

XVII THE GREAT ROUT ON THE PLAIN OF MURTHEMNE FOLLOWETH HERE BELOW

That night the warriors of four of the five grand provinces of Erin pitched camp and made their station in the place called Breslech Mor ('the Great Rout') in the Plain of Murthemne. Their portion of cattle and spoils they sent on before them to the south to the cow stalls of Ulster. Cuchulain took station at Ferta ('the Gravemound') at Lerga ('the Slopes') hard by them. And his charioteer kindled him a fire on the evening of that night, namely Laeg son of Rianganabair. Cuchulain saw far away in the distance the fiery glitter of the bright golden arms over the heads of four of the five grand provinces of Erin, in the setting of the sun in the clouds of evening. Great anger and rage possessed him at their sight, because of the multitude of his foes, because of the number of his enemies and opponents, and because of the few that were to avenge his sores and his wounds upon them.

Then Cuchulain arose and he grasped his two spears and his shield and his sword. He shook his shield and brandished his spears and wielded his sword and sent out the hero's shout from his throat, so that the fiends and goblins and sprites of the glens and demons of the air gave answer for the fearfulness of the shout]that he lifted on high, until Nemain, which is Badb, brought confusion on the host. The warriors of the four provinces of Erin made such a clangour of arms with the points of their spears and their weapons that an hundred strong, stout-sturdy warriors of them fell dead that night of fright and of heartbreak in the middle of the camp and quarters of the men of Erin at the awfulness of the horror and the shout which Cuchulain lifted on high.

As Laeg stood there he descried something: A single man coming from the northeastern quarter athwart the camp of the four grand provinces of Erin making directly for him. "A single man here cometh towards us now, Cucucan," cried Laeg.

"But what manner of man is he?" Cuchulain asked.

"Not hard to say" Laeg made answer. "A great, well-favoured man, then. Broad, close shorn hair upon him, and yellow and curly his back hair. A green mantle wrapped around him. A brooch of white silver in the mantle over his breast. A kirtle of silk fit for a king, with red interweaving of ruddy gold he wears trussed up on his fair skin and reaching down to his knees. A great one-edged sword in his hand. A black shield with hard rim of silvered bronze thereon. A five barbed spear in his hand. A pronged bye-spear beside it. Marvellous, in sooth, the feats and the sport and the play that he makes. But him no one heeds, nor gives he heed to any one. No one shows him courtesy nor does he show courtesy to any one, like as if none saw him in the camp of the four grand provinces of Erin."

"In sooth, O fosterling" answered Cuchulain "it is one of my friends of fairy kin that comes to take pity upon me, because they know the great distress

wherein I am now all alone against the four grand provinces of Erin on the Plunder of the Kine of Cualnge, killing a man on the ford each day and fifty each night, for the men of Erin grant me not fair fight nor the terms of single combat from noon of each day.”

Now in this, Cuchulain spoke truth. When the young warrior was come up to Cuchulain he bespoke him and condoled with him for the greatness of his toil and the length of time he had passed without sleep. “This is brave of thee, O Cuchulain” quoth he.

“It is not much, at all” replied Cuchulain.

“But I will bring thee help” said the young warrior.

“Who then art thou?” asked Cuchulain.

“Thy father from Faery am I, even Lug son of Ethliu.”

“Yea, heavy are the bloody wounds upon me; let thy healing be speedy.”

“Sleep then awhile, O Cuchulain” said the young warrior “thy heavy fit of sleep by Ferta in Lerga (‘the Gravemound on the Slopes’) till the end of three days and three nights and I will oppose the hosts during that time.” He examined each wound so that it became clean. Then he sang him the ‘men’s low strain’ till Cuchulain fell asleep withal. It was then Lug recited the Spell Chant of Lug.

Accordingly Cuchulain slept his heavy fit of sleep at ‘the Gravemound on the Slopes’ till the end of three days and three nights. And well he might sleep. Yet as great as was his sleep, even so great was his weariness. For from the Monday before Samhain (‘Summer End’) even to the Wednesday after Spring Beginning, Cuchulain slept not for all that space, except for a brief snatch after midday, leaning against his spear, and his head on his fist, and his fist clasping his spear, and his spear on his knee, but hewing and cutting, slaying and destroying four of the five grand provinces of Erin during that time.

Then it was that the warrior from Faery laid plants from the fairy rath and healing herbs and put a healing charm into the cuts and stabs, into the sores and gaping wounds of Cuchulain, so that Cuchulain recovered during his sleep without ever perceiving it.

XVIIA THE SLAUGHTER OF THE YOUTHS OF ULSTER

That was the time the youths came out of the north from Emain Macha to the help of Cuchulain. Thrice fifty boys of the sons of the kings of Ulster, accompanying Follomain, Conchobar's son, and three battles they offered to the hosts, so that thrice their number fell and the youths also fell, save Conchobar's son Follomain. Follomain vowed that never till the very day of doom and of life would he return to Emain unless he should bring Ailill's head with him together with the diadem of gold that was on it. That was no easy thing for him to achieve, for the two sons of Bethè son of Ban — the two sons of Ailill's foster mother and foster father to whom King Ailill's diadem had been entrusted — attacked and wounded Follomain, so that he fell by their hands. This then is the Massacre of the youths of Ulster and of Follomain son of Conchobar.

Touching Cuchulain, he remained in his sound, heavy sleep till the end of three days and three nights at the 'Gravemound on the Slopes.' Thereafter Cuchulain arose from his sleep. He passed his hand over his face and he became as a wild wheel thunder from his crown to the ground, and he felt his courage strengthened, and he would have been able to go into an assembly or on a march or to a tryst with a woman or to an alehouse or into one of the chief assemblies of Erin. "How long am I asleep now, young warrior?" Cuchulain asked.

"Three days and three nights" the young warrior made answer.

"Woe is me for that!" quoth Cuchulain.

"Why so?" asked the young warrior.

"For that the hosts have not been attacked in that time" answered Cuchulain.

"Nay, not so were they spared" the young warrior made answer.

"I would fain inquire who then attacked them?" Cuchulain asked.

"The youths came hither out of the north from Emain Macha, thrice fifty boys accompanying Follomain, Conchobar's son, and they the sons of the kings of Ulster. And three battles they offered the hosts in the space of the three days and three nights wherein thou wast till now asleep, and thrice their number are fallen at their hands and the youths themselves are fallen except Follomain alone, Conchobar's son. And Follomain vowed that never till the very day of doom and of life would he return north to Emain Macha till he carried off Ailill's head with the diadem of gold which was on it. Howbeit not such was his luck, for he fell at the hands of the two sons of Bethè son of Ban, after engaging in battle with them."

“Alas, that I was not there in my strength!” cried Cuchulain; “for had I been in my strength the youths would not have fallen, as now they have, and Follomain would not have perished.”

“But this avow, O Cucan” said the young warrior; “it is no reproach to thine honour and no disgrace to thy valour.”

“Bide here this night with us, young warrior” said Cuchulain “that together we avenge the youths on the hosts.”

“Nay then, I may not tarry” answered the young warrior.

“Why so?” asked Cuchulain.

“Easy to say” replied the young warrior; “for however prodigious the deeds of valour and skill in arms one may perform in thy company, not on him will fall the glory nor the honour nor the fame but on thyself. For this reason will I not tarry with thee, but do thou thyself try thy feats of arms and the strength of thy hands alone on the hosts, for not with them is the power over thy life on this occasion.”

Then the young warrior from Faery went from him and they knew not what way he had gone. “Good, O my master Laeg” said Cuchulain; “together we will go to avenge the youths on the hosts.”

“I will go with thee” Laeg made answer.

“And the scythed chariot, my friend Laeg” said Cuchulain. “Canst thou get it ready? If thou canst get it ready and hast its equipment, make it ready, and if its equipment is not at hand, make it not ready.”

XVIIIB THE SCYTHED CHARIOT

Thereupon the charioteer arose and donned his yeoman's suit for charioteering. Of this yeoman's suit for charioteering, this is what he put on him: His soft kirtle of skin which was light and airy, which was smooth and sparkling, which was stitched and of buckskin, so that it hindered not the movements of his arms outside. Over that he put outside an overmantle of raven's feathers, which Simon Magus had made as a gift for Darius Nero, king of the Romans. Darius bestowed it upon Conchobar; Conchobar gave it to Cuchulain; Cuchulain presented it to Laeg son of Riangabair, his charioteer. The same charioteer took the crested, plated, four bordered battle cap with variety of every colour and every figure, reaching down over the middle of his shoulders behind. It was an adornment for him and not an encumbrance. With his hand he placed the red-yellow frontlet — like one red-golden strip of glowing gold smelted over the edge of an anvil — on his forehead as a token of charioteering, to distinguish him from his master. He opened the hobbles that fastened his steeds and grasped his gold mounted goad in his right hand. In his left hand he seized the lines, that is, the bridle reins of his horses for restraining his steeds before performing his charioteering.

He next threw the iron-sheathed gold-bedecked coats of mail over his horses, so that they covered them from forehead to forehead. The chariot was studded with dartlets, lancelets, spearlets, and hardened spits, so that every portion of the frame bristled with points in that chariot and every corner and end and point and face of that chariot was a passage of laceration.

Then cast he a spell of concealment over his horses and over his fellow, so that they were not visible to any one in the camp, while all in the camp were visible to them, and over this veil of protection he wounded each one and through it and behind it. Well indeed was it that he cast that charm, for on that day the charioteer had to perform the three gifts of charioteership, namely leaping over a cleft in the ranks, unerring driving, and the handling of the goad.

Then arose the champion and battle warrior and the instrument of Badb's corpse-fold[a] among the men of the earth, Cuchulain son of Sualtair, and he donned his war dress of battle and fight and combat. To that war dress of battle and fight and combat which he put about him belonged seven and twenty waxed, board-like, equally close skin tunics which were girded by cords and swathings and ropes on his fair skin, to the end that his wit and reason might not become deranged when the violence of his nature came over him.

Over him he put on the outside his battle girdle of a champion, of tough, tanned, stout leather cut from the forequarters of seven ox hides of yearlings, so that it reached from the slender parts of his waist to the stout part under his arm-pits. He was used to wear it to keep off spears and points and irons and lances and arrows. For in like manner they would bound back from it as if from stone or rock or horn they rebounded. Then he took his silken, glossy trews with their band of spotted pale gold against the soft lower parts of his loins. His

brown, well sewn kilt of brown leather from the shoulders of four ox hides of yearlings, with his battle girdle of cow skins, he put underneath over the shining silken trews on the outside, so that it covered him from the slender part of his waist to the thick part of his thighs and reached up to the battle-belt of the hero.[1] Then the king hero and king warrior seized his battle arms of battle and fight and combat. This is what belonged to those warlike weapons of battle: He took his eight little swords together with the bright-faced, tusk hilted straightsword along with his quiver; he took his eight little spears besides his five-pronged spear; he took his eight little darts together with his javelin with its walrus tooth ornaments; he took his eight little shafts along with his play staff; he took his eight shields for feats together with his dark red bent shield, whereon a show boar could lie in its hollow boss, with its very sharp, razorlike, keen cutting, hard iron rim all around it, so that it would cut a hair against the stream because of its sharpness and fineness and keenness. When the young warrior would perform the edge feat withal, it was the same whether he cut with his shield or his spear or his sword. Next he put round his head his crested war helm of battle and fight and combat, wherein were four carbuncle gems on each point and each end to adorn it, whereout was uttered the cry of an hundred young warriors with the longdrawn wail from each of its angles and corners. For this was the way that the fiends, the goblins and the sprites of the glens and the demons of the air screamed before and above and around him, what time he went forth for the shedding of blood of heroes and champions, exulting in the mighty deeds wrought underneath it. His veil of concealment was thrown over him then, of raiment from Tir Tairngirè ('the Land of Promise') which had been brought to him as a gift by Manannan son of Ler ('the Sea') from the king of Tir na Sorcha ('the Land of Light'), his foster-father in magic. His fair, purple-red fan was placed in front of his face. Past it and through it and over it everything was visible to him and no one wounded him past it nor through it nor over it.

Then took place the first twisting fit and rage of the royal hero[Cuchulain, so that he made a terrible, many shaped, wonderful, unheard of thing of himself. His flesh trembled about him like a pole against the torrent or like a bulrush against the stream, every member and every joint and every point and every knuckle of him from crown to ground. He made a mad whirling feat of his body within his hide. His feet and his shins and his knees slid so that they came behind him. His heels and his calves and his hams shifted so that they passed to the front. The muscles of his calves moved so that they came to the front of his shins, so that each huge knot was the size of a soldier's balled fist. He stretched the sinews of his head so that they stood out on the nape of his neck, and as large as the head of a month-old child was each of the hill-like lumps, huge, incalculable, vast, immeasurable.

He next made a ruddy bowl of his face and his countenance. He gulped down one eye into his head so that it would be hard work if a wild crane succeeded in drawing it out on to the middle of his cheek from the rear of his skull. Its mate sprang forth till it came out on his cheek, so that it was the size of a five fist kettle, and he made a red berry thereof out in front of his head. His mouth was distorted monstrously and twisted up to his ears[. He drew the cheek from

the jawbone so that the interior of his throat was to be seen. His lungs and his lights stood out so that they fluttered in his mouth and his gullet. He struck a mad lion's blow with the upper jaw on its fellow so that as large as a wether's fleece of a three year old was each red, fiery flake which his teeth forced into his mouth from his gullet. There was heard the loud clap of his heart against his breast like the yelp of a howling bloodhound or like a lion going among bears. There were seen the torches of the Badb, and the rain clouds of poison, and the sparks of glowing red fire, blazing and flashing in hazes and mists over his head with the seething of the truly wild wrath that rose up above him. His hair bristled all over his head like branches of a redthorn thrust into a gap in a great hedge. Had a king's apple tree laden with royal fruit been shaken around him, scarce an apple of them all would have passed over him to the ground, but rather would an apple have stayed stuck on each single hair there, for the twisting of the anger which met it as it rose from his hair above him. The Lon Laith ('Champion's Light') stood out of his forehead, so that it was as long and as thick as a warrior's whetstone, so that it was as long as his nose, till he got furious handling the shields, thrusting out the charioteer, destroying the hosts. As high, as thick, as strong, as steady, as long as the sail tree of some huge prime ship was the straight spout of dark blood which arose right on high from the very ridgepole of his crown, so that a black fog of witchery was made thereof like to the smoke from a king's hostel what time the king comes to be ministered to at nightfall of a winter's day.

When now this contortion had been completed in Cuchulain, then it was that the hero of valour sprang into his scythed war chariot, with its iron sickles, its thin blades, its hooks and its hard spikes, with its hero's foreprongs, with its opening fixtures, with its stinging nails that were fastened to the poles and thongs and bows and lines of the chariot, lacerating heads and bones and bodies, legs and necks and shoulders.

It was then he delivered over his chariot the thunder feat of a hundred and the thunder feat of two hundred and the thunder feat of three hundred and the thunder feat of four hundred, and he ceased at the thunder feat of five hundred. For he did not deem it too much that such a great number should fall by his hand at his first onset and first battle assault on four of the five grand provinces of Erin, while avenging on them the slaughter of the youths and of Follomain son of Conchobar, In such wise fared he forth for to seek his foes, and he drove his chariot in a wide circuit round about the hosts of the four grand provinces of Erin. And he led his chariot a heavy way. The chariot's iron wheels sank into the ground so that the earth dug up by the iron wheels might have served for a dūn and a fortress, so did the chariot's iron wheels cut into the ground. For in like manner the clods and boulders and rocks and the clumps and the shingle of the earth arose up outside on a height with the iron wheels. It was for this cause he made this circling hedge of the Badb round about the hosts of four of the five grand provinces of Erin, that they might not escape him nor get away before he would come on them to press a reprisal for the boys. And he went into the midst of the ranks and mowed down huge walls of the corpses of his foes and enemies and opponents[1] in a great circle round about the host. And he made the onslaught of a foe amongst foes upon them, so that they fell sole to

sole, neck to neck, arm to arm, elbow to elbow, and rib to rib, such was the closeness of their bodies, and there were pools of ruddy blood where they moved. Thrice again in this manner he circled them round, so that he left them in beds of six in a great ring around them, even the soles of three to the backs of three men in a circle around the camp. Hence Sessrech Bresligè ('Great sixfold Slaughter') is the name of this event on the Táin, and it is one of the three unreckonable events of the Táin, which were, to wit, Sessrech Bresligè, Immsligè Glennamnach ('the Mutual Slaying at Glennamain'), and the battle of Garech and Ilgarech; only that here, hound and horse and man were one to him in the great rout on Mag Murthemni that night avenging the youths on four of the five grand provinces of Erin.

What others say is that Lug son of Ethliu fought on Cuchulain's side at the Sessrech Bresligè.

Their number is not known and it cannot be reckoned how many fell there of the rabble rout, but only their chiefs have been counted. Here below are their names, to wit: —

The two Cruad, two Calad, two Cir, two Ciar, two Ecell, three Cromm, three Cur, three Combirgè, four Feochar, four Furachar, four Cassè, four Fota, five Caur, five Cerman, five Cobtach, six Saxan, six Duach, six Darè, six Dunchadh, six Daimiach, seven Rochad, seven Ronan, seven Rurthech, eight Rochlad, eight Rochtad, eight Rindach, eight Corprè, eight Malach, nine Daigith, nine Darè, nine Damach, ten Fiach, ten Fiacach, ten Fedlimid.

Ten and six score kings, leaders and men of the land, Cuchulain laid low in the great slaughter on the Plain of Murthemne, besides a countless horde of dogs and horses and women and boys and children and common folk; for there escaped not a third man of the men of Erin without a wound or a hurt or a blueing or a reddening or a lump or a mark or breaking of thigh or of leg or of shinbone, without having hip bone broken or half his skull or an eye hurt, or without an enduring mark for the course of his life. And he left them then after inflicting that battle upon them, without having his blood drawn or wound brought on himself or on his charioteer or on either of his horses.

XVIIIC THE ACCOUNT OF THE APPEARANCE OF CUCHULAIN

Early the next morning Cuchulain came to observe the host and to display his comely, beautiful form to the matrons and dames and girls and maidens and poets and men of art, for he did not consider it an honour nor becoming, the wild, proud shape of magic which had been manifested to them the night before. It was for that then that he came to exhibit his comely, beautiful form on that day.

Truly fair was the youth that came there to display his form to the hosts, Cuchulain, to wit son of Sualtair son of Boefoltach ('Of little possessions') son of Morfoltach ('Of great possessions') son of Red Neil macRudhraid. Three heads of hair he wore; brown at the skin, blood red in the middle, a golden yellow crown what thatched it. Beautiful was the arrangement of the hair, with three coils of hair wound round the nape of his neck, so that like to a strand of thread of gold was each threadlike, loose flowing, deep golden, magnificent, long tressed, splendid, beauteous hued hair as it fell down over his shoulders. A hundred bright purple windings of gold flaming red gold at his neck. A hundred salmon coloured cords strung with carbuncles as a covering round his head. Four spots on either of his two cheeks, even a yellow spot, and a green spot, and a blue spot, and a purple spot. Seven jewels of the eye's brilliance was either of his kingly eyes. Seven toes to either of his two feet. Seven fingers to either of his two hands, with the clutch of hawk's claw, with the grip of hedgehog's talon in every separate one of them.

He also put on him that day his fair day dress. To this apparel about him belonged, namely, a beautiful, well-fitting, purple, fringed, five-folded mantle. A white brooch of silvered bronze or of white silver incrustated with burnished gold over his fair white breast, as if it were a full fulgent lantern that eyes of men could not behold for its resplendence and crystal shining. A striped chest jacket of silk on his skin, fairly adorned with borders and braidings and trimmings of gold and silver and silvered bronze; it reached to the upper hem of his dark, brown-red warlike breeches of royal silk. A magnificent, brown-purple buckler he bore, with five wheels of gold on it, with a rim of pure white silver around it. A gold hilted hammered sword with ivory guards, raised high at his girdle at his left side. A long grey edged spear together with a trenchant bye-spear for defence, with thongs for throwing and with rivets of whitened bronze, alongside him in the chariot. Nine heads he bore in one of his hands and ten in the other, and these he brandished before the hosts in token of his prowess and cunning. This then was a night's attack for Cuchulain on the hosts of four of the five provinces of Erin. Medb hid her face beneath a shelter of shields lest Cuchulain should cast at her that day.

Then it was that the maidens of Connacht besought the men of Erin to lift them up on the flat of the shields above the warriors' shoulders; and the women of Munster clomb on the men to behold the aspect of Cuchulain. For they marvelled at the beautiful, comely appearance he showed them that day compared with the low, arrogant shape of magic in which they had seen him the night before.

XVIIID DUBTHACH'S JEALOUSY

And Dubthach's wife prayed to be lifted to regard the form of Cuchulain. Then it was that jealousy, ill will and envy possessed Dubthach Doel ('the Black-tongue') of Ulster because of his wife in regard to Cuchulain; for he saw his wife climb on the men to get a glimpse of Cuchulain; and he counselled the hosts to act treacherously towards Cuchulain and to entrap him, even to lay up an ambush around him on all sides to the end that he might fall by them. And he spake these words: —

“If this be the Twisted one,
By him shall men's bodies fall;
Shrieks there shall be round the liss;
Deeds to tell of shall be wrought!

“Stones shall be on graves from him;
Kingly martyrs shall increase.
Not well have ye battle found
On the slopes with this wild Hound!

“If this be the Twisted one,
Men shall soon be slain by him;
'Neath his feet shall corpses lie;
Under bushes mantles white!

“Now the Wildman's form I see,
Nine heads dangling by his side;
Shattered spoils he has, behold;
Ten heads as his treasure great!

“And your women, too, I see,
Raise their heads above the lines;
I behold your puissant queen
Makes no move t'engage in fight!

“Were it mine to give advice,
Men would be on every side,
That they soon might end his life;
If this be the Twisted one!”

Fergus macRoig heard this and he deemed it an outrage that Dubthach should counsel how to betray Cuchulain to the hosts. And he reached him a strong, sharp kick with his foot away from him, so that Dubthach struck with his mouth against the group outside. And Fergus reproached him for all the wrongs and iniquities and treachery and shameful deeds he had ever done to the Ulstermen of old and anew. And then he spake these words: —

“If this ‘Black-tongue’ Dubthach be,
Let him skulk behind the hosts;
No good hath he ever wrought,
Since he slew the princesses!

“Base and foul, the deed he wrought:
Fiachu, Conchobar’s son, he slew.
No more fair was heard of him:
Carbrè’s death, Fedilmid’s son!

“Ne’er for Ulster’s weal doth aim
Lugaid’s son, Casruba’s scion;
Such is how he acts to men:
Whom he stabs not he incites!

“Ulster’s exiles it would grieve
If their beardless boy should fall.
If on you come Ulster’s troops
They will make your herds their spoil!

“Strewn afar your herds will be
By the rising Ulstermen.
Tales there’ll be of mighty deeds
That will tell of far-famed queens!

“Corpses will be under foot,
Food there’ll be at ravens’ rests;
Bucklers lying on the slopes;
Wild and furious deeds increase!

“I behold just now your wives
Raise their heads above the ranks.
I behold your puissant queen
Moves not to engage in war!

“Valour none nor generous deed
Comes from Lugaid’s craven son;
Nor will kings see lances red,
If this ‘Black-tongue’ Dubthach be!”

Thus far ‘The Scythed Chariot.’

XVIII THE SLAYING OF OENGUS SON OF OENLAM

Then it was that a very bold young warrior of the Ulstermen came nigh the hosts; his bye-name was Oengus son of Oenlam Gabè ('the One-handed Smith'). And he drove the hosts before him from Moda Loga, which at that time was called Lugmud, to Ath da Fert ('the Ford of the Two Gravemounds') in Sliab Fuait. And he suffered them not to go by, but he showered them with stones. What scholars say is: If Oengus son of Oenlam Gabè had fought them in single combat, two thirds of the host would have fallen before that by him in single battle at Emain Macha. Howbeit it was by no means so that they acted, but they attacked him from ambush on every side, till he fell at their hands in unequal fight at Ath da Fert in Sliab Fuait.

XVIII A HERE NOW IS TOLD THE MISTHROW AT BELACH EOIN.

Then came to them Fiacha Fialdana ('the Generous and Intrepid') of the Ulstermen to speak with the son of his mother's sister, namely with Manè Andoè ('the Unslow') of the Connachtmen. And thus he came, and Dubthach Doel ('the Black Tongue') of Ulster with him. It was in this wise that Manè Andoè came, and Dochè son of Maga along with him. When now Dochè macMagach espied Fiacha Fialdana, he straightway hurled a spear at him, but so that it went through his own friend, through Dubthach Doel of Ulster. Then Fiacha Fialdana hurled a spear at Dochè macMagach, so that it went through his own friend, through Manè Andoè of Connacht. Thereupon said the men of Erin: "A mishap in throwing" they said "is what hath happened to the men, for each of them to kill his friend and nearest relation." Hence this is entitled Imroll Belaig Eoin ('the Misthrow at Bird-pass'). And 'the Other Misthrow at Bird-pass' is another name for it.

Or it may be this from which cometh Imroll Belaig Eoin: The hosts proceed to Belach Eoin ('Bird-pass'). Their two troops wait there. Diarmait macConchobar of the Ulstermen comes from the north. "Let a horseman start from you" cries Diarmait "that Manè may come with one man to parley with me, and I will go with another man to parley with him." A while thereafter they meet "I am come" says Diarmait "from Conchobar, with commands to Ailill and Medb that they let the cows go and make good all the ill they have done here and bring hither the bull from the west to meet the other bull, to the end that they may encounter, since Medb has pledged it."

"I will go" says Manè "to tell them." He takes this message to Medb and Ailill. "This cannot be had of Medb" Manè reported.

"Let us make a fair exchange of arms, then" says Diarmait "if perchance that pleaseth thee better."

"I am content" replies Manè. Each of them casts his spear at the other so that both of them die, and hence the name of this place is Imroll Belaig Eoin. Their forces rush upon one another. Three-score of each force fall. Hence is Ard in Dirma ('the Height of the Troop').

XVIII^B HERE NOW FOLLOWETH THE DISGUIISING OF TAMON

Then said the men of Erin to Tamon the fool that he should don the garments of Ailill and the king's golden shawl, and go to the ford that was close before them. So he put the garments and golden shawl of Ailill upon him. Ailill's people placed the king's diadem on the head of Tamon the fool, for Ailill dared not wear it himself, and he went on to the ford under their eyes. The men of Erin began to scoff and to shout and jeer at him. "It is a disguising of Tamon ('a Stump') for thee, O Tamon the fool" they cried "with the dress and the golden shawl of Ailill upon thee!" When Cuchulain saw him, it seemed to him in his ignorance and lack of knowledge that it was Ailill himself that was there. And he slung a stone from his staff-sling at him so that his head was broken thereby and Tamon the fool was smitten lifeless where he was on the ford. Hence Ath Tamuin ('the Ford of a Stump') is the name of that ford ever since and 'the Disguising of Tamon' is the name of the tale.

XIX THE BATTLE OF FERGUS AND CUCHULAIN

The hosts of the four grand provinces of Erin pitched camp and entrenched themselves for that night at the pillar-stone in Crich Roiss ('the Borders of Ross'). Then Medb called upon the men of Erin for one of them to contend and do battle with Cuchulain on the morrow. And every one of them spake thus: "It shall not be I! it shall not be I!" cried each from his place. "No victim is owing from my people, and even if one were it would not be myself whom ye would send as a victim in his stead. I will not be the man to go in his place to fight with Cuchulain till the very day of doom and of life!"

Thereupon Medb summoned Fergus to go forth and contend and fight with Cuchulain, to drive him off from them on the ford at the early morning hour on the morrow, for that the men of Erin had failed her to go and do battle with him. "Ill would it befit me" quoth Fergus "to fight with a callow young lad without any beard, and mine own disciple, the fosterling of Ulster, the foster child that sat on Conchobar's knee, the lad from Craeb Ruad ('Red Branch')." Howbeit Medb murmured sore that Fergus foreswore her combat and battle. They filled him with wine till he was heavily drunken and then they questioned him about going to the combat. They bode the night in that place. Early on the morrow Fergus arose, since they importuned him urgently, and his horses were got ready for him and his chariot harnessed and he fared forth to the place of combat where Cuchulain was.

When now Cuchulain saw him coming nigh, this is what he said: "Welcome thine arrival and thy coming, O my master Fergus" spoke Cuchulain.

"Truly given we esteem thy greeting" Fergus answered.

"It is truly given for thee, O Fergus" said Cuchulain; "and thou shalt have a night's lodging here this night."

"Success and a blessing attend thee, O fosterling; not for hospitality from thee am I come, but to fight and do battle with thee."

"A vain surety is the one wherewith my master Fergus comes to me; for no sword is in the sheath of the great staff he bears." It was true what he said. A year before this tale, before the expedition of the Táin, Ailill had found Fergus going to a tryst with Medb on the hillside in Cruachan and his sword on a branch near by him. And Ailill had torn the sword from its sheath and put a wooden sword in its stead and vowed he would not restore him the sword till came the day of the great battle, when the men of Erin would clash in the great battle of the Cualnge Cattle Raid at Garech and Ilgarech. "It is a perilous thing for thee to come to a place of fight, O my master Fergus, without thy sword."

"It matters not to me, O fosterling" replied Fergus; "for had I a sword in this, it never would cut thee nor be plied on thee. But, by the honour and training I bestowed upon thee and the Ulstermen and Conchobar bestowed, by the troth

of thy valour and knighthood I adjure thee, give way before me this day in the presence of the men of Erin!”

“Truly I am loath to do that” answered Cuchulain “to flee before any one man on the Cattle spoil of Cualnge.”

“Nay then it is not a thing to be taken amiss by thee” said Fergus; “for I in my turn will retreat before thee when thou wilt be covered with wounds and dripping with gore and pierced with holes in the battle of the Táin. And when I alone shall turn in flight before thee, so will all the men of Erin also flee before thee in like manner.”

So zealous was Cuchulain to do whatever made for Ulster’s weal that he had his chariot brought to him, and he mounted his chariot and he went in confusion and flight from Fergus in the presence of the men of Erin. As far as Grellach Dolluid (‘the Stamping-place at Dolluid’) he fled, in order that Fergus might give way before him on the day of the battle. When the men of Erin saw that, they were joyful, and what they said was this: “He is fled from thee! He is fled from thee, O Fergus!” cried all.

“Pursue him, pursue him quickly, O Fergus” Medb cried “that he do not escape thee.”

“Nay then” said Fergus “I will pursue him no further. It is not like a tryst. Yon fellow is too speedy for me. For however little ye may make of the flight I have put him to, none of the men of Erin, not even four of the five provinces of Erin could have obtained so much as that of him on the Cow creagh of Cualnge. For this cause, till the men of Erin take turns in single combat, I will not engage again with this same man.” Hence here we have the ‘White Battle’ of Fergus on the Táin thus far; and it is for this cause it is called the ‘White Battle,’ because no ‘blood on weapons’ resulted therefrom. They continue their march past Cuchulain and pitch camp in Crich Roiss.

XIXA HERE NOW COMETH THE HEAD PLACE OF FERCHU

Ferchu Longsech ('the Exile'), a wonderful warrior from Loch Ce, outlawed from his land by Ailill and Medb, although of the Connachtmen, was engaged in battle and plunder with Ailill and Medb. From the day these came to the kingship, there never was a time that he fared to their camp or took part in their expeditions or shared in their straits or their needs or their hardships, but he was ever at their heels, pillaging and plundering their borders and land. At that time he sojourned in the eastern part of Mag Ai. Twelve men was his muster. He learned that a single man checked and stopped four of the five grand provinces of Erin from Monday at Summer's end till the beginning of Spring, slaying a man on the ford every one of those days and a hundred warriors every night. He weighed his plan privily with his people. "What better plan could we devise?" quoth he "than to go and attack yonder man that checketh and stoppeth four of the five grand provinces of Erin, and bring his head and his arms with us to Ailill and Medb? However great the injuries and wrongs we have done to Ailill and Medb, we shall obtain our peace therefor, if only that man fall by our hand." He made no doubt that if Cuchulain fell through him, the eastern territory of Connacht would be his. Now this was the resolve they took, and they proceeded to where Cuchulain was at Ath Aladh ('Speckled Ford') on the Plain of Murthemne. And when they came, they espied the lone warrior and knew that it was Cuchulain. It was not fair fight nor combat with one they vouchsafed him, but at one and the same time the twelve men fell upon him so that their spears sank up to their middles into his shield. Cuchulain on his part drew his sword from the sheath of the Badb to attack them, and he fell to to cut away their weapons and to lighten his shield. Then he turned on them, front and back, to the left and the right, and straightway he smote off their twelve heads; and he engaged in a furious, bloody and violent battle with Ferchu himself, after killing his people. And not long did it avail Ferchu thus, for he fell at last by Cuchulain, and Cuchulain cut off Ferchu's head to the east of the ford. And he set up twelve stones in the earth for them, and he put the head of each one of them on its stone and he likewise put Ferchu Longsech's head on its stone. Hence Cinnit Ferchon Longsig is henceforth the name of[the place where Ferchu Longsech left his head and his twelve men theirs and their arms and their trophies, to wit, Cenn-aitt Ferchon ('the Head Place of Ferchu').

XIXB MANN'S FIGHT

Medb despatched Mann son of Muresc son of Darè, of the Dommandach, to fight with Cuchulain. Own brothers were he and Daman, Ferdiad's father. A man, rough, inordinate in eating and sleeping was this Mann. An ill-tongued foulmouthed man like Dubthach Doel ('Black-tongue') of Ulster. A man, stout, mighty, with strength of limb like Munremur ('Thick Neck') son of Gercend ('Short Head'). A fiery champion like Triscoth, the strong man of Conchobar's household. "I will go" said he "and unarmed, and I will grind him between my hands, for I consider it no honour nor credit to use arms against a beardless madcap such as he."

Therewith he went to attack Cuchulain. There he was, himself and his charioteer on the ford watching the host. "A lone warrior approacheth us here" cried Laeg to Cuchulain.

"What manner of man?" asked Cuchulain.

"A dark, black man, strong, bull ike, and he unarmed."

"Let him go by thee" said Cuchulain. At that he comes nigh them.

"To fight with thee am I come" Mann announced.

Therewith they fell to wrestling for a long time, and thrice Mann threw Cuchulain, till the charioteer incited Cuchulain. "Were it the champion's portion thou wast contending for in Emain" spake Laeg "thou wouldst be all powerful over the young bloods in Emain!" At these words the hero's wrath and warrior's rage returned to Cuchulain, so that he overcame Mann at the pillar stone and he fell to pieces in morsels. Hence cometh Mag Mandachta ('the Plain of Mann's death').

XIXc THE COMBAT OF CALATIN'S CHILDREN

Then was it debated by the men of Erin who would be fit to contend and cope with Cuchulain at the morning hour early on the next day. What they all said was, that Calatin Dana ('the Bold') would be the one, with his seven and twenty sons and his grandson Glass macDelga. Thus were they: Poison was on every man of them and poison on every weapon of their arms; and not one of them missed his throw, and there was no one on whom one of them drew blood that, if he succumbed not on the spot, would not be dead before the end of the ninth day. Great gifts were promised to them for engaging to do battle and to contend with Cuchulain. And they took the matter in hand, and it should be in the presence of Fergus that the covenant would be made. But Fergus refused to have part therein, for what they all contended was that they would hold it as a single combat, a combat, to wit, of Calatin Dana and his seven and twenty sons and his grandson Glass macDelga; for their contention was that his son was a limb of his limbs and a part of his parts, and that to Calatin Dana belonged all that proceeded from his body.

Fergus betook himself to his tent and to his people and he breathed his sigh of weariness aloud. "Grievous it seems to us, the deed to be done here on the morrow" quoth Fergus.

"What deed may that be?" asked his people.

"The slaying of Cuchulain" answered Fergus. "Alas" said they "who should kill him?"

"Calatin Dana" he replied "with his seven and twenty sons and his grandson Glass macDelga. For this is their nature: Poison is on every man of them and poison on every weapon of their arms; and there is no one on whom one of them draws blood, that, if he succumb not on the spot, will not be dead before the end of the ninth day. And there is no one of you that would go and learn for me and be witness of the battle and fight and bring me news how Cuchulain died on whom I would not bestow my blessing and armour."

"I will go thither" spake Fiachu son of Ferfebè.

They abode so that night. Early on the morrow Calatin Dana arose with his seven and twenty sons and his grandson Glass macDelga, and they went forward to where Cuchulain was. And there went also Fiachu son of Ferfebè. And when Calatin arrived at the place where Cuchulain was, they forthwith hurled their nine and twenty spears, and not one of them went past him by a misthrow. Cuchulain played the edge feat with his shield, so that all the spears sank up to their middles into the shield. But for all that theirs was no erring cast, not one of the spears was blooded or reddened upon him. Thereupon Cuchulain drew his sword from the sheath of the Badb, to cut away the weapons and lighten the shield that was on him. While thus engaged, they rushed in upon him and delivered their nine and twenty right fists at the same

time on his head. They smote him and curbed him withal, till his face and his countenance and visage met the sand and gravel of the ford. Cuchulain raised his warrior's shout aloud and his cry of unequal combat, so that there was not an Ulsterman alive in the camp of those that were not asleep but heard it. Then when they all had reached for their swords, came Fiachu son of Ferfebè after them out of the camp, and he saw what they did and a qualm of love and the bond of kindred came over him, and when he saw all their hands raised against Cuchulain, he leaped from his chariot and drew his sword from the sheath of the Badb and dealt them a blow, so that he cut off their nine and twenty right fists from them at one stroke, and they all fell backwards from the intensity of the exertion and hold which they had.

Cuchulain raised his head and drew breath and gave a sigh of weariness and perceived who it was that had come to his aid. "A ready relief, O foster brother, what thou hast done" said Cuchulain.

"Although for thee a ready relief" said Fiachu "yet is it not so for us. Even though

we are the best division of three thousand of the Clann Rudraige in the camp and station of the men of Erin, nevertheless this small thing is a breach of covenant in us men of Ulster. If one of Calatin's children reaches the camp, we shall all be brought under the mouth of spear and of sword, however feeble thou mayst deem the blow I struck, if this treason be found in us."

"I give my word" quoth Cuchulain; "so soon as I raise my head and draw breath, not a man of them shall reach the camp alive, and unless thou thyself tellest the tale not one of these ever will tell it!"

With that, Cuchulain turned on them, and he fell to smiting and hewing them, so that he sent them [from him in small disjointed pieces and divided quarters eastwards and westwards along the ford. A single man got away from him, trusting to his speed while Cuchulain was busied beheading the rest; it was Glass macDelga. And Cuchulain raced after him like a blast of wind, and Glass ran on round the tent of Ailill and Medb, and all he could pant out was, "Fiach! Fiach!" when Cuchulain fetched him a stroke that cut off his head.

"Tis quick work was made of that man" quoth Medb. "What debt was that he spoke of, O Fergus?"

"I know not" Fergus answered "unless it be some one in the camp and quarters that owed him a debt. It is that which troubled his mind. But be that as it may" continued Fergus "it is a debt of blood and flesh for him. And upon my word," Fergus added, "now are his debts paid to him for good and all!"

In this wise fell Calatin Dana ('the Bold') at the hands of Cuchulain, together with his seven and twenty sons and his grandson Glass macDelga and the two sons of Ficcè with them, two bold warriors of Ulster who had come to use their strength on the host. So that for evermore in the bed of the ford is still the rock whereabout they had their strife and struggle and their slaughtering of each

other; and the mark of their sword-hilts is in it and of their knees and their elbows and their fists[3] and the butt ends of their spears. And their nine and twenty standing stones were set up there. Hence Fuil Iairn ('Blood of Iron') to the west of Ath Firdead ('Ferdiaid's Ford') is the name of the ford. It is for this it is called Fuil Iairn, because of the 'blood over weapons' that was there.

Thus far then this exploit on the Táin, the Combat of the Clann Calatin, of his children and his grandson with Cuchulain, when they went to do battle with Cuchulain.