire *buadach* 'The Triumphant,' were there before them levying tribute; for at that time a tribute was paid to Ulster from the Isles of the Foreigners.

Then Cúchulainn heard sounds of wailing before him in the dún of the king. 'What is that lamentation?' asked Cúchulainn. 'It is because the daughter of Ruad is given as tribute to the Fomori,'<sup>2</sup> said they. 'Where is the maiden?' he said. They answered, 'She is on the shore below.' Cúchulainn went down to the strand, and drew near to the maiden. He asked her the meaning of her plight, and she told him fully. Said he, 'Whence do the men come?' 'From that distant land yonder. Remain not here,' she said, 'in sight of the robbers.' But he remained there awaiting them, and he killed the three Fomori in single combat. The last man wounded him in the wrist, and the maiden gave him a strip from her garment to bind round his wound. Then he departed without making himself known to her. The maiden came to the dún, and told her father the whole story; and afterwards came Cúchulainn to the dún, like every other guest. Conall and Laegaire bade him welcome, and there were

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* the eve of the first of November, now called Hallowe'en.

<sup>2</sup> The heavy exactions of the Fomori in Irish romance are doubtless reminiscent of the real tributes demanded by the Norsemen. See *Fate of the Children of Tuireann* (Soc. Pres. Irish Language), p. 70; *Book of Rights*, ed. O'Donovan, p. 207.

many in the dún who boasted of having slain the Fomori, but the maiden believed them not. Then the king had a bath prepared, and afterwards each one was brought to her separately. Cúchulainn came, like all the rest, and the maiden recognised him.

‘I will give the maiden to thee,’ said Ruad, ‘and I myself will pay her wedding-dowry.’ ‘Not so,’ said Cúchulainn. ‘But if it please her, let her follow me this day year to Erin; there she will find me.’

Then Cúchulainn came to Emain and related all his adventures. When he had cast his fatigue from him he set out to seek Emer at the rath of Forgall. For a whole year he remained near it, but could not approach her for the number of the watch.

At the end of the year he came and said to his charioteer, ‘It is to-day, O Laegh, that we have our tryst with the daughter of Ruad, but we know not the exact place, for we were not wise. Let us go to the coast.’

When they came to the shore of Loch Cuan (Strangford Lough), they beheld two birds on the sea. Cúchulainn put a stone in his sling, and aimed at the birds. The men ran up to them, after having hit one of the birds. When they came up to them, lo! they saw two women, the most beautiful in the world. They were Dervorgil, the daughter of Ruad, and her handmaid. ‘Evil is the deed that thou hast done, O Cúchulainn,’ said she. ‘It was to meet thee we came, and now thou hast hurt us.’ Cúchulainn sucked the stone out of her, with its clot of blood round it. ‘I cannot wed thee now,’ said Cúchulainn, ‘for I have drunk thy blood. But I will give thee to my companion here, Lugaid, of the Red Stripes.’ And so it was done.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lugaid is one of the historical personages of the Saga. He is said

Then Cúchulainn desired to go to the rath of Forgall. And that day the scythe-chariot was prepared for him. It was called the scythe-chariot on account of the iron scythes that stood out from it, or, perhaps, because it was first invented by the Serians. When he arrived at the rath of Forgall, he jumped the hero's salmon-leap across the three ramparts, so that he was on the ground of the dún. And he dealt three blows in the liss, so that eight men fell from each blow, and one escaped in each group of nine, namely, Scibur, Ibur, and Cat, three brothers of Emer. Forgall made a leap on to the rampart of the rath without, fleeing from Cúchulainn, and he fell lifeless. Then Cúchulainn carried off Emer, and her foster-sister, with their two loads of gold and silver, leaping back again across the third rampart, and so went forth.

From every direction cries were raised around them. Scennmend<sup>1</sup> rushed against them. Cúchulainn killed her at the ford, hence called the ford of Scennmend. Thence they escaped to Glondáth, and there Cúchulainn killed a hundred of them. 'Great is the deed (*glond*) that thou hast done,' said Emer; 'to have killed an hundred armed able-bodied men.' 'Glond-áth (*i.e.* the ford of deeds) shall be its name for ever,' said Cúchulainn. He reached Crúfoit 'Blood-turf,' which until then had been called Rae-bán 'White Field.' He dealt great angry blows on the hosts in that place, so that streams of blood broke over it on every side. 'By thy work, the hill is covered with a blood-stained turf to-day, O Cúchulainn,' cried the maiden. Hence it is called *Crúfoit* or *Cró-fót*, 'Turf of Blood.'

to have died of grief at the death of Dervorgil. There exists a tract entitled *The Tragical Death of Dervorgil*.

<sup>1</sup> Forgall's sister.

The pursuers overtook them at Ath n-Imfúait on the Boyne. Emer left the chariot, and Cúchulainn pursued them along the banks, the clods flying from the hoofs of the horses across the ford northward. Then he turned, and pursued them northward, so that the clods flew over the ford southward from the hoofs of the horses. Hence is it called the 'Ford of the Two Clods,' from the flying of the sods hither and thither. Now at each ford from Ath Scennmend at Ollbine to the Boyne of Bray, Cúchulainn killed an hundred, and so he fulfilled all the deeds that he had vowed to the maiden, and he came safely out of all, and reached Emain Macha towards the fall of night.

Emer was brought into the House of the Red Branch to Conchobar and to the men of Ulster, and they bade her welcome. . . . Cúchulainn then took to himself his wife, and thenceforward they were not separated until they died.

THE SIEGE OF HOWTH

THIS very ancient story, which gives us a curious insight into the customs of a barbarous epoch, is taken from the Book of Leinster, pp. 114  $\beta$ -117  $\alpha$  of the facsimile. Only one other copy is catalogued by M. D'Arbois de Jubainville. It is one of the nine sieges or 'forbosa' mentioned in the LL. list of prime stories. That it was known as early as the tenth century is proved by its mention in a poem by Cinæd hua Artacain, who died in 975 A.D.

The translation here given is by Dr. Whitley Stokes; it has already appeared in *Rev. Celt.*, viii. pp. 49-63, but has undergone some revision for the present work.

The story as we have it is extremely condensed and abrupt; it would appear to have been used as a skeleton to be filled in at the time of recitation. There is, perhaps, no tale in the entire cycle which impresses upon us so forcibly the rude manners of the time. The brutalities practised by Athairne; his refusal of food during the siege, even to the king; the pouring of the milk down the cliff when the wounded were dying of thirst; the carrying of the heads of slain warriors in the belt, are all incidents belonging to an age of barbarity. Even here, however, a high code of honour is recognised in the refusal of Conall *cernach* to fight with Mesgegra except on terms of exact equality. His hand is bound to his side because Mesgegra has only one hand.

## VI

### THE SIEGE OF HOWTH

THERE dwelt in Erin a hard, merciless man, to wit, Athairne the Extortionate of Ulster. A man that would ask the one-eyed for his single eye and used to demand the wife in child-bed. He was called the Extortionate because of a bardic circuit that he took through Ireland, by the counsel of Conchobar. . . .<sup>1</sup> Now this was his intent, to leave heavy invectives upon the Leinstermen, so that they should slay him, and that then for ever Ulster should be avenging him upon Leinster.<sup>2</sup>

Now the people of South Leinster came to meet him and to offer him jewels and treasures, not to come into their country, that he might not leave invectives upon them. For no treasure on which he laid his satire would remain (with its owner) unless a bribe were given to Athairne. But no reprisals would be given to any people or tribe by whom he should be slain. So that (for fear of him) any man would give him his wife, or the single eye out of his head, or his full desire of jewels and treasures. . . .<sup>2</sup> Athairne kept on the circuit of Leinster to the end of a year, and he took thrice

<sup>1</sup> The . . . denote that the passages retailing special examples of Athairne's cruelty and avarice have been omitted.

<sup>2</sup> I have transposed this passage for the sake of clearness.

fifteen queens of the wives of princes and nobles of Leinster to carry with him to his own country.

'Well now, my lad,' said Athairne to his gillie, 'go thou on before me to the Ulstermen and bid them come to meet me. Meseemeth the Leinstermen will be plotting against me to recover my booty unless I appeal to their honour.'

Then the Leinstermen accompanied Athairne to the banks of the Tolka on the north side of Dublin, and there they bade him farewell. And Athairne bade them farewell, but he left them no blessing and took none from them.

Sorrowful were the Leinstermen that their wives should be taken from them into captivity to Ulster. So when Athairne came to Leinster the men of Leinster went to pursue their booty. And the men of Ulster met Athairne, coming to protect him. A battle was fought straightway, and the men of Ulster were routed, and they fled by the sea eastward till they were shut up in Ben Edair (Howth). Nine watches were they in Howth without drink, without food, unless indeed they should drink the brine of the sea, or devour the clay. Nevertheless Athairne himself had seven hundred kine in the middle of the fort; but there was not a boy or man of Ulster who tasted the milk, for the milking was cast down the cliff, so that of the men of Ulster none might find out Athairne's food to taste it. And the wounded men were brought to him, but he would not let a drop go into their mouths, so that they bled to death unaided.<sup>1</sup> The chiefs of Ulster used to come to him entreating a drink for Conchobar, but they got nought from him. So that all that Conchobar had

<sup>1</sup> Lit. 'alone.'



for his support was what the girl Levarcham used to bring on her back from Emain Macha at times. A slave and a slave-girl were in Conchobar's house, and this was the child that was born to them, even the girl Levarcham. Uncomely was the girl's shape, to wit, her two feet and her two knees behind her, her two hams and her two heels before her.<sup>1</sup> She it was who used to travel through Ireland in one day, and everything of good and evil that was done in Ireland she used to relate to King Conchobar in the Red Branch at the end of the day. She it was that used to bring Conchobar his portion of food on her back from Emain to Howth.

The fighting went on both day and night around the fort. Leinstermen say that it was they who built Dún Edair (*i.e.* the fort or stronghold of Howth). Cúchulainn's gap is there without closing. Every one was inciting him to close it with a fence. 'Not so,' said Cúchulainn, 'a spear (?) of iron<sup>2</sup> closes it for me.' Conchobar advised Cúchulainn not to put forth his full strength until fresh hosts should arrive from Ulster. For Levarcham had gone to muster the Ulstermen, and to bring them by sea or land to their aid.

Mesdeadh, son of Amargen, a foster-son of Cúchulainn's, a boy of seven years, was put to keep the door of the fort. Every hour of the day nine men were slain by him, and the hostages of Ulster were brought forth by the Leinstermen thrice every day, and they were borne off likewise by Mesdeadh in combat. Wherefore it is on him that unequal combat was first practised

<sup>1</sup> This apparently indicates great strength and rapidity. The same peculiarity is mentioned regarding Cúchulainn at certain times of great excitement, and of Dornolla in the 'Wooing of Emer.'

<sup>2</sup> 'Cúalgai.' See description of, T.B.C. (sec. 113) and note.

in Ireland. This then is what they say, that when the Ulstermen landed in the east of Howth, three hundred heroes went to the wicket to slay him. There he gave forth his war-cry, as they were cutting off his head.

And Cúchulainn heard it and said: 'It is the sky crashing, or the sea moaning, or the earth quaking, or else it is the war-shout of my foster-son against whom unequal combat is being practised.'

With that Cúchulainn started out suddenly. The host was cleft in twain behind him. A battle was fought straightway. Heavy in sooth was the attack that they delivered. Bloody the mutual uplifting. Destructive the prowess which the heroes and champions of valour displayed.

The two lines of battle were joined from terce to none. There the Leinstermen were routed, so that they raised a red wall (of slain) against the Ulstermen, for it was a prohibition to Ulster to pass over a red wall. A great multitude of the men of Ulster fell likewise in the fight.

Then Conall *cernach*, 'the Victorious,' went forth alone in pursuit of the Leinstermen, to avenge his brothers, Mesdeadh and Loegaire, who had fallen in the fight. And he took the road past Dublin,<sup>1</sup> and Drimnagh, through Hy-Gavla into Forcarthain, by Uachtar-Ard and Naas, to Clane.

Now when the men of Leinster reached their country, each man of them went to his own place. But Mesgegra (the king of Leinster) stayed behind the host alone with his charioteer at the path of Clane.

'I will sleep now,' said the charioteer to Mesgegra, 'and thou shalt sleep afterwards.'

<sup>1</sup> Then called Áth cliath or 'the ford of the hurdles.'

'I deem it well,' said the king.

Now while Mesgegra was looking at the water he saw a wonderful nut floating along the river towards him. Larger than a man's head was the nut. He went down (to the water) and caught the nut, and cleft it with his skene, and left half the kernel for the gillie. And he saw that the gillie was sitting upright in his sleep, and after that he awoke.

'What ails thee, my lad?' said the king.

'I have seen an evil vision,' said the gillie.

'Catch the horses, my lad,' said the king. And the boy did so.

'Hast thou eaten up the nut?' said the gillie.

'Yea,' said the king.

'Didst leave the half for me?' said the gillie.

'I lessened it first,' said the king.

'The man that ate the little behind my back,' said the gillie, 'would also eat the much.' The king's hand, with half the kernel therein, was beside the boy. He attacked the king with a sword and cut off the hand.

'That is ill done, O gillie,' said the king, 'open my fist: half the kernel is therein.' When the boy saw that, he turned the sword against himself, and drove it through his back.

'Alas, my lad!' said the king.

Mesgegra himself yokes the chariot, putting his severed) hand into it before him.

Now as he went out of the ford westwards Conall *cernach* 'the Victorious' entered it from the east.

'Art thou there, O Mesgegra?' said Conall.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This conversation between Conall and Mesgegra is very difficult to understand. I presume the meaning to be as above. Literally it reads as follows: 'Is that so, O Mesgegra?' saith Conall. 'I am here,' saith

'I am here,' said the king.

'What follows?' said Conall.

'This only remains to be done,' said Mesgegra; 'if there are any from whom thou claimest debts, demand their restitution with all thy might.'

'I claim my brothers from thee,' said Conall.

'I do not carry them (*i.e.* their skulls) in my girdle,' said Mesgegra.

'That is a pity,' said Conall.

'It were not champion like,' said Mesgegra, 'to fight with me who have but one hand.'

'My hand shall be tied to my side,' said Conall.

Triply was Conall *cernach's* hand tied to his side.<sup>1</sup> And each smote the other till the river was red with their blood. But the sword-play of Conall prevailed.

'I perceive that thou wilt not go, O Conall,' said Mesgegra, 'till thou takest my head with thee. Put thou my head above thy head and add my glory to thy glory.'

Then Conall severed his head from him in the Path of Clane, and Conall took the head and put it on the flag-stone on the ford's brink. A drop fell from the back of the head and went through the stone into the ground. Then he put Mesgegra's head on the stone, and it moved from the top of the stone to the ground, and moved on before him to the river.

Mesgegra. 'What then?' saith Conall. 'What can be wished,' saith Mesgegra, 'but on him from whom thou claimest debts, make demand with all the might thou mayest have.' 'My brothers are with thee,' said Conall. 'Not in my girdle are they,' saith Mesgegra. 'That is a blemish,' saith Conall. This conversation is repeated almost word for word in the Death of Cúchulainn.

<sup>1</sup> So Lancelot fought with Sir Melagraunce with one hand, Sommer's *Malory*, vol. i. Text, Bk. XIX. chap. ix. p. 787.

Conall 'the cross-eyed' was his name hitherto. For there were three among the men of Ulster who had blemishes: to wit, Conall the Cross-eyed and Cúchulainn the Blind, and Cuscraid the Mute. The women of Ulster divided themselves into three. Each loved one of these three. The kind that loved Cúchulainn, they used to be blind while conversing with him; the kind that loved Conall *cernach* used to be cross-eyed while conversing with him; the kind that loved Cuscraid the Mute used to be dumb while conversing with him.<sup>1</sup>

Howbeit Conall put Mesgegra's head above his own head, and the head went over his shoulder, and he was straight-eyed from that hour.

Then Conall got alone into his chariot, and his charioteer into Mesgegra's chariot. They go forward then, into Uachtar Fine till they meet fifty women; namely, Buan, Mesgegra's wife, with her maidens, coming southward from the border.

'Whose art thou,<sup>2</sup> O woman?' said Conall.

'I am the wife of Mesgegra the king.'

'It hath been enjoined on thee to come with me,' said Conall.

'Who hath enjoined me?' said the woman.

'Mesgegra,' said Conall.

'Hast thou brought a token with thee?' said she.

'Behold his chariot and his horses,' said Conall.

'Many are they on whom he bestows treasures,' said the woman.

'Behold then his head,' said Conall.

'Now am I lost to him!' she said.

<sup>1</sup> Probably a scholastic gloss inserted in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Lit. : 'With whom art thou (*i.e.* to whom belongest thou), O woman?' saith Conall.

Now the head at one moment flushed, and at another whitened again.

'What ails the head?' said Conall.

'I know,' said Buan. 'A dispute arose between him and Athairne. He declared that no man of Ulster should ever bear me away. A struggle on account of his word, this it is that ails the head.'

'Come thou to me,' said Conall, 'into the chariot.'

'Stay,' she replied, 'till I bewail my husband.'

Then she lifted up her cry of lamentation, and even unto Tara and to Allen was her cry heard. And she cast herself backwards, dead. On the roadside is her grave, even Coll Buana 'the hazel of Buan,' from the hazel that grows through her grave.<sup>1</sup>

'Bear the head hence, my lad,' said Conall.

'I cannot bear the head with me,' says the gillie.

'Then cut the brain out of it with thy sword,' said Conall, 'and bear the brain with thee, and mix lime therewith, and make a ball thereof.'<sup>2</sup>

This was done, and the head was left beside the woman. And they journeyed onward till they reached Emain Macha. So the Ulstermen exulted at the slaying of the King of Leinster.

This then is the circuit of Athairne, and the slaying of Mesgegra by Conall *cernach*, and the battle of Howth.

<sup>1</sup> Compare the death of Deirdre in the 'Tragical Death of the Sons of Usnach,' *supra*, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> It was by means of this brain-ball that King Conchobar met his death. See 'Death of Conchobar,' *infra*, pp. 267-269.

THE DEBILITY OF THE ULTONIAN  
WARRIORS

THIS fine story of a wife's self-sacrifice has evidently either been constructed or altered to explain in a popular manner the extraordinary helplessness that, at critical moments in the history of their province, fell upon the Ultonian warriors. (See Additional Note.)

It is, as Mr. Nutt points out, the earliest occurrence in post-classic European literature of the widely spread theme of the supernatural wife and the mortal husband, with whom she agrees to stay only so long as he observes certain conditions—not to mention her origin, not to ill-treat her, not to spy upon her—which she imposes.

Our version is taken from the German renderings of Dr. Windisch, published by him with two texts, one from LL. p. 125  $\beta$  (facsimile), the other from MS. Harl., 5280, fol. 53  $\beta$ , in *Berichte der K. Sächs Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften Philologisch-Historische Classe*, 1884. Dr. Windisch has there published two translations, which in our English rendering we have combined, using the second, which is fuller and longer, as the foundation, and notifying important additions from the LL. version by square brackets.



## VII

### THE DEBILITY OF THE ULTONIAN WARRIORS

THERE lived on the heights and in the solitudes of the hills a rich farmer of the Ultonians, Crundchu mac Agnoman by name. In his solitude great wealth accumulated to him. He had four sons around him. His wife, the mother of his children, died. For a long time he lived without a wife. As he was one day alone on the couch in his house, he saw coming into the mansion a young stately woman, distinguished in her appearance, clothing and demeanour. Macha was the woman's name, *ut periti dicunt*. She sat herself down on a chair near the hearth, and stirred the fire. She passed the whole day there, without exchanging a word with any one. She fetched a kneading-trough and a sieve and began to prepare the food. As the day drew to an end she took a vessel and milked the cow, still without speaking.

When she returned to the house, she turned right about, went into his kitchen and gave directions to his servants; then she took a seat next to Crundchu. Each one went to his couch; she remained to the last and put out the fire, turned right about again and laid herself down beside him, laying her hand on his side. For a long time they dwelt together. Through his

union with her, he increased yet more in wealth. His blooming appearance was delightful to her.

Now the Ultonians frequently held great assemblies and meetings. All, as many as could go, both of men and women, went to the gathering. 'I, too,' said Crundchu, 'will go like every one else to the assembly.'

'Go not,' said his wife, 'lest you run into danger by speaking of us; for our union will continue only if you do not speak of me in the assembly.'

'Then, indeed, I will not utter a word,' said Crundchu.

The Ultonians gathered to the festival, Crundchu also going with the rest. It was a brilliant festival, not alone in regard to the people, but as to horses and costumes also. There took place races and combats, tournaments, games, and processions.

At the ninth hour the royal chariot was brought upon the ground, and the king's horses carried the day in the contests. Then bards appeared to praise the king and the queen, the poets and the Druids, his household, the people and the whole assembly. (The people cried), 'Never before have two such horses been seen at the festival as these two horses of the king: in all Ireland there is not a swifter pair!'

'My wife runs quicker than these two horses,' said Crundchu.

'Seize the man,' said the king, 'and hold him until his wife can be brought to the race-contest!'

He was made fast, and messengers were despatched from the king to the woman. She bade the messengers welcome, and asked them what had brought them there. 'We have come for you that you may release your husband, kept prisoner by the king's command, because he boasted that you were swifter of foot than the king's horses.'

'My husband has spoken unwisely,' said she; 'it was not fitting that he should say so. As for me, I am ill, and about to be delivered of a child.'

'Alas for that,' said the messenger, 'for your husband will be put to death if you do not come.'

'Then I must needs go,' she said.

Forthwith she went to the assembly. Every one crowded round to see her. 'It is not becoming,' said she, 'that I should be gazed at in this condition. Wherefore am I brought hither?' 'To run in contest with the two horses of the king,' shouted the multitude.

'Alas!' she cried, 'for I am close upon my hour.'

'Unsheath your swords and hew yonder man to death,' said the king.

['Help me,' she cried to the bystanders, 'for a mother hath borne each one of you.] Give me, (O King), but a short delay, until I am delivered.'

'It shall not be so,' replied the king.

'Then shame upon you who have shown so little respect for me,' she cried. 'Because you take no pity upon me, a heavier infamy will fall upon you.' ['What is your name?' asked the king. 'My name,' said she, 'and the name of that which I shall bear, will for ever cleave to the place of this assembly. I am Macha, daughter of Sainreth mac in Botha.] Bring up the horses beside me!' It was done, and she outran the horses and arrived first at the end of the course. Then she gave vent to a cry in her pain, but God helped her, and she bare twins, a son and a daughter, before the horses reached the goal. [Therefore is the place called Emain Macha,<sup>1</sup> or 'the twins of Macha.']

<sup>1</sup> Lat., Emania. Now Navan Fort, two miles west of Armagh. For other supposed origins of the name see Ann. Four Masters, A.M. 4532,

All who heard that cry were suddenly seized with weakness, so that they had no more strength than the woman in her pain. And she said, 'From this hour the ignominy that you have inflicted upon me will redound to the shame of each one of you. When a time of oppression falls upon you, each one of you who dwells in this province will be overcome with weakness, as the weakness of a woman in child-birth, and this will remain upon you for five days and four nights; to the ninth generation it shall be so.'<sup>1</sup>

Thus it was. It continued from the days of Crundchu to the days of Fergus mac Donnell [or till the time of Forc, son of Dallan, son of Mainech, son of Lugaid.] Three classes there were upon whom the debility of the Ultonians had no power, namely, the children and the women of Ulster, and Cuchulin,<sup>2</sup> because he was not descended from Ulster; none, also, of those who were outside the province were afflicted by it.

This is the cause of the Noinden Ulad or the Debility of the Ultonians.

and notes; Cormac's *Glossary*, ed. Dr. W. Stokes, p. 63; O'Curry *ms. Mat.*, Appendix No. xxxviii. pp. 526-528.

<sup>1</sup> The *Cess noinden Ulad* seems, however, to have lasted for a much longer time than this. See *Táin bó Cuailgne* (Prol. and sec. 94, 96, etc.), and Additional Note.

<sup>2</sup> This statement is contradicted by the stories of his birth in so far as they make him a son either of Sualtam or of Conchobar, and tends to prove that the story, which makes him a son of Lugh, is the oldest form.

THE APPEARANCE OF THE  
MORRIGU

THIS tale and the one immediately preceding it are two of the tales called *remscéla*, or Introductory Tales to the Táin bó Cuailgne. The Book of Leinster gives a list of ten such tales, but they are very variously reckoned, stories even so indirectly connected with the Táin as 'The Vision of Angus mac in Daghdá,' the 'Births of Conachar and Cuchullin,' and the 'Wooing of Emer,' being sometimes included. It shows the importance attached to the Táin bó Cuailgne by Irish romanticists that these tales were considered as merely preparatory to the great Epic. Most of the *remscéla* have been translated into either English or German, and a fairly complete list of them will be found in the Chart of the Saga. The tale here printed is one of those early romances that appear to have escaped the improving hand of the ecclesiastical copyist. It retains its wild pagan flavour to the full. It introduces to us the Morrighu or Morrigan, 'Great Queen,' wife of the Dagda, the most prominent of the three fierce Irish female gods of war, sisters, of whom the other two were Badb and Macha, also frequently met with in the tales. They are the Irish Valkyre-maidens. The Morrighu appears to have a special interest in Cuchullin, but is not invariably found fighting on his side. She plays an important and very dignified rôle in the Táin bó Cuailgne.

This tale should be compared with the *Táin bó Aingen*, to which it bears a close resemblance. The title *Táin bó Regamna* is not found in the LL. recension, nor does the word occur in the tale. Dr. Windisch thinks that it may be a corruption of an older title, 'Táin bó Mórrigna.' Our translation is made from the German of Dr. Windisch, published in *Irische Texte*, zweite serie, 2 heft. Two texts of the tale are there given, that from the Golden Book of Lecan, col. 648, line 12 ff, and that from Egerton, 1782, p. 148.

## VIII

### THE APPEARANCE OF THE MORRIGU<sup>1</sup> TO CUCHULLIN BEFORE THE TÁIN BÓ CUAILGNE (called the TÁIN BÓ REGAMNA).

WHEN Cuchullin lay in sleep in Dún Imrid, he heard a cry sounding out of the north, a cry terrible and fearful to his ears. Out of a deep slumber he was aroused by it so suddenly, that he fell out of his bed upon the ground like a sack, in the east wing of the house.

He rushed forth without weapons, until he gained the open air, his wife following him with his armour and his garments. He perceived Laegh in his harnessed chariot coming towards him from Ferta Laig in the North. 'What brings thee here?' said Cuchullin. 'A cry that I heard sounding across the plain,' said Laegh. 'From which direction?' said Cuchullin. 'From the north-west,' said Laegh, 'across the great highway leading to Caill Cuan.' 'Let us follow the sound,' said Cuchullin.

They go forward as far as Ath da Ferta. When they arrived there, they heard the rattle of a chariot from the loamy district of Culgaire. They saw before

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 'Second Battle of Moytura,' ed. Dr. W. Stokes, pp. 101, 109, 111, *Rev. Celt.*, vol. xii., and 'Battle of Magh Rath,' ed. by J. O'Donovan, p. 199, *Irish Arch. Soc.* 1842.

them a chariot harnessed with a chestnut horse. The horse had (but) one leg, and the pole of the chariot passed through its body, so that the peg in front met the halter passing across its forehead. Within the chariot sat a woman, her eye-brows red, and a crimson mantle round her. Her mantle fell behind her between the wheels of the chariot so that it swept along the ground. A big man went along beside the chariot. He also wore a coat [of crimson], and on his back he carried a forked staff of hazelwood, while he drove a cow before him.

‘The cow is not pleased to be driven on by you,’ said Cuchullin. ‘She does not belong to you,’ said the woman; ‘the cow is not owned by any of your friends or associates.’ ‘The cows of Ulster belong to me,’ said Cuchullin. ‘You would give a decision about the cow!’ said the woman; ‘you are taking too much upon yourself, O Cuchullin!’

‘Why is it the woman who accosts me?’ said Cuchullin. ‘Why is it not the man?’ ‘It is not the man to whom you addressed yourself,’ said the woman. ‘Oh yes,’ said Cuchullin, ‘but it is you who answer for him.’ ‘He is Uar-gaeth-sceo Luachair-sceo.’ ‘Well, to be sure, the length of the name is astonishing!’ said Cuchullin. ‘Talk to me then yourself, for the man does not answer. What is your own name?’ ‘The woman to whom you speak,’ said the man, ‘is called Faebor beg-beoil cuimdiuir folt scenb-gairit sceo uath.’

‘You are making a fool of me!’ said Cuchullin. And he made a leap into the chariot. He put his two feet on her two shoulders, and his spear on the parting of her hair.

‘Do not play your sharp weapons on me!’ she said.



'Then tell your true name,' said Cuchullin. 'Go further off from me then,' said she. 'I am a female satirist, and he is Daire mac Fiachna of Cuailgne; I carry off this cow as a reward for a poem.' 'Let us hear your poem,' said Cuchullin. 'Only move further off,' said the woman. 'Your shaking over my head will not influence me.' Then he moved off until he was between the two wheels of the chariot. Then she sang to him. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Cuchullin prepared to spring again into the chariot; but horse, woman, chariot, man, and cow, all had disappeared.<sup>2</sup>

Then he perceived that she had been transformed into a black bird on a branch close by him. 'A dangerous enchanted woman you are!' said Cuchullin. 'Henceforth this Grelloch shall bear the name of the "enchanted place" (*dolluid*),' said the woman; and Grelloch Dolluid was it called.

'If I had only known that it was you,' said Cuchullin, 'we should not have parted thus.' 'Whatever you have done,' said she, 'will bring you ill-luck.' 'You cannot harm me,' said he. 'Certainly I can,' said the woman. 'I am guarding your death-bed, and I shall be guarding it henceforth.'<sup>3</sup> I brought this cow out of the *Sídh* of Cruachan so that she might breed by the bull of Daire mac Fiachna, namely the Donn of Cuailgne.<sup>4</sup> So long

<sup>1</sup> The song is not given; it was evidently a challenge or an insult.

<sup>2</sup> The Morrighu, like her sister Baddb, was capable of transforming herself into many forms, especially that of a scall-crow. Comp. Battle of Muirthemne, *infra*, p. 240 and p. 260 note 2. See Grimm's *Teut. Myth.*, ed. Stallybrass, vol. i. pp. 417-426.

<sup>3</sup> Hennessy (*Rev. Celt.*, vol. i. p. 47) translates thus, 'It is protecting thee I was, am, and will be.'

<sup>4</sup> *i.e.* the Bull which caused the Táin bó Cuailgne.

as her calf shall be a yearling, so long shall thy life be ; and it is this that shall cause the Táin Bó Cuailgne.'

'My name shall be all the more renowned in consequence of this Táin,' said the hero :

' I shall strike down their warriors  
I shall fight their battles  
I shall survive the Táin !'

'How wilt thou manage that?' said the woman ; 'for, when thou art engaged in a combat with a man as strong, as victorious, as dexterous, as terrible, as untiring, as noble, as brave, as great as thyself, I will become an eel, and I will throw a noose round thy feet in the ford, so that heavy odds will be against thee.'

'I swear by the God by whom the Ultonians swear,' said Cuchullin, 'that I will bruise thee against a green stone of the ford ; and thou never shalt have any remedy from me if thou leavest me not.' 'I shall also become a grey wolf for thee, and I will take (. . . ?) from thy right hand, as far as to thy left arm.'

'I will encounter thee with my spear,' said he, 'until thy left or right eye is forced out ; and thou shalt never have help from me, if thou leavest me not.'

'I will become a white red-eared cow,' said she, 'and I will go into the pond beside the ford, in which thou art in deadly combat with a man, as skilful in feats as thyself, and an hundred white red-eared cows behind me ; and I and all behind me will rush into the ford, and the "Faithfulness of men"<sup>1</sup> will be

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* fairness in combat or 'fair play,' a common expression in the tales. See 'Siege of Howth' and 'Death of Cúchulainn,' where the 'truth of men' is demanded by the combatants, and *cf.* *Silva Gadelica*, vol. ii. p. 403.

brought to a test that day, and thy head shall be cut off from thee.'<sup>1</sup>

'I will with my sling make a cast against thee,' said he, 'so that thy right or thy left leg will be broken, and thou shalt never have help from me, if thou dost not leave me.'

Thereupon the Morrighu departed into the *Stdh* of Cruachan in Connacht,<sup>2</sup> and Cuchullin returned to his dwelling.

This, then, is one of the introductory tales to the Táin Bó Cuailgne.

<sup>1</sup> This whole passage is found almost word for word in the Táin bó Aingen. For the fulfilment of the prophecy see 'Cuchullin's Combat with Lôch More' in the Táin bó Cuailgne (sec. 58).

<sup>2</sup> This is according to Lc. ; Eg. has 'Thereupon the Badb departed.'



THE CATTLE-SPOIL OF COOLEY

*(Táin bó Cuailgne)*

THIS, the most famous romance of ancient Ireland, is preserved, according to M. D'Arbois' Catalogue, in fifteen MSS., ranging from the 11th to the 19th century. O'Curry has quoted largely from the tale in his *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*, and has given a brief analysis of its contents in his *Lectures on the MS. Materials of Irish History* (pp. 31-40). Studies on the Táin bó Cuailgne have been published by Professor B. O'Looney, in Proc. R.I.A., second series, vol. i. 1879, pp. 242-248, and on the LU. version, by Professor H. Zimmer in *Keltische Studien* (*Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Sprachforschung*, band xxviii. 1887).

No complete edition of the Epic has, however, as yet been published, nor has any translation of the whole been made. The present analysis, contributed to this work by Standish Hayes O'Grady, is made from a MS. in the British Museum marked Add. 18748, p. 57, 1800, A.D. (copied from a MS. of 1730). It coincides in the main outline of events with the far earlier Book of Leinster version, (1150, A.D.) Where differences occur, these are noted in the references on the margin. It does not purport to be in any sort a critical translation, but it furnishes an outline of the episodes in their natural sequence, and is in parts a sufficiently full and close reproduction of the original to answer all the purposes of the non-critical reader. It is intended primarily for English readers, not for Irish scholars. The Táin falls naturally into the following divisions:— (a) Prologue. (b) Gathering of the hosts of Erin, and preliminary movements of the forces of Meave (Secs. 1-15.) (c) Episode of Cuchullin's Boy-deeds (Secs. 16-29.) (d) Combats and progress of the host, ending in the Brislech mór of Magh Muirthemne (Secs. 30-72.) (e) Final Conflicts, the Awakening of Ulster, the Gathering on the Hill of Slane, with the Final Battle of Gáirech and Ilgáirech and the Deaths of the Finnbennach and the Donn of Cuailgne (Secs. 73-130.)

The general course followed by the forces of Meave is shown on the map by a dotted line. In the Appendices will be found an outline of the march day by day, and a list, drawn up by the Translator, of the several corps of Ulster's host in their gathering on the Hill of Slane. In it the names of the leaders as given in LL. are compared with those contained in the modern MS. from which this translation is made.

IX  
THE TÁIN BÓ CUAILGNE  
PROLOGUE

‘BOLSTER-CONVERSATION’ OF AILELL AND MEAVE

**LL. 53 β.** It was once upon a time when Ailell and Meave were in Rath-Cruachan<sup>1</sup> of Connacht, and they had spread their royal couch. Between them then ensued a ‘bolster-conversation.’ ‘Woman,’ said Ailell, ‘a true saying ’tis: “a good man’s wife is good.”’ ‘Good indeed,’ she answered, ‘but why quotest thou the same?’ ‘For this reason I quote it: because to-day thou art better than thou wast the day I married thee.’ ‘I was good before [ever I had to do with] thee,’ she retorted. ‘How well we never heard nor ever knew that,’ said Ailell; ‘but merely that thou didst trust to female woman-means, while enemies of the borders immediately adjoining thee did violently lift from thee thy plunder and thy preys.’ ‘Not so I was,’ the queen rejoined; ‘but with my father, Eochaid *feidlech* to wit, king of Ireland. Who in the way of daughters had six girls: Derbriu, Ethi, Ele, Clothru, Mugain, and myself, Meave, noblest of

<sup>1</sup> Remains of the rath still exist at Rath Croghan, co. Roscommon. For a description of it see *Táin bó Fraich*, pp. 139-141; Proc. R.I.A., Irish MS. Series, vol. i. pt. i. 1870.

them and most worshipful. As regards wage-giving and largess, I was the best of them ; as regards battle, strife and combat, I was the best of them. I it was who in front had fifteen hundred royal mercenaries from among adventurers' sons and, in the centre, their equivalent of [home-bred] chieftains' sons ; with ten men for every mercenary, and eight for every mercenary, and seven for every mercenary, and six for every mercenary, and five for every mercenary, and three for every mercenary, and two for every mercenary, and for every mercenary a man. These,' she continued, 'I had to my standing household ; for which reason my father gave me one of the provinces of Ireland : the province of Cruachan, whence again the designation "Meave of Cruachan" is given me. From Finn mac Rosa Rua, king of Leinster, an embassy came to sue for me ; also from Cairbre Niafer mac Rosa, king of Tara ; from Conachar mac Fachtna king of Ulidia there came one, and yet again from Eochu Beg. Yet went I not ; for I was she that required a strange bride-gift, such as never from any man of the men of Erin woman had demanded : a man without penuriousness, devoid of jealousy, of fear. For should the man with whom I found myself be penurious, it were not apt for us to be together, because that in the matter of wage and of free gift I am liberal. Wherefore to my husband it were a reproach that in wage-giving I in comparison with him were the better ; but to have us equally good were no reproach, so long as really good we were, both of us. Again, were my husband timorous, it were not fitting that we kept company ; for of myself alone I have the victory in battles, contests and affrays, so that to my husband



it were a disgrace to have his wife more "lively"<sup>1</sup> than himself; while for them to be equally lively were no disgrace, so long as veritably lively they were, both of them. Were he that had me jealous, neither so would it suit; for never, I trow, have I been without a man under pretext of another. Now such a husband have I gotten: even thyself, Ailell mac Rosa Rua of Leinster. Thou art not stingy, not jealous, not a dastard. Contract and wedding-gifts I gave thee in best style appertaining to a woman: of raiment, so much as was twelve men's outfit; a chariot worth thrice seven bondmaids; thy face's width of ruddy gold, thy left forearm's circumference of a white bronze bracelet. Whoso inflicts on thee trouble or annoyance, or cozens thee, for thee in comparison is nor fine nor honour-price other than that there is for me, seeing that a petticoat-pensioner is what thou art.' 'Not so was I,' Ailell objected; 'but I had two brethren: a man of them reigning over Tara, and one over Leinster; as Finn over Leinster and Cairpre over Tara; to whom because of their seniority I had conceded the rule. Neither in respect of wage art thou better than I, nor as regards largess; nor (saving only this province) have I heard that any province in Ireland ever was under woman-regimen. I came therefore, and in virtue of my mother (that is to say, because Magach's daughter, Mata of Murrisk, was my mother) here I assumed the sway; and than thyself what queen that I could have were better for me, because thou art daughter of a monarch of all Ireland?' 'A fact it is,' Meave began again, 'that my substance is better than thine.' Ailell made answer: 'We wonder at that, for

<sup>1</sup> An epithet commonly used in the sense of energetic, vigorous.

there is not one who in jewels, in wealth and treasure, abounds more than do I, and thou knowest that there is not.'

[First of all,] to the end they should know whether of them it was for whom precious things and wealth and treasure did the more abound, there were produced for them such as were the humblest of their valuables: their mugs and vats and iron vessels, their urns and brewers' troughs, and kieves. [In the next place] their rings were brought out for them, their bangles and divers clasped ornaments, their thumb-rings and their apparel: as well crimson as blue and black and green, yellow and chequered and buff, wan-coloured, pied and striped. From greens and lawns and open country their great flocks of sheep were driven for them. These were told over, counted and numbered, and were recognised to be even: equal in bulk and in multitude the same; among Meave's sheep was a notable ram that might be accepted as a bond-woman's equivalent, and among Ailell's sheep was another that answered to him. From grass-grazings and from pastures their horse-herds and their steeds were brought in: in Meave's troop was a special horse, acceptable in lieu of a bondmaid; Ailell had one to match him. Out of woods and shelving glens and devious tracts, their vast herds of swine were brought for them; they were told over and counted and cognisance was taken of them: Meave had an eminent boar; but Ailell had another. Again, from out the forests and wastes of the province their kine-herds of cows, their cattle, their flitting-droves, were collected for them. They were counted and numbered and cognisance was taken of them: they proved to be even, of

equal bulk and in multitude the same ; among Ailell's kine, however, was an especial bull which indeed had been calf of one of Meave's cows (his name also being "the White-horned"), but he deemed it unbecoming to be under petticoat-rule, and so had departed and taken his place among the king's cattle. And now, because among her kine she had not a bull of his size, in Meave's esteem it was as though she owned no penny's worth of stock.

Then it was that Meave saw Mac Roth the herald draw nigh, and the queen required of him that he should find out where, in any province of Ireland's provinces, might be a bull altogether similar to him aforesaid. 'Verily,' said Mac Roth, 'I know where there is a bull which in double measure is better and more excellent ; in the *triucha* of Cuailgne namely, in Daire mac Fachtna's house, and Donn Cuailgne, "the Brown of Cuailgne," is his name.' 'Thither away with thee, Mac Roth! and of Daire crave for me a year's loan of the Brown ; at which year's end the bull's loan-fee shall be paid to Daire, that being fifty heifers, beside the Brown himself. Another condition also convey thou, Mac Roth: should they of those borders and of that country think ill of giving up [even for a time] that extraordinary precious thing the Brown of Cuailgne, then let Daire himself come with his bull, and of smooth Magh Ai shall be settled on him an area equalling that of his own lands, with a chariot of [the value of] thrice seven bondmaids and mine own close friendliness to boot.'

On which mission accordingly the messengers proceeded to Daire mac Fachtna's house, the number with which Mac Roth travelled being nine messengers.

In Daire's house in due time welcome was offered him; as was but reasonable, Mac Roth being all Ireland's chief herald.

Daire inquired of him what had caused him to make the journey, and what was that concerning which he was come. The herald tells him what the matter is about which he is there: that is to say, he tells him how between Ailell and Meave there has been a controversy; 'and,' he goes on, 'it is to crave a loan of the Brown Bull of Cuailgne for the purpose of matching the white-horned that I am come. There shall accrue to thee his loan's fee: fifty heifers, beside the Brown himself back again. Somewhat further yet there is too: come thou with thy bull, and of smooth Magh Ai thou shalt have a parcel to equal thine own lands' extent, a chariot of thrice seven bondmaids, with (over and outside of all) Meave's intimate friendship.' This well pleased Daire, and he threw himself about in such wise that the seams of the bed-ticks under him burst asunder. Then he said: 'By our conscience's good faith, and whatever be the spirit in which the Ultonians shall take it, this treasure (the Brown Bull of Cuailgne namely) for Ailell's and for Meave's pleasure even now shall be taken into the land of Connacht.'

To Mac Roth in his turn, that which Fiachna's son said gave pleasure.

Then they of Connacht were ministered to, and rushes and fresh sedge were strawed under them. Delicate viands were supplied to them; in fact a feast was served to them, whereby they became muddled and confused.

Now between two messengers of them a dialogue

took place, as this: 'A true word it is,' quoth the one, 'that good is the man in whose house we are.' 'Good indeed,' said the other. 'Of the Ultonians is there at all a man better than he?' pursued the first. 'There is so,' the second answered, 'Conachar is better; whose man he is, and to whom though all the Ultonians rallied, surely it were no shame to them.' 'Great goodness truly it is for him to have yielded to us nine messengers, that which it had been the work of Ireland's four provinces to carry away out of Ulster's coasts: [I mean] the Brown of Cuailgne.'

[At this point] a third messenger dropped on them as they conversed, and: 'What is the matter of your discourse?' she asked. 'It is that yonder messenger says: "A good man, he of the house in which we are."' 'Good indeed,' says another. 'Is there at all of Ulster a man better than he?' insisted the first. 'There is so,' quoth the second messenger: 'Conachar, whose man he is, is better; to whom though all Ulster rallied, surely it were no shame for them.' 'Great stoutness truly it is for him to have yielded to us—to us nine messengers—a work which it had been the work of Ireland's four great provinces to fetch out of Ulster's coasts.' 'Fain would I see a rush of blood and gore in the mouth out of which that comes; for though by fair means it were not brought off, yet should it be by foul.'

Here Daire mac Fiachna's official dispenser entered the house, he having with him a man charged with liquor and another laden with meat; he heard what the messengers expressed, and anger invaded him. He caused unload his meat and drink to them, but never told them either to use or not to use them.

Thereupon he went into the house in which Daire mac Fiachna was, and said: 'Is it thou that to the messengers hast yielded that brilliant treasure, the Brown Bull of Cuailgne?' 'Tis I indeed,' was Daire's answer. 'Where he was given up there was no governance; for the thing they say is true: that what thou givest not of free will, the same by instrumentality of Ailell's and Meave's host, and of Fergus mac Rôich's unerring guidance, thou shalt grant perforce.' 'By my gods whom I adore I swear that, unless by foul means they shall take him, he never shall be theirs.'

Early on the morrow the messengers rose and went into the house where Daire was, and said: 'Show us the way now, noble sir, that we gain the spot in which the Brown of Cuailgne is.' 'Not so, indeed,' he answered; 'but [on the contrary] were it wont of mine to deal treacherously with messengers, or with them that travel, or with folk that walk the way, never a one of you should escape alive.' 'Why, what is this?' inquired Mac Roth. 'Great cause there is for it: ye have said that, though I gave not freely, yet for Ailell's and Meave's host and for Fergus mac Rôich's skilled guidance I must give perforce.' 'Come, come,' said Mac Roth, 'whatever [common] messengers may say as the outcome of thy drink and meat, not any such thing is it as may be heeded, or that to Ailell and to Meave may be made ground of rebuke.' 'Nevertheless, Mac Roth, and if so it may be, this time I will not give my bull.'

In compliance with which the messengers returned and came to Rath-Cruachan of Connacht. Meave sought tidings of them, and Mac Roth declared them: that from Daire they had not brought back his bull.

'What was the cause of that?' Mac Roth tells her how it was, and the queen announced: 'This case, Mac Roth, is not one in which perspicacity has to be applied to riddles; it was known that the Brown Bull would not be given by fair means but must be had by foul, as so indeed he shall be given.'

This then that precedes is the Cause of TÁIN BÓ CUAILGNE: the 'Driving of the Kine of Cuailgne.'

### *Meave's Hosting*

**LL. 55 a.**—From Meave now messengers went to the Maines, that they should come to Cruachan: the seven Maines with their seven *triuchas*, as Maine *maithremail*, Maine *aithremail*, Maine *condaghaib uile*, Maine *minghor*, Maine *mórghor*, and Maine *condamoePERT*.

Messengers went to the sons of Magach: [who were] Cet, Aunluan, Maccorb, Bascell, En, Doche, Scandal. They came, and their numbers were thirty hundreds of armed men.

Other messengers went from them to Conachar's son Cormac *conloingias*, and to Fergus mac Rôich. They came, and their numbers were thirty hundreds.

The first corps of all: they had on them black heads of hair and, about them, green mantles held with silver brooches; next to their skins, shirts of gold thread bearing raised patterns of red gold; swords with white gripes they wore, and with guards of silver.

The second corps: they had new-cut hair and, about them all, grey cloaks; next to their skins, pure-white shirts; they wore swords with knobbed hilts of gold, with guards of silver. 'Is that Cormac yonder?' all asked. 'It is not indeed,' said Meave.

The last corps: flowing hair they had, fair-yellow

manes with sheen of gold, and all cast loose. Crimson mantles with cunning device of ornament enwrapped them, and at their breasts they had golden jewelled brooches. Silken shirts, fine-textured, long, touched the middle of their feet [insteps]. In unison they both lifted their feet and put them down. 'Is that yonder Cormac?' all inquired, and: 'Ay is it,' Meave replied.

So that night they pitched and encamped, and between the four fords of Aei<sup>1</sup>—Athmaga, Athbercna, Athslisen, and Athcoltna—there was a mass of smoke and fire. Until the far end of a fortnight they tarried in Rath-Cruachan of Connacht, with quaffing and all pleasure, so that all the more lightly anon they should face their travel and their hosting. At which time it was that Meave bade her charioteer to put-to her horses for her; to the end she should go and confer with her wizard, to require of him foreknowledge and prophecy.<sup>2</sup>

When she had gained the place where her magician was, she required of him foreknowledge and prediction accordingly, saying: 'Many there be which this day, and here, do part from their familiars and their friends, from their country and from their lands, from father and from mother. Now if so it be that not all of them return safe and sound, upon me it is that they will discharge their lamentation and their curses. For all which, however, there neither goes forth, nor yet stays there behind, any that to us is dearer than are we ourselves. Thou therefore find out for us whether we come

<sup>1</sup> Magh Aei was a district in central Connacht.

<sup>2</sup> For the curious rites by which a knowledge of the future was sought, see *Senchus mór*, vol. i. p. 45, and Cormac's *Glossary*, ed. W. Stokes, art. 'Imbas forosnai,' pp. 94, 95.



back or not. The wizard answered: 'Whosoever comes or comes not, thou thyself shalt come.'

The driver wheels round the chariot, and the queen returns. But lo, she saw a thing that was a marvel to her: a woman close to her, on the chariot's shaft and facing her. The damsel's manner was this: in her right hand she held a [weaver's] sword of white bronze with seven beadings of red gold on its ends, and wove a bordering. A spot-pied cloak of green enveloped her, and in it at her breast there was a bulging massive brooch. She had a high-coloured, rich-blooded face; a blue and laughing eye; lips red and thin; glistening pearly teeth, which indeed you might have taken for a shower of white pearls fallen and packed into her head. Like unto fresh coral were her lips. Sweeter than strings of peaked harps played by long-practised masters' hands was the sweet sound of her voice, of her gentle utterance. Whiter than snow shed during a single night was the lustre of her skin and flesh, filtered through and past her raiment. Feet she had that were long and most white; nails pink and even, arched and pointed; fair-yellow gold-glittering hair: three tresses of it wound round her head, while yet another fell downwards and cast its shade below her knee.<sup>1</sup>

Meave scanned her, and: 'Girl,' she said, 'at this time, and here, what doest thou?' The young woman answered: 'I reveal thy chances and thy fortunes, and Ireland's four great provinces I gather up and muster against the Raid for the Kine of Cuailgne.' 'And for me wherefore dost thou this?' 'Great cause I have,' the girl explained; 'for I am a woman bondmaid of thy people.' 'And who art thou of my people?'

<sup>1</sup> Lit. 'upon her calf.'

'I am Feidelm the prophetess, out of Cruachan's fairy hill.' 'Well, then, O prophetess Feidelm, how seest thou our host?' 'I see them all in red, I see them all becrimsoned.' 'Yet in Emania, Conachar for sure lies in his pangs,' said Meave; 'my messengers have been to him, and nought there is which we need fear from Ulster. But, Feidelm, tell us the truth of the matter: O woman-prophet Feidelm, how seest thou our host?' 'I see all red on them, I see crimson.' 'But Cuscraidh Menn Macha, Conachar's son, is in Iniscuscraidh in his pains; my messengers have been to him, and nought there is which we need dread from Ulster. But, Feidelm, tell us the truth of it: O Feidelm, O prophetess, how seest thou our host?' 'I see red on them, I see crimson.' 'But at Rathairthir, Eoghan mac Durthacht is in his pains: my messengers have been to him; nought is there which we need fear from Ulster. But, Feidelm, tell us true: Feidelm, thou woman-seer, how seest thou our host?' 'I see all red on them, I see all crimson.' 'Why, Celtchar mac Uitechar within his fort lies in his pangs: my messengers have been to him; nought is there which we need to fear from Ulster. But, O Feidelm, tell us true; woman-seer Feidelm, how seest thou our host?' 'I see red on them, I see crimson.' 'The manner in which thou deducest all this [implied evil prognostication of thine] I approve not,' said Meave. 'For when the men of Erin shall have congregated to one place, among them doubtless will be quarrels and affrays and broils and onslaughts: as regards either taking the lead or bringing up the rear, concerning [precedence at] ford or river, concerning priority in killing a swine, a cow, a stag, or other game. But, Feidelm, tell me true: O prophetess Feidelm, how

seest thou our host?' 'I see red on them, I see crimson. I see a small man who shall demonstrate weapon-feats,' . . . and here now she began to foretell and to foreshow Cuchullin to the men of Erin, and she made a lay :

'A small man I see, one who shall demonstrate weapon-feats, but at the price of many wounds in his smooth skin ; the "hero's light" is on his brow, and victory's arena his forehead-is. The seven gems of an heroic champion are in the midst of both his eyes ; his understanding [wisdom] is plain to perceive, and a red mantle, clasped, wraps him round. A face he has that is the noblest, best, and towards a woman-bevy great modesty he does observe ; a stripling young and of complexion beautiful, but to the battle he shows a dragon's form. Like to Cuchullin of Muirthemne his semblance and his valour are ; who this Cú [hound] of Culann's from Muirthemne may be, I indeed know not, but this much full well I know : that by him the present host will all be red. In either one of both his hands, four small swords belonging to superlative sleight-feats he holds ; he will attain to ply them on the host, an extraordinary act which drives men to eschew him. When, over and above his sword and spear, his *gae-bulga* as well he brings into play—he, the man who clad in scarlet mantle acts the sentinel—on all spaces he puts down his foot. His two spears point over the chariot's left ; the frenzied one lets himself go : as to the form which to me hitherto has been revealed as worn by him, to me 'tis certain that his fashion he will change.<sup>1</sup> For the battle now he sets forth, who unless he be provided against will prove to be a bane ; for the combat 'tis he comes towards you, even Sualtach's son Cuchullin. Your hosts now safe he will

<sup>1</sup> See Táin bó Cuailgne (sec. 68).

hew down, and make your slain to thickly lie :  
by him ye shall lose all your heads—she-prophet  
Feidelm conceals it not. From skins of heroes blood  
will pour, the memory of which shall be lasting,  
long ; there shall be mangled bodies, women shall  
lamentation make, all by the “ Hound of the Forge,”  
whom now I see.’

Thus far then the prediction and prognostication  
and the head and front of the story ; with the occasion  
of its being found and made, and with the bolster-  
conversation which Ailell and Meave held in Cruachan.

## THE TÁIN BÓ CUAILGNE

The Táin is distributed as follows :

1—(LL. 53 β.). Origin of the expedition for the Brown Bull.

2—(LL. 55 a.). Muster of the men of Connacht to Cruachan.

3—(LL. 56 β.). Localities which they of the four other provinces (Connacht, Munster, Leinster, Meath) pass on their march into Ulster.

4—(LL. 56 β.). The first day's march ends at *Cuil silinne*, where they camp. The order of their tents is given: Ailell's first; to his right, Fergus mac Róich, then Cormac *conloingeas*,<sup>1</sup> then others in succession. To Ailell's left were Meave, Finnabair ('bright-beam,' daughter of Meave and Ailell), wife of Ailell *finn*, Flidais of the beautiful hair,<sup>2</sup> etc. Meave brought up the rear in order to observe the temper of the troops. When the camp was pitched she made a final tour of inspection. This done, she came in and sat at Ailell's right hand. He questions her as to the spirit of the various contingents. She says that in comparison with the Gailiana<sup>3</sup> the others are but a poor set: when these

<sup>1</sup> King Conachar's eldest son, who had entered the service of Meave, along with Fergus and a large number of troops.

<sup>2</sup> She was carried off, and her husband killed, by Fergus mac Róich. Her story is told in the Táin bó Flidais.

<sup>3</sup> *i.e.* the men of Leinster. For an account of the origin and history of this brave clan, see O'Curry, *Man. Cust.* vol. ii. pp. 257-261, and

were but just halted to camp, the Gailiana had finished off their bothies and tabernacles; when others had done making their shelters, the Gailiana had made an end of cooking; when others had their food ready, the Gailiana had eaten theirs; finally, by the time others left off eating, the Gailiana were in bed and sleeping. Ailell says that this is all the better, since they are fighting on their side. But Meave protests that she would like to have them killed and slaughtered and exterminated, as she considers that they are a danger in the host. Ailell and Fergus dissent, and it is finally decided that they are to be permitted to remain with the army, but are to be dispersed among the men of Ireland, so that not more than five shall be together at any one place.

5—(LL. 57 β.). Again they march. Such, however, is the number and great variety of their tribes and kindreds, that the chief commanders are much embarrassed to keep the peace among them. As an expedient they cause each captain with his division, great or small, to take a separate route. They debate as to who shall precede them as guide and scout. Unanimous choice falls on Fergus mac Rôich, concerning whom we are told that for seven years, until Conachar usurped the kingdom, he had reigned in Ulster; and that, altogether, for seventeen years he had been an exile<sup>1</sup> from that province. Such was the ground of their choice and, accordingly, Fergus took the lead; but an overwhelming affection for Ulster

Intro., xxvii.; *Book of Rights*, ed. O'Donovan, p. 194, 195, and note; Rhys's *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 598.

<sup>1</sup> For the causes of this, see 'How Conachar gained the Kingdom' and 'Death of the Sons of Usnach,' *supra* pp. 10, 11, 49.

takes hold on him: he misleads the host to north and south, while he, in the meantime, despatches warning and information to Ulster. Meave sees through it all, and in ironical fashion lets him know it. Their trial of wit is embodied in six quatrains, which she begins thus:

‘What, O Fergus, shall we say to this?’

(6) We are left to infer that, although the army had had a good walk, yet they were not a whit the nearer to Ulster, for they encamped at *Cúil silinne* again. Here Fergus bethinks him of Cuchullin and his qualities; he exhorts the men of Erin to keep a bright look-out, because this very night the hero is to fall on them. He liberates his mind in nine quatrains of prognostication, beginning:

‘Apprehension and wisdom are what now ye need.’

7—(LL. 58 *a.*). On the morrow the four provinces advanced to Moncoltan [three places further on in the name-list], and there they were met by eight-score deer in a single herd. The host surrounds and kills them—not one escapes alive. But it was the Gailiana, all scattered as they were, who, with the exception of five stags, slew all those deer; which five represented the men of Erin’s share of them. On the same day it was that Cuchullin, and Sualtach<sup>1</sup> his father, came to a certain pillar-stone in Ardcullin, and there let their horses graze: to the north of the pillar-stone, Sualtach’s horses cropped the grass to the earth; to the south, Cuchullin’s cropped it down to the naked flags. He

<sup>1</sup> Called also Sualtam or Subaltam. We know little of Cuchullin’s mortal father except from the Táin. Comp. sec. 93 and note.

spoke to his father, saying: 'To-night I have a shrewd suspicion of a host; thou, therefore, to Ulster take a warning that they be not in the great open plains, but betake them to the woods and glens of the province, if so they may evade the men of Ireland.' Sualtach asks: 'And thou, beloved nursling, what wilt thou do?' Cuchullin answers that southwards to Tara he needs must depart, to a handmaid belonging to Feidelm *nóchruthach* [*i.e.* 'of the ever-beautiful form'], daughter of Conachar mac Nessa and wife to Laegaire *buadach*, and there pass the night in order to redeem his plighted troth. Sualtach objecting that this is a pitiful errand on which to go, at the price of abandoning Ulster to be trampled underfoot of enemies and outlanders, Cuchullin persists that go he must: 'otherwise,' says he, 'men's compacts will be falsified and women's words be verified [*i.e.* this will be erected into a precedent for holding that *à priori* a man's promise will be broken, but that a woman's will be kept].

(8) Sualtach departs to warn Ulster. Cuchullin enters the forest, and there, he standing on one leg and using but one hand and an eye, cuts a prime oak sapling. This he twists into a ring or collar, and on one end of the sapling inscribes his name in Oghamic characters. Then he passes the collar over the narrower top of the pillar-stone, forces it downwards, and on to the thick of it; which done, he in his turn goes off to keep his 'lady-appointment.'

(9) To return to the men of Erin: they made their way eventually to the pillar-stone in Ardculin, and thence surveyed the, to them, trackless province of Ulster as it lay before them. . . . The nobles of the host came to the pillar-stone, and fell to observing the



manner of the grazing which the horses had carried on round about it. They observed the barbaric collar also which had been left upon it. Ailell takes it in his hand and puts it into that of Fergus, who reads the Ogham and to the men of Erin expounds its purport. Then he delivers a lay :

‘ Here is a collar, what shall it express to us ? ’

10—(LL. 58 β). Fergus interprets the Ogham left by Cuchullin, as follows : that, until in the same posture, and by the same process,<sup>1</sup> some one of them should cut and lay up a similar collar, in that spot they must remain encamped, and to this are bound in honour—that (we repeat), should they be guilty of such a breach, then nor house nor fort nor subterranean refuge would save them from Cuchullin’s deadly vengeance before the morrow’s sunrise. Meave says : ‘ Surely what we desire is not that in this province which but now we enter, any should draw first blood on us, but on the contrary that we should draw it on some other.’ ‘ By no means,’ said Ailell, ‘ will we do violence to this collar, nor yet to the hero who twisted it ; rather will we resort to yonder forest, and in it let us secure ourselves and encamp.’ The host advances ; with their swords a way for the chariots is hewn down through the wood, whence even now the place is known as *sleacht na gearbat*, or the ‘ chariots’ hewn way’ : it is where the lesser Partry is, before royal Kells, from *Cúil silinne* south-west. That night there was an extraordinary

<sup>1</sup> It would seem that some cypher was used, as a long message was sometimes conveyed by a single rod. Fergus alone could interpret this one. See O’Curry’s Appendix in MS., *Mat.*, pp. 463-472, and compare Grimm’s *Teut. Myth.*, ed. Stallybrass, vol. iii. p. 1225.

storm of snow:<sup>1</sup> it reached to chariots' axles and to men's shoulders, and all Ireland's provinces were reduced to one blank level. That night they pitched no tent, made no *bothie*, prepared not meat nor drink; none knew whether friend or foe was alongside of him. Certain it is, that never in night encampment had the men of Erin suffered more distress. On the morrow, with the rising of the brilliant sun as he flashed over the snow, out of that district they march into another.

11—(LL. 59). Cuchullin on the other hand by no means rose early; he had had supper overnight, and now, morning refection, bath and ablution. He bids his charioteer make ready his chariot, and put to his horses. Laegh mac Riagabra, the charioteer, obeys. Cuchullin mounts and, after a while, they strike the army's trail. They find that it leads away out of the district [*i.e.* that to which, in honour, they should have confined themselves until fulfilment of the Oghamic conditions.] Cuchullin says: 'I have not much luck out of my woman-appointment that I kept last night. For the least that is expected of one that wards the marches is that he should raise the cry, or give some warning, and be able to say who it is that comes the way; of all which we have not furnished a single item, for without notice or alarm the men of Erin past our guard are slipped into Ulster.' Laegh made answer: 'I told thee, Cuchullin, that if last night thou didst keep thy woman-tryst, some such annoyance would befall thee.' 'Good now, Laegh,' said Cuchullin, 'drive away upon their trail, and estimate them, and ascertain for us in what numbers the men of Erin are entered

<sup>1</sup> Heavy snow-storms appear to have been common in Ireland in ancient times. See sec. 44 and *Mescad Ulad*, p. 17.

into Ulster's borders past us.' Laegh did so; he took the trail in front [*i.e.* facing against it], on either side, and from the rear [*i.e.* facing with it]. 'The numeration is confused with thee,' said Cuchullin, 'and I will try my hand at counting them.' This was carried out, and said Laegh: 'Tis confused with thyself, Cuchullin.' 'Not at all,' he answered; 'but they are eighteen *triucha céts* that are past us, the eighteenth being broken up and distributed among the rest, so that of them no accurate count can be made.' Now this was one of the three best estimates that ever was made in Ireland; the other two being that made by Lugh *lámfada* of the Fomorians, and Ainge's at *Bruidhen dá Derga*. For Cuchullin was endowed with many perfections, such as centred not in any other one man of his time: perfection of form, of swimming, of horsemanship, of chess-playing, of backgammon-play; pre-excellence in battle and in single combat; perfection of look-out, of eloquence, of counsel, of action, of inroad into strange borders.

12. Cuchullin now bids Laegh follow the trail, for he declares that unless that night he kills some one, whether friend or foe, he will not survive. They reach a place now called Athgowla, northwards from Knowth. Cuchullin enters a wood, and there cuts a forked pole of four prongs, using but one sweep [of his sword] in the operation, *i.e.* to lop it both top and bottom. He cleans it of all excrescences, on its side he cuts his name in Ogham; then out of the chariot's after-part and from the finger-tips of one hand, he hurls it so as to make it penetrate the ground up to two-thirds of its length, thus leaving one-third sticking up perpendicular.

13. Here he encounters the two youths that always kept a look-out in front of Meave's host. He strikes off their heads and those of their charioteers, and turns the horses' heads back towards the army; while the dripping heads he impales on the prongs of the upright pole. Now the manner of Meave's travelling was in a chariot alone, attended by a body-guard.<sup>1</sup> She sees the chariots, with the headless carcasses returning, and an inquiry is held to determine the cause of the youths' deaths. They lay their heads together, and conclude that an host, some powerful army, Ulster, in fact, must be in the neighbourhood, and awaiting them at the ford which anon they must cross on their march. They, therefore, send out Cormac *conloingeas* to discover who is at the ford. [The story proceeds.] With a company of thirty hundred, therefore, Cormac reached the ford; but not a thing he saw there except a pole that stood in the middle of it, and upon each one of its four prongs bore a head, the blood of the same running down the pole; also the track of two horses and a single chariot, leading due east out of the ford. Then came the head men in general of the host and examined the pole, and the evidences of Cuchullin's deadly work surprised them much. They name the place Ath-gabhla [Athgowla: 'ford of the forked pole'].

14—(LL. 60). Ailell expressing great wonder at the celerity and ease with which the four who were their advanced guard had been exterminated, Fergus tells him that more fitly might he expend his admiration on the feat performed by him who with the one stroke,

<sup>1</sup> Comp. the 'Colloquy,' O'Grady's *Silva Gadelica*, vol. ii. pp. 201-202, where Meave's mode of travelling is described.

had cut that pole top and bottom [that is to say, that with one circular sweep of his sword he had lopped its branches so as to leave four prongs, and felled itself], then with a cast from one hand's finger-tips caused it to fall in the middle of the ford, and without previous clearing or excavation there to penetrate the river's bottom till but one-third of the pole remained uncovered; in which process it had pierced through the stones and flags of the bed. 'Moreover,' he continued, 'to proceed beyond this point is *ges* to you, until in your host shall be found one to pluck out the pole with finger-tips of one hand, even as Cuchullin drove it in.' Meave tells Fergus that he belongs to her host, and bids him draw the pole. He calls for a chariot, which he mounts and thence assays to get up that which Cuchullin had put down. So hard he tugs and strains that he makes little bits and splinters of the chariot; so also he serves seventeen chariots of Connacht in succession, but succeeds not in even loosening the pole. Meave said: 'Give over, Fergus, and break not any more of my people's chariots. Hadst thou not been with us on this hosting, by this time verily we had been up with the Ultonians, and possessed of captives and of cowherds in abundance. Right well know I why thou hast done all this: it was to hinder and delay the host until such time as Ulster should have got over their birth-pangs, and should give us battle in defence of their bull and of their droves.' Then Fergus calls for his own chariot; he stands in it and, with all the superhuman effort he puts forth, yet never a wheel nor shaft nor board nor frame-piece of it he either starts or strains, as with the others he had done; until at last with one hand's finger-tips he brings away the

pole. He hands it to Ailell, who scrutinises it and confesses that he feels a wholesome respect for him who could so have planted it there, and Fergus intones a panegyric on Cuchullin :

Here is the well-trimmed pole. . . .

15—(LL. 61 *a*). Fergus now suggests that the host should camp and pitch their tents, refreshing themselves with food and minstrelsy. This is done. A conversation ensues between Ailell and Fergus as to who it was that had slain the two youths and their charioteers. Ailell suggests the names of several of the most famous Ulster warriors in succession, but Fergus replies that none of these could have come unattended by their troops, or have departed without having fallen upon and routed the men of Erin. ‘Then,’ asked Ailell, ‘whom takest thou to have been there?’ Fergus answered, ‘That I know not, unless, indeed, it may have been the little immature young lad, my foster-son and Conachar’s—Cuchullin, son of Sualtach.’ Said Ailell, ‘Already formerly at Cruachan we have heard you mention that little boy; and what may be his age just now?’ ‘His age is of little importance,’ said Fergus, ‘for his exploits when he was much younger than now he is, already were those of a man.’ Meave here inquiring whether in Ulster there be a champion more hard to deal with than is this youth — one of his age namely — Fergus assures her that not one there is who could come up to a third, nor to a fourth part of Cuchullin’s exploits and accomplishments, a list of which latter he recites. He rebukes Meave for belittling the prowess of Cuchullin on account of his youth, and a long digression ensues, entitled :

## CUCHULLIN'S BOY-DEEDS.

16—(LL. 62 a). 'This boy,' continues Fergus, 'was reared in his father's and his mother's house, by the seaside northwards in the plain of Muirthemne, where some one gives him an account of the *macradh*<sup>1</sup> or "boy-corps" of Emania;<sup>2</sup> how that Conachar divides his day into three parts: the first being devoted to watch the boy-corps at their sports, especially that of hurling; the second third to playing of chess and of draughts; the third, to pleasurable absorption of meat and drink until drowsiness sets in, which then is promoted by the exertions of minstrels and musicians to induce favourable placidity of mind and disposition. And for all that we are banished from him,' said Fergus, 'by my word I swear that neither in Ireland nor in Scotland is there a warrior his [*i.e.* Conachar's] counterpart. The little lad then, as aforesaid, having heard of all this, one day he tells his mother that he is bent on a visit to Emania to test the boy-corps at their own sports. She objects that he is premature, and ought to wait until some grown warrior or other, or some confidential of Conachar's should, to ensure his safety, bind over the boy-corps to keep the peace towards him. He tells his mother that that is too long an outlook, that he cannot wait, and that all she has to do is to set him a course for Emania, he not knowing which way it lies. "It is a weary way from thee," says the mother, "for between

<sup>1</sup> *Macradh* is a noun of number formed from *mac* 'a boy,' to which it bears the same relation that 'cavalry' does to 'horse-soldier,' 'jewelry' to 'jewel,' etc.

<sup>2</sup> Emania is the Latinised form of Emain Macha, Conachar's capital, and the then chief town of Ulster.

thee and it lies Slievfuad." "Give me the bearings," he said, and she did so. Away he goes then, taking with him his hurly of brass, his ball of silver, his throwing javelin, and his toy spear; with which equipment he falls to shortening the way for himself. He did it thus: with his hurly he would strike the ball and drive it ever so far; then he pelted the hurly after it, and drove it even so far again; then he threw his javelin, lastly the spear. Which done, he would make a playful rush after them all, pick up the hurly, the ball, and the javelin, while or ever the spear's tip could touch the earth he had caught the missile by the other end.

**LL. 62  $\beta$ .**—'In due course Cuchullin reaches Emania, where he finds the boy-corps, thrice fifty in number, hurling on the green and practising martial exercises, with Conachar's son Follamain at their head. The lad dived right in among them and took a hand in the game. He got the ball between his legs and held it there, not suffering it to travel whether higher up than his knees or lower down than his ankle-joints, and so making it impossible for them to get a stroke or in any other way to touch it. In this plight he brought it along and sent it home over the goal. In utter amazement the whole corps look on; but Follamain mac Conachar cries: "Good now, boys, all together respond to this youngster [*i.e.* meet him as he deserves], and kill him; because it is *ges* for you to have such an one join himself to you and interfere in your game, without first having had the civility to procure your guarantee that his life should be respected. Together then and at once have at him and avenge violation of your *ges*; for we know that he is some son of an Ultonian private



warrior, such as without such safe-conduct practise not to intrude into your play." The whole of them assail Cuchullin, and simultaneously send their hurlies at his head; he however parries all the hundred-and-fifty, and is scathless. The same with the balls, which he fends off with fists, fore-arms and palms alone. Their thrice fifty toy spears he receives in his little shield, and still is unhurt. In his turn now, Cuchullin goes into them, and lays low fifty of the best: five more of them,' said Fergus, 'come past the spot where myself and Conachar sit at chess-play, with the young lad close in their wake. "Hold, my little fellow," says Conachar, "I see this is no gentle game thou playest with the boy-corps." "And good cause I have too," cries Cuchullin: "after coming out of a far land to them, I have not had a guest's reception." "How now, little one," said the king, "knowest thou not the boy-corps' conditions: that a new arrival must have them bound by their honour to respect his life?" "I knew it not," said the boy, "otherwise I had conformed, and taken measures beforehand." "'Tis well," says the king: "take ye now upon yourselves to let the boy go safe." "We do," the boy-corps answered. They resume play; Cuchullin does as he will with them, and again lays out fifty of them on the ground. Their fathers deem they cannot but be dead. No such thing, however; it merely was that with his blows and pulls and pushes and repeated charges, he so terrified them that they went to grass. "What on earth is he at with them now?" asks Conachar. "I swear by my gods," said Cuchullin, "that until they in their turn come in under my protection and guarantee, I will not lighten my hand from off them." This they do at once. Now,' said Fergus in conclusion, 'I submit

that a youngster who did all this when he was just five years old, needs not to excite your wonder because, being now turned of seventeen years, he in this Raid for the Kine of Cuailgne has cut a four-pronged pole and the rest, and though he should have killed a man, or two, or three men, or even [as indeed he has done] four.<sup>1</sup>

17—(LL. 63 a). Conachar's son Cormac *conloingeas* spoke now, saying: 'In the year after that, the same little boy did another deed.' 'And what was that?' Ailell asked. 'Well,' continued Cormac, 'in Ulster there was a good smith and artificer, by name Culann. He prepared a banquet for Conachar, and travelled to Emania to bid him to it. He begged Conachar to bring with him only a moderate number of prime warriors; because neither land nor domain had he, but merely the fruit of his sledge-hammer, of his anvil and of his tongs. Conachar promised that he would bring no more than a small company. Culann returns home to make his last preparations; Conachar remaining in Emania until the meeting broke up and the day came to a close. Then the king assumed his light convenient travelling garb, and betook him to the green in order to bid the boy-corps farewell before he started. There however he saw a curious sight. Three hundred and fifty youths at one end of the green, and at the other, a single one; he also taking the goal against the crowd of them. Again, when they played the hole game and that it was their turn to aim at the hole, it being his to defend it, he used to receive all thrice fifty balls just at but outside the hole, so that not one went in; when

<sup>1</sup> The LU. version relates some other boyish exploits. See Zimmer, *Kelt. Studien*, p. 446-447.

the defence was theirs, and his to shoot, he would hole the entire set without missing one. When the game was to tear each one another's clothes off, he would have the mantles off them all, while their full number could not attain merely to pull out his brooch. When it was to upset each other, he would knock over the hundred and fifty and they could not stretch him. All which when Conachar had witnessed, he said: "I congratulate the land into which the little boy is come; were his full-grown deeds to prove consonant to his boyish exploits, he would indeed be of some solid use." To this expression [as admitting a doubt] Fergus objected, saying to Conachar: "That is not justly said; for according as the little boy grows, so also will his deeds increase with him." "Have the child called to us," said the king, "that he come with us to share the banquet." "I cannot go thither just now," said the youth. "How so?" asked Conachar. "The boy-corps have not yet had enough of play." "It would be too long for us to wait until they had," said the king. "Wait not at all, but I e'en will go after you." "But, young one, knowest thou the way?" "I will follow the trail of the company, of the horses, and the chariots' tracks."

18—(LL. 63 β). 'Thereupon Conachar starts; eventually he reaches Culann's house, is received in becoming fashion, fresh rushes are laid, etc., and they fall to the banquet. Anon the smith says to Conachar: "Good now, O king, has any promised that this night he would follow thee to this dwelling?" "No, not one," answered Conachar (quite forgetting the wee boy); "but wherefore askest thou?" "It is only that I have an excellent ban-dog, from which when his chain is taken off no one may dare be in the one *triucha cét* with him; for

saving myself he knows not any man, and in him resides the strength of an hundred." Conachar said: "Loose him then, and let him guard this *triucha cé*t about." So Culann did; the dog made the circuit of his country, then took up his usual position whence to watch the house, and there he couched with his head on his paws. Surely an extraordinary cruel and fierce and savage dog was he.

19. 'As for the boy-corps above, until it was time to separate they continued in Emania; then they dispersed, each one to his parent's house, or to his nurse's, or to his guardian's. But the little fellow, trusting to the trail as aforesaid, struck out for Culann's house. With his club and ball he shortened the way for himself as he went. So soon as ever he came to the green of Culann's fort, the ban-dog, becoming aware of him, gave tongue in such a way as to be heard throughout all the countryside; nor was it to carve the boy decently as for a feast that he was minded, but at one gulp to swallow him down. The child was without all reasonable means of defence; the dog's throat therefore down, as he charged open-jawed, with great force he threw his ball, which mortally punished the creature's inwards. Cuchullin seized him by the hind legs, and against a rock at hand banged him to such purpose that in disintegrated gobbets he strewed all the ground. The whole company within had heard the ban-dog's challenge, at sound of which Conachar said: "'Tis no good luck has brought us on our present trip." "Your meaning?" queried the others. "I mean that the little boy, my sister Dechtire's son Setanta mac Sualtach, had promised to come after me; who even now must be fallen by the ban-dog." To a man the heroes

rose; and though the fort's doors were thrown open, out they stormed over the ramparts to go seek him. Speedy as they were, yet did Fergus outstrip them; he picked up the boy, hoisted him on his shoulder, and carried him to Conachar. Culann himself had come abroad, and there he saw his ban-dog lie in scraps and pieces; which was a heart's vexation to him. He goes back indoors and says: "Thy father and thy mother are welcome both, but most unwelcome thou." "Why, what hast thou against the little fellow?" asked Conachar. "'Twas no good luck that pricked me on to make my feast for thee, O Conachar: my dog now being gone, henceforth my substance is but substance wasted; my livelihood, a means of living set all astray. Little boy," he continued, "that was a good member of my family thou tookest from me: a safeguard of raiment, of flocks and of herds." "Be not angered thereat," said the child; "for in this matter myself will pronounce an equitable award." "And what might that be?" inquired Conachar. The little boy replied: "If in all Ireland there be a whelp of that dog's breed, by me he shall be nurtured till he be fit for action as was his sire. In the meantime I, O Culann, myself will do thee a ban-dog's office, in guarding of thy cattle and substance and strong place." "Well hast thou made the award," said Conachar; and Cathbad the magician, chiming in, declared that not in his own person could he have done it better, and that henceforth the boy must bear the name *Cú Chulainn* "Culann's Hound," *i.e.* "Cuchullin." The youngster however objected; "I like my own name better: Setanta mac Sualtach." "Never say it," Cathbad remonstrated; "for all men in the world shall have their mouths full of that name." The boy answered

that on those terms the name would be well pleasing to him, and in this way it came to pass that it stuck to him. Now the little fellow,' continued Cormac *conloingeas* the narrator of all this, 'who when just touching six years of age slew the dog with which (he being at large) even a great company durst not at one time be in the one *triucha cét*, it were not reasonable to be astonished though the same at seventeen years completed should come into the marches, cut a four-pronged pole, and kill a man, or two, or three, or four, in the Raid for the Kine of Cuailgne.'

20—(LL. 64 β). Fiacha mac Firaba, taking up the recital, said that in the very year following that adventure of the dog, the little boy had committed a third exploit. 'And what was that?' Ailell asked. 'Why, it was Cathbad the magician,' continued Fiacha, 'who to the north-east of Emania taught his pupils, there being with him eight from among the students of his art. One of whom questioning him as to what end that day the more especially was favourable, Cathbad told him that any stripling who on that day should for the first time assume arms and armature, the name of such an one for ever would transcend those of all Ireland's youths besides. His life however must be fleeting, short. The boy was on Emania's south side, nevertheless he heard Cathbad's speech. He put off his playing suit and laid aside his implements of sport; then he entered Conachar's sleep-house and said: "All good be thine, O king." Conachar answered, "Boy, what is thy request?" "I desire to take arms." "And who prompted thee to that?" "Cathbad the magician," said the boy. "Then thou shalt not be denied," quoth the king, and forthwith gave him two spears with sword

and shield. The boy supples and brandishes the weapons, and in the process breaks them all to shivers and splinters. In short, whereas in Emania Conachar had seventeen complete weapon-equipments ready for the boy-corps' service—since whenever one of them took arms, Conachar it was that invested him with the outfit and thus brought him luck in the using of it—the boy made fragments of them all. Which done, he says: "O my master, O Conachar, these arms are not good; they suffice me not." Thereupon the king gave him his own two spears, his own sword and shield. In every possible way the urchin tested them; he even bends them point to hilt and head to butt, yet never broke them: they endured him. "These arms are good," says he, "and worthy of me. Fair fall the land and region which for its king has him whose arms and armature are these!"

21. 'Just then it was that Cathbad the magician comes into the tent and wondering asks: "Is the little boy assuming arms?" "Ay, indeed," says the king. "It is not his mother's son we would care to see assume them on this day," said the wizard. "How now," said the king, "was it not thyself that prompted him?" "Not I, of a surety." "Brat," cried the king, "what meanest thou with telling me that it was so, wherein thou liedst to me?" "O king, be not wroth," the boy pleaded; "for he it was that prompted me when he instructed his other pupils. For they asking him what special virtue lay in this day, he told them that the name of whatsoever youth should therein for the first time take arms, would top the fame of all other Erin's men; nor thereby should he suffer following disadvantage, save that his life must be fleeting, short."

“And true it is for me,” said Cathbad: “noble and famous indeed thou shalt be, but transitory, soon gone.” “Little care I,” said Cuchullin, “nor though I were but one day or one night in being, so long as after me the history of myself and doings may endure.” Then said Cathbad again: “Well then, get into a chariot, boy, and proceed to test in thine own person whether mine utterance was truth.”

22—(LL. 65 *a*). ‘So Cuchullin mounts a chariot; in divers ways he tries its strength, and reduces it to fragments. He mounts a second, to the same effect. Brief, whereas in Emania for the boy-corps’ service Conachar had seventeen chariots, in like wise the little fellow smashed them all; then he said, “These chariots of thine, O Conachar, are no good at all, nor worthy of me.” “Where is Iubar, son of Riangabar?” cried Conachar, and: “here am I,” he answered. “For him there, tackle my own chariot and put-to both my horses.” The driver does his will; Cuchullin mounts, tests the chariot, and it endures him. “This chariot is good,” he said, “and is my worthy match.” “Good now, little boy,” said Iubar, “suffer the horses to be turned out to grass.” “Too early for that yet, Iubar; drive on and round about Emania.” “Yet suffer now that the horses go to graze.” “Too early yet, Iubar; drive ahead, that the boy-corps give me salutation on this the first day of my taking arms.” They came to the place where the boy-corps was, and the cry of them resounded: “These are arms that thou hast taken!” “The very thing indeed,” he said. They wished him success in spoil-winning and in first-slaying, but expressed regret that now he was weaned away from them and from their sports. Cuchullin assures them



that 'tis not so, but that 'tis something in the nature of a charm that has caused him to take arms on this day of all others. Again Iubar presses to have the horses taken out, and again the boy refuses. He examines the driver: "Whither leads this great road here running by us?" Iubar says that it runs to *Ath an foraire* "the Look-out Ford," in Slievefuad. In answer to further questions with which he plies the charioteer, Cuchullin learns that the ford has that name from the fact that daily there some prime warrior of the Ultonians keeps watch and ward to see that no extern champion comes to challenge them, it being his duty to do battle [single combat] on behalf of his whole province. Should men of verse be coming away from them dissatisfied with their treatment, his it was, in lieu of the whole province, to solace them with gold and gear. On the other hand, where men of verse entered into his land, his duty it was to see that up to Conachar's bedside they had safe-conduct. This sentinel warrior's praises then would be the theme of the first pieces, in divers forms of verse, which on arriving at Emania these men of metre straightway would rehearse. Cuchullin inquiring whether Iubar knows who it is that on this particular day mounts guard, the servitor replies: "I know it well; it is Conall mac Amargin, surnamed *cernach* 'Victorious,' Ireland's pre-eminent man of war." "To that ford onwards therefore, driver!" cried the boy. Sure enough, at the water's edge they light on Conall, who receives them with: "And are they arms that thou hast taken to-day, small boy?" "They are that," Iubar answered for him. "May they bring him triumph and victory and drawing of first blood," said Conall. "The only thing is

that in my judgment thou<sup>1</sup> prematurely hast assumed them, seeing that as yet thou art not exploit-fit." For all answer the boy says: "And what dost thou here, Conall?" "On behalf of the province I keep watch and ward." "Come," said the youngster, "for this day let me take the duty." "Never say it," quoth Conall, "for as yet thou art not up to coping with a right fighting man." "Then will I go down to the shallows of Loch Echtra, to see whether I may 'redden' [draw blood] on either friend or foe." "And I," said Conall, "will go to protect thee and to safeguard, to the end that on the marches thou run not into danger." "Nay," said Cuchullin, "come not." "I will so," Conall insisted, "for were I to admit thee all alone to frequent the marches, Ulster would avenge it on me."

23—(LL. 65 β). 'Conall has his chariot made ready, his horses put-to; he starts on his errand of protection, and soon overhauls Cuchullin, who had cut the matter short and was gone before. They now being abreast, the boy deemed that, in the event of opportunity to do some deed of mortal daring, Conall never would suffer him to execute the same. From the ground therefore he picks up a 'handstone,' *i.e.* one that filled his fist, and takes a very careful shot at Conall's chariot-yoke. He breaks it in two, the vehicle comes down, and Conall is hurled prone, so falling that his mouth is brought over one shoulder. "What's all this, urchin?" "It was I: in order to see whether my shot [marksman-ship] was good, and whether in me there was material of a man at arms." "Poison take both thy shot and thyself as well; and though thy head now should fall a prize to foe of thine, yet never a foot further will I

<sup>1</sup> This change of person is in the original text.

budge to keep thee!" "The very thing I crave of thee," said the boy; "[which I do in this peculiar manner] because to you Ultonians it is *gzs* to persist after violence done to you." With that, Conall goes back to his post at the watch-ford.

24. 'As for the little boy, southwards he went his way to the shallows of Loch Echtra, and until the day's end abode there. Then spoke Iubar: "If to thee we might venture to say so much, little one, I should be more than rejoiced that we made instant return to Emania. Because already for some time the carving is begun there; and whereas there thou hast thine appointed place kept till thou come: between Conachar's knees to wit, I on the contrary have nothing for it but among the messengers and jesters of his house to fit in where I may; for which reason I judge it now high time that I were back again to scramble with them." Cuchullin orders him to harness and put-to; which being done, they drive off, and Cuchullin inquires the name of a mountain that he sees. He learns that it is Slievemourne [the Mourne range], and further asks the meaning of a white cairn which appears on a summit. It is Finncharn; the boy thinks it inviting, and orders the driver to take him thither. Iubar expressing great reluctance, Cuchullin says: "Thou art a lazy loon, considering that this is my first adventure-quest, and this thy first trip with me." "And if it is," says Iubar, "and that ever I reach Emania, for ever and for ever may it be my last!" "Good now, driver," says the boy when they are on the tulach's apex; "in all directions teach me the topography of Ulster, a country in which I know not my way about." The servitor from that coign points out the tulachs and plain lands and dúnns of the

province. "'Tis well, O driver ; and what now is yon well-defined glen-seamed plain before us to the southward ?" "That is Magh Breagh." "Proceed then, and instruct me in the fast places and forts of that plain." Then Iubar pointed out to him Tara and Tailte, Cletty and Knowth and the *brugh* of Angus on the Boyne, and the *dún* of Nechtan Sceine's sons. "Are they those sons of Nechtan of whom 'tis said, that the number of Ultonians now alive exceeds not the tale of them fallen by their hands ?" "The same," said Iubar. "Away with us then to *dún mac Nechtan*." "Woe waits on such a speech ; and whosoe'er he be that goes there, I will not be the one." Cuchullin said : "Alive or dead, thither thou shalt go however." "Alive I go then, and dead I shall be left there." They make their way to the *dún*, and the little boy dismounts upon the green, a green with this peculiar feature : in its centre stood a pillar-stone, encircled with an iron collar, test of accomplishment heroic ; for it bore graven writing to the effect that any man (if only he were one that carried arms) who should enter on this green, must hold it *gzs* to him to depart from off it without challenging to single combat some one of the dwellers in the *dún*. The little boy read the Ogham, threw his arms around the stone to start it, and eventually pitched it, collar and all, into the water close at hand. "In my poor opinion," ventured Iubar, "'tis no better so than it was before ; and well I know that this time at all events thou wilt find the object of thy search : a prompt and violent death." "Good, good, O driver, spread me now the chariot-coverings that I sleep a little while." "Alas that one should speak so ; for a land of foemen and not of friends is this." Iubar obeys, and on the green

at once the little fellow falls asleep. Just then it was that Foill mac Nechtan Sceine issues forth, and, at sight of the chariot, calls out: "Driver, untackle not those horses!" Iubar made answer that in his hand still he held their reins [a sign that he was not about to unharness them]. "What horses are these?" "Conachar's two body-pied [piebalds]." "Even such at sight I took them to be," said Foill; "and who has brought them into these borders?" "A young bit of a little boy; one who for luck has taken arms to-day, and for the purpose of showing off his form and fashion is come into the marches." "Never let it thrive with him," says Foill; "were it a sure thing that he is capable of action, 'tis dead in place of alive that he would go north back to Emania." "Indeed he is not capable, nor could it rightly be imputed to him; this is but the seventh year since his birth." Here the little one lifts his face from the ground; not only that, but his whole body to his feet, blushes deep at the affront which he has overheard, and he says: "Ay am I, fit for action!" But Foill rejoined: "I rather would incline to hold that thou art not." "Thou shalt know what to hold in this matter [replied the lad], only let us repair to the ford;<sup>1</sup> but first, go fetch thy weapons, in cowardly guise thou art come hither, for nor drivers nor messengers nor folk unarmed slay I." Foill rushes headlong for his arms, and Iubar advises the boy that he must be careful with him. Cuchullin asks the reason, and is told that that is Foill mac Nechtan

<sup>1</sup> In Irish romance, all single combats take place close to running water. The *gae bulga* could be used with effect only by being laid along the surface of a stream. For the similar Scandinavian usage, see Weinhöf's *Altnordisches Leben*, p. 299.

Sceine, invulnerable to either point or edge of any kind. "Not to me should such a thing be spoken," he replies; "for I will take in hand my special feat: the tempered and refined iron ball, which shall land in his forehead's midst and backwards through his occiput shall carry out his brain, so leaving his head traversed by a fair conduit for the air." With that, out comes Foill mac Nechtan again; the little lad grasps his ball, hurls it with the exact effect foretold, and he takes Foill's head.

25—(LL. 66  $\beta$ ). 'Out of the dún now the second son emerges on the green, whose name was Tuachall mac Nechtan, and he says: "Belike thou art inclined to boast of that much." Cuchullin saying that the fall of a single warrior is for him no matter of boast, Tuachall tells him that in that case he will not boast at all, because straightway he shall perish by his hand. "Then make haste for thy weapons," quoth the boy; "for in cowardly guise thou comest hither." Away goes Tuachall; Iubar repeats his admonition. "Who is that?" asks the boy. He is told not only that he is a son of Nechtan's, but also that he must be slain at the first stroke or shot or other attempt of whatsoever nature, or not at all; and this because of the extraordinary activity and skill which in front of weapon's points he displayed to avoid them. Again Cuchullin objects that such language ought not to be addressed to him. "I will," says he, "take in my hand Conachar's great spear, the Venomous; it shall pierce the shield over his breast and, after holing the heart within him, shall break three ribs in his side that is the farther from me." This also the boy performed, and took the patient's head or ever his body touched the ground.

26—(LL. 67 a). ‘Now comes out the youngest of the sons, Fainnle mac Nechtan, and says: “But simpletons were they with whom thou hast had to do.” Cuchullin asks him what he means, and Fainnle invites him to come away down and out upon the water where his foot will not touch bottom, himself on the instant darting to the ford. Still Iubar warns the boy to be upon his guard. “How is that then?” says Cuchullin. “Because that is Fainnle mac Nechtan; and the reason why he bears the name is that, as it were a *fáinnle* ‘swallow’ or a weasel, even so for swiftness he travels on the water’s surface, nor can the whole world’s swimmers attempt to cope with him.” “Not to me ought such a thing to be said,” the boy objects again; “for thou knowest the river which we have in Emania, the Callan: well, when the boy-corps break off from their sports and plunge into the same to swim, on either shoulder I take a lad of them, on either palm another, nor in the transit across that water ever wet so much as my ankles.” Then he and Fainnle enter the ford and there wrestle. The youngster clasps his arms around him and gets him just flush with the water; then he deals him a stroke of Conachar’s sword and takes his head, letting the body go with the current. To finish up, Cuchullin and his man enter the dún and harry it; they fire it and leave it burning brightly, then turn about to retrace their steps through Slievefuad, not forgetting to carry with them the heads of Nechtan Sceine’s sons.

27. ‘Soon they saw in front of them a herd of deer, and the boy sought to know what were those numerous and restless cattle. Iubar explains that they are not cattle, but a herd of wild deer that keep in

the dark recesses of Slievefuad. He being urged to goad the horses in their direction, does so; but the king's fat horses cannot attain to join company with the hard-conditioned deer. Cuchullin dismounts therefore and, by sheer running and mere speed, in the moor captures two stags of the grandest bulk, which with thongs and other gear of the chariot he makes fast to it. Still they hold a course for Emania, and by-and-bye, when nearing it, perceive a certain flock of whitest swans. The boy asks are they pet birds or wild, and learns that they are wild swans which used to congregate from rocks and islands of the sea and, for feeding's sake, infest that country. Cuchullin questions still, and fain would know which were the rarer thing: to bring some of them back alive to Emania, or to bring them dead. Iubar hesitates not to say that to bring them living were the more creditable by far: "for," said he, "you may find plenty to bring them in dead; perhaps not one to bring them living." Into his sling Cuchullin lays a little stone, and with it at a cast fetches eight swans of the number. Again he loads, this time with a larger stone, and now brings down sixteen. "Driver, bring along the birds," he says. But Iubar hesitates. "I hardly can do that." "And why not?" says the boy. "Because if I quit my present posture, the horses' speed and action being what they are the chariot's iron wheels will cut me into pieces; or else the stags' antlers will 'hole' and otherwise wound me." "No true warrior art thou, Iubar; but come, the horses I will overlook with such a look that they shall not break their regulation pace; as for the gaze which I will bend on the stags, they shall stoop their heads for awe." At this,



Iubar ventures down and retrieves the swans, which with more of the thongs and ropes he secures to the chariot. In this form they cover the rest of the way to Emania.

28—(LL. 67  $\beta$ ). 'Levarcham, daughter of Aedh [and messenger to the king], perceives them now and cries: "A solitary chariot-fighter draws near to thee, O Conachar, and terribly he comes! The chariot is graced with bleeding heads of his enemies; beautiful white birds he has which in the chariot bear him company, and wild unbroken stags bound and tethered to the same. Verily, unless measures be taken to receive him prudently, the best of the Ultonians must fall by his acts." "I know that chariot-fighter," Conachar said: "even the little boy, my sister's son, who this very day went to the marches. Surely he will have 'reddened his hand'; and should his fury not be timely met, all Emania's young men will perish by him." At last they hit upon a method to abate his manly rage [the result of having shed blood], and it was this: Emania's women all (sixscore and ten in number) reduce themselves critically to nature's garb, and without subterfuge of any kind troop out to meet him [their manœuvre being based on Cuchullin's well-known modesty which, like all his qualities, was excessive]. The little fellow leans his head upon the rail and shuts them from his sight. Now is the desired moment: at unawares he is pinned, and soused into a vat of cold water ready for the purpose.<sup>1</sup> In this

<sup>1</sup> A similar account of the means employed to calm Cuchullin's fury is given in the 'Sickbed of Cuchullin,' after his fights in company with Labraid 'of the quick hand at sword.' This is the first example in the Táin of the hero's 'paroxysm,' or 'demoniac rage,' which gained him the name of the *Riastartha*, or 'Distorted One.'

first vessel, the heat generated by his immersion was such that both staves and hoops flew asunder instantly. In a second, the water escaped [by boiling over]; in yet a third, the water still was hotter than one might bear. By this time, however, the little man's fury had died down in him; from crown to sole he blushed a beautiful pinky red all over, and they clad him in his festive clothes. Thus his natural form and feature were restored to him.

29—(LL. 68 *a*). 'A beautiful boy indeed was that: seven toes to each foot he had, and to either hand as many fingers; his eyes were bright with seven pupils apiece, each one of which glittered with seven gem-like sparkles. On either cheek he had four moles: a blue, a crimson, a green one and a yellow. Between one ear and the other he had fifty clear-yellow long tresses that were as the yellow wax of bees, or like unto a brooch of the white gold as it glints to the sun unobscured. He wore a green mantle silver-clasped upon his breast, a gold-thread shirt. The small boy took his place between Conachar's knees, and the king began to stroke his mane. Now the stripling who, by the time that seven years were completed from his birth, had done such deeds: had destroyed the champions by whom two-thirds of the Ultonians fell unavenged—I hold,' said Fiacha mac Firaba, the narrator, 'that there is scant room for wonder though at seventeen years completed he comes to the marches, cuts a pole of four prongs, and kills a man, ay, two, or three, or four, all in the Raid for the Kine of Cuailgne.'

This then, and thus far, is somewhat of Cuchullin's boy-feats in the Raid, and the story's first inception,

and the account of the host's moving out from Cruaċhan, with the route they took.

*Progress of the Táin*

30—(LL. 68 a). The story now resumes the original thread: on the morrow Ireland's four great provinces marched past Corann<sup>1</sup> eastwards, across the mountain namely. Cuchullin, coming against them as it were, he falls in with a charioteer belonging to Meave's son and Ailell's, Orlam by name. At Tamlacht-Orlam it was, and the driver was busied with cutting chariot-poles from a holly-tree in the wood. To his own charioteer Cuchullin said: 'Laegh, it is a bold stroke for the Ultonians if it be they that in this fashion, with the men of Erin coming on them, cut down the forest. Thou therefore, O Laegh, tarry here till I discover who it is that fells the wood.' He proceeds and soon finds the Connacht driver, whom he greets with: 'And what, my lad, dost thou there?' He made answer, 'I cut holly-poles, because that in chasing of that famous deer, Cuchullin, we have damaged our chariots sorely; and therefore, warrior, for thine honour's sake lend me a hand that the same noble Cuchullin pounce not on me here.' 'Thy choice, lad: whether shall I get thee the holly-poles, or else trim them for thee?' 'Do the trimming,' said the driver. Cuchullin goes to work, and by the simple process of drawing the poles through the interstices both of his toes and of his fingers, finishes them to perfect straightness and smoothness, all bark and protuberances cleaned away. He drew them

<sup>1</sup> LU. says Magh Mucceda; but both the names must be incorrect, as these places lie in Connacht, while the troops were in eastern Ulster or Meath. See map.

'against their crookedness and their excrescences,' *i.e.* by the tops and cleaned them downwards, instead of by the butts and upwards. So polished were they, that, when he dismissed them, a fly could not have kept a footing on them. The charioteer intently looks at him and says: 'I incline to think that this work to which I set thee is not thy proper work. Who art thou then at all?' 'I am that notable Cuchullin of whom but now thou spakest.' Thereat the driver exclaims that surely he is but a dead man; Cuchullin however comforts him with the assurance that he slays not drivers, nor messengers, nor the unweaponed, and inquires of him where his lord and master is. Cuchullin hearing that Orlam is not far off, he orders the charioteer back to him with a warning that Ulster's representative is at hand: 'because,' said he, 'if we meet, surely thy lord shall fall.' The man of Connacht sought his master, but, for all his haste, Cuchullin won the race: he the first reaches Orlam, he strikes off his head, holds it aloft, shows it to and shakes it at the men of Erin.

[A number of short episodes occur here, which can be but briefly dealt with.]

31—(LL. 68  $\beta$ ). Cuchullin kills the three sons of Garach and their charioteers.

32. Lethan and his charioteer are killed by him at his ford on the Nith, in *Conaille Muirthemne*.

33. Then it was that to the men of Erin 'Cainbile's Harps' came from Assaroe and made minstrelsy for them. But the host, as deeming that it was to spy on them in Ulster's interest they were there, drove them off; and even pursued them so hotly that, at the great stone of Lecmore, in the form of wild deer they vanished from them. For though men called

them 'the Harps of Cainbile,' they in good sooth were human, and magicians possessed of great science and much occult power.<sup>1</sup>

34. Cuchullin with two casts of a sling-stone kills the squirrel and the pet bird that are seated on Meave's two shoulders.

35. The men of Erin harry Magh Breagh and Magh Muirthemne. Fergus warns them that Cuchullin is in their neighbourhood; he pronounces his panegyric.

*The Brown Bull and the Morrighu*

36—(LL. 69 a). On the same day it was that the Brown Bull of Cuailgne, accompanied by fifty Ultonian heifers, entered into the land of Mairgen and there bellowed. On the same day it was that the Morrighu had come, and on a pillar-stone in Tara of Cuailgne sat sounding a warning to the Brown Bull in advance of the men of Erin. She discoursed to him, and what she said was this: 'Good now, unhappy one, O Brown Bull of Cuailgne! be cautious, and watch well and be on thy keeping; for otherwise the men of Erin will come to thee, and to their camp will carry thee away.' In this fashion timely she alarmed him; whose words when the Brown Bull of Cuailgne heard, he took fifty of his heifers and went his ways to *Glenn samaisce* 'the Heifer's Glen,' in Slievegullion.

37. The Brown Bull's virtues are set forth.

38. Locha, a hand-maiden of Queen Meave, goes to the river for water, decorated with Meave's golden

<sup>1</sup> This last sentence is a note by the redactor. A less sceptical and more imaginative explanation is given of some similar harps in *Táin bó Fraich* (Proc. R.I.A., Irish MS. Series, vol. i. part i. p. 141 and note, 'Chants of Uaithne').

coronet (or *mind*).<sup>1</sup> Cuchullin, mistaking her for Meave, kills her with a stone, breaking the diadem in pieces.

39—(LL. 69 β). Meave's host endeavours to ford *Glais Chruinn* 'Crunn's Stream'; but on account of the swollen condition of the waters, the chariots that essay to do so are swept down to the sea. Uala, who ventures in, is drowned.

40. Cuchullin kills Raen and Rae, the two historians of the Raid, and a hundred common men. Meave tries to persuade one of her champions to meet him, but all refuse. She requires to have the mountain cleared before her, and a way cut into the solid, there to endure as an abiding shame to Ulster. It is called *bernas Ulad* 'the Gap of Ulster.' They pitch at *bélat Aileoin* 'the Crossways of Ailen,' henceforth called *glenn tdíl* 'glen of shedding,' from the copious flow of milk that night yielded by the flocks and herds; they cross the river Seochair and camp at *druim én* 'Ridge of Birds.' Cuchullin takes up a position close at hand, and brandishes and shakes his weapons at them; the effect being so terrific that, with the fear and horror which he inspires, one hundred warriors of the host die presently.

41. Meave sends Fiacha mac Firaba of Ulster to propose terms to Cuchullin, bidding him to leave the service of Conachar, whom she insultingly calls 'a petty captain,' and enter that of Ailell and herself.

42—(LL. 70 a). Cuchullin promptly rejects the

<sup>1</sup> The *mind* was a crown or diadem of gold. It covered or surrounded the whole head and is to be distinguished from the *land* or crescent of gold. It would appear to have been worn by both men and women, (comp. sec. 75) and see O'Curry, *Man. Cust.* vol. iii. pp. 193-198.

terms, but promises to confer in person with Meave and Fergus. On the morrow the hero seeks the glen; thither the queen and Ailell come to meet him, but they keep the glen between themselves and him.

*Meave's Conference with Cuchullin*

43. The queen scanned him narrowly, and was disappointed to find in him (as she reckoned it) but the bulk of a small boy.<sup>1</sup> 'Is that, O Fergus, the famous Cuchullin of whom thou speakest?' 'The same,' quoth he. Then Meave intoned a lay, Fergus answering alternately:—

'If yonder be the comely Cú . . .'

After some discussion Cuchullin refuses Meave's terms, and they depart on either side in high dudgeon.

*MacRoth's Embassy<sup>2</sup>*

44. During the three days and three nights that the host are encamped at *druim én* they never venture to eat nor sleep, for each night Cuchullin harasses them and kills a hundred men. MacRoth the messenger-in-chief is sent to propose terms to Cuchullin. Fergus says that probably he would be found between Ochain and the sea, where after the sleeplessness of a whole night spent in single-handed slaughter of Ireland's four great provinces he, by admitting sun and wind to play upon his body, would be refreshing himself. In the night next ensuing there was a great fall of snow,

<sup>1</sup> Cuchullin was but seventeen years of age at the time of the Táin and had no beard (see sec. 58).

<sup>2</sup> Extracts from this passage describing the embassy of MacRoth the herald are given by O'Curry, *Man. Cust.*, vol. ii. Lect. xiv. pp. 297-298.

whereby the five provinces at large were reduced to one dead level. Cuchullin discarded the twenty-seven cunningly prepared under-shirts which with cords and ropes were secured about him; and this he did to escape the difficulty that would arise in throwing them off, should his paroxysm come to boiling-point and he in them still. Anon, and for thirty feet all round his body, the snow melted with the intense heat generated in the hero's system; his charioteer, indeed, durst not come nigh him. From a safe distance he informs Cuchullin of MacRoeth's approach and describes him. The herald announces his terms, which are instantly rejected. He is sent back a second time with the same result. MacRoeth asks whether there is any condition that he will accept. Cuchullin says there is; but that they must discover it for themselves, as he will not tell them.

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*Cuchullin's Conditions*

45—(LL. 71 a). Meave demands of Fergus what are the terms that Cuchullin will accept. He tells her reluctantly that they are these: that every day a man of the men of Erin be sent to give him single combat; Cuchullin on his side to allow the host their progress without let or hindrance during the time occupied in killing the said man. Which killing when he shall have accomplished, the men of Erin to halt and camp until the morrow's sunrise; Cuchullin also, for so long as the Raid shall last, to be clothed and fed by his enemies. Meave says it is better to have one warrior killed every day than a hundred, and gives security to Fergus that these conditions shall be kept faithfully.



*Fergus mac Róich's Embassy*

46. Fergus sets forth in his chariot to propose these terms to Cuchullin. He is accompanied by a youth named Etarchomal, who is anxious to see the renowned hero. Laegh, who is playing a game at javelins with his master, announces them and describes their appearance. Cuchullin receives Fergus with a hearty greeting, and ironically offers him a share of his scanty fare. Fergus says that he is well aware how Cuchullin is circumstanced on the Raid, and that therefore he has not come in search of provant but to notify that his conditions are accepted. 'And I,' said Cuchullin, 'engage to keep my part of the contract.' Then they part, lest the men of Erin should imagine that Fergus is playing them false, if he lingers to talk with his foster-son and pupil.

*Etarchomal's Death*

47-48—(LL. 71  $\beta$ , LL. 72  $\alpha$ ). The lad Etarchomal, deceived by the youthful appearance of the hero, determines to fight him. To warn him of his danger, Cuchullin plays upon him two sword-feats. By the first, the 'under-cut,' he slices away the sod from under Etarchomal's soles, and lays him supine with the sod upon his upturned chest. By the second, the 'vigorous edge-stroke,' he takes off all his hair from poll to forehead and from ear to ear, as clean as though he had been shaven with a razor, but without drawing blood. Finally, he despatches him with the 'oblique-transverse stroke' whereby in three simultaneously fallen segments the youth reaches the ground. Fergus turns to demand of Cuchullin why he has killed the lad who came under

his safeguard, but Etarchomal's charioteer shows that it was entirely his master's fault. The body of the unfortunate youth is dragged back into Meave's camp at the wheels of his own chariot.

### *Death of Natchrantal*

49-50—(LL. 72 β). The fighting man Natchrantal goes out to meet Cuchullin with no other arms than thrice nine 'spits' of holly prepared with fine-hardened points. Cuchullin takes little notice of him, and continues to stalk a flock of wild-fowl from which he hopes to furnish the night's meal. Natchrantal, returning to Meave's and Ailell's tent, boasts that so soon as Cuchullin had seen him, he had run away dismayed. Fergus sends Fiacha mac Firaba to upbraid Cuchullin with cowardice, but Cuchullin replies that he wounds never charioteers messengers and those who are weaponless: that he had abstained from slaying Natchrantal, seeing that he had no arms, but only timber-spits in his hands. He bids Natchrantal come early next morning armed to meet him. Natchrantal, going forth next day, fails to recognise Cuchullin, for his anger-paroxysm had come upon him, and so violently had he flung his mantle about him that it enwrapped not only himself, but a pillar-stone that stood hard by, breaking it off short by the ground. So great was his frenzy that Cuchullin had no inkling that the pillar-stone was jammed betwixt him and his cloak [LL.]. The two draw near and Natchrantal hurls his sword; the weapon shivers against the pillar-stone interposed between Cuchullin and his mantle. Then Cuchullin rose from off the ground until he surmounted

the top rim of Natchrantal's shield, over which he lent him a 'flat-blow' which took off his head.

*The finding (or acquiring) of the Brown Bull*

51—(LL. 73 *a*). Meave, attended by a third part of her army, marches to Dunseverick northwards, seeking the Bull. Cuchullin, hanging upon their rear, kills many of her men; he then turns back to defend his own country. To Cuchullin now comes Buic mac Bainblai of Ailell's country and of Meave's, who to the queen was a most singular man of trust; his number being four-and-twenty all clad in pleated mantles, in front of whom careered the Brown Bull of Cuailgne forcibly lifted out of Glensamasc in Slievegullion, and here accompanied with fifteen of his heifers.<sup>1</sup> To Cuchullin's question: 'Whence bringest thou these few cattle?' Buic makes answer: 'Out of yon mountain.' His name also being required, he says: 'I love thee not, neither fear thee; Buic mac Bainblai from Ailell's country and from Meave's am I.' 'Have at thee then with this spear!' Cuchullin cried, and with it laid him low. During this exploit, with all urgency and violence the Brown Bull was driven away from Cuchullin's neighbourhood and to the hostile camp: the greatest affront which in the course of the Raid was put upon Cuchullin.

*Death of Forgaman*

52—(LL. 73 *β*). 'At the far end' of a fortnight [over a month LL.] the four great provinces of Ireland came in to camp. By rattling their spear-shafts on

<sup>1</sup> LL. says fifty heifers; but LU. and the modern recension agree in giving the above number.

their shields they drove the Brown Bull and his attendant kine into a most strait pass; which kine now made little gobbets and small mince of their herdsman, and trod his body thirty feet down into the earth. His name was Forgaman, and there you have the episode known as 'Forgaman's death in the Raid for the Kine of Cuailgne.'

53. Death of Meave's jester, Rec.

54—(LL. 74 a). Deaths of Cûr mac Dalâth and others.

55—(LL. 74 β). Combat of Ferbaeth, Cuchullin's fellow-pupil.

56—(LL. 74 β lin. penult.)<sup>1</sup> Combat of Lairin mac Nôis.

*Dialogue between Cuchullin and the Morrighu*

57—(LL. 74 a). This done, Cuchullin saw draw near him a young woman of surprising form, wrapped also in a mantle of many colours. 'Who art thou?' he asked. She made answer: 'Daughter of Buan the king. I am come to thee. For the record of thy deeds I have loved thee, and all my valuables and my cattle I bring with me.' 'Surely,' he said, 'the season is not opportune in which thou hast come to us; my bloom is wasted with hardship nor, so long as in this strife I shall be engaged, is it easy for me to hold intercourse with a woman.' 'But in thy labour thou shalt have mine aid.' He answered her: 'Go to, not as putting my trust in a woman's aid was it that I took this job in hand.' 'It shall go hard with thee,' she said, 'what time thou settest-to with men and I come to take part against thee: in shape of an

<sup>1</sup> This page of LL. is followed by a lacuna, equivalent to a whole folio of the MS. The episode following (Sec. 57) is in LU. only.

eel, among thy legs I'll go at the ford's bottom, so shalt thou fall.'<sup>1</sup> . . . With that she went away from him. Thus he spent a week at the ford of Grennach, where by his hand daily fell a hundred men.

*Death of Lôch More<sup>2</sup> and his brother*

58—(Add. 18748, p. 133). Then Lôch More mac Mofebis was summoned to Ailell's tent and Meave's, and he inquired saying: 'And what would ye with me?' 'To have thee fight with Cuchullin,' said the queen. 'Upon that errand I will not go, because neither an honour nor a credit do I deem it to go meet a beardless hairless boy. But I would not belittle him unduly; I have one to meet him: Long mac Emonis my brother, who will accept conditions from you.' Thereupon Long was fetched to the royal tent, and Meave offered him great terms: twelve men's accoutrements of armour, a chariot worth four times seven bondwomen, with Finabair to wife, and in Cruachan to have perennial entertainment. Straightway Long proceeds to meet Cuchullin, and Cuchullin kills Long. Meave now bade her womankind go speak with Cuchullin, and tell him that he must bedaub himself into the semblance of having a beard; 'because otherwise,' they were to say to him, 'not a single good warrior in the camp will think it consistent with his dignity to come and fight with thee, thou being thus smoothfaced and beardless.' This behest Cuchullin obeyed; then he came upon the

<sup>1</sup> The rest of this conversation is almost word for word the same as that in the *Táin bó Regamna*.

<sup>2</sup> Lôch More is mentioned in the 'Wooing of Emer' as one of Cuchullin's fellow-pupils in the school of Scathach; Ferdia mac Daman too was there.

hill commanding the queen's camp and there to all and several exhibited his mock beard.<sup>1</sup> When Lôch mac Mofebis saw it he said : ' Why, that is a beard on Cuchullin ! ' ' Such certainly is the thing I see,' said Meave, and to Lôch she makes the same great offer as before to Long his brother. Accordingly, by the ford at which Long had fallen the two warriors met. ' Come away up to the higher ford,' said Lôch, ' we will not fight at this one.' For that ford in which his brother fell was unclean to him.<sup>2</sup> So they fought at the upper ford, and then it was that out of the *sidhe* came the Morrighu, daughter of Ernmas, to destroy Cuchullin ; to whom on the Raid for the Kine of Regaman<sup>3</sup> she had promised that, when during *táin bó Cuailgne* he should be engaged with some prime warrior, she would so come to his hurt. Thither therefore the Morrighu came in form of a white red-eared heifer, she having about her fifty other heifers, with a chain of white bronze between each two of them. Cuchullin made a most careful cast at her, and fractured an eye of the Morrighu. Then with the current she came in shape of a black eel, reached the water [in which they fought], and tangled in Cuchullin's legs. In the interval during which Cuchullin rid himself of her, Lôch wounded him. Then came the Morrighu in the semblance of a rough grey bitch-wolf and, short time as it took Cuchullin to despatch her, again Lôch wounded him. Therefore

<sup>1</sup> We are told that Cuchullin used the juice of blackberries for this purpose.

<sup>2</sup> This is an interesting form of *ges* or *tabu*. The pollution caused by the death of a relative is common to many nations. The Jews were polluted for many days after a death.

<sup>3</sup> Refer to the prophecy in the ' Appearance of the Morrighu.' (*Táin bó Regamna*), *supra*, p. 106.

Cuchullin's ire rose against him,<sup>1</sup> and he wounded him with the *gae bulga*, so splitting his heart within him. 'For thine honour's love, Cuchullin, grant me a request!' he cried. 'And what is that?' 'No petition for quarter is it that I make,' said Lôch; 'but suffer me now to rise, that it be on my face I fall and not backwards towards the men of Erin. And this is to the end that no one of them shall say that in derout or flight in front of thee I perished, as perished indeed I have this time by the *gae bulga*.'<sup>2</sup> 'That will I surely,' Cuchullin answered, 'for a warrior's boon is that thou cravest.' With that Cuchullin took a rearward pace; and hence the name *dth troighe* 'the foot's ford,' which is at one end of Tiérmore. Now on that day above any other, great dejection fell on Cuchullin for his being all alone against the four great provinces of Erin. He told his charioteer therefore, Laegh, to depart and to seek Ulster, that they should come on and vindicate and make a fight for their *Táin*; for sadness and great discouragement visited Cuchullin now, and he uttered a lay:—

'Go from me, Laegh, and in red-weaponed  
Emania declare in my behalf that I am  
wearied with daily waging war, that I am  
wounded and full of bloody hurts. . . .'<sup>3</sup>

And there you have the combat of Cuchullin and

<sup>1</sup> Here LL. 75 a begins.

<sup>2</sup> For the description of this deadly weapon and method of its use see sec. 79. It came from the East and was given by Scathach to Aife, who apparently gave it to Cuchullin. With it he slew his own son Connlaech, as well as Ferdia. See an old poem quoted by O'Curry, *Man. Cust.* vol. ii. p. 311.

<sup>3</sup> This is the first of nineteen quatrains.

Lôch mac Mofebis in the Raid for the Kine of Cuailgne.

*Death of Meave's Three Wizards and Three Witches*

59. Then the queen detached six that all together should assail Cuchullin: Troigh, Dorn, and Derna; Col, Accuis, and Eraise; that is to say, three wizards and three witches. Cuchullin dealt with them all six and took off their heads; moreover now that faith had been broken with him—the covenant namely that he should be compelled to single combat only—from Delga to the southward of them that day, out of his sling he plied the host to such effect that, whether wolf-dog, whether horse or man, not a being of them all durst southwards turn a face toward Cuchullin.

*The Healing of the Morrigu*

60—(*Ibid.*). At this juncture it was that out of the *sidhe*, in the counterfeit presentment of an old crone, Ernmas's daughter, the Morrigu, came and appeared as milking a cow of three teats. The aim of her coming thus being that of Cuchullin she should have relief; for of all such as at any time he might have hurt, save and except that in the curing of them also he had a hand, none might recover and live. He then with thirst being in extremity, craved of her a drink and she gave him such measure as one teat yielded. 'May this be to the giver's profit,' he said, and the Morrigu's injured eye was whole. He begged the yield of another teat; she let him have it, and he pronounced a blessing on her that bestowed it. Yet again he begged a draught, and she gave him the third teat. 'The full blessing of



both *dée* and *andée*<sup>1</sup> be upon thee!' he said. Now 'the people of power' at that time they rated as *dée* 'gods,' and 'the people of ploughing'<sup>2</sup> as *andée* 'non-gods.' The end of the matter was that hereby the Morigu was healed completely.

*Continued Treachery of Meave*

61—(*Ibid.*) One hundred warriors all at once now Meave sent to assail Cuchullin. But he fell upon them, and by his hand they were exterminated all. 'It is an abomination to us,' said Meave, 'to have our people slaughtered thus.' 'That is not the first abomination he has wrought us,' quoth Ailell. Whence *cuillenn cinn dhuin*. Therefore *cuillenn* 'abomination' still is that spot's name, while *áth cró* 'ford of blood' designates that ford at which they were; as well it may, for the great plenty of gore and blood which they gave to run with the river's current.

*The Brislech mór in Magh Muirthemne<sup>3</sup> and all that there occurred*

62—(*Ibid.*). In the place called the *Brislech mór* in the plain of Muirthemne, Ireland's four great provinces camped and secured themselves; but their kine and their captives they sent southwards away into *clithar bó Uladh*. Hard by them Cuchullin posted himself at the grave that is in the Lerga, where towards eventide

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* of gods and of non-gods.

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.* the aristocracy or war-class and the plebeians or agriculturalists. For an interesting allusion to this passage, see 'Cóir Anmann,' § 149, *Irische Texte*, Dritte Serie, p. 355.

<sup>3</sup> The final battle which preceded the death of Cuchullin also bears this name. See *infra*, p. 237.

Laegh mac Rianganabra, his chariot-driver, kindled him a fire. When now, at the fall of evening's shades, Cuchullin looking abroad saw the glint and gleam of the burnished and gilded weapons that stood up over the four great provinces of Erin, anger and great fierceness took him as he marked the vast number of his foemen that were so near to him. He grasped his two javelins, his shield and his sword. He shook his shield, brandished his sword, wheeled his spears, and from his throat gave forth his 'hero's call.' So horrific was the cry, that from all quarters goblins and other eldritch beings and the daft glen-folk answered it.<sup>1</sup> A witch moreover so frenzied and confused the four great provinces of Ireland, that with great hubbub they ran upon the points of each other's spears and other weapons; whereby of sheer fright and terror alone, in the camp's very heart and centre a hundred warriors died.

63. Laegh then being where he was, he descried a lone man that out of the north-eastern quarter, and obliquely through the four great provinces encamped, came in a straight line towards him. 'A man comes to us, little Cú!' he cries, and: 'What figure of a man is he?' Cuchullin asked. 'A tall and comely and impetuous man he is, and wears a green mantle which at his breast is fastened with a silver brooch. Next to his skin, and reaching to his knees, is a shirt of regal silk embroidered with red gold. He carries a black shield with hard rim of white bronze. In his hand is a five-barbed spear; beside him, a pronged javelin. Wonderful

<sup>1</sup> *bocánachs, banánachs, geniti glindi.* These mythological beings twice appear during the combat with Ferdia (sec. 79). They are there spoken of as Tuatha dé Danann. See O'Curry, *Man. Cust.* vol. iii. pp. 425, 449.

indeed is the manner of his progress, the mode and semblance of his action. Him no man notices,<sup>1</sup> no man he heeds, even as though in that great camp none saw him.' 'True it is, my servitor,' said Cuchullin, 'and 'tis some one of my fairy kin that comes to succour and to solace me; for they know the tribulation in which now, upon this Raid for the Kine of Cuailgne, I as against the four great provinces of Ireland am involved.'

64. Cuchullin was quite right. The approaching warrior when he was come up to him spoke to him, and for the greatness of his travail and the length of time for which he had lacked sleep, condoled with him, saying: 'Sleep then, Cuchullin, and by the grave in the Lerga slumber deeply, until three days with their three nights be ended. During which space, upon yonder host I myself will exercise my skill in arms.' By the grave that is in the Lerga, for three days accordingly Cuchullin slept a torpid sleep. Nor were the duration and profoundness of his stupor things at which to marvel, considering how great his weariness necessarily must have been.

For to be precise: from the Monday immediately before *Samhain* to the Wednesday next after the Feast of Bridget<sup>2</sup>—during all that time, I say—saving only a brief snatch at mid-day, he never slept; and even that was taken as he leaned on his spear, his head resting on his fist, and his fist closed around the spear-shaft, this

<sup>1</sup> Compare the equally dignified and unobserved appearance of Finn after the Battle of Gaura, *Trans. Ossianic Soc.*, vol. i. p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.* From the Monday before Oct. 31st (Hallowe'en) to the first of February. LL. has the old Pagan name *imbolc*, *i.e.* the spring season, instead of its later Christian substitute, St. Bridget's Festival. See *Book of Rights*, ed. O'Donovan, *Intro.* liii-iv.

last also resting on his knee. Rather did he employ that interval in hewing and in felling, in slaughter and in ruin of the four great provinces. Cuchullin thus being lulled to rest, to his wounds and hurts forthwith that warrior laid balsams and healing herbs of fairy potency ; so that as he slept, nor knew that which was wrought in him, the hero made a good recovery.

65. Now was the time and this the hour at which out of the north the boy-corps from Emania came to help Cuchullin : thrice fifty lads of the sons of Ulster's leading chiefs, captained by Conachar's son Follaman. Three battles they delivered against all Ireland ; in which encounters fell three times their own number of the enemy, but the boy-corps suffered perdition utterly.<sup>1</sup> Follaman alone escaped. Who threatened then that never would he return to Emania before he should carry off Ailell's head, with the golden diadem that surrounded it. This however was a matter that proved to be not so easy for him, seeing that Bethach<sup>2</sup> mac Baen's two sons (sons, that is to say, of a couple that to Ailell had been nurse and guardian) fell on him and wounded him to death. There then and thus far you have the destruction of the boy-corps and of Conachar's son Follaman.

66—(LL. 76 β). As touching Cuchullin again : until the end of those three days and three nights, at the grave that was in the Lerga he continued in his heavy drowsy trance. Then he rose from sleep and passed

<sup>1</sup> This episode has been introduced from our Saga into the later Finn Saga. See 'Battle of Ventry Harbour,' ed. Prof. Kuno Meyer, *Anec. Oxon.*, *Mediaeval Series*, vol. i. pt. iv. Zimmer points out many corresponding instances of borrowed episodes in *Keltische Beiträge*, iii., *Zeitschrift für Deut. Alterthum*, 1891

<sup>2</sup> LL. calls him Beth.

his hand over his face; from his crown to the ground he blushed all crimson red, he felt his courage strengthened in him, and he would have entered any assembly or place or carousing-house or great convention whatsoever of all Ireland. 'Warrior,' said he, 'how long am I thus asleep?' 'Three days and three nights,' the other answered. 'Whereby thou hast done me an evil turn indeed,' said Cuchullin. 'Why now, how so?' 'In that for that space the host of Erin have been unmolested.' 'But not so have they been.' 'And who then has fallen upon them?' 'Out of the north Emania's boy-corps came, led by Conachar's son Follaman, and during thy sleeping-spell thrice gave battle to the provinces. . . .'<sup>1</sup> 'Alas and alas, that I was not there!' cried Cuchullin; 'for had I been at hand, never had the boy-corps been extinguished as now they are, neither had Conachar's son Follaman perished.' 'Take comfort, little Cú: 'tis no disgrace to thy weapon-skill, and to their honour no affront.' 'Warrior,' Cuchullin said, 'this night abide with me, that both together we avenge the boy-corps.' 'By no means will I tarry,' quoth the stranger; 'for no matter what and how great deeds of valour one should achieve in thy companionship, not to himself but to thee would accrue the fame renown and glory of them every one. For this reason it is that I will not tarry with thee; but rather wreak thou thy fury on them, seeing that at this present 'tis not they that have power of thy life [*i.e.* that shall prevail over thee to slay thee].'

<sup>1</sup> Here particulars are repeated verbatim as above. The modern MS. gives them in full, but BL. cuts them short with an 'etc.'

*The Scythed Chariot*

67. Thereupon Cuchullin said: 'O my tutor Laegh, canst thou tackle for me the scythed chariot—that is to say, if thou hast with thee paraphernalia and gear of the same?' With that, up rose Laegh and donned his charioteer's accoutrement, a suit to which belonged the following: a graceful frock of skins, light and airy, spotted and striped; it was made of deer-skins, close-fitting so as not to interfere with the free action of his arms outside. . . .<sup>1</sup>

The passage ends as follows: Cuchullin then threw over him his mantle of invisibility, manufactured from the precious fleeces of the land of the immortals, which had been brought to him by Manannan mac Lir, from the king of Sorcha.

*Cuchullin's Distortion*

68—(LL. 77 β). Then it was that he suffered his *riastradh* or paroxysm, whereby he became a fearsome and multiform and wondrous and hitherto unknown being. All over him, from his crown to the ground, his flesh and every limb and joint and point and articulation of him quivered as does a tree, yea a bulrush, in mid-current. Within in his skin he put forth an unnatural effort of his body: his feet, his shins, and his knees shifted themselves and were behind him; his heels and calves and hams were displaced to the front of his leg-bones, in condition such that their knotted muscles stood up in lumps large as the clenched fist of a fighting

<sup>1</sup> For this long descriptive passage on the dress of Laegh and Cuchullin, see O'Curry's *Man. Cust.*, vol. ii. p. 299.

man. The frontal sinews of his head were dragged to the back of his neck, where they showed in lumps bigger than the head of a man-child aged one month. Then his face underwent an extraordinary transformation: one eye became engulfed in his head so far that 'tis a question whether a wild heron could have got at it where it lay against his occiput, to drag it out upon the surface of his cheek; the other eye on the contrary protruded suddenly, and of itself so rested upon the cheek. His mouth was twisted awry till it met his ears. His lion's gnashings caused flakes of fire, each one larger than fleece of three-year-old wether, to stream from his throat into his mouth [and so outwards]. The sounding blows of the heart that panted within him were as the howl of a ban-dog doing his office, or of a lion in the act of charging bears. Among the aerial clouds over his head were visible the virulent pouring showers and sparks of ruddy fire which the seething of his savage wrath caused to mount up above him. His hair became tangled about his head, as it had been branches of a red thorn-bush stuffed into a strongly fenced gap [to block it]; over the which though a prime apple-tree had been shaken, yet may we surmise that never an apple of them would have reached the ground, but rather that all would have been held impaled each on an individual hair as it bristled on him for fury. His 'hero's paroxysm' projected itself out of his forehead, and showed longer [as well as thicker LU.] than the whet-stone of a first-rate man-at-arms. Taller, thicker, more rigid, longer than mast of a great ship was the perpendicular jet of dusky blood which out of his scalp's very central point shot upwards and then was scattered to the four cardinal points; whereby was formed a

magic mist of gloom resembling the smoky pall that drapes a regal dwelling, what time a king at night-fall of a winter's day draws near to it.

69. This distortion being now past which had been operated in Cuchullin, he leaped into the scythed chariot<sup>1</sup> that was equipped with iron points, with thin [*i.e.* sharp] edges, with hooks, with hard spit-spikes, with machinery for opening it, with sharp nails that studded over its axles and straps and curved parts and tackle. Then he delivered a thunder-feat of a hundred, one of two hundred, one of three hundred, one of four hundred, and stood at a thunder-feat of five hundred; and he went so far, because he felt it to be obligatory on him that in this his first set-to and grappling with the four provinces of Erin, even such a number must fall by his hand. In which guise then he goes forward to assault his enemies, lending the chariot such impulse that its iron [shod] wheels sank in the earth and made ruts which well might have served as earth-works of defence; for both stones and rocks, both flags and the earth's bottom-gravel on either hand were heaped up outside the wheels and to an equal height with them.

70. The reason which moved him this day to make such hostile demonstration round about the men of Erin [for he careered round them in a circle] was that he designed thus to ensure that they should not escape him, neither should dissolve away from him, before he should have avenged the boy-corps on them. Then he charged them, and all round the host on their outer side he drew a fence built up of his enemies' carcasses. An onfall of

<sup>1</sup> The Scythed Chariot or *carpat* seems to have been used only on rare occasions. See O'Curry's *Man. Cust.*, vol. i. cccclxxxii., vol. ii. 299-302.



a foeman on foemen indeed was this attack of his, for they fell sole to sole and trunk to trunk. Thrice in this wise he made the circuit of them, thereby leaving them laid in sexuple slaughter: the soles of three against the headless bodies of three more. Hence *seisreach brislighe* 'the *seisreach* of the *brisleach*'<sup>1</sup> is the name of this episode in the Táin of which it constitutes the third great carnage, the three being: the *seisreach*, the affair of Glenomna, and the [final] battle of Gáirech and Ilgáirech. In which *seisreach* wolfdog, horse, and man indiscriminately were heaped together, and some do say that there Lugh mac Ethlenn fought for Cuchullin. It were not possible to count up all that fell of the plebeian herd; but their lords and chiefs have been numbered: six-score and ten kings Cuchullin slew in that great *brisleach* ['smash-up'] of Magh Muirthemne, besides their horses, women, boys, and little people and plebeians; for 'the third man of the men of Erin' [*i.e.* every third man or one-third of them] escaped not from Cuchullin but with fracture of a hip-bone, of one hemisphere of his skull, of one eye, or with some lasting blemish imprinted on him. This done, Cuchullin turned and left them, yea, and without blood drawn on himself, on his horse, or on his servitor.

#### *Description of Cuchullin's Person*

71—(LL. 78 β). On the morrow Cuchullin came to view the host; also to exhibit himself in his [natural]

<sup>1</sup> This is a kind of play upon words not possible to render in a different tongue. O'Reilly's *Dictionary* gives the meaning of *seisreach* as 'a plough of six horses.' And in O'Curry's, *Man. Cust. Glossary*, 'a *seisreach* of new milk' is said to be a quantity sufficient for six persons. Here it seems to mean a ploughland of six horses in reference to the sixfold slaughter in the *brisleach mór* or 'Great Rout' of the plain of Muirthemne.

form of beauty to the wives and womankind and girls and lasses, to the poets and professors of the men of Erin, for not by any means did he plume himself upon the horrid magic-wrought disguise in which they the night before had seen him wrapt. To show them all his comeliness therefore, that day he came. A handsome lad truly was he that stood there then: Cuchullin son of Sualtam. Three sets of hair<sup>1</sup> he had: next to the skin of his head, brown; in the middle, crimson; that which covered him on the outside formed as it were a diadem of gold, seeing that comparable to yellow gold was each glittering long-curling splendid beauty-coloured thread of the same, as free and loose it fell down and hung betwixt his shoulders. About his neck were a hundred linklets of red gold that flashed again, with pendants hanging from them. His headgear was adorned with a hundred mixed carbuncle jewels, strung.<sup>2</sup> On either cheek four moles he had: a yellow, a green, a blue, a red. In either eye seven pupils, as it were seven sparkling gems. Either foot of the twain was garnished with seven toes; both this hand and that, with as many fingers; each one of which [*i.e.* fingers and toes] was endowed with clutch of hawk's talon, with grip of hedgehog's claw. He dons his gorgeous raiment that he wore in great conventions: a fair crimson tunic of five plies and fringed, with a long pin of white silver, gold-enchased and patterned, shining as it had been a luminous torch which for its blazing property and brilliance men might not endure to see. Next to his

<sup>1</sup> The original means that each hair was of three hues: brown, crimson, and gold.

<sup>2</sup> This is the general sense; the meaning is obscure.

skin, a body-vest of silk bordered and fringed all round with gold with silver and with white bronze [*i.e.* with braid etc., made of thread of these metals]; which vest came as far as the upper edge of his russet-coloured kilt. A trusty special shield, in hue dark crimson, and in its circumference armed with a pure white silver rim. At his left side, a long and golden-hilted sword. Beside him in the chariot, a lengthy spear; together with a keen 'aggression-boding' javelin, fitted with 'hurling' thong, with rivets of white bronze. In one hand he carried nine heads, nine also in the other; the which in token of valour and of skill in arms he held at arm's length, and in sight of all the army shook.

*Jealousy of Dubtach dael Uladh*

72—(LL. 79 a). Under an 'ox-vat'<sup>1</sup> of shields Meave that day hid her face, for fear lest with his sling Cuchullin might make a mark of her. Then the woman-kind of the men of Erin besought them that on platforms made of their bucklers they might be hoisted to the level of warriors' shoulders, and so have it given to them to look upon Cuchullin's form; for they marvelled to see the more than comely and mild and gentle figure which to-day he made, as compared with the unnatural hideous terrible disguise that had deformed him yesterday. But at this point, envy and jealousy of Cuchullin filled the breast of Dubtach *dael Uladh*; for he saw his own wife zealous in climbing with the other women to inspect the hero. Therefore Dubtach counselled them of the army, that

<sup>1</sup> A 'testudo' of shields, *i.e.* 'a party of men held their shields interlocked over Meave's head and around her for protection.

guilefully they should compass his destruction by means of ambushes surrounding him on all sides; so should he fall. And Dubtach uttered these words:

‘If he be the Riastartha . . .’

Fergus hearing this guileful counsel of Dubtach, inflicts upon him summary chastisement; and he utters a poem which proclaims the evil acts of Dubtach, and foreshadows the terrible deeds about to follow in requital, when the hosts of Ulster shall arise from their long torpor and descend to the aid of Cuchullin.

This then is the Brislech mór of Magh Muirthemne, and the Scythed Chariot.

73—(LL. 79 β). Death of Angus, son of *Aenlámh gáibhe*.

74—(LL. 79 β). The Shooting-error of *Belach eoin*, ‘the Pass of the Birds.’

75—(LL. 79 β). The ‘Thatching of the Stump.’

#### *Fight of Fergus and Cuchullin*

76—(LL. 79 β). That night the four great provinces of Ireland pitched camp and lay at the great stone which is in the land of Ross; and Meave inquired for some one of them who should do battle on the morrow with Cuchullin. But every soul of the men of Ulster said: ‘Not I—it is not I who will go—my race is not called upon to furnish a condemned criminal.’

Meave now requested of Fergus that he would fight with Cuchullin, for the men of Erin in general had refused the task. Fergus objected: ‘It is not right to demand this of me, that I should encounter with a young and beardless stripling; with one, moreover, who to me stands in the position of disciple.’

Nevertheless, and with her entreaties so urgently did Meave press him, that Fergus could not choose but take the thing in hand. At early morn he arose therefore and betook him to the ford of combat, where Cuchullin was. Who seeing Fergus draw near, exclaimed: 'In perilous guise thou comest to fight, Fergus my guardian, without a sword!' (That was true for him [*i.e.* Cuchullin was justified in making this remark] because that, a year before these hostings of the Táin, on a hillside in Cruachan, Ailell had discovered Fergus making love to Meave, his sword in his near vicinity hanging on a bough. Ailell, unobserved, abstracted the weapon from its sheath, putting a wooden sword in its place; and vowed that never would he return it to the owner before the day of the great battle; that one in which the men of Erin should meet and contend in the grand battle of the Raid for the Kine of Cuailgne, at Gâirech and Ilgâirech.)<sup>1</sup> 'Never a whit matters it,' said Fergus; 'for though the scabbard held a sword, yet would I not use it on thee. And now, for sake of the nurture which I, Conachar also and all Ulster gave thee, in sight of the men of Erin this day fly thou before me.' Cuchullin answered: 'Loath indeed am I to do this thing, to fly before any warrior in the Raid.' 'No need for such repugnance,' quoth Fergus; 'for in my turn, what time in the great final battle of the Raid thou shalt be full of wounds and drenched in blood, before thee I will fly.'<sup>2</sup> Now when once I run, the men of Erin too

<sup>1</sup> This episode is somewhat differently related in LU. See Zimmer's abstract, *Keltische Studien*, p. 451. It also occurs earlier in the order of the story.

<sup>2</sup> This promise was fulfilled in the final battle of Gâirech and Ilgâirech, sec. 118.

will run all.' So eager was Cuchullin to work out Ulster's profit, that [at his behest] his chariot was brought to him; he mounted it and, as though utterly discomfited, in sight of all Ireland before Fergus head-long fled. They marking this cried out: 'A flight is being made before thee, Fergus.' 'With speed, O Fergus, follow him up that he escape thee not!' was Meave's ejaculation. 'Verily and in sooth not so,' said Fergus; 'further than this I will not follow him. Trifling as in your eyes may be the modicum of flight that I have 'knocked out of him' [*i.e.* put him to], for all that, and many of them as in this Raid have had to do with him, never a one of all the men of Erin as yet has done as much. Neither will I, before they all singly shall have fought with him, any more assail him.' This then and thus far is the Fight of Fergus and Cuchullin.

77—(LL. 80 *a*). The *cinnit* 'head-place' [the place where he left his head] of Ferchû the Exile.

#### *Fight of Calatin and his Twenty-seven Sons*

78—(LL. 80 *a*). Again the men of Erin debated the question of whom at early dawn on the morrow they should send to single combat with Cuchullin, and unanimously they declared that it must be Calatin *dána* with his score and seven sons, and his sister's son, who was Glas mac Delga. The manner of whom all was this: every man of them was endowed with poisonous quality, each individual weapon of their armament also being envenomed; not one of them ever hurled spear or slung stone that missed; and none whose blood was drawn by any one of them, but either incontinently or before nine days were out he was

merely a dead man. To these men then great conditions were offered as the price of going to face Cuchullin. They took in hand to fight this fight, and in presence of Fergus it was that the business was 'knotted' [*i.e.* finally settled]. The universal voice was that they for their part looked upon Calatin with his twenty-seven sons and his sister's son as fairly constituting but the equivalent of one antagonist in a single combat, for they averred that the gang of them were so many of Calatin's own organs, and that to Calatin assuredly belonged the total of his own body's constituent parts. This done, Fergus be-took him to his tent and to his people. Once there, loudly he groaned in exceeding trouble, saying: 'Alas, for the deed to be done to-morrow!' 'And what deed may that be?' they inquired. 'The slaying of Cuchullin!' 'But who shall kill him?' 'Calatin with his twenty-seven sons and his sister's son, Glas mac Delga. The manner of whom is this [repeat as above to "dead man."] And were there of you all one that should go to learn for me whether in this combat Cuchullin be slain, I would bestow on him my benediction, together with all my armature.' 'I will go on that errand,' said Fiacha mac Firaba. They passed that night. In the morning Calatin *dána* with his sons and his sister's son rose and proceeded to Cuchullin's ground, Fiacha mac Firaba also accompanying them. Calatin and his, when now they were within range of Cuchullin, in one volley discharged their nine-and-twenty javelins at him, nor did a single one of them miss and go past him. With his shield Cuchullin performed the 'edge-feat,' and up to their bulges the whole set of spears entered into the shield.

This could not be called a miss on their part, yet never a javelin of them drew blood or 'reddened' on him. Out of the sheath then Cuchullin drew his sword, for the purpose of lopping off the missiles and of thereby lightening his buckler on him. Even as he was busied with this lopping, they ran at him and on his head laid all their twenty-nine right hands. His face and countenance they thrust and bent down [*i.e.* strove hard to do so] to the ford's gravel and sand. Stentoriously he emitted his hero's roar, and his cry of dire distress in unequal fight, and in the camp was not a man of Ulster (and he not asleep) but heard him. Then Fiacha mac Firaba came to him and, when he saw Cuchullin's plight, a great wave of affection swept over him; he plucked his sword from its protecting sheath and warlike scabbard, and dealt them a single stroke with which he pruned from them their nine-and-twenty right hands, with the result that (owing to the grip they held and the strain that was on them) they all fell backwards. Cuchullin raised his head and fetched his breath and drew a deep sigh of relief, and saw him that had succoured him. 'That was leisurely and deliberately done, my trusty comrade!' <sup>1</sup> he cried; but Fiacha made answer: 'However much so it may have been for thee, for us on the contrary, the consequences may be neither leisurely nor slow. For in the men of Erin's camp we are thirty hundred of clan Rury's best; and for all thou mayest choose to belittle the stroke I struck for thee, yet shall we all, if it be known "on me" [the Irish idiom = 'if my deed be reported'], be given to the sword's edge

<sup>1</sup> Cuchullin speaks sarcastically. He means that Fiacha might have interfered sooner and saved him from getting such a knocking about.



and to point of spear.' 'I pledge my word,' Cuchullin said, 'that, since now I have lifted my head and drawn my breath, unless thyself shall tell tales "on thee," 'tis not any one of those will do it.' With that, Cuchullin fell upon them and took to hack and hew them, until at last both eastwards and westwards over the face of the ford he dismissed them from him in small joints and in disintegrated quarters. One man, however, Glas mac Delga, took to his heels and so got away. Cuchullin bounded after him; nevertheless still Glas eluded him, and won to Meave's tent and Ailell's. But no more than 'Fiacha, Fiacha . . .!' could he manage to gasp out when Cuchullin gave him one blow and struck off his head.

'Fergus,' said Meave, 'what *fiacha* "debts" are those he mentioned?' 'That I know not,' quoth Fergus, 'unless it were that some one in the camp owed him some such, and that that was what occupied his mind. However that may be, to him at all events it is a debt of flesh and blood. Upon my word, and verily 'tis now and all together his debts are paid him, seeing that Calatin with his seven-and-twenty sons and his grandson<sup>1</sup> Glas mac Delga, are fallen.' In that ford still the stone endures on which they had the dragging-match [or 'tug-of-war'] and tussled hand-to-hand. In which stone are the prints of their swords' hilts,<sup>2</sup> the marks of their knees and elbows, and of their spears' butt-ends. Therefore *áth iarrainn*, 'ford of iron' (to the westward of *áth Firdiadh*, 'Ferdia's Ford,') is

<sup>1</sup> Here the modern MS. replaces *nia* 'sister's son,' by *ua* 'grandson.' This is the LL. reading throughout, and fits in with the curious argument used above.

<sup>2</sup> See Grimm's *Teut. Myth.*, ed. Stallybrass, p. 1396.

that same ford's name; and the reason for which it is so styled is that there 'was there blood on edges' [*i.e.* edged weapons were well dipped in blood]. This then is the fight of Calatin *dána* and his sons and his grandson, Glas mac Delga, with Cuchullin.<sup>1</sup>

### *The Combat of Cuchullin and Ferdia*

Here follows the combat of Cuchullin with Ferdia, of which we here reproduce a portion from O'Curry's *Man. Cust.*, vol. iii. Appendix i. pp. 414-463, where the episode is given *in extenso*. It is taken from LL., not from the modern manuscript, from which most of the above translation is made, and an outline of it is given in *Man. Cust.*, vol. ii. pp. 302-312. These translations being easily accessible, we have not thought it necessary to reproduce the whole of the section, but it should be read by all students of Irish romantic literature. Its tenderness, pathos, and high ideal of chivalrous honour exceed anything that the Arthurian saga can show, and perhaps cannot be surpassed in any literature. The episode is interspersed with numerous lays.

**79.** Meave, partly by flattery and the promise of Finnabair to wife, partly by the dread of satire, incites Ferdia, Cuchullin's fellow-pupil in the schools of Scathach, of Uathach, and of Aife, to do combat with him. Fergus goes forward to warn Cuchullin that it is needful that he should be cautious and prepared, because Ferdia, his equal in feats and deeds of valour, is about to offer him combat.

In Ferdia's tent that night there is no merriment or pastime; they are cheerless, sorrowful, and dispirited, knowing that from any combat in which their master and Cuchullin met, one of them would not return alive. Ferdia sleeps heavily during the

<sup>1</sup> These semi-superhuman beings were destined to destroy Cuchullin in a later fight. 'Battle of Muirthemne,' *infra*, p. 239.

first half of the night, but as dawn approaches his sleep departs from him, and the anxiety of the battle presses hard upon him. He commands his charioteer to harness his horses and yoke his chariot. His charioteer endeavours to dissuade him, but Ferdia insists on proceeding to the ford, which they reach at earliest dawn of day. Here the charioteer spreads for him the cushions and skins of the chariot, and Ferdia takes deep sleep and repose.

Cuchullin on the contrary did not arise until the full light of day had come, lest the men of Erin should say that he had arisen early through fear or dread of the battle. Then, surrounded by the *bocánachs* and *banánachs* and *geniti glindi*, and demons of the air, who shouted round him, he proceeded to the ford (*i.e. áth Firdiadh* ang. Ardee).

Ferdia's driver hears the thunder of the approaching chariot, and awakens his master with a lay in praise of the valour of Cuchullin. Ferdia reproaches him for lauding his enemy. With that Cuchullin reached the ford. Ferdia stood on the south side of the ford, and Cuchullin drew up on the north side. Ferdia bade his adversary welcome. 'I am happy at thy coming, O Cuchullin,' said Ferdia. 'Thy welcome would have been pleasant to me at any earlier time; but this day I deem it not the welcome of true friendship,' said the hero. 'Moreover, O Ferdia, it were fitter that I bade thee welcome than that thou shouldst welcome me, because it is into my own province and country that thou art come to fight with me. It were more meet that I had gone abroad to fight with thee.' Ferdia asks him what it is that has brought him out to fight at all, since, when they were companions in

the School of Scathach, Cuchullin had been his attendant, to tie up his spears and to prepare his bed. Cuchullin says that this is true: that then he acted as junior to Ferdia, but that henceforth a different story will be told; for there is not in the whole world a champion that he is not ready to meet that day. Then by sharp unfriendly invectives they incite each other to valour, and Cuchullin in a poetical dialogue seeks to dissuade Ferdia from the combat. 'Good, now, O Ferdia,' said Cuchullin, 'thou shouldst not have come to combat and to fight with me. For when we were with Scathach, with Uathach, and with Aife, side by side we went to every battle and every battle-field, to every fight and every combat, to every forest and every wilderness, through every darkness and every difficulty.

'We were heart companions  
 We were comrades in assemblies  
 We were fellows of the same bed  
 Where we used to sleep the deep sleep. . . .'

'O Cuchullin of the beautiful feats,' said Ferdia, 'though together we have studied arts of science, and though I have listened to [the recital of] our bonds of friendship, it is by me that thy first wounds shall come; remember not our comradeship, O Hound, for it shall not avail thee—O Hound, it shall not avail thee.'

They then discuss the arms to which they shall first resort, and Cuchullin says that the choice lies with Ferdia, for he it was that first reached the ford. 'Dost thou remember,' said Ferdia, 'the missive weapons we used to practise with Scathach?' 'I remember them indeed,' said Cuchullin. 'If thou dost

remember them, let us have recourse to them,' said Ferdia.

So they take their missive shields<sup>1</sup> in their hands, and their eight turned handled spears, and their eight little quill spears, and their eight ivory-hilted swords, and their eight sharp ivory-handled spears. They fly backwards and forwards between them like bees on the wing on a sunny day. Till midday they fight with these weapons, yet, though not one of them misses its mark, so good is the defence that during that time no blood is drawn on either of them. 'Let us drop these feats now, Cuchullin,' said Ferdia, 'for it is not by these that our battle will be decided.' 'Let us desist, indeed, if the time be come,' said Cuchullin.

Again Ferdia has the choice of weapons, and until eventide they fight with their spears, and though the defence was most excellent, yet was the casting so good that either of them bled and reddened and wounded the other in that space.

'Let us now desist for the present, O Cuchullin,' said Ferdia. 'Let us indeed desist if the time be come,' said Cuchullin. They ceased. They threw away their weapons from them into the hands of their charioteers. Each of them forthwith approached the other, and each put his arms around the other's neck and gave him three kisses. Their horses were in the same paddock that night and their charioteers were at the same fire; and for the champions their charioteers spread beds of green rushes, with wounded men's

<sup>1</sup> These were shields with sharp edges which were thrown vertically or horizontally. Two other instances of their use occur in this tract (secs. 86 and 95). The other 'missive weapons' must have been small javelins and spears.

pillows. The professors of healing and curing came to heal and to cure them, and they applied herbs and plants of healing and of curing to their stabs and cuts and gashes, and to all their wounds. Of every herb and healing plant that was applied to the stabs and cuts and gashes and to all the wounds of Cuchullin, he would send an equal portion westward over the ford to Ferdia, so that the men of Erin might not be able to say, should Ferdia fall by him, that it was by better means of cure that he had gotten the victory over him. And of each kind of food, and of palatable, pleasant, intoxicating drink that was sent by the men of Erin to Ferdia, he would send a fair moiety over the ford northwards to Cuchullin; because the purveyors of Ferdia were more numerous than those of Cuchullin. To Ferdia, for beating back Cuchullin from them, all the men of Erin were purveyors; but only the men of Bregia purveyed for Cuchullin.

The second day they fight from their chariots with broad spears, and at night they are so fatigued and lacerated with the combat, that, birds, if it had been their custom in flight to pass through the bodies of men, might have passed through their bodies, and carried off pieces of flesh. At night they show each other the same attention and courtesies, making interchange of food and medicine. Their horses are placed in the same enclosure, and their charioteers sleep at the same fire.

In the morning Cuchullin perceives a dark and ill-boding cloud resting upon the face of Ferdia. 'Badly thou lookest to-day, O Ferdia,' said he. 'Thy hair this day has grown darker, and thine eye drowsy, and thine own form and features and appearance are

departed from thee.' 'Not through fear or terror is it so,' said Ferdia, 'for in all Erin is there not this day a champion that I could not overthrow.' And Cuchullin lamented :

CUCHULLIN. 'O Ferdia, if it be thou,  
Thine honour is fallen low,  
To have come, at a woman's bidding,  
To fight with thy fellow-pupil.'

FERDIA. 'O Cuchullin, inflictor of wounds,  
O valiant man, O true champion !  
A man is constrained to come  
To the sod where his final grave shall be. . .'

After this lay of mutual faith and compliment, again they fall to smiting each other, this time with very heavy, hard-smiting swords. Each of them, from dawn to the hour of evening's close, continued to hew and to hack the other in this manner.

'Let us now desist from this, O Cuchullin,' said Ferdia.

'Let us desist, indeed, if the time be now come,' said Cuchullin.

They ceased. They cast their arms from them into the hands of their charioteers. Their meeting in the morning had been pleasant, happy, spirited, but their separation that night was mournful, sorrowful, disheartened.

Their horses were not in the same enclosure that night. Their charioteers were not at the same fire. They rested there that night. Then Ferdia arose early next morning, and went forward alone to the ford of battle. For he knew that on that day the combat and the fight would be decided ; and he knew that one of

them would fall there on that day, or that both of them would fall.

And he put on his battle-suit of combat before the coming of Cuchullin. And that battle-suit of combat was as follows: a kilt of striped silk with a border of spangled gold upon it, next his white skin. Outside, well sewed over it, an apron of brown leather on the lower part of his body. Over that again he put a huge stone as big as a mill-stone, to defend his body below. And above all he put on his firm deep apron of iron, of purified iron, over the great stone, through dread of the *gae bulga* on that day. Upon his head he wore his crested helmet of battle, on which were four [or forty] gems, carbuncles, in each compartment; moreover, it was studded with *cruan* and crystal and carbuncles, and with brilliant rubies of the eastern world. In his right hand he took his destructive, sharp-pointed, strong spear, and on his left side hung his curved sword of battle, with its golden hilt, and its pommel of red gold. He slung on his back his huge, large-bossed, beautiful shield, on which were fifty bosses, each of which would bear the weight of a full-grown hog, not to mention the great central boss of red gold.

The two combatants then display before each other many marvellous feats which they never had learned from any tutor, but had invented for themselves. Then they fell to work, and a terrific combat ensued, Laegh the charioteer admonishing and urging Cuchullin forward whenever he seemed about to give way, according to the instructions given him by his master. Three times Cuchullin succeeded in springing upon the boss of Ferdia's shield, with purpose to strike his head from



above, and three times he was cast off into the water of the ford.<sup>1</sup>

It was then that, as before, Cuchullin's distortion came on, and he was filled with swelling and great fulness, like breath in a bladder, until he became a terrible, fearful, many-coloured, wonderful Tuaig (giant), and he the great and valiant champion became as big as a Fomor, or man of the sea, in perfect height over Ferdia.

So close was the fight they made, that their heads met above, and their feet below, and their arms in the middle over the rims and bosses of their shields. So close was the fight they made, that they cleft and loosened their shields from their rims to their centres. So close was the fight they made, that they turned and bent and shivered their spears from their points to their handles. Such was the closeness of the fight they made that the *bocânachs* and *banânachs*, and wild people of the glens,<sup>2</sup> and demons of the air, screamed from the rims of their shields, and from the hilts of their swords, and from the shafts of their spears. Such was the closeness of the fight they made, that they cast the river out of its bed, and out of its course, so that it might have been a reclining and reposing couch for a king and queen in the middle of the ford, for there was not a drop of water in it, unless it dropped into it by the trampling and hewing made by the two champions in the middle of the ford.

<sup>1</sup> There is a parallel passage in Cuchullin's combat with Elcho *glas* in the 'Second Feast of Bricriu.' Examples of shields with bosses are figured in Sir John Evans' *Ancient Bronze Implements of Great Britain*, pp. 344, 348, and in Sir William Wilde's *Catalogue of the Collection in the Royal Irish Academy*.

<sup>2</sup> See sec. 62 and note.

Such was the intensity of the fight they made that the steeds of the Gaels darted away in fright and shyness, with fury and madness breaking their chains and their yokes, their ropes and their traces; and the women and youths and little people and camp-followers and non-combatants of the men of Erin, broke out of the camp south-westwards.

They were practising the 'edge-feat of swords' during this time. Then it was that Ferdia found an unguarded moment upon Cuchullin, and he gave him a stroke of the straight-edged sword, and buried it in his body, so that his blood fell into his girdle, and the ford was reddened with his gore.

Cuchullin could not endure this, for Ferdia continued his unguarded stout strokes, and his rapid strokes, and his tremendous heavy blows at him. Then Cuchullin asked Laegh, son of Rianganbar, for the *gae bulga*.<sup>1</sup> The manner of the weapon was this: it had to be set down the stream and cast from between the toes; it made the wound of one spear in entering the body, but it had thirty barbs to open, and could not be withdrawn from the body, but must be cut out. And when Ferdia heard the *gae bulga* mentioned, he made a stroke of the shield downwards, to protect the lower part of his body. Cuchullin thrust the unerring thorny spear off the centre of his palm, over the rim of the shield, and through the breast of the skin-protecting armour, so that its further half protruded after piercing his heart in his body. Then he gave a stroke of his shield upwards, to protect the upper part of his body, though it was 'relief after danger' [*i.e.* it came too late].

<sup>1</sup> See sec. 58 and note.

The servant set the *gae bulga* down the stream, and Cuchullin caught it between the toes of his foot, and threw an unerring cast of it at Ferdia, and it passed through the firm deep apron of wrought-iron, and broke the great stone, which was as large as a millstone, into three parts, and passed through the protections of his body into him, so that every crevice and every cavity of his body was filled with its barbs.

‘The end is come now, indeed,’ said Ferdia. ‘I fall by that. But in truth I say, that I am sickly after thee; for it did not behove thee that I should fall by thy hand.’ And he spake these words:

‘O Hound of the beautiful feats. . . .’

Then Cuchullin ran towards him, and clasped his two arms about him, and lifted him with his arms, his armour, and his clothes across the ford northwards, that the slain man might be on the north of the ford, and not on the west with the men of Erin.

Then he laid down the wounded man; and a trance, a faint, and a weakness fell upon Cuchullin there as he saw the body of Ferdia. Laegh noticed that, and the men of Erin arose to come over to him. ‘Arise now, O Cuchullin,’ said Laegh, ‘for the men of Erin are coming to us, and it is not single combat they will give us, since Ferdia, son of Daman, son of Dáre, is fallen by thee.’

‘What availeth me to rise, O servant,’ said he, ‘after him that is fallen by me?’ And Cuchullin began to lament, and to mourn for Ferdia and to utter a panegyric over the slain. . . . ‘Great was the treachery and abandonment played on thee by the men of Erin, O Ferdia, to bring thee to combat and fight with me.

For it was not easy to combat and fight with me on the Táin bó Cuailgne.' And he uttered these words :

'O Ferdia, treachery hath defeated thee.  
 Unhappy was thy fate—  
 Thou to die, I to remain,—  
 Grievous for ever is our lasting separation.

When we were far away, yonder  
 With Scathach, the gifted Buanand,  
 We then resolved that till the end of time  
 We should not be hostile one to the other.

Dear to me was thy beautiful ruddiness,  
 Dear to me thy perfect form,  
 Dear to me thy clear, grey-blue eye,  
 Dear to me thy wisdom and thine eloquence.

There hath not come to the body-cutting combat,  
 There hath not been angered by manly exertion,  
 There hath not borne shield on the field of spears  
 Thine equal, O ruddy son of Daman.

Never until now have I met,  
 Since I slew Aife's only son,  
 Thy like in deeds of battle  
 Never have I found, O Ferdia.

Finnabair, daughter of Meave,  
 Notwithstanding her excellent beauty  
 It is putting a gad on the sand or sunbeam  
 For thee to expect her, O Ferdia.'

And he continued to gaze on Ferdia. At length he said: 'Well, my friend Laegh, strip Ferdia now, that I may see the brooch, for the sake of which he undertook the combat.' Laegh came, and stripped Ferdia. He took his armour and clothes off him, and he saw the pin, and he began to lament and moan afresh for him. . . . 'Now, O my friend Laegh, take the *gae bulga* out of the body of Ferdia ; for I cannot afford

to be without my weapon.' Then Laegh opened the body, and took out the *gae bulga*, and Cuchullin saw the weapon, bloody and red, lying by the side of the dead. And he spake these words :

' O Ferdia, sorrowful is the fate . . . '

' Good, O Cuchullin,' said the charioteer, ' let us leave the ford now. Too long have we been here.' ' We will leave now, O my friend Laegh,' said the hero, ' but every other combat and fight that ever I have made was to me but a game or a sport, compared to the combat and the fight of Ferdia.' And so he was saying, and he spake these words :

' Play was each, pleasure each,  
Till Ferdia faced the beach ;  
One had been our student-life,  
One in strife of school our place,  
One our gentle teacher's grace,  
Loved o'er all and each.

Play was each, pleasure each,  
Till Ferdia faced the beach ;  
One had been our wonted ways,  
One the praise for feat of fields ;  
Scathach gave two victor shields—  
Equal prize to each.

Play was each, pleasure each,  
Till Ferdia faced the beach ;  
Dear that pillar of pure gold,  
Who fell cold beside the ford.  
Hosts of heroes felt his sword  
First in battle's breach.

Play was each, pleasure each,  
Till Ferdia faced the beach ;

Lion fiery, fierce, and bright,  
 Wave whose might nothing withstands,  
 Sweeping, with the shrinking sands,  
 Horror o'er the beach.

Play was each, pleasure each,  
 Till Ferdia faced the beach ;  
 Loved Ferdia, dear to me :  
 I shall dree his death for aye,  
 Yesterday a mountain he,—  
 But a Shade to-day.<sup>1</sup>

### *The Healing of Cuchullin*

80—(LL. 89 *a*). From Ulster now came certain to comfort Cuchullin. Of whom were Senoll *uathach*, and Gege's two sons, Muredach and Cotreb. These carried him away to the burns and rivers of Conaille-Muirthemne, in order that against the current of those streams they should bathe and wash his hurts and wounds and gashes. Because into those waters the Tuatha dé Danann practised to throw balsamic plants and herbs of health for aid and relief to Cuchullin; so much so that with these simples the rivers' surface was chequered over green. The names then of Cuchullin's curative rivers were as follows: Sais, Buais, Bithlan, Finglas, Gleoir, Glenamain, Bedhg, Cumung, Cuillenn, Gainemain, Drong, Delt, Dubghlas.

Then by the men of Erin Ferdia's grave was dug, and all the rest of his funeral ceremony duly carried out.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Taken, by kind permission, from Dr. Sigerson's *Bards of the Gael and Gaul* (T. Fisher Unwin). The repetition of the first two lines, and the iteration and return in the rhythm, are features of the original Irish.

<sup>2</sup> This sentence is wanting in LL.

*Ceithern mac Fintan's 'hard-fight,' and the Diagnosis  
of his wounds*

**81-84.** Ceithern comes in frantic wise to avenge Cuchullin's hurts on Meave's host. After the combat he repairs to Cuchullin's tent to have his wounds attended to.<sup>1</sup>

**84-86.** As soon as he comes out of the marrow-bath, he rushes again into battle and is killed. Then came Inda his wife, daughter of Echaid *sálbuide* 'yellow heel,' to lament him.

*Finntan's 'tooth-fight' to avenge his son*

**87.** Finntan mac Niall *niamghlonnach* 'of the brilliant exploits' with thirty men comes to avenge his son. Finntan and one son only remain alive. The host falls back a day's march.

*Menn's red disgrace*

**88.** Salcholgan's son, Menn More, with twelve men from the Boyne, fight with the men of Erin. Menn is wounded and the twelve killed.

*Reochaid's bloodless fight*

**89.** Fatheman's son Reochaid with thrice fifty comes. Finnabair tells her mother that she loves him. The twelve Munster kings [chiefs of note], to each of whom Finnabair has been promised as sole and only wife,

<sup>1</sup> Of the exhibition of and pronouncement on his wounds, and of his 'marrow-bath,' a lengthened description from LL. is given in *Man. Cust.* vol. iii. note 59, pp. 97-101, to which we refer our readers. The modern MS., however, differs from it in many respects.

agree to avenge themselves upon Reochaid, and ere they separate, seven hundred valiant warriors fall.

Finnabair, hearing of the slaughter, dies of shame, but Reochaid returns to his own land none the worse.

*Iliach's 'lump-fight'*

90. Iliach mac Cas mac Fachtna mac Fiach mac Ross mac Rury abode at this time with his son's son, Laegaire *buadach*. In his own mind and with his people he matured a plan: to go and to set upon the men of Erin, to let loose his strength on them, to take their spoils and to have his triumph of them, and so to avenge Ulster's honour on them. 'Whether then I fall or come out of it, is all one,' he said. Then his pair of withered and wasted old horses, that hard by his dún stood on the shore, were harnessed for him; his ancient chariot was made ready and they were tackled to it, without cushions under him at all. He took on him his rough shield of iron with hard rim of silver that encircled it. At his left side he had his greyish-hilted, formidably-striking sword, and into the chariot by his side he received his pair of rickety-headed blunt-rusty spears. The chariot was well stored with stones, with great flat flags, heaped up around him. He thus accoutred came to attack the men of Erin; apart from his armament also he appeared before them stark naked. When the men of Erin saw him thus appointed, they vented jeers and mockery; but at sight of him Meave said: 'Right glad indeed were I to have all Ulster come equipped even so into the field.'

Dôche mac Mâgach happened in his way, and bade



him be welcome. 'Who is he that greets me?' Iliach asked. 'Confidant and friend of Laegaire *buadach* am I: Dôche mac Mâgach to wit.' 'Dear to me is thy salutation then; and for the sake of it come thou to me when I ply my fury on the host, to the end that when my vigour ebbs, when my hand shall weary at my weapons, thou and none other of the men of Erin be the one to hew off my head. For thy friend also, for Laegaire *buadach*, preserve thou my silver sword.' Then with his weapons he wrought on the men of Erin and, when those weapons all were shivered, his adversaries he pounded with stones with rocks with the earth's tabular flags. Which in their turn being expended, he would seize the next one of the men of Erin, and betwixt his hands and fore-arms and his side [body] so mightily compress him that he made of him a 'marrow-mess,' flesh and skin and bones and all; so that still the memory is green of the two marrow-messes: that which for the healing of Cethern mac Finntan Cuchullin made of Ulster's and of the men of Erin's kine, and that which Iliach made of the men of Erin's own bones; and the third prodigy [*i.e.* one of the three leading prodigies] of the Táin, was the countless number that fell in Iliach's 'lump-fight': so called because it was with rocks and stones and flags that he maltreated them. When all was done, again Dôche mac Mâgach came in his way, and Iliach said to him: 'Draw near to me now, Dôche, and take off my head, and keep my sword by thee for Laegaire *buadach*.' Dôche approached him, and with a sword-stroke smote off his head; the head and his spoils he carried away to Ailell and to Meave, and so 'Iliach's lump-fight' is the title of this episode in the Táin.

91. The thrice-fifty charioteers of Ulster attack the men of Erin with flags and stones.

92. Now Conall's father, Amargin, overtakes the host at Tailte, drives them northward, and posting himself on the west side of Tailte, he 'puts his left elbow under him,' and commences to pelt the host with rocks and flags and stones. He perseveres for three days and three nights.

Curói mac Daire meanwhile advances from Munster, intending to attack Cuchullin, but seeing him riddled with wounds after his recent combat with Ferdia, he refrains, and, posting himself to the north of the men of Erin, he begins answering Amargin's fire of stones. Between the two combatants the men of Erin fared badly, for high overhead among the clouds in air the ponderous flags, speeding on their hostile mission, continually met and were shattered, falling in great masses upon the men of Erin. At Meave's entreaty, the two agree to desist, and Curói takes himself off to his own country back again.

The host falls back a day's march to the northward, Amargin meanwhile holding his hand from pelting them.

### *Sualtach's<sup>1</sup> warning*

93. It was Sualtach son of Becaltach mac Móraltach, father of Cuchullin mac Sualtach: and it had been told him that in fighting with Calatin, his seven-and-twenty sons, and Glas mac Delga his grandson, and again in his combat with Ferdia mac Deman, Cuchullin his son was being wounded sore [yet had he not gone

<sup>1</sup> LL. has Sualtaim. The name is variously spelled Soaltainn, Soalta, Sualtan, etc.

to help him]. But now Sualtach spake thus: 'Is it the heaven that bursts, or the sea that runs away, or the earth that gapes, or is this that I hear the groaning of my son over-matched?'<sup>1</sup> Forthwith he came to visit him, and found him covered with blood, and hurts, and wounds. He stood over him and gave way to bemoan him and to lament for him; but this Cuchullin deemed to be discreditable and disgraceful: For well he knew that, hurt and damaged as he might be, Sualtach was not the man to avenge him. Sualtach's character in short was this: no hero was he, nor yet by any means a coward, but just an average good fighting-man; and Cuchullin said to him: 'Good now, Sualtach, have done with mourning and sorrowing for me. Get thee away to Emania; tell Ulster that for the future themselves must come and follow up their Táin, seeing that I no more am able to defend and rescue them. Because from the Monday before *samhain* etc.,<sup>2</sup> in the gaps and passes of Conaille-Muirthemne I have stood against the four great provinces of Erin, daily slaying a man at a ford [*i.e.* in single combat], and nightly a hundred warriors; while for thirty nights I had not manly fairplay of single combat. None comes to succour, none to comfort me; yet my hurts are such that I may not endure to have my fighting vesture touch my skin. They are "fetter-hooks" that maintain my mantle overhead; dried sops of grass they are that stuff my wounds; from crown to sole of me is not a spot on which a needle's point might rest but has some hurt; in all my body not an individual hair does grow but

<sup>1</sup> There is a parallel passage in the 'Siege of Howth,' where Cuchullin uses the words with reference to his foster-son.

<sup>2</sup> This 'etc.' is in the Irish text also.

a dew of red blood garnishes its point, only excepting my left arm that holds my shield, and even that bears three times fifty wounds. All which unless I may avenge now presently until the world's utmost last end I never shall requite.'

94. Sualtach on the *liath Macha* set out to take the news to Ulster, and when he was come alongside of Emania he cried out saying: 'In Ulster men are slain, women carried captive, kine driven,' yet from Ulster he had no answer. Which being so, right up to Emania's rampart he pushed on, and again: 'Men are slain, women carried captive, kine driven,' he said, and still a second time found not an answer. He penetrated to *lec na ngiall* 'the stone of hostages,' and there repeated the same words: 'Men are slain,' etc. 'Who are taken, and who are they that take?' asked Cathbad. 'Ailell and Meave they are that have harried and banished you,' Sualtach answered: 'your women, your little boys, your cattle, and your horses they have carried away; in the gaps and passes of Conaille-Muirthemne Cuchullin all alone delays and impedes Erin's four great provinces, all which till the world's utmost last end never shall be requited.' 'Death and destruction were the fitting portion of him who thus challenges the king,' said Cathbad. But Conachar the king answered: 'Tis true for Sualtach, what he says. 'Ay, true indeed,' all Ulster as one man assented.

95. In high dudgeon and with most spiteful inclination, Sualtach (because from Ulster he had not had an answer to his mind) turned and came away from them. True it is that under the rampart of Emania then the *liath Macha* started under Sualtach, so that the rider came into contact with his shield, the sharp rim of

which shore off his head; and there you have Sualtach's violent demise. To Emania the horse travelled back again, dragging the shield after him with the head upon it, and Sualtach's head uttered the same words: 'Men are killed,' etc., as before. Then Conachar said these words: 'The heavens are over our heads, the earth is under us, and the sea encompasses us round about; and unless the heavens with their showers of stars fall to earth, unless that same earth bursts about our feet, and unless the azure-like, blue-surfaced sea submerges the universe's continental face, every cow and every woman of them I will restore to her own byre and to her own dwelling-house.' At the moment a certain messenger of Conachar's people, Finnchad mac Troiglethan by name, chanced to be beside the king, who thereupon bade him go rally and muster Ulster; and it was so that through confusion begotten of his recent trance and childbed pains, Conachar enumerated to him their dead as well as their living, saying:—

'Finnchad, arise, I send thee. . . .'<sup>1</sup>

### *Gathering of the Men of Ulster*

96. No difficult task for Finnchad was this that Conachar had laid on him: Ulster in general, all so many of them as there were from Emania downwards and northwards, flocked to answer Conachar's design and his rising out. As for them that were from

<sup>1</sup> Here is a bare list of men and places to be visited, which in LL. extends to over one hundred items, most of them otherwise unknown to fame. In the modern MS. it is very much shorter, but corrupt. In both lists are mentioned divers whom we have seen slain by Cuchullin and others. This mental confusion of Conachar's is a very graphic touch.

Emania southwards and westwards, they tarried not for Conachar; rather they followed on the track of the great host, and held the very way taken by the Táin. The first day's march which from Emania the Ultonians under Conachar made, was prolonged to *irard cuillenn* and there that night they halted. 'Men,' said Conachar, 'for whom here tarry we?' 'For thine own sons,' they answered: 'for Fiachna and for Fiacha, that are gone from us to fetch thy daughter Feidelm *nóchruthach's* son Erc, son also of Cairbre king of Tara, to have him come with us.' The king said: 'By my word, I swear that here I will not make delay until the men of Erin shall have heard that I am risen from the birthpangs and distress in which I lay; for of my recovery they have no inkling, nor even whether as yet I live at all.' Conachar and Celtchar, accompanied with thirty hundred fierce chariot-fighters, came on therefore, and came upon eight-score full-grown men belonging to Ailell's and to Meave's especial people, these having with them eight-score women-captives. This namely had been their proportion of the captivity of Ulster: that into every man's hand a woman-prize had been delivered. Conachar and Celtchar deprived them of their eight-score heads, so also rescuing the women. Hitherto *áth irmidhe* had been the name of the ford at which thus they encountered; thenceforth its appellation has been *áth féinne*, for the reason that upon its edges both warrior-bands, one on the east, the other on the west, fought out their quarrel.

97. To return to the men of Erin: that night they passed in Slane of Meath.<sup>1</sup> Conachar and Celtchar on

<sup>1</sup> *Sleamhain* or Slane in Westmeath is not to be confused with the village of the same name on the river Boyne in Meath, called in Irish *baile Sldine*. See Ann. Four Mast. A.D. 492 note.

their side fell back to *irard cuillenn* again, and with the rest of Ulster there abode. In which same night it was that in his sleep Celtchar uttered a rhapsody. At Slane that night also it was that Cormac *conloingeas* being with the men of Erin pronounced a rhapsody. In the same night again at Slane with the men of Erin, Dubtach *dael Uladh* expressed a rhapsody.<sup>1</sup> Then suddenly Dubtach sprang up out of his sleep and [as a consequence of these rhapsodies emitted by the three heroes as they slept] a frenzy seized and confused the host, to such effect that they set-to and with their spear-points and cutting implements made a 'weapon-clang' so great, that in the heart of the encampment a hundred men expired with horror of the din that they created. At all events, what with these dreams and bogies and with these prognostications that were revealed to them, by no means was this the most comfortable night that the men of Erin ever had passed.

*Mac Roth's scouting mission*

98. Ailell complains that from the Monday preceding *samhain* until now he has harried Ulster and the Dalaradia and Cuailgne, carried away spoil and left the hills levelled behind him. He proposes to retreat to *Magh ái*, where they may offer him battle if they will. Before going, however, he sends Mac Roth to scan the great broad plain of Meath and to learn whether Ulster comes indeed, in which case he will tarry for them, it being 'no good king's trick to do a

<sup>1</sup> In LL. these rhapsodies are given in full; in the modern MS., opening words only; but these are ejaculatory merely, not to be Englished intelligibly.

good run away.’<sup>1</sup> With this commission Mac Roth set out to observe Meath’s vast expanse, nor long had he been at his post when he heard a noise, an uproar, a booming and a crackling which not to any trivial matter might be likened, but was as though the heaven fell prone upon the face of the earth; as though the azure sea o’erflowed the solid surface; as though the earth in labour were rent asunder; as though the forest’s trees falling were dashed into each other’s prongs and forks. Even the wild things were banished from their lairs, so that under them the open plain of Meath hardly was distinguishable. To Ailell and to Meave with this intelligence Mac Roth came back, and: ‘Fergus, who comes there?’ queried Ailell. ‘Good now,’ came Fergus’s reply, ‘the noise [etc.] that he has heard is the thunder and the crackling made by the men of Ulster as before their chariots they with their swords hew down the woods; and that is what has covered the face of Meath with creatures put to flight.’ ‘Again as I looked,’ resumed Mac Roth, ‘I saw a huge grey mist that filled the void and intervening space betwixt the heavens and the earth. I deemed they had been islands upon lochs that I perceived in the sloping cavities of that mist. . . .’ [Here follows a most diffuse list of phenomena observed and retailed by Mac Roth. As he relates each one, Fergus is asked to interpret it; that hero then scrupulously recapitulates Mac Roth’s words, and gives his own interpretation: the mists above are breaths of Ulster’s horses; the islands, heads of warriors, hoods of chariots, showing up through the fog aforesaid, and so on, and so on.]

‘As for all that,’ quoth Meave, ‘I value it but little:

<sup>1</sup> He seems to quote a proverb.



we have good fighting men and warriors that will speak with them.' 'Alas for thy confidence,' said Fergus; 'neither in Ireland nor in Scotland is there a host that can quell Ulster when from their childpangs once they rise, and when once their fury kindles.'

*Mac Roth's second mission*

99. Erin's four great provinces that night pitched camp in Clartha, and posted sentinels to keep a good look-out so that Ulster should not without advertisement or warning fall on them. Then with thirty hundred fierce chariot-fighters Conachar and Celtchar came to Slane, where but a very short stay they made; thence they proceeded to Ailell's and Meave's camp, with intent thus to anticipate the rest of Ulster in reddening their hands upon the men of Erin. Not long had Mac Roth been in observation, when straight out of the north-east he noted the advent of a huge body of horses. He returns at once to Ailell, to Meave, and to the chiefs of the men of Erin. The king questions him: 'Well, Mac Roth, and hast thou this day seen any man of Ulster on this army's track?' Mac Roth told him what he had seen. 'What may be the number of those horses?' Ailell asked. 'Not less than thirty hundred chariots, that is to say, ten chariots and twenty hundreds.'<sup>1</sup> 'Ulster's warriors with Conachar are those,' said Ailell, and: 'What meanest thou, Fergus, threatening us hitherto with the reek and dust and panting breaths [as a while ago set

<sup>1</sup> The modern MS. has three hundred chariots in some places, but this must be incorrect. Both in the modern MS. and LL. this final calculation agrees.

forth by Mac Roth] of a huge host in the plain,<sup>1</sup> when yonder mean company is all thou canst produce to give us battle?' 'A little too early thou complainest of them,' Fergus returned; 'and soon shalt thou know that they number more than are there.' Hereat Meave proposed as follows: 'Let us then devise some plan, perfect yet expeditious; for positive it is that that enormous man, most rudely fierce, all primed with hottest energy: Conachar mac Fachtna king of Ulster, son of all Ireland's arch-king, will assault us. Of the men of Erin therefore be there now made and held ready before him an enclosure,<sup>2</sup> open-mouthed indeed, but with a force of thirty hundred men prepared to shut it as a door behind him; for the fellows must be taken and not slain, inasmuch as they are not so many as that with honour we may do more than to make captives of them.' Note now that this was 'the third most abundantly comical saying' that was expressed on the Táin:<sup>3</sup> that Conachar namely must be captured alive, and prisoners be made of the thirty hundred of Ulster's gentles whom he had along with him.

100. When Conachar's son Cormac *conloingeas* [who was with Fergus in Meave's camp] heard this, he was aware that unless presently he took vengeance of Meave for her arrogant speech, never in the future would he do so. With his own troop of three thousand therefore Cormac arose to fall on Meave and Ailell. The king and queen for their part, either one with thirty hundred,

<sup>1</sup> This refers to Fergus's well-known sympathy with Ulster.

<sup>2</sup> Lit. 'a man-pen,' 'a man-fold,' *i.e.* men disposed in the form of a pen, a fold, a corral. The whole host (except the three thousand) were to be so drawn up.

<sup>3</sup> *i.e.* one of the three most comical.

rose too; as also did their sons the Maines and the sons of Magach, each with as many. The Gailiana, they of Munster, and the *populus* of Tara rose and by them mediation was employed successfully, and every man of the disputants was induced to sit down 'in the vicinity of his weapons.'<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless Meave did make a formidable man-fold to receive Conachar, with a body of three thousand to close it when he should have entered in. With intent to force it, Conachar made for the enclosure nor ever so much as looked for an opening; so far from that, right in front of his own and of his men's faces he burst 'a gap of two hundred': one of a hundred on his right hand, another of a hundred on his left. Right through them all to the further side he went, and in their very centre wrought them dire confusion. In the result there perished of them eight hundred men of war; yet without blood drawn and without a scratch he came away from them, and so to Slane to rejoin Ulster.

*Mac Roth's third mission*

101. Then said Ailell: 'Good now, men, let there go from us one to inspect Ulster, and to learn in what guise they enter on this plain of Meath; that he recite to us the description of their arms and gear and armature, of their kings and regal chiefs and champions and battle heroes, to listen to the which shall be to us a pastime.' 'Who ought to go?' asked all in general, and: 'Who but Mac Roth, the royal messenger?' said Fergus. So Mac Roth went and seated himself in

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* they piled or stacked their arms, instead of retaining them on their persons or within arm's reach.

Slane of Meath; and from early morning's first dim glimmering till the evening's twilight, Ulster continued to march in and to take position on the Hill of Slane. In such wise they came, that during all that time 'the earth was not naked under them';<sup>1</sup> every division under its chief, every corps under its gentles, every company under its captain, while each lord and leader was followed by the full strength of his force, of his gathering and muster, and every one of them all distinct and apart. Thus then it was that Ulster reached and covered the Hill of Slane in Meath.

### *Mac Roth's Report*

102. Back to the spot where Meave and Ailell were, and the chiefest among the men of Erin, Mac Roth returned with the delineation of those numerous corps which he had seen. Then Ailell questioned him, and the queen joined in asking: 'Good now, Mac Roth, and what like were they as they came up on the Hill of Slane in Meath?' The messenger made answer: 'That I know not, excepting only to this extent: '<sup>2</sup>

(i) Reochaid mac Fatheman's Corps. 'A corps there came upon the Hill that is in Slane of Meath, and at

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* they were serried so that all along their line of march, so long as it lasted, there was not a patch of ground to be seen bare of a man.

<sup>2</sup> Here follows Mac Roth's description of the several companies of Ulster's host, with their leaders. We content ourselves with the briefest outline. In Appendix iii. will be found the list of the chiefs as they appeared successively, each with his battalion, before the eyes of Mac Roth. It will be seen that the modern recension contains several passages not in the Book of Leinster. In *Man. Cust.*, vol. iii. pp. 91-97, portions of these descriptive passages will be found translated from the Book of Leinster, and in vol. ii. Lect. xv. pp. 315-318, an account is given of the warriors' weapons.

their head was one than whom not many warriors are handsomer or more comely. . . .'

Ailell asked: 'Fergus, who is that?' and Fergus answered: 'I know well; he is one that is half the battle, Reochaid mac Fatheman from Righdown in the North. . . .'

(ii) Fergus mac Leide's Corps. 'Another corps there came [etc.], and at their head a formidable warrior, thick-thighed, and indeed in every limb of him as it were grosser than a whole man. Black hair he had, a ruddy face, most haughty eyes that flashed. . . .' Ailell asked: 'Fergus, who is he?' 'We know well; that is mine own tried comrade and con-disciple, Fergus mac Leide, from Rilinn in the North.'

(iii) Conachar's Corps. 'Another corps there came upon the hill that is in Slane of Meath,' Mac Roth went on, 'the which, to look at them, I judged to be of thirty hundred. Forthwith they all put off their raiment of defence and, to make their lord a seat, dug and threw up a sodded mound on which then, upon the highest pinnacle of the hill, he, surrounded by his sitting host, sat to wait until the rest should have arrived. Accordingly, as each leader did come up, he with his people likewise would sit down.'

'Fergus,' said Ailell, 'who is he?' 'Yonder hero, that on the topmost summit of the hill has so enthroned himself, is Conachar son of Fachtna *fathach*, arch-king of Ulster, and son of all Ireland's monarch.'

(iv) Cumsraid *menn's* Corps. 'Another corps there came [etc.],' pursued Mac Roth, 'in number less than thirty hundred. . . . This warrior seated himself on the left hand of him who had preceded him on the hill, and hard by himself his people too sat down.'

Which thing although we say, yet actually sit they did not; much rather had they their knees on the ground and their shields' rims to their chins, because they deemed it all too long till they should be let go at us. Moreover, I could distinguish that a painful stutter afflicted the tall fierce leader of this band.'

'Fergus,' said Ailell, 'who is he?' 'Conachar's son Cumsraidh *menn Macha* 'Macha's stutterer,' accompanied with Ulster's sons of chiefs and nobles. . . .'

(v) Sencha's Corps. He, though ordinarily the foremost to pacify the men of Erin, on this occasion uses his oratory to stir up the host of Ulster to deeds of valour.

(vi) Celtchar's Corps from *dún dá lethglas*.

(vii) Amargin's Corps.

(viii) Eoghan mac Durthacht's Corps: not less than thirty hundred.

(ix) Laegaire *buadach's* Corps. 'Another corps there came [etc.], and in impetuous style it was they gained the hill. Heavy the horror and great the terror that they brought with them [*i.e.* their advance inspired these feelings]. Their raiment streamed out behind them. In their van was a great-headed warrior: horrific, ravening, covered with sparse and clear-grey hair, his head adorned with two big yellow eyes.'

'Fergus,' said Ailell, 'who is that?' 'That I know well; neither battle nor single foe may withstand him that comes there: Laegaire *buadach*, son of Iliach, out of Imal in the north.'

(x) Munremar's Corps. 'Another corps there came [etc.], at the head of which strode a thick-necked, brawny warrior, crop-haired, with scarred visage crimsoned with recent wounds, with blue and blazing

eye; while upwards projected over him a spear diversely shaded and tinted with blood.'

(xi) Conna mac Morna's Corps.

(xii) Feidlimid mac Chilairchetail's Corps.

(xiii) Feradach *finn fechnach's* Corps.

(xiv) Corps of Ros, Daire, and Imchill, sons of Fiacha: keepers of the Brown Bull of Cuailgne.

(xv) Corps of Fiacha and Fiachna, two young sons of Conachar.

(xvi) Errge *echbél's* Corps.

(xvii) Menn mac Salcholgan's Corps.

(xviii) Fergna mac Finnchonna's Corps.

(xix) Furbaide *ferbenn's* Corps.

(xx) Corps of Ulster's poets, accompanying Fercheirtne the Ollave, Athairne the Poet-in-chief, and Ailell mac Cairbre whom men call *miltenga* 'honey-tongue.'<sup>1</sup>

(xxi) Corps of Cathbad and his two sons. As they move along they raise their eyes to heaven and watch the clouds; the whole company follow their example, and against the elements hurl their spells, setting them a-warring with each other, so that downwards on the men of Erin they discharge shower-clouds of fire. These are Ulster's wizards, by their incantations striving to forecast the issue of the final decisive battle of Gâirech and Ilgâirech now about to take place.

(xxii) Corps of Finghin the leech. This is an exceeding numerous corps, bright-faced, and arrayed in special garb; every man at his waist carries a *fearbolg*,<sup>2</sup> used by them as receptacles of their medicaments. So

<sup>1</sup> The Corps numbered xx.-xxvi. are not mentioned in LL.

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.* 'a man-bag,' the receptacle for chess-men, meaning here a bag similar in size and make.

great is Finghin's skill, that by merely seeing the smoke of the house in which the patient lies, he can diagnose his sickness, and by simply hearing what a wound is, can heal it.

(xxiii) Corps of Glas and Menn, sons of Uitechar.

(xxiv) Triscathal's Corps. This hero is accompanied by a man of enormous strength and gloomy countenance. Seven chains he has around his neck, and to the end of each are bound seven men. These then he drags along in such fashion that their noses bang against the ground; they in their turn reviling him until he gives them respite. Triscathal himself is no less powerful, and can fling a 'strength-stone'<sup>1</sup> into the air as high as flight of lark or swallow.

(xxv) Corps of Conachar's sons Glas, Maine, and Conaing.

(xxvi) Corps of Conall *cernach* son of Amargin. Their leader is an active handsome young man: one that has light-yellow hair, above and all over whose head though a sack of acorns had been shot, yet never a one of them would have reached the ground through the curled twisted volume of his locks. Bluer than *bugha-flower*<sup>2</sup> is his one eye; blacker than beetle's back the other. His beard matches his hair and is bifurcated. . . .'

(xxvii) Erc mac Cairpre's Corps.<sup>3</sup> In their midst, in crimson mantle, is a little ruddy freckled boy with golden brooch on breast and, next his skin, a shirt of

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* one used for competitive tests of strength.

<sup>2</sup> Some blue flower to which eyes frequently are compared. Whether blue-bell or hyacinth or some variety of lavender is uncertain.

<sup>3</sup> Erc's father, here mentioned by Fergus, had been killed by Cuchullin at the battle of *Ros na rígh*. Some accounts make Erc the slayer of Cuchullin.



regal satin, broidered with red gold. He has a white shield rimmed and otherwise lavishly bedecked with the same red gold; at his waist, a little golden-hilted sword; upright he holds a light sharp spear.

Fergus takes these to be the men of Tara with Erc mac Cairpre *niafer*, whose mother is Conachar's daughter Feidelm, and who without his father's leave must now be come to help the king his grandfather. 'Should they indeed be those for whom I take them,' continues Fergus, 'then shall ye find them to be a sea that drowns; for by that company and the little boy that is among them, this impending battle shall be won against you.'

(xxviii) Here occurs a very long, exceedingly florid, and redundant passage (not in L.L.), describing three corps accompanied by three 'battle-wheels' and three castles (evidently of the old classical military movable type); which wheels, when launched at the masses of the enemy, produce a terrific effect. Each wheel has four openings, and as they career along, a reckless gang of the opposing party [this so far takes place among themselves] snatch up twelve huge iron bars with one forked end, jump into the wheels and, by digging their forks into the ground (four to each wheel), arrest and as it were anchor them. Vast numbers of horses too these people have. Their pugnacity is such that when they have a battle in prospect they cannot in the meantime possess their souls in peace; in default of an enemy therefore they turn to and tackle one another.

Mac Roth professes great amazement at the utterly unwonted form, attire, and mode of warfare of this party, over whom three wonderful bird-flocks fly; while round about the wheels three red-mouthed scall-

crows circle, uttering forecasts of the coming battle. Fergus remembers that he has seen such things before when, in company with the king of Spain, he invaded Africa and gave battle to the Carthaginians. He has also heard from Lebarcham that the men of Ulster had brought back the wonderful wheels from Germany.<sup>1</sup>

(xxix) Cuchullin's corps from Muirthemne. This final corps, in spite of their brilliant array, are sad and downcast all: clamorous grief has invaded them; and their ranks are as orphans in the absence of their aggressive natural champion, Cuchullin. Fergus bursts forth into praise of their courage and exploits. 'Happy they that shall have their help; woe to them whom they shall oppose! They of themselves are sufficient to encounter with the men of Erin, and in this coming morning's battle to fight around and for their chief.' There, then, you have the corps sent by Conachar and Ulster to contend in the Raid for the kine of Cuailgne.

103. Here Mac Roth is aware of a great uproar proceeding from some point external to the battalion. It is Cuchullin who, making violent effort to rise from his bed of convalescence, desires to rejoin his battalion and take part in the final conflict. With help of hooks and clasps and ropes he is forcibly constrained and on his bed of healing supine laid.

104. Two female lampooners from the camp of the men of Erin stand over Cuchullin and in hypocrisy weep over him, telling him that Ulster will be routed, Conachar slain, and that Fergus will perish in the mêlée.

<sup>1</sup> This passage, full of omissions and distortions, is a late interpolation. It occurs only in the modern MS. and plainly was too much for the illiterate modern scribe.

105. The Morrighu utters a plaint between the two hosts: 'ravens shall pick the necks of men . . . etc.'

106. Cuchullin charges Laegh to keep him well-informed of the events of the day. Laegh reports that already he sees a little herd emerge from yon western camp and come forth on the plain [*i.e.* the Brown Bull and his following]. After them come a band of lads endeavouring to stay and restrain them. Out of the eastern camp [Ulster's] he sees another company of lads coming to oppose them. 'True indeed,' said Cuchullin: 'an occasion of great battle is that little herd upon the plain, for sake of which the young men from the west and from the east shall meet in fray.' A skirmish ensues between them.

Cuchullin now bids Laegh devote himself to stirring up Ulster to battle. Thereupon Laegh set himself to arouse Ulster, and he pronounced these words: 'Let Macha's kings arise, those doers of great exploits . . .'<sup>1</sup>

### *Battle of Gáirech and Ilgáirech*

[Of this great final battle of the Táin, in which the whole collected forces of Ulster were engaged in conflict with the men of Erin, we can give only a brief outline.]

107. In response to the call of Laegh and of Cuchullin, all Ulster springs to arms; so great is the haste that the warriors grasp their weapons, but do not otherwise array themselves. Those whose tent-doors face eastward force a westward passage through their tents, not pausing to make the circuit.

<sup>1</sup> Thus cut short in the ms. LL. contains a few more phrases of the rhapsody, as also of that of the Morrighu on preceding page.

108. Conachar commands Sencha to restrain Ulster from warfare until the 'lucky moment' for them be come, *i.e.* until the sun be full risen and flood with its light the glens and hills of all Ireland. Then Sencha stirs them up with uttering of these words, 'Let Macha's kings arise . . .'

109. Laegh sees the men of Erin prepare themselves hurriedly for battle and fall to hew down and to fell the men of Ulster.

110. The nine chariot-fighters of Norway's warriors and Meave's 'trios' of the men of Erin are enumerated.

111. The queen incites Fergus to bestir himself against her adversaries. Fergus replies that had he once again his own inherited sword, the *caladcholg*, the sword of Léide, he would obey her behest.

112. Ailell commands his charioteer to bring the sword of Fergus, which at Ailell's request for a twelve-month he has guarded. Fergus greets his sword. Meave requires of Fergus that he shall spare none 'except it be some very dear friend.'

113. Fergus Ailell and Meave enter the battle. Thrice is Ulster routed northwards before them; but the *Cual gae*<sup>1</sup> 'a fagot of spears and swords' meeting the men of Erin, the rout is reversed and the latter are driven back to their former positions.

114. Conachar, hearing of the rout of his people, leaves in charge of the household of the Red Hall the post held by him, and goes down to discover who has forced Ulster to flight.

<sup>1</sup> The *Cual gae* is mentioned in the 'Siege of Howth,' and also in the section of the 'battle-wheels,' in the muster of the Ulstermen on the Hill of Slane. It may have been a sort of large *chevaux de frise*, mounted perhaps with a wheel at either end of the spar in which the weapons would be set, and movable.

115. Fergus encounters Conachar, and strikes three defiant strokes, on Conachar's shield the *bócháin*. The shield cries aloud and the three arch-waves of Erin give response, and all the bucklers of Ulster scream. Fergus demands who it is that opposes his shield to him, and the Ultonians in an insulting speech cry out that it is Conachar.

116. Fergus thereupon takes in both his hands the *caladcholg*, swings it backwards until the point touches the earth, and is about to strike three 'vicious strokes' for his honour's sake, when Conachar's son Cormac seizes him in his arms and prays him to deliver them instead upon three hillocks that stand behind the host. Fergus consents, and the king falls back. Overhead of the host then delicately Fergus turns his hand, and from the three hillocks in question shears their heads; and there they still are for all the men of Erin to behold, being 'Meath's three bare ones' or, 'the topless three of Meath.' As for that sword of Fergus's which was Lêide's sword out of *sidhe*-land, this was the manner of it: when he was fain to strike with it, it equalled in size the rainbow of the air.<sup>1</sup>

117. Cuchullin, hearing the cry of Conachar's shield, demands who dares strike it and he still living. He learns that it is Fergus who has made the shield resound, and that the hosts have advanced as far as Gâirech. 'My word I pledge,' he cries, 'that by the time I catch them they shall not have reached Ilgâirech.' Then he puts forth a mighty effort, and bursts the bonds that restrain him, scattering them to the farthest borders of Ulster and Connacht, and ejecting the dry

<sup>1</sup> O'Curry, *Man. Cust.*, vol. ii. p. 320. This stroke was reckoned one of the three best cuts of Erin, *Silva Gadelica*, vol. ii. p. 345.

wisps from his wounds to the firmament's ethereal vault.<sup>1</sup>

118. Of his armament he finds remaining only fragments of his chariot, a handsbreadth of the spindles clinging to the wheels, and a fist's-length of the *cret*.<sup>2</sup> This ruin he picks up, and setting his face for Fergus mac Róich he makes his way through the press of Erin's host, calling on him to turn. Fergus demands who calls on him with such big words, and is reminded by Cuchullin of his engagement to fly before him in this battle, even as he (Cuchullin) had pretended to fly before him when Fergus had no sword. Fergus consents, seeing the wounds of Cuchullin, and falls back three full warrior-paces, then swinging right round he is followed by the men of Erin who, breaking their ranks, turn as one man and in rout stream westward over the hill. The host continues to flee from noon to twilight, being pressed behind by Cuchullin and his men.

119. Meave then takes it on herself to bring up the rear and to cover the retreat of her whole host; but the Brown Bull of Cuailgne, with his fifty heifers and eight of her own messengers, she by a circuitous way sends off to Cruachan; to the end that whoso might, or might not win thither, the Brown Bull at all events (even as she had promised) should do the distance.

120. The host recross the Shannon at Athmore, 'great ford' (now Athlone).

121. Cuchullin takes his sword the *cruaidén cadat*-

<sup>1</sup> A note [not in LL.] is here added by the copyist to say that it must have been the 'powerful friends' of Cuchullin, *i.e.* the *sidhe*-folk, who transported these objects for illustration and blazoning of the story.

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.*, the shell or bottom of the chariot's body.

*chenn*<sup>1</sup> from Laegh, and strikes off the heads of three rocks for an affront and insult to Connacht, in order that so often as 'Meath's three bare ones' should be mentioned, westward yonder 'Athlone's three bare ones' abidingly should give the answer.<sup>2</sup>

122. Fergus falls to contemplate the host as it recrosses the ford. 'Verily and indeed,' he exclaims, 'the upshot of this day, resulting as it does from following a woman's lead, is orthodox completely. To-day this host is cleared and swept away; and even as, without choice of path or forming of design, a brood mare preceding her foals wanders in a land unknown, such is this army's plight to-day.'

123. Cuchullin turns and seeks the place where are Conachar and his nobles; he finds him lamenting for the woes undergone by Cuchullin in warding the province:

'How goes it, O Cú of Cuailgne . . . ?'

124. Here again we proceed to chronicle Meave's doings.

She had the men of Erin mustered to Cruachan, nor suffered the host to disperse before they should see the battle of the Bulls, and what kind of parting they would have; because, as already stated, during the fighting of the battle the Brown Bull accompanied with fifty heifers had been brought to Cruachan. When therefore the Brown Bull first saw the beautiful but

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* the 'Little Hard'; 'little' being used as a term of endearment, not in regard to size. This inherited sword of Cuchullin (not to be confused with the *Gae bulga*) is fully described in a tract called 'Cormac's Adventure in the Land of Promise,' ed. Whitley Stokes, *Irische Texte*, dritte serie, 1 heft.

<sup>2</sup> See *ante*, sec. 116.

trackless land that lay before him, loudly he emitted three hoarse bellowings; whereas by reason of the White-horned of Aei not a male of all that country's cattle as comprised between the four fords of Aei (as *áth Mogha, áth slisen, áth coltna, áth merchon*) durst in the way of bellowing utter sound louder than a *gnuasach*.<sup>1</sup> Therefore rabidly, head high in air, the White-horned hastened in the direction of the Brown Bull's roar.

125. A question now arises as to who shall be deputed to witness the battle of the Bulls. It is decided that Briccriu, son of Cairpre ['son of Garbadh,' LL.], shall go.

126. Briccriu takes up his position in a gap whence to perfection he can view the beasts. The bulls sight each other. They, as it were, dig down for courage, and over their withers and their shoulders throw up the earth; as though they had been globes of wild-fire, their eyes in their heads glow red; like a smith's bellows in the smithy their nostrils are distended, and their breaths speed like sparkle-showers of ruddy-rushing fire. Wickedly they butt together with dull resonance, and fall to bore and hole, to rend and crush, each one his fellow.

127. In their headlong course Briccriu is caught by the bull's hoofs, and thrust down a man's length into the earth. That was the manner of Briccriu mac Cairpre's violent and tragic death. Then Cormac *conloingeas* laid hold of a spear's shaft that completely filled his grip, and from ear to tail of the Brown Bull laid on three mighty strokes, saying 'May we not

<sup>1</sup> A suppressed sound, almost meditative in its character, sometimes emitted by horned cattle.



long possess, nor ever plume ourselves upon this precious prize of ours that cannot dispose of a mere calf of his own age!' Which when the Brown Bull heard (for he had human understanding) a paroxysm of exceeding fury infected him; he turned upon the White-horned, and for a great while the two pushed and gored each other. So long as day lasted for the men of Erin they persisted to contemplate the battle of the bulls; when night came, all that they could do was to listen to their sound and noise. In that same night the bulls traversed the greater part of all Ireland: everywhere in Erin where there is a *clódh na dtarbh* 'the turning of the bulls,' or a *berna na dtarbh* 'the bull's gap' etc., 'tis from the Brown Bull and the White-horned those places have their appellation.

128. On the morrow the Brown Bull is seen coming over Cruachan from the westward, with the White-horned in a mangled mass sticking on and about his horns. The seven Maines arise with intent to kill the Brown Bull in revenge for his violence to the Connacht bull. 'Whither go those fellows?' shouted Fergus, and the general answer was: 'They go to kill the Brown Bull of Cuailgne.' 'Then my word I pledge to it,' Fergus threatened, 'that unless with his spoils and fruits of his victory intact ye license the Brown Bull to pass you by in peace and to regain his own country, all that has been done to the [vanquished] bull shall be but a little thing in comparison with what I will do now.' Thrice now the Donn roared forth the primest bellowing that his voice could furnish, so celebrating and glorying in his triumph. As for the men of Erin, dread of Fergus restrained them that they should not meddle with him.

129. From westward of Cruachan, therefore, the Brown Bull of Cuailgne pursued his way, and there he left a *cruach* 'conical heap' of the Finnbennach's *ae* 'liver'; hence the name *cruachan*<sup>1</sup> (or *cruacha*) *aei*, 'heap (or heaps) of liver.' . . . On he went again until he met Shannon's river, and was on the brink that borders *áth mór*, 'great ford'; a second time he drank, nor, while his drinking lasted, permitted one drop of all the flood to run down past him. This done, he raised his head, and from him fell the Finnbennach's either loin; whence *áth luain*, 'loin's ford' (Athlone). Onward still and into the land of Meath, to a place where he let fall the Finnbennach's [remaining] liver . . . and the well-versed in questions of the kind aver, that from the *trom* 'liver,' of the White-horned, here fallen from the Donn of Cuailgne, we have the term *áth truim* 'ford of liver' (Trim, Co. Meath.)

130. The Brown Bull kept going, and so attained to the summit of *sliabh Breg*, from which point, as he looked abroad, he saw *benna Cuailgne* 'the hills of Cuailgne'; then, at sight of his own borders, and with the view of his own country, a great spirit rose within him. Northwards now he turned and entered into the land of Cuailgne, the madness of his frenzy being so great that in his way there came none such but perished by him. One gathering of people,<sup>2</sup> indeed, that chanced before him made shift to evade him; for

<sup>1</sup> For another explanation of the name Cruachan, see *Silva Gadelica*, vol. ii., Extracts XXII. vi. vii. p. 539.

<sup>2</sup> In the Book of Leinster these are 'women and boys and little folk that made lamenting for the Brown Bull of Cuailgne.' In spite of this token of affection 'the Donn turned upon the women [etc.] and executed a great slaughter of them.' The LL. account of these concluding scenes with the Donn differs considerably from ours and is less diffuse.

when [in good time] they had noted the Donn's rude approach, they cried out, 'A sudden-charging bull comes at us!' whence from that time to this the expression *tultarbh*, 'sudden-charging bull,' is in vogue. Finally the Brown Bull of Cuailgne came up to them;<sup>1</sup> he turned his back to a hillock, and made his bellowing to resound; his heart in his body was rent by a 'blood-burst,' and in the form of 'black mountains of dark-red gore,' he vomited it up through his mouth.

There then and so far you have the proceedings of the Brown Bull of Cuailgne, and the Driving of the Táin<sup>2</sup> by Meave, daughter of Eochaid and Ailell More mac Magach, and [the disputing of it by] the Ultonians.

[In LL. the following note is added in the hand of the scribe, Finn mac Gorman, Bishop of Kildare, but not as emanating from him: 'A blessing on all such as conscientiously shall recite the *Táin* as it stands here, and shall not give it any other form.']

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<sup>1</sup> To whom? The narrative must here be defective.

<sup>2</sup> Here Táin has its natural sense of 'a herd,' *i.e.* the Donn and his company of heifers.



THE INSTRUCTION OF CUCHULLIN  
TO A PRINCE

THESE precepts, delivered by Cuchullin when on his sickbed to Lugaid *reoderg* or *riabh nderg* 'of the Red Stripes,' on the occasion of the election of that prince to the throne of Tara, give us not only an interesting insight into the manner in which a supreme monarch was chosen in pagan times, but a conception of the high moral qualities that were expected from the chief ruler of Erin. Many of the precepts here instilled by Cuchullin are shown by the testimony of the Brehon Laws to have been rules legally incumbent upon the chieftains. The 'Instruction of Cuchullin' forms a detached episode in the romance entitled the 'Sickbed of Cuchullin.' It has been preserved only in a single manuscript, the *Leabhar na hUidhre* or Book of the Dun Cow. It has been translated by O'Curry in *Atlantis*, vol. i. pp. 362-392, and vol. ii. pp. 98-124, and again by Mr. Brian O'Looney in *Facsimiles of National ms. of Ireland*, edited by Mr. Gilbert, part i., plates xxxvii., xxxviii., and part ii. appendix iv. These two translations are almost identical, but they differ materially from a French translation more recently made by M. D'Arbois de Jubainville, and published by him in *L'Épopée celtique en Irlande*, pp. 186-191. I have followed the translation of O'Curry, but have adopted a few phrases from the French version where Mr. O'Curry's translation is obscure. These variations are shown by the use of square brackets.

## X

### THE INSTRUCTION OF CUCHULLIN TO A PRINCE

A MEETING of the four great provinces of Erin was held at this time, to seek out a person on whom should be bestowed the sovereignty of Erin; because it was deemed an evil that the Hill of Supremacy and Lordship of Erin, Tara namely, should be without the rule of a king; moreover, they deemed it an evil that the tribes should be without a king's government to judge their houses. For a period of seven years the men of Erin had been without the government of a king over them; that is, from the death of Conaire at Bruidhen da Derga to the time of this great meeting of the four provinces of Erin in the court of [Erc, son of] Cairbre *niafer* at Tara of the Kings.<sup>1</sup>

Now these were the princes that were gathered to that meeting: Meave and Ailell, Curóí, Tighernach *tetbannach* son of Luchta, and Finn Mac Rossa. These would not admit the Ultonians to their council in the election of a king, because they were of one accord opposed to Ulster.

A bull-feast was prepared by them, that by its

<sup>1</sup> Conaire môr, monarch of Erin, was slain at the destruction of Bruidhen da Derga, A.M. 5160.

means they might discover on whom the sovereignty should be bestowed.

This was the manner in which the bull-feast was prepared. A white bull was killed, and one man ate his sufficiency of the flesh and of the broth; and he slept after having partaken of that meal, and a charm of truth was pronounced upon him by four druids. Then in a dream was shown to him the form of the man who should be made king, and his appearance and manner, with the sort of work that he was engaged in. Out of his sleep the man uttered a cry and he described to the kings the thing he saw, namely, a young man strong and noble, with two red streaks around him, and he sitting over the pillow of a man in a decline in Emain Macha.

Then was a message sent with this description to Emain Macha. Now the men of Ulster were at that time gathered round Conachar in Emania, where Cuchullin lay upon his bed of sickness. The messenger told his story to the king and to the nobles of Ulster also. Then said Conachar, 'There is with us a free and nobly descended youth of that description, namely Lugaid *reoderg*, the son of the Three Fair Twins: the pupil of Cuchullin; over whose pillow he sits alone within, solacing his tutor, that is Cuchullin, who is in his bed of decline.

Suddenly Cuchullin arose and began to instruct his pupil. These are his words:

### *The Instruction of Cuchullin*

'[Stir not up sharp and ignoble contests.] Be not flighty, inaccessible, haughty. Be not intractable,



proud, precipitate, passionate. Be not bent down by the intoxication of much wealth.

‘Be not like a flea who fouls the ale in the house of a provincial king.<sup>1</sup> [Make not long sojourn on the frontiers of strangers.] Do not visit obscure persons and those without power. Let not prescription close on illegal possession. Let witnesses be examined as to who is rightful heir of the land. Let the historians combine to act uprightly before you. Let the lands of the brethren, and their increase, be ascertained in their lifetime. [Let the genealogical trees be added to as children are born. Let the living be called to their possessions]; on the security of their oaths let the habitations of their ancestors be revived. Let the heir be established in his lawful patrimony. Let strangers be driven out by force of arms.

‘Speak not haughtily. Discourse not noisily. Mock not, insult not, deride not the old. Think not ill of any. Make no demands that cannot be met. [Grant nothing, refuse nothing, lend nothing without good cause.] Receive submissively the instructions of the wise. Be mindful of the admonitions of the old. Follow the decrees of your fathers.

‘Be not cold-hearted to friends, but against your foes be vigorous. Avoid dishonourable disputes in your many contests. Be not a tattler and abuser. Waste not, hoard not, alienate not. Submit to reproof for unbecoming deeds. Do not sacrifice justice to the passions of men. [Lay not hands on the possessions of others, lest you repent it.] Compete not, that you may not excite jealousy; be not lazy, lest you become weakened; be not importunate, lest you be-

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* he is to avoid intemperance at the feasts of the provincial kings.

come contemptible. Do you consent to follow these counsels, my son ?'

Then Lugaid answered Cuchullin in these words :

['These precepts without exception are worthy to be observed. All men will see that none of them shall be neglected. They shall be executed, if it be possible.']

Lugaid then repaired to Tara with the messengers. He was proclaimed king. That night he slept at Tara, after which all the assembly returned to their own homes.

THE GREAT DEFEAT ON THE  
PLAIN OF MUIRTHEMNE BEFORE  
CUCHULLIN'S DEATH

THIS is part of a fine modern recension<sup>1</sup> which contains, besides the 'Battle of Muirthemne' from which our extracts are taken, the 'Death of Cuchullin' the 'Red Vengeance' of Conall *cernach* for Cuchullin's death, the 'Lay of the Heads,' and 'Emer's Death.' The tale opens with a mention of the victories won by Cuchullin at Finnchora and Rossnaree, at Gâirech and Ilgâirech, with an enumeration of the heroes slaughtered by him. The best of which deeds was the destruction of Calatin and his twenty-seven children (T.B.C. sec. 78). Shortly after the death of her husband, however, Calatin's wife gave birth to three sons and three daughters at one time. This monstrous brood of ill-shapen children Meave rears during seven years, and afterwards sends through the wide world to learn magical arts by which to destroy Cuchullin. They visit Alba and Babylon, and study under all wizards of note from the rise to the set of sun. Finally they attain to 'Hell's fearful realm.' There Vulcan forges for them three swords, three knives, and three spears, more cruel and venomous than ever had been forged before. By them should fall three kings, as is related in the 'Death of Cuchullin,' namely: Cuchullin, king of heroes; Laegh, king of charioteers, and the king of steeds, the Grey of Macha, Cuchullin's chariot horse. On their return, Meave stirs up Lugaid son of Curōi mac Daire king of North Munster and Erc King of Tara, with the king of Leinster and others, whose fathers had been slain by Cuchullin, to revenge themselves on him. They await the period during which the 'curse' lay upon Ulster's warriors, incapacitating them for fight. The king of Ulster, the Magicians and Emer exert all their arts to hold back Cuchullin from the conflict, in which they know that he is foredoomed to fall, but the deadly machinations of the Clan Calatin, who create before his imagination hosts and armed battalions out of grass-stems and puff-balls, drive him to frenzy. For two days his friends have succeeded in holding him back. Our extract opens on the third day.

<sup>1</sup> The MS. is marked 1712, Brit. Mus., Egerton 132, fo. i., written in the 17th century. See M. D'Arbois' *Essai d'un Catalogue de la littérature épique de l'Irlande*, pp. 47-49.

## XI

### THE GREAT DEFEAT ON THE PLAIN OF MUIRTHEMNE BEFORE CUCHULLIN'S DEATH

AS regards Conachar: on the morrow's morn Cathbad and Genann of the bright cheek, with the other magicians, were brought before him; Forgall Monach's daughter Emer, as well, and Celtchar mac Uitechair's daughter Niamh, and all the womankind and woman-folk. Of whom Conachar sought to know what ward that day they would keep over Cuchullin. 'We know not,' answered all. Conachar said, 'I know: take him this day into *Glenn na mbodhar*' (i.e. the Glen of the Deaf, so called for the reason that were all Erin's men round about it and loudly uttering their cries of war, yet might none in that glen hear either shout or halloo). 'Thither, then, to take Cuchullin is your duty; there let him this day be well and prudently and cunningly and craftily kept by you until the spell be spent, and to his succour Conall come out of Pictland.'<sup>1</sup> 'Monarch,' said Niamh, 'albeit for the fair day's length we interceded with him and besought him, yet not for me nor

<sup>1</sup> Conall *cernach* is represented as a great wanderer. He was often absent at critical moments. See *Battle of Ros na righ*, Todd Lecture Series, R.I.A., vol. iv. p. 11.

for the women all yielded he yesterday to enter that same glen. Let Cathbad go to him ; and Genann ; the poets and the women and thyself, with Emer, lead him into that glen. There make for him festival and pleasure, with diverse artifice distracting him ; so shall he not to his great perturbation hear Calatin's children with their shouts and cries provocative.' 'I indeed will not go with him,' said Emer ; 'rather let Niamh with our blessing go, for she it is whom to refuse most irks him.' This now being so resolved among them, together come women and maids, wise men and poets, reciters and all various professors that were in the fort, and into the house where Cuchullin was they entered. Cathbad also, with Conachar's harper and foster-brother, Cobhtach of the sweet strains, making melody and music ; Ferchertne, too, being on the couch beside Cuchullin, guarding and beguiling him. Then Cathbad, standing over against him, fell to beseech him and to intercede with him, and Niamh, going to him upon the couch gave him three kisses, fondly, lovingly. 'Dear son,' pleaded Cathbad, 'come with me this day to share my banquet, and with us will come all the women and the poets. And verily to shun or to decline a feast also is *gés* to thee.' 'Alas for that,' Cuchullin cried ; 'now is it no becoming time for me to feast and to make merry : while Erin's four great quarters burn and destroy the province, while Ulster are in the Pains, and Conall in foreign parts ; so that the men of Erin reviling me the while, and reproaching me, say that I am put to flight. But were it not thou and Conachar, Genann and Ferchertne, the women and the bards as well, upon the men I would fall and sternly execute a scattering of enemies, so that their dead should be

more than their living.' Then Emer and all the women pleaded with him, and the queen<sup>1</sup> addressed herself to him saying: 'Little Cú, never until this hour have I hindered thee of exploit or of expedition that thou mightst desire. For my sake, then, O my first love and first darling of the earth's men, my only chosen sweetheart, thou one favourite of Erin's poets, go now with Cathbad and with Genann, with Celtchar's daughter Niamh and all the poets, to share the feast which for thee Cathbad hath prepared.' Discreetly, and with sweet syllables, Niamh too intreated him and, they all rising, he sorrowful and heavy bore them company, and so entered into *Glenn na mbodhar*. 'Alas for this,' Cuchullin said; 'I have ever shunned entering into this glen, nor ever have come into a spot that more disliked me; for the men of Erin will say that to escape from them I now am here.' Into the regal mansion of vast size, by Cathbad fashioned to receive Cuchullin, now they repaired; in the midst of the glen *liath Macha* and the *Dubhsaighlenn*<sup>2</sup> were unyoked. At the king's side of the mansion sat Cuchullin, upon whose one hand were Cathbad, Genann, and the poets; upon the other, Niamh daughter of Celtchar, with the women. Opposite were the musicians and the reciters, performing for them. Thus with melody and play they betook them to drink and to be merry, making brave and wondrous show of joy and joviality before him there. So far their doings.

Of Calatin's children we now will tell expressly.

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* 'Lady,' damsel of high degree.

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.* the Grey of Macha and the Black Saighlenn, Cuchullin's two chariot steeds. For the account of the capture of these marvellous steeds see the tale entitled 'Feast of Bricriu,' D'Arbois de Jubainville's *Epopée celtique en Irlande*, p. 103.

His three maimed misshapen daughters, lightly fluttering, swiftly swooping, gained Emania's green, and sought the spot where the day before they had descried Cuchullin. Whom, when they found not, without avail they searched out all Emania, then marvelled whither he might be gone, he not being with Conachar and with his heroes of the Red Hall. Straightway these apparitions knew that from them Cathbad's powers concealed him. Up then they rose birdlike, airily soaring with the moaning magic wind of their own making, and vehemently borne away to scrutinise the entire province; so that nor wood nor sloping glen nor dark recess nor path impracticable they left unsearched, until at length they came over *Glenn nambodhar*, and in mid-glen saw the *liath Macha* and *Dubhsaighlenn*, with *Riangabar's* son *Laegh* that tended them. Then they were aware that Cuchullin must be in the glen; and they heard the poets' noise and music, as joyously they banqueted with resonant mirth of woman-kind and woman-folk and maidens [seeking] to cheer Cuchullin's heart and soul. Calatin's offspring therefore gathering hooded sharp-spiked thistles, the light wee puff-balls and the wood's withered fluttering leaves, made of them [phantasms of] numerous warriors armour-clad, and of fighting-men<sup>1</sup> bearing battle-weapons, so that around the glen was no hill nor hillock nor whole district but was filled with battalions, with companies of an hundred, and with marshalled bands. Up to the clouds of heaven and to the vault

<sup>1</sup> Comp. a similar sort of incantation in the Welsh tale of *Math*, son of *Mathonwy*, *Lady Guest's Mab.*, p. 416, and in the old Welsh poem of 'Kat Godeu,' *Skene's Four Ancient Books of Wales*, vol. i. pp. 277-8; vol. ii. p. 138, quoted *Rhys's Hibbert Lectures*, p. 258.



of the firmament ascended the cries, loud and wailing, the hoarse bellowings, the hideous chattering laughter, which these uttered round [the glen]. Also the land was full of preyings, of burnings, of women's tears and lamentation, of goblins and all eldritch things that gibbered, of trumpets and of horns that brayed. By which great prodigies of Calatin's descendants, both men and women, both hounds and [all other] dogs throughout all the region were terror-stricken. But when the women [in the glen] heard these continued cries, they answering shouted back; yet had Cuchullin (and more readily than they) caught the great uproar's sound. 'Alas!' he said, 'loud cries I hear from the men of Erin that harry all the province; now is my triumph's end at hand, no more shall I be as of old esteemed, Ulster lies low for ever!' 'Let that pass,' Cathbad said, 'these be but idle and fairy noises of fleeting motley hosts, by Calatin's children framed with design to hurt thee. Heed them not, but bide here yet a while; banquet with us, and be merry.' Thus did Cuchullin, but still they heard the din of Calatin's children raised about the glen; answering which the women then would cry aloud, and raise debate, and join in sports around Cuchullin. Calatin's children, perceiving that against Cathbad's cunning and the womankind these spells of theirs availed them nought, they wearied in the end. 'Here stay ye,' Calatin's daughter Badb<sup>1</sup> said to her two sisters, 'and maintain the fight that I may enter into the glen and, though my death come of it, accost Cuchullin.' Then she going forth careered

<sup>1</sup> One of the three war-goddesses. Her name means 'rage' or 'fury.' She was wife of Tethra or Neit. See 'Appearance of the Morrighu,' *supra*, p. 103, and prefatory note, p. 102.

shamelessly and madly to the palace, where she assumed a woman's form of the women of Celtchar's daughter Niamh, and beckoned out the queen to speak with her. Out through the palace-door, a great company of the women being with her, Niamh came then; whom every one the witch by her power and magic wiles led far from the mansion and, having confounded and confused them quite, sent them wandering through the glen, then betwixt them and the palace behind them cast a spell. This done she departed, as knowing that from Cuchullin Niamh had exacted troth that, until she should license him, he would not fall on the men of Erin. Now then she took on her Niamh's shape and, being come where Cuchullin was, bade him attack the hosts, saying: 'My soul, my hero, and my warrior! dún Delgan is burnt, the plain of Conaille, Muirthemne's plain and the whole province, ravaged; all which Ulster will lay to my charge, for that in place of letting thee out to avenge the preys and to check this army I e'en have hindered and withheld thee. Further, I know that I must die; and that surely 'tis Conachar shall slay me, who suffered thee not to avenge the province.' Then she pronounced a lay . . . . .

Cuchullin said: 'Alas, after that 'tis hard to trust in woman! I thought that for all gold of the globe and for the whole world's wealth never wouldst thou have granted me this leave. Yet since 'tis thou that sufferest me to affront battle and dire combat with all Erin's men, verily I will go to it.' Thereupon Cuchullin, being thus enjoined rose presently, but heavy with grief, and as he raised himself to stand upright, his mantle's border chanced under his feet, or [to be special] under his left foot, so that he unwittingly was put

sitting. He from that misadventure upspringing rose again, red for shame, and the gold bodkin in his mantle flew up to the palace roof-tree, then downwards falling, pierced his foot through to the earth. 'True,' said Cuchullin, 'the bodkin is a foe, the cloak a friend, it warns me.' He came out of the palace and bade Laegh mac Rianganabra harness the horses and make ready the chariot. Cathbad and Genann and the women-folk in general following him put forth their hands to lay hold on him, but might not stay or stop him of going from the glen. Then they gazed on the province as it lay stretched before them on all sides. The witch now being departed from them, loudly and terribly they raised the same cries as before; which when Cuchullin heard, much that he never yet had seen was shown him. Then was he certified that his *gessa* were destroyed, and his endowments perished; but Cathbad sought to quiet him, saying 'Dear son, for this day only abide by my counsel: which is that thou assail not the men of Erin; and thenceforth from all magic of Calatin's children I will save thee.' 'Dear Master,' he answered, 'henceforth there is no more cause to guard my life: my span is ended, my *gessa* done away with, and Niamh hath licensed me to go meet the men of Erin.' Next, Niamh overtook him and, 'Alas, my little Cú,' she cried, 'not for the globe's gold, not for the whole world's wealth, had I e'er given thee that leave; neither was it I that licensed thee, but Calatin's daughter Badb in my shape taken upon her to deceive thee. Abide with me then, my friend, my gentle loving darling!' But he believing nought of that which she said commanded Laegh to harness the horses, to prepare the chariot, and to set his fighting

gear in order. Laegh went about the task, nor ever at any time had been more loath than now he was to execute the same. As he was wont to do, so now he shook the bridles at the horses, but they fled before him; the *liath Macha* evading him and shewing him obstinacy, with restiveness. 'Ah, true it is,' said Laegh; 'to me 'tis presage of great evil. O my soul [*i.e.* the *liath*] seldom indeed before this day would ye not come to meet the bridle and to meet myself.' And he proceeded to discourse the *liath Macha*, inditing of his merits and of his fame, and saying to him:— . . .

Yet even so the horse stayed not for Laegh, who coming to Cuchullin told him that the *liath Macha* stayed not for him. Cuchullin himself rose to catch him, but neither for him stayed he; while down the *liath Macha's* cheeks coursed tears of dusky blood, large as clenched fist of warrior. Laegh coming on the horse's other side said: 'This day *liath Macha*, above any former day, 'tis urgent on thee to prove that thou art good,' and he pronounced a lay . . . .

Then the *liath Macha* stood for Laegh; the Dubh-saighlenn also he harnessed, and on them both imposed the chariot; which done, he fell to set in order and array Cuchullin's varied implements and edged weapons. About his skin Cuchullin took his battle-suit and, all leave-taking omitted, leaped into his chariot; but from their appointed places when they were set ready to his hand, his weapons in the chariot fell away from him and down beneath his feet: to him a mighty fore-shadowing of evil. He set his face the way he had to go, and reached Emania; nor far had they progressed when it seemed to him that on Emania's green stood strong battalions, the plain he saw as it were filled with

great ranks and troops of battle, with companies of an hundred and marshalled lines, with horses arms and armour in great plenty. He deemed moreover that he heard shouts more and more terribly increase, saw burnings throughout the city spread and extend, whilst around Emania nor hill nor hillock but was full of plunderers. It appeared to him that men slew Emer, and out over Emania's rampart tossed her; that the Red Hall was all aglow, and Emania, as it had been a firebrand, blazing in murky black and crimson-flecked vapour of great smoke. 'Cathbad,' he said, 'alas for this! though ye would hinder me and stay me, how great are these preyings, these burnings, and incursions, throughout the plain of Emania's level land and over the whole province!' Cathbad answering said, 'Dear son, these be but great delusions: temptations which these shadowy hosts, feeble and empty, these vague and misty crowds all magic-begotten, bring to bear upon thee; for saving only grass and leaves, nought else is there.' But of all this, from Cathbad he believed nothing, rather saying:

'Cathbad son of Maelcrôch, from Carn maighe. . . .'

In the meantime, the women-folk weeping before them, and behind them wailing, they came to Emania, and he sought the bower where Emer lay; who coming forth to meet them, bade him alight and enter. Cuchullin answered: 'I will not, until I shall have gone to Muirthemne: there to attack Erin's four great provinces, and to avenge the preys, the evils and the wrongs, by them inflicted on me and on Ulster generally; for it hath been shown me that this place was filled with hostings and with gather-

ings of the men of Erin burning it up and scorching it.' 'Verily,' the young woman said, 'these are all but magic phantasms; heed them not nor regard them.' 'Girl,' said Cuchullin, 'my word I pledge thee that, until I shall assault the men of Erin's camp, from this my task I never will hold back.' At this hearing, the womankind raised piercing cries of lamentation; but of the queen and of them all he took his leave. Then Cathbad and the poets with loving zeal attending him went on to Dechtire's dún, there to bid his mother farewell. Dechtire when he came upon the green stepped forth to meet him, the while knowing well that it was to fall upon the men of Erin he was fain to go. Then she proffered him that vat from which to take a draught before journey or expedition undertaken was to him a certitude of victory; but [this time] what should be in the great vessel but crimson blood alone. 'Dechtire, alas!' he said, 'that all else forsake me surely is no wonder, when in this state thou tenderest me the vat.' A second time she took and filled it, then gave it to him; and a second time it was full of blood. Thrice she filled up the vat, and each time it was full of blood. Anger against the vat seized on Cuchullin now, whereby he hurling it against a rock shattered it; hence to this day *Tulach an bhalláin*, 'Hill of the Vat,' is that hill's name. 'Lady, 'tis true, and as regards myself thou art not in fault; but 'tis my *gessa* that are all destroyed, and that my life's end is near: from the men of Erin this time I shall not return alive.' Then he said this lay:

'O Dechtire, thy vat is empty. . . .'

Dechtire and Cathbad now besought him that he

would refrain and await Conall; but he said, 'By no means will I wait, for my span and my triumphs are determined; yet will I not for the world's lying vanities forsake my fame and battle-virtues, seeing that from the day when first I took [a full-grown] warrior's weapons in my hand I never have shirked fight or fray. Now therefore still less will I do so, for fame will outlive life.'<sup>1</sup> Again he was on Emania's green, where Ulster's chiefs' and chieftains' daughters dolefully waiting for him raised piteous cries of grief. Last of all, Cathbad alone followed him; nor as yet were they a great way from the fort when at the entrance into the Ford of Washing on Emania's plain they chanced upon a maiden,<sup>2</sup> slender and white of her body, yellow of her hair. In grief and tribulation she on the ford's extreme brink ever washed and wrung crimson bloody spoils. 'Little Cú,' Cathbad asked, 'seest thou not yonder sight? She is Badb's daughter that with woe and mourning washes thy gear, because she signifies thy fall and thy destruction by Meave's great hosting and by incantations of Calatin's children. Hence it is, my gentle foster-son, that thou shouldst refrain.' But: 'Dear guardian, it is well,' he answered; 'follow me now no farther, for from avenging on the men of Erin this their coming to burn up my country, to ravage and to consume my stronghold, I may not stay. What though the fairy woman wash my spoils? great

<sup>1</sup> An Irish proverb. In an earlier part of this tale Cuchullin says: 'In every tongue this noble old saying is remembered "Fame outlives Life."'

<sup>2</sup> The 'Washer of the Ford' was a banshee, who foretold the death of heroes. In the *Bruidhen dá Choga*, she appears to Cormac *conloingias* as a spectre. See a fine imaginative description of her in Sir S. Ferguson's *Congal*, 1872, pp. 56, 57.

spoil of arms, of armour and of gear, is that which by my sword and by my spear shall shortly lie there drenched in blood, in streams and pools of curdled gore. Moreover, loath as ye be to dismiss me into danger and against my foes, there to encounter death and dissolution, even so cheerful am I that now go to have my side bored and my body mangled; neither knowest thou better than I myself know that in this onset I must fall. No more then hinder my path and course; for whether I stay I am devoted to death, or whether I go my life's span is run out. From me to Ulster, to Conachar also and to Emer, carry life and health; to meet whom no more for ever I shall go. Pity that we should part! a sad and a lamentable rending is our rending away from you! For as now in gloom and grief, O Laegh, we get us gone from Emer, even so out of far countries and from foreign tribes many a day in gallant glee we came home to her.' Then he uttered a lay . . . . .

Herewith Cuchullin turned his face to Emania, and gazing on the town hearkened to the lamentation made by the womankind. Then it seemed to him that over rath Sáilenn, which to-day is called Ard Macha, (Armagh), he saw the angels in their watches;<sup>1</sup> he was aware that over the rath from heaven to earth the space was full of splendour and of light, of all things excellent, of organs' music, of canticles and minstrelsy. To this which he beheld he gave his mind intently, and into his heart with influence of love the melody which he heard sank. These revelations he told to Cathbad, saying: 'These be not like the wonders which, as I

<sup>1</sup> The whole of the following passage is plainly a Christian interpolation.



would return to Emania, used to be shown me terrible or hideous. The one Almighty God whom they that are up there adore, Him I do worship, and in the King Supreme that made Heaven and Earth I do believe. Now, henceforth and for evermore welcome Death!' and he took leave of Cathbad. So he turned his back on Emania, and in joy and gladness, cheerful and void of care, went on his way; his weariness also, his delusion and his gloom passed from him.



THE TRAGICAL DEATH OF  
CÚCHULAINN

THIS translation, abridged from the Book of Leinster (ff. 77a 1-78b. 2), was originally contributed by Dr. Whitley Stokes to the *Revue Celtique*, tome iii.

The Battle of Muirthemne, in which Cúchulainn fell, was inspired by revenge for the deaths of Calatin, Curói mac Daire king of Munster, and Cairpre *niasfer* king of Meath. Cairpre had been slain in fair fight at the Battle of *Ros na rígh* (see Todd Lecture Series, R. I. A., vol. iv.), but Curói by treachery and by the aid of Curói's adulterous wife Blathnait (*i.e.*, 'the Weasel'). The Battle of *Ros na rígh* ends with the words, 'Therefrom originated the expedition of the battle of Findchora, and the great sea-voyage round among the Connachta, and the Battle of the Youths.' The latter may mean the Battle of Muirthemne, which was led by the sons of the slaughtered men, Lugaid son of Curói, Erc son of Cairpre, and the six children of Calatin. The death of Calatin and his twenty-seven sons forms an episode in the *Táin bó Cuailgne* (sec. 78).

## XII

### CÚCHULAINN'S DEATH

WHEN Cúchulainn's foes came for the last time against him, the land was filled with smoke and flame ; weapons fell from their racks, and the day of his death drew nigh.

The evil tidings were brought to him, and the maiden Levarcham bade him arise, though he was forewarned with fighting in defence of the plain of Muirthemne. Niamh, wife of Conall the Victorious, also urged him, so that he sprang to his arms, and flung his mantle about him ; but the brooch fell and pierced his foot, forewarning him.<sup>1</sup>

Then he took his shield, and ordered his charioteer, Laegh, to harness his horse, the Grey of Macha. But Laegh said : ' I swear by the God by whom my people<sup>2</sup> swear, that though all the men of Conchobar's fifth<sup>3</sup> were round the Grey of Macha, they could not bring him to the chariot. I never gainsaid thee until to-day. Come, then, if thou wilt, and speak with the Grey himself.'

<sup>1</sup> For a further account of all this, see 'Battle of Muirthemne,' *supra*, p. 242, 243.

<sup>2</sup> This, the common form of oath in the romances, points to the belief in local deities.

<sup>3</sup> Conachar's fifth, *i. e.* Ulster. Ireland was anciently divided into five provinces, viz. : Ulster, Munster, Leinster, Connacht, and Meath.

Cúchulainn went to him. And thrice did the horse turn his left side to his master. On the night before, the Morrighu had unyoked the chariot, for she liked not Cúchulainn's going to the battle, for she knew that he would not come again to Emain Macha.

Then Cúchulainn reproached his steed, saying that he was not wont to deal thus with his master. Thereat the Grey of Macha came, and let his big round tears of blood fall on Cúchulainn's feet. And Cúchulainn leaped into the chariot, and started southwards along the road of Mid-Luachair.

And Levarcham met him, and besought him not to leave them; and the thrice fifty queens who were in Emain Macha, and who loved him, cried to him with a great cry.<sup>1</sup> But he turned his chariot to the right, and they gave a scream of wailing and lamentation, and smote their hands, for they knew that he could not come to them again.

The house of his nurse that had fostered him was on this road. He used to go to it whenever he went driving past from the north or south, and she kept for him always a vessel, with drink therein. He drank a drink and fared forth, bidding his nurse farewell. Then he saw somewhat, the Three Crones (*i.e.* the daughters of Calatin), blind of the left eye, before him on the road.

They had cooked a hound with poisons and spells on spits of the rowan-tree. Now, one of the things that Cúchulainn was bound not to do, was to go to a cooking-hearth and consume the food. Another of the things that he must not do, was to eat his namesake's

<sup>1</sup> Compare the death of Arthur in Arthurian legend, *Malory's Morte d'Arthur*, Ed. Sommer, vol. i., text, book xxi. chap. v. p. 849.

flesh.<sup>1</sup> He speeds on, and was about to pass them, for he knew that they were not there for his good.

Then said the Crone to him, 'Stay with us a while, O Cúchulainn.'

'I will not stay with you, in sooth,' said Cúchulainn.

'That is because the food is only a hound,' quoth she. 'Were this a great cooking-hearth thou wouldst have visited us. But, because what is here is little, thou comest not. Unseemly is it for the great to despise the small.'<sup>2</sup>

Then he drew nigh to her, and the Crone gave him the shoulder-blade of the hound out of her left hand. Then Cúchulainn ate it out of his (left) hand, and put it under his left thigh. The hand that took it, and the thigh under which he put it, were stricken from trunk to end, so that their former strength abode not in them.

Then he drove along the road of Mid-Luachair around Sliab Fuad; and his enemy, Erc son of Cairpre, saw him in his chariot, with his sword shining redly in his hand and the light of valour<sup>3</sup> hovering over him, and his three-hued hair like strings of golden thread over an anvil's edge beneath some cunning craftsman's hand.

'That man is coming towards us, O men of Erin!' said Erc. 'Await him.' So they made a fence of their linked shields, and at each corner Erc made them

<sup>1</sup> Cú-chulainn means 'Culann's Hound.' For the origin of the name, see 'Táin bó Cuailgne' (sec. 19).

<sup>2</sup> Literally, 'Unseemly is the great who endures not the little.' This reads like a proverb.

<sup>3</sup> The 'lon gaile,' or hero's light, appeared above the head of Cuchullin when he was roused to special feats of valour; cf. the light that Athéné makes blaze from the head of Achilles. *Iliad* xviii. 188-220.

place two of their bravest, feigning to fight each other, and a satirist with each of these pairs; and he told the satirists to ask Cúchulainn for his spear, for the sons of Calatin had prophesied of his spear that a king should be slain thereby unless it were given when demanded.

And he made the men of Erin utter a great cry, and Cúchulainn rushed against him in his chariot, performing his three thunder-feats; and he plied his spear and sword so that the halves of their heads and skulls and hands and feet, and their red bones were scattered broadcast throughout the plain of Muirthemne, in number like unto the sand of the sea, and the stars of heaven; like dewdrops in May, and flakes of snow and hailstones; like leaves of the forests and buttercups on Magh Breagh and grass under the feet of the herds on a summer's day. And grey was that field with their brains after the onslaught and plying of weapons which Cúchulainn dealt out to them.

Then he saw one of the pairs of warriors contending together, and the satirist called on him to intervene, and Cúchulainn leaped at them, and with two blows of his fist dashed out their brains.

'Thy spear to me!' says the satirist.

'I swear by the oath of my people,' said Cúchulainn, 'thou dost not need it more than I myself do. The men of Erin are upon me here, and I too am upon them.'

'I will revile thee if thou givest it not,' says the satirist.

'I have never yet been reviled because of my niggardliness or my churlishness,' said Cúchulainn, and with that he flung the spear at him with its handle foremost;



and it passed through his head and killed nine on the other side of him. And Cúchulainn drove through the host, but Lugaid son of Curói got the spear.

'What will fall by this spear, O sons of Calatin?' said Lugaid.

'A king will fall by that spear,' say they.

Then Lugaid flung the spear at Cúchulainn's chariot and it reached the charioteer, Laegh son of Riangabar, and all his bowels came forth on the cushion of the chariot.

'Then,' said Laegh, 'bitterly have I been wounded, etc.'<sup>1</sup>

Thereupon Cúchulainn drew out the spear and Laegh bade him farewell. Then said Cúchulainn, 'To-day I shall be champion and I shall also be charioteer.'

Then he saw the second pair contending, and one of them said it was a shame for him not to intervene. And Cúchulainn sprang upon them and dashed them into pieces against a rock.

'That spear to me, O Cúchulainn!' said the satirist.

'I swear by the oath of my people, thou dost not need the spear more than I do. On my head and my valour and my weapons it rests to-day to sweep the four provinces of Erin<sup>2</sup> from the plain of Muirthemne.'

'I will revile thee,' says the satirist.

'I am not bound to grant more than one request in one day; and moreover, I have already saved my honour by payment.'

'Then I will revile Ulster for thy default,' says the satirist.

<sup>1</sup> The beginning of a poem of which only the two first words are given in the Irish.

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.* the hosts of Meath, Connacht, Leinster, and Munster.

‘Never yet hath Ulster been reviled on account of any refusal or churlishness of mine. Though little of my life remains to me, Ulster shall not be reviled this day.’

Then Cúchulainn cast the spear at him by the handle, and it went through his head and killed nine behind him, and Cúchulainn passed through the host even as we said before. But Erc son of Cairpre took the spear.

‘What shall fall by this spear, O sons of Calatin?’ says Erc, son of Cairpre.

‘A king falls by that spear,’ say the sons of Calatin.

‘I heard you say that a king would fall by the spear which Lugaid long since cast,’ he replied.

‘And that is true,’ say the sons of Calatin, ‘thereby fell the King of the Charioteers of Erin, namely Cúchulainn’s charioteer, Laegh mac Riagabra.’

Thereupon Erc cast the spear at him and it lighted on the Grey of Macha. Cúchulainn snatched out the spear, and each of them bade the other farewell. Thereat the Grey of Macha left him with half the yoke hanging from his neck, and went into Grey’s Linn in Sliab Fuad. Then Cúchulainn drove through the host, and saw the third pair contending, and he intervened as he had done before. The satirist demanded his spear, and Cúchulainn at first refused it.

‘I will revile thee,’ quoth the satirist.

‘I have paid for mine honour to-day. I am not bound to grant more than one request in one day.’

‘Then I will revile Ulster for thy default.’

‘I have paid for the honour of Ulster,’ said Cúchulainn.

‘I will then revile thy race,’ said the satirist.

‘Tidings that I have been defamed shall not go back

to the land to which I myself shall never return ; for little of my life remains to me,' said the hero. So Cúchulainn flung the spear to him, handle foremost, and it went through his head and through thrice nine other men.

'Tis grace with wrath, O Cúchulainn,' says the satirist.

Then Cúchulainn for the last time drove through the host, and Lúgaid took the spear and said, 'What shall fall by this spear, O sons of Calatin?'

'A king will fall thereby,' say the sons of Calatin.

'I heard you say that a king would fall by the spear that Erc cast this morning.'

'That is true,' say they ; 'the King of the Steeds of Erin fell by it, namely the Grey of Macha.'

Then Lúgaid flung the spear and struck Cúchulainn, and his bowels came forth on the cushion of the chariot, and his only horse, the Black Sainglend, fled away, with half the yoke hanging to him, and left the chariot and his master, the King of the Heroes of Erin, dying alone upon the plain.

Then said Cúchulainn, 'I would fain go as far as that loch to drink a drink thereout.'

'We give thee leave,' said they ; 'provided that thou come to us again.'

'I will bid you come for me,' said Cúchulainn, 'unless I shall return to you myself.'

Then he gathered his bowels into his breast, and went on to the loch. And he drank his drink, and washed himself, and came forth to die, calling on his foes to come and meet him.

Now a great mearing went westwards from the loch, and his eye lit upon it, and he went to the pillar-stone

that is in the plain, and he put his breast-girdle round it that he might not die seated nor lying down, but that he might die standing up. Then came the men around him, but they durst not go to him, for they thought he was alive.

'It is a shame for you,' said Erc, son of Cairpre, 'not to take that man's head in revenge for my father's head that was taken by him.'<sup>1</sup>

Then came to Cúchulainn the Grey of Macha to protect him, so long as his soul was in him, and the 'hero's light' out of his forehead shone above him. And the Grey of Macha wrought the three red onsets around him. And fifty fell by his teeth and thirty by each of his hoofs. Hence is the saying: 'Not keener were the victorious courses of the Grey of Macha after Cúchulainn's slaughter.'

Then came the birds<sup>2</sup> and settled on his shoulder.

'There were not wont to be birds about that pillar,' said Erc, son of Cairpre. Then Lugaid arranged Cúchulainn's hair over his shoulder, and cut off his head. And the sword fell from Cúchulainn's hand, and it smote off Lugaid's right hand, so that it fell to the ground. And they struck off Cúchulainn's right hand in revenge for this. Then Lugaid and the hosts marched away, carrying with them Cúchulainn's head and his right hand, and they came to Tara, and there is the grave of his head and his right hand, and the full of the cover of the shield of mould.

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* in the Battle of *Ros na rígh*. See R. I. A. Todd Lecture Series, vol. iv. pp. 52-57. Erc, after making peace with Cúchulainn, had married his daughter. See Additional Note.

<sup>2</sup> In the 'Great Defeat on the Plain of Muirthemne' we read that it was Calatin's daughter Badb who hovered over him in the form of a bird or scallcrow to find out whether he were really dead.

From Tara they marched southward to the river Liffey. But meanwhile the hosts of Ulster were hurrying to attack their foes, and Conall the Victorious, driving forward in front of them, met the Grey of Macha streaming with blood. Then Conall knew that Cúchulainn had been slain. Together he and the Grey of Macha sought Cúchulainn's body. They saw the corpse of Cúchulainn at the pillar-stone. Then went the Grey of Macha and laid his head on Cúchulainn's breast.<sup>1</sup> And Conall said, 'A heavy care is that corpse to the Grey of Macha.'

Then Conall followed the hosts, meditating vengeance, for he was bound to avenge Cúchulainn. For there was a comrade's covenant between Cúchulainn and Conall the Victorious, namely, that whichever of them was first killed should be avenged by the other.

'And if I be the first killed,' said Cúchulainn, 'how soon wilt thou avenge me?'

'On thy death-day,' said Conall, 'before its evening I will avenge thee. And if I be the first slain,' says Conall, 'how soon wilt thou avenge me?'

'Thy blood will not be cold upon the earth,' says Cúchulainn, 'before I shall avenge thee.'

So Conall pursued Lugaid to the Liffey.

There was Lugaid bathing. 'Keep a look-out over the plain,' he said to his charioteer, 'that no one come upon us without being seen.'

The charioteer looked past him.

'A single horseman is coming to us,' said he, 'and great are the speed and swiftness with which he comes.'

<sup>1</sup> Compare the beautiful story of Columba's old white horse at Iona, Reeves's ed. *Adamnan's Life of St. Columba*, book iii. p. 96, and cf. York Powell's *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, vol. i. p. 307.

Thou wouldst deem that all the ravens of Erin were above him. Thou wouldst deem that flakes of snow were specking the plain before him.'

'Unbeloved is the horseman that comes there,' says Lugaid. 'It is Conall the Victorious mounted on Dewy-Red. The birds thou sawest above him are the sods from the horse's hoofs. The snow-flakes thou sawest specking the plain before him are the foam from the horse's lips and from the bits of the bridle. Look again,' says Lugaid, 'by what road is he coming?'

'He is coming to the ford, the path that the hosts have taken,' answered the charioteer.

'Let that horse pass us,' said Lugaid; 'we desire not to fight against him.'

But when Conall reached the middle of the ford he spied Lugaid and his charioteer and went to them.

'Welcome is a debtor's face!' said Conall. 'He to whom thou owest debts demands them of thee. I am thy creditor,' continues Conall, 'for the slaying of my comrade Cúchulainn, and here I stand suing thee for it.'

Then it was agreed to fight on the plain of Argetros, and there Conall wounded Lugaid with his javelin. Thence they went to a place called Ferta Lugdach.

'I wish,' said Lugaid, 'to have men's truth [*i.e.* strict justice, or fair play] from thee.'<sup>1</sup>

'What is that?' said Conall the Victorious.

'That thou shouldst use only one hand against me, for one hand only have I.'

'Thou shalt have that,' says Conall the Victorious.

So Conall's hand was bound to his side with a cord.

<sup>1</sup> This passage is almost identical with the combat of Mesgegra and Conall in the 'Siege of Howth.'

There, for the space between two watches of the day, they fought, and neither of them prevailed over the other.

When Conall found that he prevailed not, he saw his steed the Dewy-Red by Lugaid. And the steed came close to Lugaid and tore a piece out of his side.

'Woe is me!' said Lugaid, 'that is not men's truth, O Conall.'

'I gave it thee only on my own behalf,' said Conall; 'I gave it not on behalf of savage beasts and senseless things.'

'I know now,' said Lugaid, 'that thou wilt not go till thou takest my head with thee, since we took Cúchulainn's head from him. Take therefore my head in addition to thine own, and add my realm to thy realm, and my valour to thy valour. For I prefer that thou shouldst be the best hero in Erin.'

Then Conall the Victorious cut off Lugaid's head. And Conall and his Ulstermen returned to Emain Macha. That week they made no triumphal entry.

But the soul of Cúchulainn appeared there to the thrice fifty queens who had loved him, and they saw him floating in his spirit-chariot over Emain Macha, and they heard him chant a mystic song of the Coming of Christ and the Day of Doom.





THE TRAGICAL DEATH OF KING  
CONACHAR

THE original of this piece, taken from LL., will be found with translation in O'Curry's ms. Materials of Irish History (Appendix cxvi. pp. 637-643.) Beyond some slight modifications in the English, no changes have been made.

It is necessary to read this tale in connection with the 'Siege of Howth,' where it is explained how Conall *cernach* came by the brain of Mesgegra, king of Leinster.

The composition of this piece probably goes back earlier than the 10th century. As, even at this early date, it was felt desirable to re-cast the tale and add a Christian tone, the antiquity of the original pagan form of the story is vouched for.

### XIII

## THE TRAGICAL DEATH OF KING CONACHAR

THERE was an occasion on which the Ultonians at Emain Macha were greatly intoxicated, in consequence of which angry contentions and disputes about the importance of their trophies sprang up between the three chief heroes, Conall *cernach*, Cuchullin, and Laegaire the Triumphant. 'Bring me,' said Conall, 'the brain of Mesgegra<sup>1</sup> that I may challenge the competing warriors.' It was at that time the custom with the Ultonians to take out the brains from the head of every warrior that they killed in single combat, and to mix them with lime until they formed a hard ball. And whenever a dispute arose between them or when they were comparing trophies, these balls were brought to them and they held them in their hands. 'See, O Conachar,' said Conall, 'the warriors of the trophy-comparison have not performed a deed like this in single combat; their trophies cannot compare with mine.' 'That is true indeed,' said Conachar. The brain was then restored to the shelf where it was kept.

Next morning, each one went his way to the sport that pleased him best. At this moment Cet,<sup>2</sup> son of Magach,

<sup>1</sup> Read the 'Siege of Howth' for an explanation of this.

<sup>2</sup> Cet was the most powerful of the Connacht warriors and a deadly

came into Ulster in search of adventures. This Cet was the most dangerous pest in Erin. He entered the enclosure of Emain having with him the half-heads of three Ultonians. Now the two jesters<sup>1</sup> of the king were making sport together, and one jester said to the other that it was the brain of Mesgegra with which they played. Cet heard this. He snatched the ball out of the hand of one of them, and carried it away with him. It was prophesied that Mesgegra would, even after death, have his revenge, and Cet knew this. Thenceforth, at every battle in which the warriors of Connacht fought against Ulster, Cet used to carry the brain-ball in his belt, seeking an opportunity to kill some illustrious personage among the Ultonians by its means.

One day, Cet made an expedition eastward and carried off a Táin of cows from the men of Ross. The Ultonians pursued him [and overtook the rear of his troop]. The Connachtmen, on the other hand, mustered to his aid. A battle began and Conachar himself took part in it. The women of Connacht prayed the king to come to them out of the battle that they might see him. For there was not the equal of Conachar in all the world, not only in the splendour of his figure, but in his carriage, appearance and features; he excelled by his height, symmetry and fine proportions, as well as by his eyes, hair, and the fairness of his skin; by his wisdom, prudence and eloquence as well as by the

enemy of Ulster. He plays a large part in the tale called 'Mac Dathó's Pig,' *Hibernica Minora*, Anec. Oxon., ed. by Dr. Kuno Meyer. He was killed by Conall *cernach*, and the stroke which slew him is counted one of the three greatest cuts ever made in Erin, *Silva Gadelica*, vol. ii. p. 345.

<sup>1</sup> There is a quaint description of Conachar's fool or jester in *Mesca Ulad*, R.I.A., Todd Lecture Series, pp. 35-37.

magnificence of his raiment and his air of distinction. In arms in amplitude and in dignity he was as famous as he was also in accomplishment in valour and in the nobility of his descent. Conachar, indeed, was without blemish. But it was Cet who had incited the women of Connacht to proffer their request.

Then Conachar withdrew from his followers, so that the women might view him. Cet had placed himself beforehand in the middle of the group of women. He adjusted Mesgegra's brain-ball in his sling, and flung it so that it entered Conachar's skull to two-thirds of its whole size, and the king fell head-foremost to the ground.

The men of Ulster rushed forward and wrested him from the hands of Cet.

On the brink of the ford of Daire dá Bhaeth it was that Conachar fell. There is his bed, and a rock rises at the head and a rock at the feet.

Then were the Connachtmen routed and driven back to Sciaidh aird na Con. But the Ulstermen in their turn were driven back to Daire dá Bhaeth.

'Carry me out of the battle,' said Conachar. 'The kingdom of Ulster to him who will carry me to my own house!'

'I will carry thee,' said Cennberraidhe, his own servant.

He bound his master with a rope upon his back and carried him to Ard Achad of Sliab Fuad. But there his heart burst within him, so that he died; thence comes the saying, 'The sovereignty of Cennberraidhe over Ulster'; that is, that he bore the king upon his back for half a day.

But the battle continued from that hour until the

same hour of the following day, and then the Ultonians were overthrown.

In the meantime, Conachar's physician, one Fingen, was sent for to him. [Now the skill of Fingen was such] that by the vapours that arose from a house he could tell how many were ill in that house, and with what disease they were afflicted. 'Well,' said Fingen, 'if the ball be extracted from thy head, thou wilt die at once. But if thou suffer it to remain, I can restore thee to health, only thou wilt retain the blemish of it.'

'The blemish,' said the Ultonians, 'is a small thing for us compared with his death.'

His head was then healed, and it was stitched with a thread of gold, because Conachar had golden hair. And the physician warned the king to be cautious, and not to allow himself to be roused to anger or to passion, nor to ride henceforth on horseback, nor to run.

So long as Conachar lived, namely, for seven years, he continued in that precarious condition; he was incapable of action and could merely remain sitting still. This lasted until the day on which he heard that Christ had been crucified by the Jews. There came at that time a convulsion over nature, and the heavens and the earth were shaken by the enormity of the deed that was there perpetrated, namely, when Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, although He had done no sin, was crucified.

'What is this?' asked Conachar of his Druid; 'what great evil is being committed to-day?' 'A great evil, indeed,' said the Druid. [And he related to him the death of Jesus Christ.] 'That is a terrible crime,' said the king. 'The Man who has just been crucified,' con-

tinued the Druid, 'was born on the same night of the year as that on which you were born,<sup>1</sup> namely, in the eighth of the kalends of January, though the year was not the same.'

Then Conachar believed; and he was one of the two who believed in God in Erin before the coming of the Faith: the other man was Morann.

'Alas, now,' said Conachar, 'would that Christ had appealed to the aid of a valiant high-king, for then would I have rushed to his relief, a hardy champion, with quivering lip, with the valour of a soldier dealing division between hosts; by heavy slaughter setting the bound One free. With Christ should my assistance be. A wild cry is gone up to heaven; a true Lord, a bitter loss is lamented; the crucifixion of a King, the greatest of human beings; an illustrious, admirable King. I would pour out my complaint to the loyal host, to the workers of noble feats: promptly would they, with irresistible might, come to the aid of the merciful God. Complete would be the overthrow that I should make. Splendid the combat that I would wage for Christ who is being defiled. Though my body of clay suffered torments I would not rest. . . . My heart is broken at the sound of the wailing for my God; that my arm cannot be stretched forth in relief to arrest the pains of death—because I am not permitted to ride in chariots—and to avenge the death of my Creator.'

The time that Conachar made this declamation was when Bacrach, a Druid of Leinster, told him that Christ was crucified: or perchance it was Altus, the [Roman] Consul, who came from Octavius to demand tribute

<sup>1</sup> This attempt to synchronise the birth and death of Conachar with that of our Lord is evidently a Christian interpolation.

from the Gaels, that told the king that Christ was crucified.<sup>1</sup>

[Keating ends the tale as follows]:

And with that Conachar brought out his sword, and rushed at a woody grove which was near to him, and began to cut and to fell it; for he said, that if he were among the Jews, he would use them in the same manner: and from the excess of the fury that seized upon him, the lump started out of his head, and some of his brain came away with it; and in that manner was his death.

The Wood of Lámhraighe, in Feara Rois, is the name by which that shrubby wood is called.

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<sup>1</sup> This is evidently a note by a later scribe which has crept into the text. It suggests what seems to himself a more plausible explanation than that contained in the original story.



THE PHANTOM CHARIOT OF  
CUCHULLIN

THIS translation, from the original in LU., is founded on that published by O'Beirne Crowe in the journals of the Kilkenny Archæological Society, 1870-71, pp. 371-448. Besides slight modifications of the English with a view to clearness, I have adopted some fresh readings published by Dr. Whitley Stokes in a pamphlet entitled *Remarks on the Celtic Additions to Curtius' Greek Etymology* (Calcutta, 1875, pp. 55-7), and by Professor Rhys in his *Hibbert Lectures*, pp. 260, 261. Mr. S. H. O'Grady has furnished me with re-renderings of a few very obscure passages. These will be found in the footnotes.

The tale, which introduces us to a new and Christian order of things, is interesting as showing the esteem in which the old pagan hero was held even in Christian times. The possibility of Cuchullin's reception into heaven is not only admitted, but he is appealed to by St. Patrick to witness before the heathen king to the truth of his doctrine.

## XIV

### THE PHANTOM CHARIOT OF CUCHULLIN

PATRICK went to Tara to enjoin belief upon the King of Erin, that is, upon Laegaire,<sup>1</sup> son of Niall, for he was King of Erin at the time; for he would not believe in the Lord though He had been preached unto him.

Laegaire said to Patrick: 'By no means will I believe in thee, nor yet in God, until thou shalt call up Cuchullin in all his dignity, as he is recorded in the old stories, that I may see him, and that I may address him in my presence here; after that I will believe in thee.'

'Even this thing is possible for God,' said Patrick.

Then a messenger came from the Lord to Patrick, and he said that they [*i.e.* Patrick and Laegaire] should remain until the morrow on the rampart of the Rath of Tara, and that Cuchullin would appear to him there.

Afterwards (that is, after the appearance of Cuchullin to him in his chariot) Laegaire went to converse with Patrick.

Patrick said to Laegaire: 'Has something indeed appeared to thee?'

'Something has indeed appeared to me,' said Laegaire; 'but I have not power to relate it, unless thou wilt sign and consecrate my mouth.'

<sup>1</sup> Laegaire reigned A.D. 429-458. See Additional Notes on this tale.

'I will not sign thy mouth,' said Patrick, 'until I shall have my demand. I will, however, make a sign on the air that comes out of thy mouth, in order that thou mayest describe the appearance which was shown to thee.'

'As I was going,' said Laegaire, 'over the Slope of the Chariot to the Hill of the Sídh of the Plain, in the Plateau of the Assembly in the plain of MacIndoc, I saw the cold piercing wind, like a double-barbed spear. It hardly spared to take the hair from our heads, and to go through us to the earth. I asked of Benen<sup>1</sup> the meaning of the wind. Benen said to me, "That is the wind of hell after its opening before Cuchullin." We saw then the heavy fog which dropped upon us. I asked also of Benen the meaning of the heavy fog. Benen said that the fog was the breath of men and of horses that were traversing the plain before me.

'Then we saw the great raven-flock on high above us. The country was full of birds, and in height they reached to the clouds of heaven. I asked of Benen concerning that matter. Benen said they were sods thrown up by the hoofs of the horses that were yoked to Cuchullin's chariot. After that, we being still there, we saw the forms of the horses through the mist, and of men in the easy chariot. A charioteer on high behind them; a spirit-chieftain: horses that ride paths.<sup>2</sup>

'I observed after this the two horses; equal in size and beauty were they, and only unlike in form and colour; in swiftness, in symmetry, in action, equal.

<sup>1</sup> Benen or St. Benignus was companion to St. Patrick and his successor at Armagh. See Additional Note.

<sup>2</sup> 'Horses that career along roads, tracks, courses,' S. H. O'Grady.

Broad were their hoofs and broad their backs; in colour beautiful; in height, in vehemence, remarkable. Their heads were small: large-lipped, bright-eyed. Red of chest, sleek and well-knit, they yielded promptly to the yoke; they [attracted attention by] the lofty dignity [of their movements]; their manes and tails hung down in curls.

'Behind the pair a wide-spaced chariot. [Beneath it], two black solid wheels; [above it], two symmetrical, over-lapping reins; its shafts firm and straight as swords; the reins adorned and pliant; the pole, white silver with a withe of *findruine*; the yoke, firm, ridged, and made of gold; the hood, purple; the fittings, green.

'Within the chariot a hero was visible. His hair was thick and black, and smooth as though a cow had licked it. In his head his eye gleamed swift and grey. About him was flung a tunic of purple-blue, its borders of white gold-withe. It was clasped with a brooch of red gold upon his breast; it floated out over each of his two shoulders. A white hooded cloak hung about him with a border of flaming red. A sword with a hilt of gold lying in a rest on his two thighs; and in his hand a broad grey spear on a shaft of wild ash. Beside it lay a sharp venomous dart. Across his shoulders he bore a purple shield surrounded by an even circle of silver; upon it were chased loop-animals in gold. Into his head a shower of pearls seemed to have been thrown. Blacker than the side of a black cooking-spit each of his two brows, redder than ruby his lips.

'Before him in the chariot was the charioteer; a certain very slender, tall and lank, stooped, very freckled person. Very curly red hair on the top of

his head; a wreath (*gibne*) of *findruine* on his forehead, that prevented his hair from falling about his face. Above his two ears spheres of gold, into which his hair was gathered. About him was a winged little cloak,<sup>1</sup> with an opening at its two elbows. He held in his hand a small goad of red gold with which he urged on his horses. It seemed to me that it was Cuchullin and Laegh, his charioteer, who were within the chariot, and that it was the Dubhsaighlenn and the *liath Macha* that were yoked to it.<sup>1</sup>

‘Dost thou believe in God henceforth, O Laegaire,’ said Patrick, ‘since Cuchullin came to converse with thee?’

‘If it were Cuchullin that I saw, it seems to me that he stayed too short a time conversing with me.’

‘God is powerful,’ said Patrick. ‘If it were indeed Cuchullin, he will return and converse with thee again.’

Now they remained still in the same place, and they perceived the chariot coming across the plain towards them drawn by its two horses. Within rode Cuchullin [garbed] as a warrior, and Laegh, son of Rianganbar, as his charioteer.

Then in mid-air Cuchullin performed twenty-seven feats of skill above them.

The Noise-feat of Nine, that is the Feat of Cat the Feat of Cuar and the Feat of Daire, the Blind-feat of Birds, Leap over Poison, Red-folding of a brave Champion, the Bellows-dart, the Stroke with Quick-

<sup>1</sup> ‘He wore a lapeted hood of the lesser sort, the same being slit up at either corner,’ S. H. O’Grady. See Additional Notes on *cochall*, *findruine*, *gibne*, etc.

<sup>2</sup> This description of Cuchullin and his charioteer closely resembles that in the ‘Wooing of Emer.’

ness, the Ardour of Shout, the Hero's Scream, the Wheel-feat, Edge-feat, Apple-feat, and Noise-feat; the Ascent by rope, and Straightening of Body on Spear-point, the Binding of a Noble Champion, the Return-stroke and the Stroke with measure.<sup>1</sup>

In respect of the charioteer, the management of the reins confounds all speech: he is above evaporations and breathings.<sup>2</sup>

Then Cuchullin went to converse with Patrick and saluted him, saying :

‘I beseech, O holy Patrick,  
In thy presence that I may be,  
That thou wouldst bring me with thy faithful ones,  
Into the Lands of the Living.’

[Then he addressed the king thus.]

‘Believe in God and in holy Patrick, O Laegaire, that earth's surface may not come over thee; for it is not a demon that has come to thee: it is Cuchullin, son of Sualtach. For, a world for every champion is law or earth: every quiet one's is concealment, every hero's is earth, every holy one's is heaven: for of the order of demons is everything thou ponderest on: it is the world of each in turn that thou chariotest.’<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Only nineteen feats are here mentioned. In the ‘Wooing of Emer’ a list of twenty-four is given. See O’Beirne Crowe’s notes to this tale, *Kilkenny Journal*, 1871, part ii., and O’Curry, *Man. Cust.*, vol. ii. pp. 372-373.

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.* ‘He is above ears [of horses] and breaths [of men.]’ Elsewhere the phrase occurs in full, and must mean that he overtopped all others. S. H. O’Grady.

<sup>3</sup> This is a difficult passage. Mr. O’Grady reads as follows: ‘For the world of all champions is: law or earth; of all the quiet: that they are concealed [relegated to obscurity]; of all saints: heaven; . . . the world of all the rest it is that in turn thou dost roam through [*i.e.* experi-

Cuchullin was silent, and Laegaire did not speak.

‘Who chariots the Bregia, O Laegaire? Who sits their slopes? Who watches their fords? Whom do their wives elope with? Whom do their daughters love?’

‘What is that inquiry to me and to thee?’ says Laegaire.

‘There was a time, O Laegaire, that it was I who used to go among them, who used to go around them, who used to keep them together. I was their little champion whom they used to love: whom with high spirits they used to play about. There was a time, O Laegaire, it was I who used to go to their great attacks, who used to burst their great contests. I was the battle-victorious, loud-shouting, red-wristed, broad-palmed, brave Cuchullin, who used to be on the rich plain of Muirthemne. Believe in God and in Patrick, O Laegaire, for it is not a demon that has come to thee, but Cuchullin son of Sualtach.’

‘If it is Cú that is here present,’ said Laegaire, ‘he will tell us of his great deeds.’

‘That is true, O Laegaire,’ said Cuchullin. ‘I was the destroyer of hostageship in the reception of the fords of my territories; I was heavy of hand on heroes and great hosts. I used to hunt the fleet herds of my enemies in the full rushries, and left their flocks live-dead upon the mountains after the slaying in equal combat of the men who were over them.’

‘If thou didst indeed those deeds that thou recountest, the deeds of a hero were with thee; but they were not the deeds of Cú.’

ence, make trial of].’ The ‘world’ seems to mean ‘the way of the world,’ ‘the lot of’ each.



‘That is true, O Laegaire :

‘I was not a hound of taking of a Les  
I was a hound of taking of a deer :  
I was not a hound of a forbidden trotter,  
I was a hound strong for combat :  
I was not a hound of round lickings of leavings,  
I was a hound who visited the troops :  
I was not a hound to watch over calves,  
I was a hound to guard Emania.’<sup>1</sup>

‘If those deeds are as thou recountest them, the deeds of a hero were with thee.’

‘That is true, O Laegaire,’ says Cuchullin: ‘the deeds of a hero were with me.

‘I was a hero, I was a leader ;  
I was the charioteer of a great chariot ;  
I was gentle to the gentle,  
But against dishonour I wrought vengeance.

I was the innocent of my enemies ; I was not the poison-tongue<sup>2</sup> of my territories ; I was the casket of every secret for the maidens of Ulidia. I was a child with children ; I was a man with men. It was for correction I used to labour. I was good against my satirising ; I was better for praising.’<sup>3</sup>

‘If it be Cuchullin that is here,’ says Laegaire, ‘he will tell us a portion of the great risks he risked.’

‘That is true, O Laegaire,’ said Cuchullin.

<sup>1</sup> This passage is a play upon Cuchullin’s name, ‘the Hound of Culann.’ He dwells upon his noble deeds.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Poison-tongue’ is the epithet applied to Bricriu.

<sup>3</sup> ‘As against satire directed against me, I was good ; as against praise, I was better,’ *i.e.* I never deserved satire ; I outstripped all panegyric, S. H. O’Grady.

## I.

' I used to hunt their great flocks  
 With hardy Conachar :  
 It was in a foreign territory,  
 I used to behold each victory.

## II.

I played on breaths  
 Above the horses' steam :  
 Before me on every side  
 Great battles were broken.

## III.

I broke contests  
 On the champions of the territories :  
 I was the sword-red hero  
 After the slaying of hosts.

## IV.

I broke edge-feats  
 On the points of their swords ;  
 I reached their great spoils,  
 Were it through drivings of fire !'

[The next stanzas describe a journey in which he waged battles against Lochland on the north, and slew a giant. He continues] :—

## X.

' A journey I went, O Laegaire,  
 When I went into the Land of Scath :<sup>1</sup>  
 Dún Scaith in it with its locks of iron—  
 I laid hand upon it.

## XI.

Seven walls about that city—  
 Hateful was the fort :  
 A palisade of irons on each wall,  
 On which were nine heads.

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* Scathach the Amazon, with whom Cuchullin learned feats in Alba. See 'Wooring of Emer,' *supra*, p. 73.

## XII.

Doors of iron on each flank—  
Not strong defences against us :  
I struck them with my foot,  
And drove them into fragments.

## XIII.

There was a pit in the dún,  
Belonging to the king, so it is said :—  
Ten serpents<sup>1</sup> burst  
Over its border—it was a deed !

## XIV.

After that I attacked them,  
Though very vast the throng,  
Until I made bits of them,  
Between my two fists.

## XV.

There was a house full of toads,  
That were let loose upon us ;  
Sharp, beaked monsters  
That clave to my snout.

## XVI.

Fierce dragon-like monsters  
Were sent against us ;  
Strong were their witcheries  
Though they . . .

## XVII.

After that I attacked them  
When a rush was made on me  
I ground them into small pieces  
Between my two palms.

---

<sup>1</sup> Compare the combat of Conall *cernach* with the serpents in the 'Táin bó Fraich.' Nearly all heroes and demi-gods are represented as overcoming serpents.

## XVIII.

There was a caldron in that dún ;<sup>1</sup>  
 The calf of the three cows :—  
 Thirty joints [of meat] in its girth,  
 Were not a charge for it.

## XIX.

They used to frequent that caldron,  
 Delightful was the contest ;  
 They would not go from it on any side,  
 Until they left it full.

## XX.

There was much gold and silver in it—  
 Wonderful was the find :  
 That caldron was given [to us]  
 By the daughter of the king.

## XXI.

The three cows we carried off—  
 They swam boldly over the sea :  
 There was a load of gold for two men  
 To each of them on her neck.

## XXII.

After we had come upon the ocean,  
 Which spread out towards the north,  
 The crew of my currach was drowned  
 By the fierce storm.

## XXIII.

After this I floated them  
 Though it was a sharp danger  
 Nine men on each of my hands  
 Thirty on my head.

---

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* the dún of Curóí mac Daíre, with whose wife Blathnait Cuchullin had a discreditable connection. There is a reference to this passage in MS. H. 2, 16, col. 777, T. C. D. See also, *Silva Gadelica*, Extracts XII. xxxvii. ; Rhys's *Hibbert Lectures*, pp. 261, 473-6 ; O'Curry's *Man. Cust.*, vol. iii. pp. 79-82.

## XXIV.

Eight upon my two sides  
 Clung to my body.  
 Thus I swam the ocean  
 Until I reached the harbour.

## XXV.

What I suffered of trouble,  
 O Laegaire, by sea and land :—  
 Yet more severe was a single night,  
 When the demon was wrathful.

## XXVI.

My little body was scarred—  
 With Lugaid the victory :  
 Demons carried off my soul  
 Into the red charcoal.

## XXVII.

I played the swordlet on them,  
 I plied on them the *gae bulga* ;  
 I was in my concert victory  
 With the demon in pain.<sup>1</sup>

## XXVIII.

Great as was my heroism,  
 Hard as was my sword :  
 The devil crushed me with one finger  
 Into the red charcoal !'

[Cuchullin endeavours to persuade King Laegaire to believe in God and Patrick, by dwelling on the pains of hell, in which are lying the champions of the

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* 'I was in exact correspondence with the Devil in pain' [in every way my torments corresponded with his]. There is something very quaint in the notion of Cuchullin plying the *gae bulga* on the demons of hell. It is a foretaste of many mediæval visions of the Inferno.

Ulad. He extols Patrick's power in having conjured him up. He concludes :]

## XLVII.

' Though thine were the continual life  
Of earth, with its beauty,  
Better is a single reward in heaven  
With Christ, Son of the living God.

## XLVIII.

I beseech, O holy Patrick,  
In thy presence, that I may come,  
That thou wouldst bring me with thy faithful ones  
Unto the land which thou drivest about.'<sup>1</sup>

' Believe in God and holy Patrick, O Laegaire, that a wave of earth may not come over thee. It will come, unless thou believest in God and in holy Patrick, for it is not a spirit that has come to thee: it is Cuchullin, son of Sualtach.'

Now, that thing came indeed to pass: earth came over Laegaire ;<sup>2</sup> heaven is declared for Cuchullin. Now Laegaire believed in Patrick in consequence.

Great was the power of Patrick, in awakening Cuchullin after being nine fifty years<sup>3</sup> in the grave; that is, from the reign of Conachar mac Nessa (it is he

<sup>1</sup> ' I crave, holy Patrick, may it be mine to attain to thy companionship; along with thy faithful, may he convey me into the land which he pervades,' S. H. O'Grady.

<sup>2</sup> O'Beirne Crowe says that the story-teller has confused between King Laegaire and a Druid of the same name, who was swallowed up at the prayer of St. Patrick. But probably the reference is to the strange death of the king. See Additional Note.

<sup>3</sup> *i.e.* four hundred and fifty years. The date of Laegaire being 429-458, this calculation agrees with the chronologists in placing the epoch of Conachar and Cuchullin in the first century.

that was born in co-birth with Christ), to the end of the reign of Laegaire, son of Niall, son of Eochaid *muighmedbin*, son of Muiredach *trech*, son of Fiachra *roptine*, son of Cairpre *liffechair*, son of Cormac *ulfada*, son of Art *aenfer*, son of Conn, the fighter of a hundred, son of Feradach *rechtmar*, son of Tuathal *techtmar*, son of Feradach *finnfachtnach*, son of Crimthann *niadnár*, son of Lugaid of the Red Stripes. And he [*i.e.* Lugaid] was a foster-son to Cuchullin, son of Sualtach.





## ADDITIONAL NOTES

### ON 'THE WOOING OF EMER.'

*After the likeness of the House of the Meadhall—i.e. the Teach-Miodhchuarta, or banqueting-hall of Tara. This was an oblong building. The ruins measure 759 feet in length by 46 feet in breadth, but it was originally wider. See Petrie's Tara Hill, pp. 160-189, for full description. It had fourteen doors, seven to the west and seven to the east, and was slightly raised at the southern end where the dais of the bards and brehons stood. The following description of it is given in the time of Cormac O'Cuinn :—*'Three hundred feet was the measurement of the house and seven cubits the length of the fire-place, and seven chandeliers in that palace. Twice seven doors in that Royal House. Three times fifty *imdhas* (i.e. couches, beds, or compartments) beside the *imdha* of Cormac; three times fifty heroes in each *imdha*. Cormac had fifty lawgivers. Fifty heroes stood up in the presence of the king while he was eating.'—H. 2, 18, quoted Petrie, *Tara*, p. 163. A description of the Croebh Ruad or Red Branch House reads as follows :—'A jointed plate of red yew the house and apartments. The apartment of Conchobar in the centre of the house. Rails of bronze about it, with tops of silver, and birds of gold on the rails; and gems of precious stone—they are the eyes that used to be in their heads.' In the Feast of Bricriu we have a description of Meave's palace at Cruachan. It appears to have been circular, not oblong like the others, and had twelve windows with glass shutters to them. The royal apartment was, as at Tara and Emain Macha, in the middle of the house.

*Pp. 63-69. Kennings.*—This curious conversation, in which Cuchullin and Emer converse together in figures of speech not understood by their companions, is a remarkable example of what

are known as 'kennings,' the use of which Irish literature shares with Iceland. There are several other places in which this hyperbolic form of speech is used. In a poem known as *Dá Choca's* poem (Rawl. B. 512, fo. 52a, 2, and Egerton 88, fo. 14b), the various dishes of a banquet are thus described. It begins: 'Banban the bard had gone to the house of the woman Desnat, who prepared a repast for them. Said the bard to the apprentice who was asleep: "Get up," said he, "we are served." To test the apprentice, Banban said: "Tell us by the rules of thy art [*i.e.* through kennings], the repast that has been given us." Then said the apprentice: "Here is gravel of Glenn Ai," etc. (meaning "hen's eggs.")'<sup>1</sup> In *Scél Baili Binnbérlaig*, or *The Story of Baile the Sweet-spoken* (Harl. 5280, fo. 48a), a number of Latin, Hebrew, and archaic Irish words are used instead of the ordinary Irish words.<sup>2</sup> From the extract that we give above, it would appear that this form of speech was a special accomplishment of those who desired to become bards, and was used as a test of their capacities. We know that there was a special 'dialect of the poets,' which had to be acquired by all aspirants during their apprenticeship. Whether the use of 'kennings' was introduced from Scandinavia or arose separately in Ireland it is difficult to say. It may be a mere form of erudite slang.

Slang of various kinds has always been employed by certain sections of society. The learned slang of Euphuism or that ridiculed by Molière in *Précieuses ridicules* has gone out of fashion, but that of the Stock Exchange and the turf remains. It is as mysterious to those outside the circle of the initiated as was Cuchullin's conversation to Laegh and the maidens.

For other examples of poetic obscurity, see *Battle of Magh Rath*, ed. O'Donovan (published by the Irish Arch. Soc.), proem, pp. 90-95; 'The fate of the Children of Tuireann,' (published by the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language), pp. 107-108, and 'The Proceedings of the Great Bardic Institution' (published by the Ossianic Soc., vol. v.), pp. 15-17. In all these instances the bard is obliged to explain his poem word for word as it is otherwise incomprehensible to the audience.

<sup>1</sup> *Hibernica Minora*, edited by Prof. Kuno Meyer. Anecdota Oxoniensia, Mediæval and Modern Series. Part viii. (Clarendon Press.)

<sup>2</sup> *Revue Celtique*, t. xiii., edited by Prof. Kuno Meyer, preface and notes.

*The Bridge of the Cliff.*—This is the earliest appearance in Irish literature of this famous bridge. It may have been introduced from Norse legend. It is not mentioned in the shorter and older recension, nor is the home of Scathach there said to be on an island. The account of this incident in MS. Rawl. B. 512, is as follows: 'There was a large glen before him. One narrow path across it. Yet that was his way to the house of Scathach. Across a terrible stormy height besides. He then went that way. He went up to the dún.' The Bridge of the Cliff was, however, destined to play an important part in later Irish Visions of Purgatory and Hell. (See Vision of Adamnán, ed. Dr. Whitley Stokes, Calcutta, 1870. Vision of Tundale, ed. by Mr. Turnbull from a MS. in the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh, 1843. Vision of Owayn Miles, ed. Turnbull and Laing, Edinburgh, 1837). The idea of a 'brig o' Dread' is familiar in many Border ballads, and in Arthurian legend. It belongs to the Hell-doctrine of nearly all Oriental religions. Scathach means 'shadowy,' and her abode may have been looked upon as a realm of darkness. She probably gives her name to the Isle of Skye. For a study of the whole subject see Lucian Schermann's *Materialien zur Geschichte der indischen Visions-litteratur*, Leipzig, 1892. The Persian belief will be found expressed in Zend Avesta Fargard xiii. 1a, Fargard xix. v. For that of the Mohammedans see Sales' Koran, prel. discourse.

### ON 'THE SIEGE OF HOWTH.'

*Bardic Circuit.*—These princely or bardic circuits became a serious infliction to the chiefs, who were bound to offer entertainment. These visitations were only submitted to through dread of the satire of the bards, which was supposed to bring down evil on themselves and their country. (Compare the Boromean Tribute, *Sil. Gad.*, vol. ii., Trans. p. 408; and *Rev. Celt.*, vol. xiii.; and see the Proceedings of the Great Bardic Institution, Trans. Ossianic Society for 1857, vol. v.)

The visitation of Athairne who was Arch-Poet of Ulster was political, and devised for the express purpose of picking a quarrel

with the southern chiefs. His circuit was made during the height of the power of the Northern Province when, lifted up with insolence, they sought still further contests. Athairne, though here mentioned with deserved execration, is elsewhere honourably spoken of. (See O'Curry, *MS. Mat.*, pp. 176, 383.) He met with a violent death, the just result of his own evil deeds. (See Y. B. Lecan, facsimile, R. I. A., List of Contents.)

### ON 'THE DEBILITY OF THE ULTONIANS.'

One of the most curious features in the Cuchullin romance is the *Cess noiden Ulad*, the weakness that at certain critical moments in the history of their country fell upon the Ultonians. In the *Táin bó Cuailgne* we find Cuchullin holding back single-handed the hosts of Ailill and Meave, while the Ultonians are incapacitated by one of their periodical fits of debility from coming to his assistance. He is at length obliged to send his father to inquire whether they are free from their sufferings, as he can no longer keep at bay by his single force the combined hosts of Erin. Again, before the great battle of Muirthemne, when all Erin and the powers of evil were leagued together against Cuchullin, the Ultonians were equally unable to give him aid, for 'the Curse worked upon Ulster,' and 'in Emain Macha, with Ulster's nobles, Conachar lay in the Pains.'

This curious idea has been supposed to have had its origin in some custom similar to the 'Couvade' which has been practised among many savage nations, and retains its hold even to-day among the Indians of Central and South America, the natives of Martinique and the islands near Panama, in parts of China, and in the Congo State in Africa. Diodorus and Strabo mention its existence in Corsica and other places in Europe, and it is found still among the Basque inhabitants of Northern Spain.

Francisque-Michel says :—'En Biscaye, dans les vallées, toute la population rappelle, par les usages, l'enfance de la société ; les femmes se lèvent immédiatement après leurs couches et vaguent aux soins du ménage, pendant que leur mari se met au lit, prend la tendre créature avec lui, et reçoit ainsi les compléments des voisins.'

A similar custom is recorded concerning the province of Zardanan by Marco Polo (see Yule's *Marco Polo*, p. 52, and note 3, p. 57). There is, however, no instance on record of the 'Couvade' extending to a whole tribe; nor has the Irish prostration anything to do with the private concerns of any particular family. It has more probably arisen from some form of *ges* or *tabu*, such as are found among all savage nations, and may have been connected with religious or funeral ceremonies. Similar instances of periodic inactivity are mentioned by Dr. F. B. Jevons in his *Introduction to the History of Religion*, pp. 65-66 (quoting from Gage, *A New Survey of the West Indies*, p. 160; and Ellis's *Tshi-speaking Peoples*, pp. 228, 74).

### ON 'THE TÁIN BÓ CUAILGNE.'

There existed in Ireland an ancient tradition that the Epic of the Táin had at a very early period been lost, and that the sequence of its episodes had been forgotten by the bards. This tradition is preserved in a tale entitled 'The Recovery of the Táin and the conjuring up of Fergus mac Róich.' Two different versions of this legend, one pagan and one Christian, exist. According to the first account, which is preserved in the Book of Leinster, Senchan Torpeist, chief poet and *file* of Erin about the year 598 A.D., called a meeting of the bards and story-tellers of Erin to ascertain whether any of them could recollect the whole of the Táin bó Cuailgne. They confessed that they remembered only fragments, and he then sent away two of their body to the East to seek an old book called *The Cuilmenn*, long since carried away out of Ireland, which was said to contain the whole story of the Táin. Setting forth, the young bards arrive, on their journey, at the grave of Fergus mac Róich at Magh Aei, in Roscommon, and, seating himself on the tomb, one of them addressed to the spirit of Fergus a lay of his own composing. Suddenly he found himself enveloped in a heavy mist, and Fergus himself appeared to him in all his old dignity and splendour, and, during a space of three days, he related to him from beginning to end the Progress of the Táin. This version of the 'Recovery of the Táin,' which has

no Christian details, is found entirely dissociated from the Táin itself in LU. and LL. In more modern MSS. the whole tale, or a *resumé* of it, often forms the introduction to the Epic.

The second, or Christianised version, is preserved in a curious old tract called *Imtheacht na tromdhaimhe*, *i.e.* 'The Proceeding (or Going forth) of the Great Bardic Institution.' It is contained in the Book of Lismore, a MS. of the fourteenth century, and has been published, with translation, by Professor Connellan in the *Transactions of the Ossianic Society*, vol. v., 1857. According to this version, Fergus appears in response to the prayers of the chief saints of Ireland collected for this purpose round his tomb. St. Cieran of Clonmacnoise, who was present at the recital, is said to have written down the tale from beginning to end on a fine vellum manufactured from the skin of his favourite dun cow, hence called the *Leabhar na hUidhre*, or Book of the Dun Cow. Having offered up thanksgiving the saints retire, and Fergus returns to his tomb.

### ON 'THE DEATH OF CUCHULLIN.'

*Lugaid . . . cut off his head.* So also in the MS. from which our extract of the Battle of Muirthemne is taken, but other accounts make Erc son of Cairpre *niafer*, the beheader of Cuchullin.

In a poem ascribed to Dubhthach Ua Lugair, A.D. 430, in praise of the Leinstermen, we read of 'the three Red-heads':—

'They killed Lugaid, and Conaire, | and Conall.

Erc, son of Cairpre, famed King of Erin, | with his multitude  
Stoutly the Fair-haired one cut his head | off Cuchullin.'

And in a poem by Cinaeth O'Hartigain, A.D. 973, in the Book of Ballymote, we read:—'Erc's Mound, whence is it named? It is not difficult to tell. Erc was the son of Cairpre *niafer*, who was son of Ros *ruadh*, King of Leinster (Laighen). And it was Erc that cut his head off Cuchullin.' In revenge for this deed

Conall *cernach* killed Erc, and brought his head to Tara. It is said that his sister Acaill, who came out of Ulster to lament her brother, grieved so sorely for his death that her heart burst within her: she desired that her grave might be made within sight of that of her brother. A pathetic lament for her is cited by O'Curry, *MS. Mat.*, Appendix, p. 514.

All accounts agree in making Cuchullin die young.

In the Annals of Tighernach, with a marginal note, 'Ann. Chr. 39,' is recorded: 'Mors Conculainn fortissimi heros Scotorum by Lugaidh [mac-na-tri-Con, and by Erc], son of *the Son of Cairpre Niafer*. vii years was his age when he took arms. xvii when he was in pursuit of the Táin Bo Cuailgne. xxvii when he died.' There is evidently some significance here attached to the number seven.

The same age is given to him in the Book of Ballymote, but in H. 3, 17, lib. T.C.D., it is said: 'The year of the Táin was the fifty-ninth of Cuchullain's age from the night of his birth to the night of his death.'

There is an evident desire shown throughout the tracts to throw an added wonder over Cuchullin's deeds of prowess by making him as youthful as possible.

## ON 'THE PHANTOM CHARIOT OF CUCHULLIN.'

*Loeghaire* or *Laeghaire*, son of Niall of the Nine Hostages, A.D. 429-458. He reigned during thirty years of unexampled prosperity. In his reign both Palladius and Patrick came to Ireland. He was killed in a mysterious manner by the forces of nature while endeavouring to reimpose the Boromean Tribute upon Leinster. He was buried standing, in the external rampart of Tara, called Rath Laeghaire, clad in armour and facing his enemies. (See *Ann. Four Masters*, A.D. 429-458, and notes, and *Ann. Clon.* at same date.)

His death having been prophesied to occur 'between Ere and Alba,' he never would go on any naval expedition between these

two countries; but he met his death in Leinster between two hills of that name.

*Benen* or St. Benignus, is spoken of as the 'psalmist of St. Patrick' (see *Ann. IV. Mas.*, A.D. 448). He became a bishop, and succeeded St. Patrick at Armagh in 455, resigned his bishopric in 465, and died at Armagh, 468. He was of a Munster family and of noble birth, being a descendant of Tadhg mac Cein, grandson of Oilíoll Olum, King of Munster. The father had been baptized by St. Patrick, with his family, near the Boyne, when the latter was on his way to Tara; and the boy, then only seven years old, became so attached to St. Patrick that he insisted on accompanying him. He was named Benignus from his benign disposition. He must have been a man of learning and a poet, for he assisted in the compilation of the celebrated *Saltair of Caiseal*, and perhaps also in drawing up the *Book of Rights (Leabhar na-gCeart)*. His life has been preserved by Colgan (*Trias. Thaum.*, p. 203); see also *Book of Rights*, ed. O'Donovan, pp. 29, 51, 53, etc., and *Introd.* pp. ii-xi. In the *Senchus Mór*, p. 5, we read that that compilation was made by three kings, three bishops, and three poets or men of science.

Laeghaire, Corc, Dairi the hardy,  
Patrick, Benen, Cairnech, the just,  
Rossa, Dubthach, Fergus with science,  
These were the nine pillars of the *Senchus mór*.

*Findruine*.—The exact nature of this metal is not known, but in value it ranked between bronze and silver. In the *Feast of Bricriu (LU.) Meave* says: 'The difference between bronze and findruine is between Laeghaire the Victorious and Conall *cernach*, and the difference again between findruine and red gold is between Conall *cernach* and Cuchullin.' It was used for ornaments such as anklets, bracelets, and brooches; for ribs of spears and for strengthening rods; for rims of shields, ornamentation of helmets or caps, and for chess-boards. It is usually translated 'white bronze.'

*A wreath of Findruine on his forehead*.—The *gibne*, a band or thread which was tied on the head to keep the hair in its place



down on the forehead, was, O'Curry thinks, a badge of office peculiar to charioteers. It is often described as part of the dress of Laegh. In the Combat of Cuchullin and Ferdia, we read: 'The same charioteer put on his crested, gleaming, quadrangular helmet, with a variety of all colours and of all devices, and falling over his two shoulders behind him. This was an addition of gracefulness to him, and not an incumbrance. He then with his hand placed to his forehead the red-yellow *gibne*, like a crescent of pure gold, of gold that had poured over the edge of the purifying crucible; and this he put on in order to distinguish his office of charioteer from that of his master.'

In an ancient glossary in a vellum in T. C. D. O'Curry found this explanation of the word: '*Gibne*, that is a thread, as Laegh said when giving his description. "I saw," said he, "a man on the plain and a *gibne* of Findruine upon his forehead.'" Among the gold ornaments in the R.I.A. are many torques of gold, both plain and twisted. The *Mind* was a broader band or circlet of gold used by royal personages.

*Spheres of gold.*—These were apparently little cups of gold into which the hair was gathered at the sides or behind the head. They are frequently mentioned. The description in the 'Wooing of Emer' is: 'A ring of bronze on his brow prevents the hair from falling over his face. Patins of gold on both sides of the back of his head to confine his hair.' In the 'Sickbed of Cuchullin' Laegh describes Labraid, 'of the quick hand at sword,' as having on him 'yellow hair of most splendid colour, an apple of gold closing it.'

*A winged little cloak.*—The *cochall* was a hood rather than a cloak, though it sometimes had lappets coming down to the shoulders. It represented the Roman 'cucullus,' and, having been adopted by the monks as their especial head-dress, provided the modern word 'cowl.' In the Battle of Moytura it is said of the Dagda, 'He had *Cochlini gobach* (bill-pointed little Cochalls) on his two elbows.' In the 'Sickbed of Cuchullin' it is said that 'Cuchullin saw the bare shoulder of Eochaid *Iuil* through the *cochall*' while he was washing his hands. There is an interesting article on the *cochall* by Robert MacAdam in the *Ulster Journal of*

*Arch.*, vol. ix. p. 294. In the *Táin bó Cuailgne* Laegh is described as being clothed in 'a cochall of deerskin,' and a skin cochall has been found in a bog in Co. Antrim. It was made of otter-skins carefully sewn with animal fibre; one edge of it fitted exactly round the neck. The only other mention of leather cloaks besides that of Laegh that is known to us is a noted historical instance: *i.e.* when 'Murtoch of the Leather Cloaks' made cochalls of skin to preserve his army against the cold.

## APPENDICES

I. CHART OF THE CONACHAR-CUCHULLIN SAGA

II. TRACK OF MEAVE'S FORCES ON THE TÁIN BÓ CUAILGNE

III. CONSPECTUS OF THE GATHERING OF ULSTER AT THE  
HILL OF SLANE



# APPENDIX I.—CHART OF THE CONACHAR-CUCHULLIN SAGA.

(A whole title printed in italics denotes that the Tale is lost.)

## I. TALES PERSONAL TO CONACHAR.

- (1) Conachar, how generated.
- (2) Conachar's Adventures.
- (3) Conachar's Vision.
- (4) Battle of Rosnaree.
- (5) Conachar's Tragedy.

## II. TALES PERSONAL TO CUCHULLIN.

- (6) Cuchullin, how generated.
- (7) Cuchullin's training to arms.
- (8) Scathach's farewell to Cuchullin.
- (9) Cuchullin's *gessa*.
- (10) " Sick-bed.
- (11) " Courtship of Emer.
- (12) Emer's Elopement from Cuchullin (poem).
- (13) Cuchullin's adventure at the Boyne.
- (14) Intoxication of the Ultonians.
- (15) Siege of the Men of Falga.
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- (37) The Capture of the *Sidh*.
- (38) Dispute of the Swineherds.
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- (40) Mac Datho's Pig.
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- (46) " *Fíther*.
- (47) " Flidais.
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- (49) " *Ge*.
- (50) " Munad in Alba (?).
- (51) " Regaman.
- (52) " Regamna.
- (53) " Ros (part of 5).
- (54) " Ruanadh.
- (55) " Sailin (?).
- (56) *Táin* of Erc's three cows.
- (57) TÁIN BÓ CUAILGNE.
- (58) The Great Quest for the *Táin*.
- (59) The Revealing of the *Táin*.
- (60) The Recovering of the *Táin* and conjuring up of Fergus mac Róich.

## V. MISCELLANEOUS TALES CONNECTED WITH THE SAGA.

- (61) *Ailell's One Jealousy.*
- (62) *Meave's Man-jeering.*
- (63) *Echaid Airem's Great Company* (sequel to 94).
- (64) The Hiding of Aingedh (?).
- (65) " " Belach con glais.
- (66) " " *Cruachan's Cave.*
- (67) Triumphs of Conall *cláiringnech*.
- (68) *The Quarrel in Cathbad's House.*
- (69) Tragedy of Meave.
- (70) " Cet mac Magach.
- (71) " The Heroes.
- (72) " Laegaire *buadach*.
- (73) " Goll mac Carbad.
- (74) " Garb of Glenree.
- (75) " *Fiamain mac Fordá.*
- (76) " Athairne the Poet.
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- (78) " Aenach Macha.
- (79) " Airtech.
- (80) " Athcomar.
- (81) " The Boyne.
- (82) The Harrying of Belchu of Breifne.
- (83) " *Caher-Boirche.*
- (84) " *Cruachan.*
- (85) " Dinn Righ.
- (86) " *Rath Cruachan.*
- (87) " *Sidh Nennta* (sequel to Tochmarc Etaine).
- (88) The *Bruidhen* of Dá derga.
- (89) " Dá Choga.
- (90) *The Féis of Emania.*
- (91) " *Cruachan.*
- (92) Courtship of the Witch Báis.
- (93) " Etaine.
- (94) " Feirb.
- (95) Adventures of the Heroes.
- (96) " " Crimthan *nia náir*.

### The following have been published with translations.

- I. (1) Ed. with English translation by Prof. Kuno Meyer. *Rev. Celt.*, vol. vi. pp. 174-178.
- (4) Ed. with trans. from two texts by Rev. Edmund Hogan, S.J., M.R.I.A. Todd Lecture Series, R.I.A., 1892.
- (5) O'Curry's *MS. Mat.*, Appendix civi. pp. 637-643.
- II. (6) Ed. with Fr. trans. by M. Louis Duvau. *Rev. Celt.*, vol. ix. pp. 1-13. English rendering in *Voyage of Bran*, vol. ii., by Mr. Alfred Nutt. See also Windisch and Stokes' *Irische Texte*, vol. i. pp. 134-143, for text, introduction, and notes.
- (10) *Atlantis*, vol. i. pp. 370-392, and vol. ii. pp. 98-124. English trans. by E. O'Curry. Gilbert's *Facs. of Nat. MSS. of Ireland*, part i. plates xxxvii. and xxxviii., and Appendix iv. part ii. English trans. by Prof. B. O'Looney. See also *Irische Texte*, vol. i. pp. 197-234, for text, introduction, and notes. A Fr. trans. will be found in M. D'Arbois de Jubainville's *Épopée Celtique en Irlande*.
- (11) Text from Bodleian ms. Rawl. B. 512, ed. with English trans. by Prof. Kuno Meyer. *Rev. Celt.*, vol. xi. pp. 442-453, and English trans. from LU. and

- MS. Stowe 992, *Archaeological Review*, vol. i. pp. 68-75, 150-155, 231-235, 298-307.
- (14) Ed. with text and trans. by W. M. Hennessy, R.I.A. Todd Lecture Series, vol. i. part i.
- (16) Ed. with trans. by Dr. Whitley Stokes. *Rev. Celt.*, vol. viii.
- (17) A. A Fr. trans. appears in M. D'Arbois de Jubainville's *L'Épopée Celtique en Irlande*. Dr. Windisch, in *Irische Texte*, vol. i. pp. 235-311, gives text, intro., and notes without trans.
- B. Feast of Bricriu and Exile of the Sons of Duil Dermait. *Irische Texte*, vol. ii. part i. pp. 164-216. Ed. by Dr. Windisch with German trans. and notes.
- (18) Metrical rendering with trans. in Miss Brooke's *Reliques of Irish Poetry*, 1816, pp. 393-402, 1-44.
- (20) See *supra*, pp. 235-249, and extracts and trans. by Dr. Whitley Stokes, *Rev. Celt.*, vol. iii. pp. 175-185.
- (21) Ed. with trans. by O'Beirne Crowe. *Journal of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society*, 4th Series, 1870-71.
- III. (22) Ed. with trans. by S. H. O'Grady. *Silva Gadelica*, vol. i. p. 238; vol. ii. p. 269.
- (23) Ed. with English trans. by Dr. W. Stokes, *Irische Texte*, vol. ii. part ii. Two texts with English trans.

- IV. (38) Text with German trans. and notes by Dr. Windisch. *Irische Texte*, vol. iii. part i. pp. 230-278. English version, *Voyage of Bran*, vol. ii. (Grimm Library).
- (39) Ed. with trans. by Prof. Kuno Meyer. *Rev. Celt.*, vol. x.
- (40) Ed. with trans. by Prof. Kuno Meyer, *Hibernica Alinora*, in Anec. Oxon., Mediaeval and Modern Series; and by M. Louis Duvau, *Rev. Arch.* 3<sup>e</sup> série, t. viii., 1886. See also *Irische Texte*, vol. i. pp. 93-112.
- (41) Ed. by Dr. Windisch, with German trans., in Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften Philologisch-Historische Classe, 1884.
- (42) Ed. with trans. by Ed. Muller, *Rev. Celt.*, vol. iii.

- (45) Ed. with German trans. by Dr. Windisch. *Irische Texte*, vol. ii. part ii. pp. 185-205.
  - (47) Ed. with German trans. by Dr. Windisch. *Irische Texte*, vol. ii. part ii. pp. 206-223.
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  - (51) Ed. with German trans. by Dr. Windisch. *Irische Texte*, vol. ii. part ii. pp. 224-238.
  - (52) Ed. with German trans. by Dr. Windisch. *Irische Texte*, vol. ii. part ii. pp. 239-254.
  - (57) *Supra*, pp. 109-227. See abstract of LU. version in Zimmer's *Keltische Studien*, pp. 442-475. (Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Sprachforschung, 1887.)
  - (58-60) See 'The Proceedings of the Great Bardic Institution.' Ed. with trans. by Prof. Connellan. Trans. of the Ossianic Society, vol. v. 1857.
  - V. (94) Ed. with German trans. by Dr. Windisch. *Irische Texte*, vol. iii. part ii.
- A large number of the above tales will be found in Keating's *History of Ireland*, eds. pub. in Dublin, 1723, 1811, and in New York, 1866; and in M. D'Arbois de Jubainville's *Épopée Celtique en Irlande*. Outlines of the tales with translations of fragments in O'Curry, *MS. Mat.*, and *Man. and Cust.*; and in the prefaces to facsimiles published by the Royal Irish Academy.



## APPENDIX II

### TRACK OF MEAVE'S FORCES ON THE TÁIN BÓ CUAILGNE. (See MAP.)

- Sect. (4) Day 1. Start from Rath Cruachan, camp at *Cúil silinne* ('to the direction S.W. of Kells').
- Sect. (6) Day 2. They make a long detour led by Fergus, and find themselves at night again at *Cúil silinne*.
- „ (7) „ 3. Advance to Monocoltan. On the same day Cuchullin and his father meet at Ardcullin, and Cuchullin leaves a collar on the pillar stone. The men of Erin find it. They advance by *sleacht na gearbat*, 'where the lesser Partry is,' and spend the night before royal Kells.
- „ (11) „ 4. Cuchullin returns from his tryst at Tara and meets the host near Kilmore, 'northwards from Knowth,' 'to-day called Athgowla': formerly Athgrencha, and kills the advanced guard. He cuts the forked pole. (Interlude of Cuchullin's boy deeds.)
- „ (30) „ 5. They march past Corann eastwards across the mountain (LU. says Magh Mucceda).<sup>1</sup>
- „ (31) „ 6. Death of the sons of Garach at the ford of Ardkiacht.  
Death of Lethan at the ford on the Nith in Conaille-Muirthemne.  
Meave's pet squirrel killed.

<sup>1</sup> This is a mistake: both Corann and Magh Mucceda are in Connacht, and the troops at this time were close to Conaille-Muirthemne.

- Sect. (35) Day 7. The four great provinces march, fall on Magh Breagh and Magh Muirthemne and harry them. Fergus warns them of Cuchullin's approach. On the same day the Donn comes into the land of Mairgen. The Morrigu discourses to him 'from the pillar stone in Tara of Cuailgne,' and the Bull withdraws into Slievegullion.
- „ (38) „ 8. The men of Erin push into the rocky parts of Conaille-Muirthemne. Locha is killed.
- „ (39) „ 9. The host advances to *Glais Chruinn*. Uala is swept away in the torrent. Cuchullin hangs upon their rear and kills a hundred. The host skirts along the swollen stream to its source. Meave has the 'Gap of Ulster' cut for her passage. They pitch at *bélat Aileoin*, formerly called *glenn táil* or *liasa liac*. They pass on to the R. Seochair, or *glais gadrath*. They secure themselves at *druim én* in Conaille of Muirthemne.
- „ (40) „ 10. Cú brandishes his spear and a hundred die of fright. They encamp at *druim én* for three nights. Fiacra mac Firaba offers terms to Cuchullin on Meave's behalf.
- „ (43) „ 14. Meave confers with Cuchullin at Glenn Focháine. Cú nightly kills a hundred.
- „ (44) „ 15. During the night there has been a heavy fall of snow. Mac Roth's first and second embassy. Meave's conference with Fergus.
- „ (46) „ 16. The embassy of Fergus. Etarchomal is slain.
- „ (49) „ 17. Natchrantal's advance on Cuchullin.
- „ „ „ 18. Natchrantal's combat and death.
- „ (51) „ 19. Meave with a third part of her troops pursues her way northward to Dunseverick. Cuchullin hangs about them and kills several. Then he returns southward to protect his own country, and kills twenty of Meave's advanced guard. Buic mac Bainblai is discovered by him driving the Donn out of Glensamasc in Slievegullion.



Cú kills him at *Áth Buidhe* in Fir Rois, but the Bull escapes to Meave's camp.  
 Meave kills Finnmore, wife of Celtchar mac Uitechar, and harries Dunseverick.

Here a fortnight (or a month) elapses.<sup>1</sup> During this time the three divisions of Meave's army reunite and encamp. The Bull is driven into a strait pass and kept there. He tramples his keeper Forgaman to death. Cú kills Rec the Jester at *áth talachsét*, hence called *namsruth*.

Sect. (54). Cú mac Daláth's death.

Deaths of Liath mac Dabro, Srubdaire mac Fedach, and More.

„ (55). Cuchullin sends a message to Lugaid mac Nôis and other friends in Meave's camp. The same day Ferbaeth mac Furbennach falls by him.

„ (56). Lugaid entreats Cuchullin for his brother Lairin mac Nôis.

Lairin fights with Cuchullin and gets a 'hiding.'

„ (57). The Morrighu meets Cuchullin and talks with him.

Cuchullin spends a week at *áth grencha*; a hundred fall daily by his hand. Long mac Emonis is killed.

„ (58). Cuchullin bedaubs himself a beard; and Lôch Mor mac Mofebis goes out to meet him. The Morrighu attempts to overthrow Cuchullin. Lôch Mor is killed with the *gae bulga*. In great dejection Cú sends Laegh to Ulster for help.

„ (59). Cú kills Meave's three wizards and three witches. He sets upon the host in general from Delga to the southward. The Morrighu is healed.

„ (61). Meave sends a hundred against him. He kills them at *áth cró*.

„ (62). The men of Erin secure themselves at the *Brisleach mór* in Magh Muirthemne, but send away their kine and captives southward. At evening Cuchullin posted himself at 'the grave that is in the Lerga,'

<sup>1</sup> Henceforward the epochs of time become more perplexing. We shall therefore notify the Sections only.

and uttered his 'hero's call,' at which a hundred die of pure fright. Lugh mac Ethlenn visits Cú, and watches for three days and three nights while Cuchullin sleeps.<sup>1</sup>

- Sect. (65). The boy-corps from Emania come down and deliver three battles for Cuchullin. They with their captain Follaman are utterly destroyed.
- „ (66). Cuchullin awakens and avenges the slaughter of the boy-corps. In the great fight which ensues he destroys six score and ten kings, and one-third of the men of Erin.
- „ (71). He shows himself in his beauty to the women. Dubtach, for his jealousy, gets a kick from Fergus.
- „ (73). Angus, son of Aenlámh *gáibhe*, an Ulster warrior attacks the host, but is slain. Fiacha *fialdána* of Ulster and Docha mac Magach commit shooting-errors. Tamhan the jester, dressed in Ailell's crown, falls by a sling-stone.
- „ (76). The host of Meave pitch by the great stone in the Land of Ross. Fergus goes out to fight with Cuchullin, and the champion consents to fly before him on condition that Fergus will do the same in the final battle of the Táin.
- „ (77). Ferchú *loingsech*, an outlaw of Connacht, and twelve with him, come from Magh Aei to attack Cuchullin; they fall.
- „ (78). Calatin and his twenty-seven sons attack Cuchullin. Fiacha mac Firaba interferes to help him, and Cú kills them all at *áth iarrainn* (westward of Ardee). He follows Glas mac Delga to Meave's tent.
- „ (79). Combat of Ferdia and Cuchullin at *áth Firdiadh* (Ardee).
- „ (80). Cuchullin, grievously wounded, is comforted by the

<sup>1</sup> Here for the first time it is mentioned that Cuchullin had been holding in check the four great provinces of Erin, from the Monday before *Samhain* to the Wednesday next after *imbolc*—*i.e.* from November 1st to February 1st (St. Bridget's festival). This is afterwards several times repeated.

men of Ulster. He bathes his wounds in the rivers of Conaille-Muirthemne. Ferdia is buried.

- Sect. (81). Ceithern mac Fintan comes from Line in the north, across Slievefuad, to attack the host. He is healed
- „ (84). of his wounds by a 'marrow-bath,' rushes again into battle, and is slain.
- „ (87). Finntan avenges the death of his son.
- „ (88). Menn More from the Boyne fights. He and the host consent to fall back.
- „ (89). Reochaid comes to fight, but is conciliated by Finnbair.
- „ (90). The aged warrior Iliach hurls stones upon the men of Erin.
- „ (91). The charioteers' attack.
- „ (92). The host is overtaken by Amargin at Tailte, and driven north-west before him. They fall back a day's march to the northward.
- „ (93). Sualtach (or Sualtaim) gives warning to Ulster. He is killed.
- „ (96)-(102). During the Gathering of the men of Ulster the men of Erin camp at Slane [*i.e.* Sleamhain] in West Meath. Mac Roth makes three reports.
- „ „ The hosting of the Ultonians is on the Hill of Sleamhain, where Conachar pitches his tent.
- „ (105). The Morigu rouses Ulster to battle.
- „ (107). The great final Battles of the Táin bó Cualigne at Gâirech and Ilgâirech.
- „ (113). Ulster is routed and thrice driven back northwards.
- „ (117). Cuchullin re-enters the battle. Fergus, as he had engaged to do, falls back before him, and the men of Erin, perceiving this, take to flight. Meave sends the Brown Bull to Cruachan.
- „ (120). The routed army re-cross the Shannon at Athmore, now Athlone.
- „ (124). They are mustered to Cruachan, where the Battle of the Bulls takes place.
- „ (128)-(130). The White-horned being killed, the Brown Bull re-enters the Land of Cualigne, and there falls dead.

## APPENDIX III

## CONSPECTUS OF THE GATHERING OF ULSTER AT THE HILL OF SLANE.

(A) gives the names in order as they occur in the Book of Leinster; (B) their order in the modern version; (C) names to which the paragraphs describing arms belong, *Man. Cust.* vol. ii. pp. 316-318. Names in black type are common to both; names in small capitals are special to the modern version. viii., ix., x., xviii. (in List A) are not mentioned in *Man. Cust.*

| (A)   | (B)  | (C)  |
|---|--|--|
| (i.) Conachar. . . . .  | <b>Reochaid m<sup>c</sup> Fatheman</b> (A)             | (1) 'One of the Ulster chiefs' = (i.) (A). |
| (ii.) Cumsraid <i>menn</i> . . . . .  | <b>Fergus m<sup>c</sup> Leide</b> (x.). . . . .        | (2) 'Of another he says' = (ii.).          |
| (iii.) Sencha. . . . .  | <b>Conachar</b> (i.). . . . .                          | (3) 'Another bears' = (iii.).              |
| (iv.) Eoghan m <sup>c</sup> Durthacht. . . . .  | <b>Cumsraid <i>menn</i></b> (ii.). . . . .             | (4) 'Another has' = (iv.).                 |
| (v.) Laegaire <i>buadach</i> . . . . .  | <b>Sencha</b> (iii.). . . . .                          | (5) 'Another again carries' = (v.).        |
| (vi.) Munreamar. . . . .  | <b>Celtchar m<sup>c</sup> Uitechar</b> (xiv.). . . . . | (6) 'The next' = (vi.).                    |
| (vii.) Conna m <sup>c</sup> Morna. . . . .  | <b>Amargin</b> (xi.). . . . .                          | (7) 'Another bears above him' = (vii.).    |
| (viii.) Feidlimid m <sup>c</sup> chilairchetail. <b>Eoghan m<sup>c</sup> Durthacht</b> (iv.). . . . . | <b>Eoghan m<sup>c</sup> Durthacht</b> (iv.). . . . .   | (8) 'The next bears' = (ix.).              |
| (ix.) Reochaid m <sup>c</sup> Fatheman. . . . .   | <b>Laegaire <i>buadach</i></b> (v.). . . . .           | (9) 'Another warrior bears' = (xi.).       |

- (x.) Fergus m<sup>o</sup> Leide. . . . . Munreamar (vi.). . . . . (10) 'Another wears' = (xii.).  
 (xi.) Amargin. . . . . Conna m<sup>o</sup> Morna (vii.). . . . . (11) 'The two chieftains' = (xiii.).  
 (xii.) Feradach *finn fechnach*. Feidlimid m<sup>o</sup> chilairechetail (12) 'Another . . . arms of iron' =  
     viii.). . . . . (xiv.).  
 (xiii.) Fiacha and Fiachna. . . . . Feradach *finn fechnach* (xii.). (13) 'The next has' = (xv.).  
 (xiv.) Celtchar m<sup>o</sup> Uitechar. . . . . ROS, DAIRE, AND IMCHILL. (14) 'The next' = (xvi.).  
 (xv.) Errge *echbél*. . . . . Fiacha and Fiachna (xiii.). . . . . (15) 'Then comes' = (xvii.).  
 (xvi.) Menn m<sup>o</sup> Salcholgan. . . . . Errge *echbél* (xv.). . . . . (16) 'And another' = (xviii.).  
 (xvii.) Fergna m<sup>o</sup> Finnchonna. . . . . Menn m<sup>o</sup> Salcholgan (xvi.). . . . . (17) 'Another again bears' = (xix.).  
 (xviii.) Furbaide *ferbenn*. . . . . Fergna m<sup>o</sup> Finnchonna (xvii.). (18) 'Lastly, come a group' = (xx.).  
 (xix.) Erc m<sup>o</sup> Cairbre niafer. . . . . Furbaide *ferbenn* (xviii.). . . . . [NOTE.—(viii.), (x.) have not any  
     arms assigned to them.]  
 (xx.) Muirthemne. . . . . FERCHERTNE (CHIEF POET OF ULSTER), AILELL *milteanga*,  
     ATHAIRNE THE POET.  
 (xxi.) . . . . . CATHBAD AND HIS TWO SONS: IMRINN AND GENANN.  
 (xxii.) . . . . . FINGHIN THE CUNNING LEECH.  
 (xxiii.) . . . . . GLAS AND MENN, SONS OF UITECHAR.  
 (xxiv.) . . . . . TRISCATHAL AND ANOTHER.  
 (xxv.) . . . . . GLAS, MAINE, CONAING : SONS OF CONACHAR.  
 (xxvi.) . . . . . CONALL *cernach*.  
 (xxvii.) . . . . . Erc m<sup>o</sup> Cairpre niafer (xix.).  
 (xxviii.) . . . . . THE THREE 'BATTLE-WHEELS' AND THREE 'CASTLES.'  
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