

XX THE COMBAT OF FERDIAD AND CUCHULAIN

The four grand provinces of Erin were side by side and against Cuchulain, from Monday before Samhain-tide to Wednesday after Spring Beginning, and without leave to work harm or vent their rage on the province of Ulster, while yet all the Ulstermen were sunk in their nine days' 'Pains,' and Conall Cernach ('the Victorious') sought out battle in strange foreign lands paying the tribute and tax of Ulster. Great was the plight and strait of Cuchulain during that time, for he was not a day or a night without fierce, fiery combat waged on him by the men of Erin, until he killed Calatin with his seven and twenty sons and Fraech son of Fiadach and performed many deeds and successes which are not enumerated here. Now this was sore and grievous for Medb and for Ailill.

Then the men of Erin took counsel who would be fit to send to the ford to fight and do battle with Cuchulain, to drive him off from them at the morning hour early on the morrow.

With one accord they declared that it should be Ferdiad son of Daman son of Darè, the great and valiant warrior of the men of Domnann, the horn skin from Irrus Domnann, the irresistible force, and the battle rock of destruction, the own, dear, foster brother of Cuchulain. And fitting it was for him to go thither, for well matched and alike was their manner of fight and of combat. Under the same instructresses had they done skilful deeds of valour and arms, when learning the art with Scathach ('the Modest') and with Uathach ('the Dreadful') and with Aifè ('the Handsome'). Yet was it the felling of an oak with one's fists, and the stretching of the hand into a serpent's nest, and a spring into the lair of a lion, for hero or champion in the world, aside from Cuchulain, to fight or combat with Ferdiad on whatever ford or river or mere he set his shield. And neither of them overmatched the other, save in the feat of the Gae Bulga ('the Barbed Spear') which Cuchulain possessed. Howbeit, against this, Ferdiad was horn-skinned when fighting and in combat with a warrior on the ford; and they thought he could avoid the Gae Bulga and defend himself against it, because of the horn about him of such kind that neither arms nor multitude of edges could pierce it.

Then were messengers and envoys sent from Medb and Ailill to Ferdiad. Ferdiad denied them their will, and dismissed and sent back the messengers, and he went not with them, for he knew wherefore they would have him, to fight and combat with his friend, with his comrade and foster brother, Cuchulain.

Then did Medb despatch the druids and the poets of the camp, the lampoonists and hard attackers, for Ferdiad, to the end that they might make three satires to stay him and three scoffing speeches against him, to mock at him and revile and disgrace him, that they might raise three blisters on his face, Blame, Blemish and Disgrace, that he might not find a place in the world to lay his head, if he came not with them to the tent of Medb and Ailill on the foray.

Ferdiad: “Naught I’ll take without bond —
 No ill spearman am I —
 Hard on me to-morrow:
 Great will be the strife!
Hound that’s hight of Culann,
 How his thrust is grievous!
 No soft thing to stand him;
 Rude will be the wound!”

Medb: “Champions will be surety,
Thou needst not keep hostings.
 Reins and splendid horses
 Shall be given as pledge!
 Ferdiad, good, of battle,
For that thou art dauntless,
 Thou shalt be my lover,
 Past all, free of cain!”

Ferdiad: “Without bond I’ll go not
 To engage in ford feats;
 It will live till doomsday
 In full strength and force.
Ne’er I’ll yield — who hears me,
 Whoe’er counts upon me —
Without sun- and moon-oath,
 Without sea and land!”

Medb: “Why then dost delay it?
 Bind it as it please thee,
By kings’ hands and princes’,
 Who will stand for thee!
 Lo, I will repay thee,
Thou shalt have thine asking,
For I know thou’lt slaughter
 Man that meeteth thee!”

Ferdiad: “Nay, without six sureties —
 It shall not be fewer —
 Ere I do my exploits
 There where hosts will be!
Should my will be granted,
I swear, though unequal,
 That I’ll meet in combat
 Cuchulain the brave!”

Medb: “Domnall, then, or Carbrè,
Niaman famed for slaughter,
 Or e’en folk of barddom,

Natheless, thou shalt have.
Bind thyself on Morann,
Wouldst thou its fulfilment,
Bind on smooth Man's Carbrè,
And our two sons, bind!"

Ferdiad: "Medb, with wealth of cunning,
Whom no spouse can bridle,
Thou it is that herdest
Cruachan of the mounds!
High thy fame and wild power!
Mine the fine pied satin;
Give thy gold and silver,
Which were proffered me!"

Medb: "To thee, foremost champion,
I will give my ringed brooch.
From this day till Sunday,
Shall thy respite be!
Warrior, mighty, famous,
All the earth's fair treasures
Shall to thee be given;
Everything be thine!

"Finnabair of the champions,
Queen of western Erin,
When thou'st slain the Smith's Hound,
Ferdiad, she's thine!"

Ferdiad: "Should I have Finnabair to wife,
Falls of Ai and Cruachan too,
And to dwell for alway there,
I'd not seek the deedful Hound!

"Equal skill to me and him — "
Thus spake Ferdiad withal —
"The same nurses raised us both,
And with them we learned our art.

"Not for fear of battle hard,
Noble Eocho Fedlech's maid,
Would I shun the Blacksmith's Hound,
But my heart bleeds for his love!"

Medb: "Thou shalt have, dear, bright-scaled man,
One swift, proud, high mettled steed.
Thou shalt have domains and land
And shalt stay not from the fight!"

Ferdiad: “But that Medb entreated so,
 And that poets’ tongues did urge,
 I’d not go for hard rewards
 To contend with mine own friend!”

Medb: “Son of Daman of white cheeks,
Shouldst thou check this heroes’ Hound,
 E’er so long thy fame will live,
 When thou comest from Ferdiad’s Ford!”

Then said they, one and all, those gifts were great. “’Tis true, they are great. But though they are” said Ferdiad “with Medb herself I will leave them, and I will not accept them if it be to do battle or combat with my foster brother, the man of my alliance and affection, and my equal in skill of arms, namely, with Cuchulain.” And he said: —

 “Greatest toil, this, greatest toil,
 Battle with the Hound of gore!
 Liefer would I battle twice
 With two hundred men of Fal!

 “Sad the fight, and sad the fight,
 I and Hound of feats shall wage!
We shall hack both flesh and blood;
 Skin and body we shall hew!

 “Sad, O god, yea, sad, O god,
 That a woman should us part!
My heart’s half, the blameless Hound;
 Half the brave Hound’s heart am I!

 “By my shield, O, by my shield,
If Ath Cliath’s brave Hound should fall,
 I will drive my slender glaive
Through my heart, my side, my breast!

 “By my sword, O, by my sword,
 If the Hound of Glen Bolg fall!
 No man after him I’ll slay,
Till I o’er the world’s brink spring!

 “By my hand, O, by my hand!
Falls the Hound of Glen in Sgail,
 Medb with all her host I’ll kill,
 And then no more men of Fal!

 “By my spear, O, by my spear!
Should Ath Cro’s brave Hound be slain,
 I’ll be buried in his grave;

May one grave hide me and him!

“Liefer would I, liefer far,
Arms should slay me in fierce fight,
Than the death of heroes’ Hound,”
Should be food for ravenous birds?

“Tell him this, O, tell him this,
To the Hound of beauteous hue,
Fearless Scathach hath foretold
My fall on a ford through him!

“Woe to Medb, yea, woe to Medb,
Who hath used her guile on us;
She hath set me face to face
'Gainst Cuchulain — hard the toil!”

“Ye men” spake Medb, in the wonted fashion of stirring up disunion and dissension, as if she had not heard Ferdiad at all, “true is the word Cuchulain speaks.”

“What word is that?” asked Ferdiad.

“He said, then” replied Medb “he would not think it too much if thou shouldst fall by his hands in the choicest feat of his skill in arms, in the land whereto he should come.”

“It was not just for him to speak so” quoth Ferdiad; “for it is not cowardice or lack of boldness that he hath ever seen in me by day or by night. And I speak not so to him, for I have it not to say of him. And I swear by my arms of valour, if it be true that he spoke so, I will be the first man of the men of Erin to contend with him on the morrow, how loath soever I am to do so!”

And he gave his word in the presence of them all that he would go and meet Cuchulain. For it pleased Medb, if Ferdiad should fail to go, to have them as a witness against him, in order that she might say it was fear or dread that caused him to break his word. “A blessing and victory upon thee for that!” said Medb; “It pleaseth me more than for thee to show fear and lack of boldness. For every man loves his own land, and how is it better for him to seek the welfare of Ulster, because his mother was descended from the Ulstermen, than for thee to seek the welfare of Connacht, as thou art the son of a king of Connacht?”

Then it was that Medb obtained from Ferdiad the easy surety of a covenant to fight and contend on the morrow with six warriors of the champions of Erin, or to fight and contend with Cuchulain alone, if to him this last seemed lighter. Ferdiad obtained of Medb the easy surety, as he thought, to send the aforesaid six men for the fulfilment of the terms which had been promised him, should Cuchulain fall at his hands.

There was a wonderful warrior of the Ulstermen present at that covenant, and that was Fergus macRoig. Fergus betook him to his tent. "Woe is me, for the deed that will be done on the morning of the morrow!"

"What deed is that?" his tent folk asked.

"My good fosterling Cuchulain will be slain!"

"Good lack! who makes that boast?"

"Not hard to say: None other but his dear, devoted foster brother, Ferdiad son of Daman. Why bear ye not my blessing" Fergus continued "and let one of you go with a warning and mercy to Cuchulain, if perchance he would leave the ford on the morn of the morrow?" "

As we live" said they; "though it were thyself was on the ford of battle, we would not go near him to seek thee."

"Come, my lad" cried Fergus, "get our horses for us, and yoke the chariot!"

Then were Fergus' horses fetched for him and his chariot was yoked, and he came forward to the place of combat where Cuchulain was, to inform him of the challenge, that Ferdiad was to fight with him.

"A chariot cometh hither towards us, O Cuchulain!" cried Laeg. For in this wise was the gilla, with his back towards his lord. He used to win every other game of draughts and of chess from his master. Watch and guard of the four airts was he besides.

"What manner of chariot is it?" asked Cuchulain.

"A chariot like to a royal fort, huge, with its yoke, strong, golden; with its great board of copper; with its shafts of bronze; with its thin-framed, dry bodied box, set on two horses, black, swift, stout, strong-forked, thickset, under beautiful shafts. One kingly, broadeyed warrior is the combatant in the chariot. A curly, forked beard he wears that reaches below outside over the smooth lower part of his soft tunic, which would shelter fifty warriors on a day of storm and rain under the heavy shield of the warrior's beard. A bent buckler, white, beautiful, of many colours, he bears, with three stout wrought chains, so that there is room from edge to edge for four troops of ten men behind the leather of the shield which hangs upon the broad back of the warrior. A long, hard edged, broad, red sword in a sheath woven and twisted of white silver, over the shoulder of the battle warrior. A strong, three ridged spear, wound and banded with all-gleaming white silver he has lying across the chariot."

"Not difficult to recognize him" said Cuchulain: "'tis my master Fergus that cometh hither with a warning and with compassion for me, before all the four provinces of Erin."

Fergus drew nigh and sprang from his chariot. Cuchulain bade him welcome. "Welcome is thy coming, O my master Fergus!" cried Cuchulain. "If a flock of birds comes into the plain, thou shalt have a duck with half of another. If a fish comes into the river-mouths, thou shalt have a salmon with half of another. A handful of watercress and a bunch of laver and a sprig of seagrass and a drink of cold water from the sand thou shalt have thereafter."

"'Tis an outlaw's portion, that" said Fergus.

"'Tis true; 'tis an outlaw's portion is mine" answered Cuchulain.

"Truly intended, methinks, the welcome, O fosterling" said Fergus. "But, were it for this I came, I should think it better to leave it. It is for this I am here, to inform thee who comes to fight and contend with thee at the morning hour early on the morrow."

"E'en so will we hear it from thee" said Cuchulain.

"Thine own friend and comrade and foster brother, the man thine equal in feats and in skill of arms and in deeds, Ferdiad son of Daman son of Darè, the great and mighty warrior of the men of Domnann."

"As my soul liveth" replied Cuchulain "it is not to an encounter we wish our friend to come, and not for fear, but for love and affection of him; and almost I would prefer to fall by the hand of that warrior than for him to fall by mine."

"It is even for that" answered Fergus "thou shouldst be on thy guard and prepared. Say not that thou hast no fear of Ferdiad, for it is fitting that thou shouldst have fear and dread before fighting with Ferdiad. For unlike all to whom it fell to fight and contend with thee on the Cualnge Cattle Raid on this occasion is Ferdiad son of Daman son of Darè, for he hath a horny skin about him in battle against a man, a belt, equally strong, victorious in battle, and neither points nor edges are reddened upon it in the hour of strife and anger. For he is the fury of a lion, and the bursting of wrath, and the blow of doom, and the wave that drowneth foes."

"Speak not thus!" cried Cuchulain "for I swear by my arms of valour, the oath that my people swear, that every limb and every joint will be as soft as a pliant rush in the bed of a river under the point of sword, if he show himself to me on the ford! Truly am I here" said Cuchulain "checking and staying four of the five grand provinces of Erin from Monday at Summer's end till the beginning of spring, and I have not left my post for a night's disport, through stoutly opposing the men of Erin on the Cattle Lifting of Cualnge. And in all this time, I have not put foot in retreat before any one man nor before a multitude, and methinks just as little will I turn foot in flight before him."

And thus spake he, that it was not fear of Ferdiad that caused his anxiety for the fight, but his love for him. And, on his part, so spake Fergus, putting him

on his guard because of Ferdiad's strength, and he said these words and Cuchulain responded: —

Fergus: "O Cuchulain — splendid deed —
 Lo, 'tis time for thee to rise.
 Here in rage against thee comes
 Ferdiad, red-faced Daman's son!"

Cuchulain: "Here am I — no easy task —
 Holding Erin's men at bay;
 Foot I've never turned in flight
 In my fight with single foe!"

Fergus: "Dour the man when anger moves,
 Owing to his gore-red glaive;
 Ferdiad wears a skin of horn,
'Gainst which fight nor might prevails!"

Cuchulain: "Be thou still; urge not thy tale,
 Fergus of the mighty arms.
 On no land and on no ground,
 For me is there aught defeat!"

Fergus: "Fierce the man with scores of deeds;
 No light thing, him to subdue.
Strong as hundreds — brave his mien —
 Point pricks not, edge cuts him not!"

Cuchulain: "If we clash upon the ford,
 I and Ferdiad of known skill,
 We'll not part without we know:
 Fierce will be our weapon fight!"

Fergus: "More I'd wish it than reward,
 O Cuchulain of red sword,
 Thou shouldst be the one to bring
Eastward haughty Ferdiad's spoils!"

Cuchulain: "Now I give my word and vow,
 Though unskilled in strife of words,
 It is I will conquer this
 Son of Daman macDarè!"

Fergus: "It is I brought east the host,
 Thus requiting Ulster's wrong.
With me came they from their lands,
 With their heroes and their chiefs!"

Cuchulain: "Were not Conchobar in the 'Pains,'

Hard 'twould be to come near us.
Never Medb of Mag in Scail
On more tearful march had come!"

Fergus: "Greatest deed awaits thy hand:
Fight with Ferdiad, Daman's son.
Hard stern arms with stubborn edge,
Shalt thou have, thou Culann's Hound!"

After that, Fergus returned to the camp and halting-place of the men of Erin, lest the men of Erin should say he was betraying them or forsaking them, if he should remain longer than he did conversing with Cuchulain. And they took farewell of each other.

Now as regards the charioteer of Cuchulain after Fergus went from them: "What wilt thou do tonight?" asked Laeg.

"What, indeed?" said Cuchulain.

"It will be thus" (said the charioteer) "Ferdiad will come to attack thee, with new beauty of plaiting and dressing of hair, and washing and bathing, and the four provinces of Erin with him to look at the combat. I would that thou wouldst go where thou wilt get a like adorning for thyself, to the place where is Emer Foltchain ('Emer of the Beautiful Hair,' thy wife), daughter of Forgal Monach, at Cairthenn in Cluan da Dam, ('two Oxen's Meadow') in Sliab Fuait, where thou wilt get even such an adorning for thyself."

"It is fitting to do so" said Cuchulain. Then Cuchulain went thither that night to Dundelgan, and passed the night with his wife. His doings from that time are not related here now.

As for Ferdiad, he betook himself to his tent and to his people, and imparted to them the easy surety which Medb had obtained from him to do combat and battle with six warriors on the morrow, or to do combat and battle with Cuchulain alone, if he thought it a lighter task. He made known to them also the fair terms he had obtained from Medb of sending the same six warriors for the fulfilment of the covenant she had made with him, should Cuchulain fall by his hands.

The folk of Ferdiad were not joyful, blithe, cheerful or merry that night, but they were sad, sorrowful and downcast, for they knew that where the two champions and the two bulwarks in a gap for a hundred, the two pillars of battle and strife of the men of Erin of that time met in combat, one or other of them would fall there or both would fall, and if it should be one of them, they believed it would be their king and their own lord that would fall there, for it was not easy to contend and do battle with Cuchulain on the Raid for the Kine of Cualnge.

Ferdiad slept right heavily the first part of the night, but when the end of the night was come, his sleep and his heaviness left him. And the anxiousness of the combat and the battle came upon him. But most troubled in spirit was he that he should allow all the treasures to pass from him, and the maiden, by reason of combat with one man. Unless he fought with that one man, he must needs fight with six champions on the morrow. What tormented him more than that was, should he once show himself on the ford to Cuchulain he was certain he would never have power of head or of life ever after. And Ferdiad arose early on the morrow. And he charged his charioteer to take his horses and to yoke his chariot. The charioteer sought to dissuade him from that journey. "By our word" said the gilla "twould be better for thee to remain than to go thither," said he; "for, not more do I commend it for thee than I condemn it."

"Hold thy peace about us, boy!" quoth Ferdiad "for we will brook no interference from any one concerning this journey. For the promise we gave to Medb and Ailill in the presence of the men of Erin, it would shame us to break it; for they would say it was fear or dread that caused us to break it. And, by my conscience, I would almost liefer fall myself by Cuchulain's hand than that he should fall by mine on this occasion. And should Cuchulain fall by my hand on the ford of combat, then shall Medb and many of the men of Erin fall by my hand because of the pledge they extorted from me, and I drunken and merry. And in this manner he spake, conversing with the charioteer, and he uttered these words, the little lay that follows, urging on the charioteer, and the henchman responded: —

Ferdiad: "Let's haste to th' encounter,
 To battle with this man;
 The ford we will come to,
 O'er which Badb will shriek!
 To meet with Cuchulain,
 To wound his slight body,
To thrust the spear through him
 So that he may die!"

The Henchman: "To stay it were better;
 Your threats are not gentle;
Death's sickness will one have,
 And sad will ye part!
 To meet Ulster's noblest,
To meet whence ill cometh;
 Long will men speak of it.
 Alas, for your course!"

Ferdiad: "Not fair what thou speakest;
 No fear hath the warrior;
 We owe no one meekness;
 We stay not for thee!
 Hush, gilla, about us!
The time will bring strong hearts;

More meet strength than weakness;
Let's on to the tryst!"

Ferdiad's horses were now brought forth and his chariot was hitched, and he set out from the camp for the ford of battle when yet day with its full light had not come there for him. "My lad" spake Ferdiad "it is not fitting that we make our journey without bidding farewell to the men of Erin. Turn the horses and the chariot for us towards the men of Erin." Thrice the servant turned the heads of the horses and the chariot towards the men of Erin. Then he came upon Medb letting her water from her on the floor of the tent.

"Ailill, sleepest thou still?" asked Medb.

"Not so!" replied Ailill.

"Dost hear thy new son-in-law taking farewell, of thee?"

"Is that what he doth?" asked Ailill.

"'Tis that, verily," Medb made answer; "but I swear by what my tribe swears, not on the same feet will the man who makes that greeting come back to you."

"Howbeit, we have profited by a happy alliance of marriage with him" quoth Ailill; "if only Cuchulain falls by his hand, I should be pleased if they both fell, yet would I prefer that Ferdiad should escape."

Ferdiad came to the ford of combat. "Look, my lad!" said Ferdiad "is Cuchulain on the ford?"

"That he is not" replied the gilla.

"Look well for us" said Ferdiad.

"Cuchulain is not a little speck where he would be in hiding" answered the gilla.

"'Tis true, then, my lad; till this day Cuchulain hath not heard of a goodly warrior coming to meet him on the Cow Spoil of Cualnge, and now when he has heard of one, he has left the ford."

"Shame for thee to slander Cuchulain in his absence. Rememberest thou not when ye gave battle to German Garbglas above the borders of the Tyrrhene Sea, thou leftest thy sword with the hosts, and it was Cuchulain who slew a hundred warriors till he reached it and brought it to thee? And mindest thou well where we were that night?" the gilla asked further.

"I know not" Ferdiad answered.

“At the house of Scathach’s steward” said the other; “and thou wentest proudly in advance of us all into the house. The churl gave thee a blow with his three-pointed fork in the small of the back, so that thou flewest like a bolt out over the door. Cuchulain came in and gave the churl a blow with his sword, so that he made two pieces of him. I was their house steward whilst ye were in that place. If it were that day, thou wouldst not say thou wast a better warrior than Cuchulain.”

“Wrong is what thou hast done, O gilla” said Ferdiad; “for I would not have come to the combat, hadst thou spoken thus to me at first. Why dost thou not lay the chariot poles at my side and the skin coverings under my head, that so I may sleep now?”

“Alas” said the gilla “‘tis a sorry sleep before deer and packs of wolves here!”

“How so, gilla? Art thou not able to keep watch and guard for me?”

“I am,” the gilla answered; “unless they come in clouds or in the air to attack thee, they shall not come from east or from west to attack thee without warning, without notice.”

“Come, gilla,” said Ferdiad, “unharness the horses and spread for me the cushions and skins of my chariot under me here, so that I sleep off my heavy fit of sleep and slumber here, for I slept not the last part of the night with the anxiousness of the battle and combat.”

The gilla unharnessed the horses; he unfastened the chariot under him, and spread beneath him the chariot-cloths. He slept off the heavy fit of sleep that was on him. The gilla remained on watch and guard for him.

Now how Cuchulain fared is related here: He arose not till the day with its bright light had come to him, lest the men of Erin might say it was fear or fright of the champion he had, if he should arise early. And when day with its full light had come, he passed his hand over his face and bade his charioteer take his horses and yoke them to his chariot. “Come, gilla” said Cuchulain “take out our horses for us and harness our chariot, for an early riser is the warrior appointed to meet us, Ferdiad son of Daman son of Darè. If Ferdiad awaits us, he must needs think it long.”

“The horses are taken out” said the gilla; “the chariot is harnessed. Mount, and be it no shame to thy valour to go thither!” Cuchulain stepped into the chariot and they pressed forward to the ford. Then it was that the cutting, feat performing, battle winning, red sworded hero, Cuchulain son of Sualtair, mounted his chariot, so that there shrieked around him the goblins and fiends and the sprites of the glens and the demons of the air; for the Tuatha De Danann (‘the Folk of the Goddess Danu’) were wont to set up their cries around him, to the end that the dread and the fear and the fright and the terror of him might be so much the greater in every battle and on every field, in every fight and in every combat wherein he went.

Not long had Ferdiad's charioteer waited when he heard something: A rush and a crash and a hurtling sound, and a din and a thunder, and a clatter and a clash, namely, the shield cry of feat shields, and the jangle of javelins, and the deed striking of swords, and the thud of the helmet, and the ring of spears, and the clang of the cuirass, and the striking of arms, the fury of feats, the straining of ropes, and the whirr of wheels, and the creaking of the chariot, and the trampling of horses' hoofs, and the deep voice of the hero and battle warrior in grave speech with his servant on his way to the ford to attack his opponent.

The servant came and touched his master with his hand and awakened him. "Ferdiad, master" said the youth "rise up! They are here to meet thee at the ford." Then Ferdiad arose and girt his body in his war dress of battle and combat. And the gilla spake these words: —

"The roll of a chariot,
Its fair yoke of silver;
A man great and stalwart
O'ertops the strong car!
O'er Bri Ross, o'er Branè
Their swift path they hasten;
Past Old-tree Town's tree-stump,
Victorious they speed!

"A sly Hound that driveth,
A fair chief that urgeth,
A free hawk that speedeth
His steeds towards the south!
Gore-coloured, the Cua,
'Tis sure he will take us;
We know — vain to hide it —
He brings us defeat!

"Woe him on the hillock,
The brave Hound before him;
Last year I foretold it,
That some time he'd come!
Hound from Emain Macha,
Hound formed of all colours,
The Border-hound, War-hound,
I hear what I've heard!"

"Come, gilla" said Ferdiad; "for what reason laudest thou this man ever since I am come from my house? And it is almost a cause for strife with thee that thou hast praised him thus highly. But, Ailill and Medb have prophesied to me that this man will fall by my hand. And since it is for a reward, he shall quickly be torn asunder by me. And make ready the arms on the ford against his coming."

“Should I turn my face backward” said the gilla; “methinks the poles of yon chariot will pass through the back of my neck.”

“Too much, my lad” said Ferdiad “dost thou praise Cuchulain, for not a reward has he given thee for praising, but it is time to fetch help.” And he spake these words, and the henchman responded: —

Ferdiad: “’Tis time now to help me;
 Be silent! cease praising!
 ’Twas no deed of friendship,
 No doom o’er the brink
 The Champion of Cualnge,
Thou seest ‘midst proud feats,
 For that it’s for guerdon,
 Shall quickly be slain!”

The Henchman: “I see Cualnge’s hero,
 With feats overweening,
 Not fleeing he flees us,
 But towards us he comes.
 He runneth — not slowly —
Though cunning — not sparing —
 Like water ‘down high cliff
 Or thunderbolt quick!”

Ferdiad: “’Tis cause of a quarrel,
 So much thou hast praised him;
 And why hast thou chose him,
 Since I am from home?
 And now they extol him,
 They fall to proclaim him;
 None come to attack him,
 But soft simple men.”

Here followeth the Description of Cuchulain’s chariot, one of the three chief Chariots of the Tale of the Foray of Cualnge.

It was not long that Ferdiad’s charioteer remained there when he saw something: “How beholdest thou Cuchulain?” asked Ferdiad of his charioteer. “I behold” said he “a beautiful, live-pointed chariot, broad above, of white crystal, with a thick yoke of gold, with stout plates of copper, with shafts of bronze, with wheel bands of bronze covered with silver, approaching with swiftness, with speed, with perfect skill; with a green shade, with a thin framed, dry bodied box surmounted with feats of cunning, straight-poled, as long as a warrior’s sword. On this was room for a hero’s seven arms, the fair seat for its lord; two wheels, dark, black; a pole of tin, with red enamel, of a beautiful colour; two inlaid, golden bridles. This chariot was placed behind two fleet steeds, nimble, furious, small headed, bounding, large eared, small snouted, sharp beaked, red chested, gaily prancing, with inflated nostrils, broad-chested,

quick-hearted, high flanked, broad-hoofed, slender limbed, overpowering and resolute. A grey, broad hipped, small stepping, long maned horse, whose name was Liath ('the Roan') of Macha, was under one of the yokes of the chariot; a black, crisped maned, swift moving, broad-backed horse, whose name was Dubh ('the Black') of Sithleann, under the other. Like unto a hawk after its prey on a sharp tempestuous day, or to a tearing blast of wind of Spring on a March day over the back of a plain, or unto a startled stag when first roused by the hounds in the first of the chase, were Cuchulain's two horses before the chariot, as if they were on glowing, fiery flags, so that they shook the earth and made it tremble with the fleetness of their course.

"In the front of this chariot is a man with fair, curly, long hair. There is around him a cloak, blue, Parthian purple. A spear with red and keen cutting blades, flaming red in his hand. The semblance of three heads of hair he has, namely, brown hair next to the skin of his head, blood red hair in the middle, a crown of gold is the third head of hair.

"Beautiful is the arrangement of that hair so that it makes three coils down behind over his shoulders. Even as a thread of gold it seems, when its hue has been wrought over the edge of an anvil; or like to the yellow of bees whereon shines the sun on a summer's day is the shining of each single hair of his hair. Seven toes he has on each of his feet and seven fingers on each of his hands and the brilliance of a very great fire is around his eye.

"Befitting him is the charioteer beside him, with curly, jet black hair, shorn broad over his head. A cowled garment around him, open at the elbows. A horsewhip, very fine and golden in his hand, and a light grey cloak wrapped around him, and a goad of white silver in his hand. He plies the goad on the horses whatever way would go the deed renowned warrior that is in the chariot."

And Cuchulain reached the ford. Ferdiad waited on the south side of the ford; Cuchulain stood on the north side. Ferdiad bade welcome to Cuchulain. "Welcome is thy coming, O Cuchulain!" said Ferdiad.

"Truly spoken meseemed thy welcome till now" answered Cuchulain; "but today I put no more trust in it. And, O Ferdiad" said Cuchulain "it were fitter for me to bid thee welcome than that thou should'st welcome me; for it is thou that art come to the land and province wherein I dwell; and it is not fitting for thee to come to contend and do battle with me, but it were fitter for me to go to contend and do battle with thee. For before thee in flight are my women and my boys and my youths, my steeds and my troops of horses, my droves, my flocks and my herds of cattle."

"Good, O Cuchulain" spake Ferdiad; "what has ever brought thee out to contend and do battle with me? For when we were together with Scathach and with Uathach and with Aifè, thou wast not a man worthy of me, for thou wast my serving man, even for arming my spear and dressing my bed."

“That was indeed true” answered Cuchulain; “because of my youth and my littleness did I so much for thee, but this is by no means my mood this day. For there is not a warrior in the world I would not drive off this day in the field of battle and combat.”

It was not long before they met in the middle of the ford. And then it was that each of them cast sharp cutting reproaches at the other, renouncing his friendship; and Ferdiad spake these words there, and Cuchulain responded: —

Ferdiad: “What led thee, O Cua,
To fight a strong champion?
Thy flesh will be gore-red
O'er smoke of thy steeds!
Alas for thy journey,
A kindling of firebrands;
In sore need of healing,
If home thou shouldst reach!”

Cuchulain: “I'm come before warriors
Around the herd's wild Boar,
Before troops and hundreds,
To drown thee in deep.
In anger, to prove thee
In hundred-fold battle,
Till on thee come havoc,
Defending thy head!”

Ferdiad: “Here stands one to crush thee,
’Tis I will destroy thee,
From me there shall come
The flight of their warriors
In presence of Ulster,
That long they'll remember
The loss that was theirs!”

Cuchulain: “How then shall we combat?
For wrongs shall we heave sighs?
Despite all, we'll go there,
To fight on the ford!
Or is it with hard swords,
Or e'en with red spear-points,
Before hosts to slay thee,
If thy hour hath come?”

Ferdiad: “Fore sunset, fore nightfall —
If need be, then guard thee —
I'll fight thee at Bairchè,
Not bloodlessly fight!
The Ulstermen call thee,

'He has him!' Oh, hearken!
The sight will distress them
That through them will pass!"

Cuchulain: "In danger's gap fallen,
At hand is thy life's term;
On thee plied be weapons,
Not gentle the skill!
One champion will slay thee;
We both will encounter;
No more shalt lead forays,
From this day till Doom!"

Ferdiad: "Avaunt with thy warnings,
Thou world's greatest braggart;
Nor guerdon nor pardon,
Low warrior for thee!
'Tis I that well know thee,
Thou heart of a cageling
This lad merely tickles —
Without skill or force!"

Cuchulain: "When we were with Scathach,
For wonted arms training,
Together we'd fare forth,
To seek every fight.
Thou wast my heart's comrade.
My clan and my kinsman;
Ne'er found I one dearer;
Thy loss would be sad!"

Ferdiad: "Thou wager'st thine honour
Unless we do battle;
Before the cock croweth,
Thy head on a spit!
Cuchulain of Cualnge,
Mad frenzy hath seized thee
All ill we'll wreak on thee,
For thine is the sin!"

"Come now, O Ferdiad" cried Cuchulai, "not meet was it for thee to come to contend and do battle with me, because of the instigation and intermeddling of Ailill and Medb, and because of the false promises that they made thee. Because of their deceitful terms and of the maiden have many good men been slain. And all that came because of those promises of deceit, neither profit nor success did it bring them, and they have fallen by me. And none the more, O Ferdiad, shall it win victory or increase of fame for thee; and, as they all fell, shalt thou too fall by my hand!" Thus he spake, and he further uttered these words and Ferdiad hearkened to him: —

“Come not nigh me, noble chief,
Ferdiaid, comrade, Daman’s son.
Worse for thee than ’tis for me;
Thou’lt bring sorrow to a host!

“Come not nigh me ‘gainst all right;
Thy last bed is made by me.
Why shouldst thou alone escape
From the prowess of my arms?

“Shall not great feats thee undo,
Though thou’rt purple, horny-skinned?
And the maid thou boastest of,
Shall not, Daman’s son, be thine!

“Finnabair, Medb’s daughter fair,
Great her charms though they may be,
Fair as is the damsel’s form,
She’s for thee not to enjoy!

“Finnabair, the king’s own child,
Is the lure, if truth be told;
Many they whom she’s deceived
And undone as she has thee!

“Break not, weetless, oath with me;
Break not friendship, break not bond;
Break not promise, break not word;
Come not nigh me, noble chief!

“Fifty chiefs obtained in plight
This same maid, a proffer vain.
Through me went they to their graves;
Spear-right all they had from me!

“Though for brave was held Ferbaeth,
With whom was a warriors’ train,
In short space I quelled his rage;
Him I slew with one sole blow!

“Srubdarè — sore sank his might —
Darling of the noblest dames,
Time there was when great his fame —
Gold nor raiment saved him not!

“Were she mine affianced wife,
Smiled on me this fair land’s head,
I would not thy body hurt.

Right nor left, in front, behind!”

“Good, O Ferdiad!” cried Cuchulain. A pity it is for thee to abandon my alliance and my friendship for the sake of a woman that has been trafficked to fifty other warriors before thee, and it would be long before I would forsake thee for that woman. Therefore, it is not right for thee to come to fight and combat with me; for when we were with Scathach and with Uathach and with Aifè, we were together in practice of valour and arms of the world, and it was together we were used to seek out every battle and every battlefield, every combat and every contest, every wood and every desert, every covert and every recess.” And thus he spake and he uttered these words: —

Cuchulain: “We were heart-companions once;
 We were comrades in the woods;
 We were men that shared a bed,
 When we slept the heavy sleep,
 After hard and weary fights.
 Into many lands, so strange,
 Side by side we sallied forth,
And we ranged the woodlands through,
When with Scathach we learned arms!”

Ferdiad: “O Cuchulain, rich in feats,
 Hard the trade we both have learned;
 Treason hath o’ercome our love;
Thy first wounding hath been bought;
 Think not of our friendship more,
 Cua, it avails thee not!”

“Too long are we now in this way” quoth Ferdiad; “and what arms shall we resort to today, O Cuchulain?”

“With thee is thy choice of weapons this day till night time,” answered Cuchulain “for thou art he that first didst reach the ford.”

“Rememberest thou at all” asked Ferdiad “the choice deeds of arms we were wont to practise with Scathach and with Uathach and with Aifè?”

“Indeed, and I do remember,” answered Cuchulain.

“If thou rememberest, let us begin with them.”

They betook them to their choicest deeds of arms. They took upon them two equally matched shields for feats, and their eight edged targes for feats, and their eight small darts, and their eight straight swords with ornaments of walrus tooth and their eight lesser, ivoried spears which flew from them and to them like bees on a day of fine weather.

They cast no weapon that struck not. Each of them was busy casting at the other with those missiles from morning's early twilight till noon at midday, the while they overcame their various feats with the bosses and hollows of their feat-shields. However great the excellence of the throwing on either side, equally great was the excellence of the defence, so that during all that time neither of them bled or reddened the other. "Let us cease now from this bout of arms, O Cuchulain" said Ferdiad; "for it is not by such our decision will come."

"Yea, surely, let us cease, if the time hath come" answered Cuchulain. Then they ceased. They threw their feat tackle from them into the hands of their charioteers.

"To what weapons shall we resort next, O Cuchulain?" asked Ferdiad.

"Thine is the choice of weapons till nightfall" replied Cuchulain; "for thou art he that didst first reach the ford."

"Let us begin, then" said Ferdiad, "with our straight cut, smooth hardened throwing spears, with cords of full-hard flax on them." "Aye, let us begin then," assented Cuchulain. Then they took on them two hard shields, equally strong. They fell to their straight cut, smooth hardened spears with cords of full-hard flax on them. Each of them was engaged in casting at the other with the spears from the middle of noon till yellowness came over the sun at the hour of evening's sundown. However great the excellence of the defence, equally great was the excellence of the throwing on either side, so that each of them bled and reddened and wounded the other during that time. "Wouldst thou fain make a truce, O Cucugan?" asked Ferdiad.

"It would please me," replied Cuchulain; "for whoso begins with arms has the right to desist."

"Let us leave off from this now, O Cuchulain" said Ferdiad.

"Aye, let us leave off, an the time hath come" answered Cuchulain. So they ceased. They threw their arms from them into the hands of their charioteers.

Thereupon each of them went toward the other in the middle of the ford, and each of them put his hand on the other's neck and gave him three kisses in remembrance of his fellowship and friendship. Their horses were in one and the same paddock that night, and their charioteers at one and the same fire; and their charioteers made ready a litter bed of fresh rushes for them with pillows for wounded men on them. Then came healing and curing folk to heal and to cure them, and they laid healing herbs and grasses and a curing charm on their cuts and stabs, their gashes and many wounds. Of every healing herb and grass and curing charm that was brought from the fairy dwellings of Erin to Cuchulain and was applied to the cuts and stabs, to the gashes and many wounds of Cuchulain, a like portion thereof he sent across the ford westward to Ferdiad, to put to his wounds and his pools of gore, so that the men of Erin

should not have it to say, should Ferdiad fall at his hands, it was more than his share of care had been given to him.

Of every food and of every savoury, soothing and strong drink that was brought by the men of Erin to Ferdiad, a like portion thereof he sent over the ford northwards to Cuchulain; for the purveyors of Ferdiad were more numerous than the purveyors of Cuchulain. All the men of Erin were purveyors to Ferdiad, to the end that he might keep Cuchulain off from them. But only the inhabitants of Mag Breg ('the Plain of Breg') were purveyors to Cuchulain. They were wont to come daily, that is, every night, to converse with him.

They bided there that night. Early on the morrow they arose and went their ways to the ford of combat. "To what weapons shall we resort on this day, O Ferdiad?" asked Cuchulain.

"Thine is the choosing of weapons till night time" Ferdiad made answer "because it was I had my choice of weapons on the day aforegone."

"Let us take, then" said Cuchulain "to our great, well-tempered lances today, for we think that the thrusting will bring nearer the decisive battle today than did the casting of yesterday. Let our horses be brought to us and our chariots yoked, to the end that we engage in combat over our horses and chariots on this day."

"Aye, let us go so" Ferdiad assented. Thereupon they girded two full firm broadshields on them for that day. They took to their great, well-tempered lances on that day. Either of them began to pierce and to drive, to throw and to press down the other, from early morning's twilight till the hour of evening's close. If it were the wont for birds in flight to fly through the bodies of men, they could have passed through their bodies on that day and carried away pieces of blood and flesh through their wounds and their sores into the clouds and the air all around. And when the hour of evening's close was come, their horses were spent and their drivers were wearied, and they themselves, the heroes and warriors of valour, were exhausted.

"Let us give over now, O Ferdiad" said Cuchulain "for our horses are spent and our drivers tired, and when they are exhausted, why should we too not be exhausted?" And in this wise he spake, and he uttered these words at that place: —

"We need not our chariots break —
This, a struggle fit for giants.

Place the hobbles on the steeds,
Now that din of arms is o'er!"

"Yea, we will cease, if the time hath come" replied Ferdiad. They ceased then. They threw their arms away from them into the hands of their charioteers. Each of them came towards his fellow. Each laid his hand on the other's neck and

gave him three kisses. Their horses were in the one pen that night, and their charioteers at the one fire. Their charioteers prepared two litter beds of fresh rushes for them with pillows for wounded men on them. The curing and healing men came to attend and watch and mark them that night; for naught else could they do, because of the direfulness of their cuts and their stabs, their gashes and their numerous wounds, but apply to them philtres and spells and charms, to staunch their blood and their bleeding and their deadly pains. Of every magic potion and every spell and every charm that was applied to the cuts and stabs of Cuchulain, their like share he sent over the ford westwards to Ferdiad. Of every food and every savoury, soothing and strong drink that was brought by the men of Erin to Ferdiad, an equal portion he sent over the ford northwards to Cuchulain, for the victuallers of Ferdiad were more numerous than the victuallers of Cuchulain. For all the men of Erin were Ferdiad's nourishers, to the end that he might ward off Cuchulain from them. But the indwellers of the Plain of Breg alone were Cuchulain's nourishers. They were wont to come daily, that is, every night, to converse with him.

They abode there that night. Early on the morrow they arose and repaired to the ford of combat. Cuchulain marked an evil mien and a dark mood that day beyond every other day on Ferdiad. "It is evil thou appearest today, O Ferdiad" spake Cuchulain; "thy hair has become dark today, and thine eye has grown drowsy, and thine upright form and thy features and thy gait have gone from thee!"

"Truly not for fear nor for dread of thee is that happened to me today," answered Ferdiad; "for there is not in Erin this day a warrior I could not repel!"

"Alas, O Ferdiad" said Cuchulain, "a pity it is for thee to oppose thy foster brother and thy comrade and friend, on the counsel of any woman in the world!"

"A pity it is, O Cuchulain" Ferdiad responded. "But, should I part without a struggle with thee, I should be in ill repute forever with Medb and with the nobles of the four grand provinces of Erin."

"A pity it is, O Ferdiad" said Cuchulain; "not on the counsel of all the men and women in the world would I desert thee or would I do thee harm. And almost would it make a clot of gore of my heart to be combating with thee!"

And Cuchulain lamented and moaned, and he spake these words and Ferdiad responded: —

Cuchulain: "Ferdiad, ah, if it be thou,
Well I know thou'rt doomed to die!
To have gone at woman's hest,
Forced to fight thy comrade sworn!"

Ferdiad: "O Cuchulain — wise decree —
Loyal champion, hero true,
Each man is constrained to go

'Neath the sod that hides his grave!"

Cuchulain: "Finnabair, Medb's daughter fair,
Stately maiden though she be,
Not for love they'll give to thee,
But to prove thy kingly might!"

Ferdiad: "Provèd was my might long since,
Cu of gentle spirit thou.
Of one braver I've not heard;
Till today I have not found!"

Cuchulain: "Thou art he provoked this fight,
Son of Daman, Darè's son,
To have gone at woman's word,
Swords to cross with thine old friend!"

Ferdiad: "Should we then unfought depart,
Brothers though we are, bold Hound,
Ill would be my word and fame
With Ailill and Cruachan's Medb!"

Cuchulain: "Food has not yet passed his lips,
Nay nor has he yet been born,
Son of king or blameless queen,
For whom I would work thee harm!"

Ferdiad: "Culann's Hound, with floods of deeds,
Medb, not thou, hath us betrayed;
Fame and victory thou shalt have;
Not on thee we lay our fault!"

Cuchulain: "Clotted gore is my brave heart,
Near I'm parted from my soul;
Wrongful 'tis — with hosts of deeds —
Ferdiad, dear, to fight with thee!"

After this colloquy, Ferdiad spake: "How much soever thou findest fault with me today" said Ferdiad "for my ill boding mien and evil doing, it will be as an offset to my prowess." And he said "To what weapons shall we resort today?"

"With thyself is the choice of weapons today till night time," replied Cuchulain, "for it is I that chose on the day gone by."

"Let us resort, then" said Ferdiad "to our heavy, hard smiting swords this day, for we trow that the smiting each other will bring us nearer to the decision of battle to-day than was our piercing each other on yesterday."

"Let us go then, by all means" responded Cuchulain.

Then they took two full great longshields upon them for that day. They turned to their heavy, hard smiting swords. Each of them fell to strike and to hew, to lay low and cut down, to slay and undo his fellow, till as large as the head of a month-old child was each lump and each cut, each clutter and each clot of gore that each of them took from the shoulders and thighs and shoulderblades of the other.

Each of them was engaged in smiting the other in this way from the twilight of early morning till the hour of evening's close. "Let us leave off from this now, O Cuchulain!" cried Ferdiad.

"Aye, let us leave off, if the hour has come" said Cuchulain. They parted then, and threw their arms away from them into the hands of their charioteers. Though it had been the meeting of two happy, blithe, cheerful, joyful men, their parting that night was of two that were sad, sorrowful and full of suffering. They parted without a kiss a blessing or aught other sign of friendship, and their servants disarmed the steeds, the squires and the heroes; no healing or curing herbs were sent from Cuchulain to Ferdiad that night, and no food nor drink was brought from Ferdiad to him. Their horses were not in the same paddock that night. Their charioteers were not at the same fire.

They passed there that night. It was then that Ferdiad arose early on the morrow and went alone to the ford of combat, and dauntless, vengeful and mighty was the man that went thither that day, even Ferdiad son of Daman. For he knew that that would be the decisive day of the battle and combat; and he knew that one or other of them would fall there that day, or that they both would fall. It was then he donned his battle weed of battle and fight and combat, or ever Cuchulain came to meet him. And thus was the manner of this harness of battle and fight and combat: He put his silken, glossy trews with its border of speckled gold, next to his white skin. Over this, outside, he put his brown leathern, well sewed kilt. Outside of this he put a huge, goodly flag, the size of a millstone, the shallow stone of adamant which he had brought from Africa and which neither points nor edges could pierce. He put his solid, very deep, iron kilt of twice molten iron over the huge, goodly flag as large as a millstone, through fear and dread of the Gae Bulga on that day. About his head he put his crested war cap of battle and fight and combat, whereon were forty carbuncle gems beautifully adorning it and studded with red-enamel and crystal and rubies and with shining stones of the Eastern world. His angry, fierce striking spear he seized in his right hand. On his left side he hung his curved battle falchion, which would cut a hair against the stream with its keenness and sharpness, with its golden pommel and its rounded hilt of red gold. On the arch-slope of his back he slung his massive, fine buffalo shield of a warrior, whereon were fifty bosses, wherein a boar could be shown in each of its bosses, apart from the great central boss of red gold. Ferdiad performed divers, brilliant, manifold, marvellous feats on high that day, unlearned from any one before, neither from foster mother nor from foster father, neither from Scathach nor from Uathach nor from Aifè, but he found them of himself that day in the face of Cuchulain.

Cuchulain likewise came to the ford, and he beheld the various, brilliant, manifold, wonderful feats that Ferdiad performed on high. “Thou seest yonder, O Laeg my master, the divers, bright, numerous, marvellous feats that Ferdiad performs on high, and I shall receive yon feats one after the other, and, therefore, O Laeg” cried Cuchulain “if defeat be my lot this day, do thou prick me on and taunt me and speak evil to me, so that the more my spirit and anger shall rise in me. If, however, before me his defeat takes place, say thou so to me and praise me and speak me fair, to the end that the greater may be my courage!”

“It shall surely be done so, if need be, O Cucuc” Laeg answered.

Then Cuchulain, too, girded his war harness of battle and fight and combat about him, and performed all kinds of splendid, manifold, marvellous feats on high that day which he had not learned from any one before, neither with Scathach nor with Uathach nor with Aifè.

Ferdiad observed those feats, and he knew they would be plied against him in turn. “To what weapons shall we resort today, O Ferdiad?” asked Cuchulain. “With thee is thy choice of weapons till night time” Ferdiad responded. “Let us go to the ‘Feat of the Ford’ then” said Cuchulain.

“Aye, let us do so” answered Ferdiad. Albeit Ferdiad spoke that, he deemed it the most grievous thing whereto he could go, for he knew that in that sort Cuchulain used to destroy every hero and every battle soldier who fought with him in the ‘Feat of the Ford.’

Great indeed was the deed that was done on the ford that day. The two heroes, the two champions, the two chariot fighters of the west of Europe, the two bright torches of valour of the Gael, the two hands of dispensing favour and of giving rewards and jewels and treasures in the west of the northern world, the two veterans of skill and the two keys of bravery of the Gael, the man for quelling the variance and discord of Connacht, the man for guarding the cattle and herds of Ulster, to be brought together in encounter as from afar, set to slay each other or to kill one of them, through the sowing of dissension and the incitement of Ailill and Medb.

Each of them was busy hurling at the other in those deeds of arms from early morning’s gloaming till the middle of noon. When midday came, the rage of the men became wild, and each drew nearer to the other.

Thereupon Cuchulain gave one spring once from the bank of the ford till he stood upon the boss of Ferdiad macDaman’s shield, seeking to reach his head and to strike it from above over the rim of the shield. Straightway Ferdiad gave the shield a blow with his left elbow, so that Cuchulain went from him like a bird onto the brink of the ford. Again Cuchulain sprang from the brink of the ford, so that he alighted upon the boss of Ferdiad macDaman’s shield, that he might reach his head and strike it over the rim of the shield from above. Ferdiad

gave the shield a thrust with his left knee, so that Cuchulain went from him like an infant onto the bank of the ford.

Laeg espied that. "Woe then, O Cuchulain!" cried Laeg; "meseems the battle warrior that is against thee hath shaken thee as a fond woman shakes her child. He hath washed thee as a cup is washed in a tub. He hath ground thee as a mill grinds soft malt. He hath pierced thee as a tool bores through an oak. He hath bound thee as the bindweed binds the trees. He hath pounced on thee as a hawk pounces on little birds, so that no more hast thou right or title or claim to valour or skill in arms till the very day of doom and of life, thou little imp of an elf-man!" cried Laeg.

Thereat for the third time, Cuchulain arose with the speed of the wind, and the swiftness of a swallow, and the dash of a dragon, and the strength of a lion into the clouds of the air, till he alighted on the boss of the shield of Ferdiad son of Daman, so as to reach his head that he might strike it from above over the rim of his shield. Then it was that the battle warrior gave the shield a violent and powerful shake, so that Cuchulain flew from it into the middle of the ford, the same as if he had not sprung at all.

It was then the first twisting fit of Cuchulain took place, so that a swelling and inflation filled him like breath in a bladder, until he made a dreadful, terrible, many coloured, wonderful bow of himself, so that as big as a giant or a man of the sea was the hugely brave warrior towering directly over Ferdiad.

Such was the closeness of the combat they made, that their heads encountered above and their feet below and their hands in the middle over the rims and bosses of the shields.

Such was the closeness of the combat they made, that their shields burst and split from their rims to their centres.

Such was the closeness of the combat they made, that their spears bent and turned and shivered from their tips to their rivets.

Such was the closeness of the combat they made, that the boccanach and the bananach ('the puck faced Fays' and 'the white faced Fays') and the sprites of the glens and the eldritch beings of the air screamed from the rims of their shields and from the guards of their swords and from the tips of their spears.

Such was the closeness of the combat they made, that they forced the river out of its bed and out of its course, so that there might have been a reclining place for a king or a queen in the middle of the ford, and not a drop of water was in it but what fell there with the trampling and slipping which the two heroes and the two battle warriors made in the middle of the ford.

Such was the closeness of the combat they made, that the steeds of the Gael broke loose affrighted and plunging with madness and fury, so that their chains and their shackles, their traces and tethers snapped, and the women and

children and pygmy-folk, the weak and the madmen among the men of Erin brake out through the camp southwestward.

At that time they were at the edge feat of swords. It was then Ferdiad caught Cuchulain in an unguarded moment, and he gave him a thrust with his tusk hilted blade, so that he buried it in his breast, and his blood fell into his belt, till the ford became crimsoned with the clotted blood from the battle warrior's body. Cuchulain endured it not, under Ferdiad's attack, with his death bringing, heavy blows, and his long strokes and his mighty, middle slashes at him.

Then Cuchulain bethought him of his friends from Faery and of his mighty folk who would come to defend him and of his scholars to protect him, what time he would be hard pressed in the combat. It was then that Dolb and Indolb arrived to help and to succour their friend, namely Cuchulain, and one of them went on either side of him and they smote Ferdiad, the three of them, and Ferdiad did not perceive the men from Sid ('the Faery Dwelling'). Then it was that Ferdiad felt the onset of the three together smiting his shield against him, and he gave all his care and attention thereto, and thence he called to mind that, when they were with Scathach and with Uathach learning together, Dolb and Indolb used to come to help Cuchulain out of every stress wherein he was. Ferdiad spake: "Not alike are our foster brotherhood and our comradeship, O Cuchulain" quoth he.

"How so, then?" asked Cuchulain.

"Thy friends of the Fairy Folk have succoured thee, and thou didst not disclose them to me before" said Ferdiad.

"Not easy for me were that" answered Cuchulain; "for if the magic veil be once revealed to one of the sons of Milè, none of the Tuatha De Danann ('the Folk of the Goddess Danu') will have power to practise concealment or magic. And why complainest thou here, O Ferdiad?" said Cuchulain. "Thou hast a horn skin whereby to multiply feats and deeds of arms on me, and thou hast not shown me how it is closed or how it is opened."

Then it was they displayed all their skill and secret cunning to one another, so that there was not a secret of either of them kept from the other except the Gae Bulga, which was Cuchulain's. Howbeit, when the Fairy friends found Cuchulain had been wounded, each of them inflicted three great, heavy wounds on him, on Ferdiad, to wit. It was then that Ferdiad made a cast to the right, so that he slew Dolb with that goodly cast. Then followed the two woundings and the two throws that overcame him, till Ferdiad made a second throw towards Cuchulain's left, and with that throw he stretched low and killed Indolb dead on the floor of the ford. Hence it is that the story-teller sang the rann: —

"Why is this called Ferdiad's Ford,
E'en though three men on it fell?
None the less it washed their spoils —

It is Dolb's and Indolb's Ford!"

What need to relate further! When the devoted, equally great sires and champions, and the hard, battle victorious wild beasts that fought for Cuchulain had fallen, it greatly strengthened the courage of Ferdiad, so that he gave two blows for every blow of Cuchulain's. When Laeg son of Riangabair saw his lord being overcome by the crushing blows of the champion who oppressed him, Laeg began to stir up and rebuke Cuchulain, in such a way that a swelling and an inflation filled Cuchulain from top to ground, as the wind fills a spread, open banner, so that he made a dreadful, wonderful bow of himself like a sky bow in a shower of rain, and he made for Ferdiad with the violence of a dragon or the strength of a blood-hound.

And Cuchulain called for the Gae Bulga from Laeg son of Riangabair. This was its nature: With the stream it was made ready, and from between the fork of the foot it was cast; the wound of a single spear it gave when entering the body, and thirty barbs had it when it opened, and it could not be drawn out of a man's flesh till the flesh had been cut about it.

Thereupon Laeg came forward to the brink of the river and to the place where the fresh water was dammed, and the Gae Bulga was sharpened and set in position. He filled the pool and stopped the stream and checked the tide of the ford. Ferdiad's charioteer watched the work, for Ferdiad had said to him early in the morning: "Now, gilla, do thou hold back Laeg from me today, and I will hold back Cuchulain from thee and thy men forever."

"This is a pity" quoth the henchman; "no match for him am I; for a man to combat a hundred is he amongst the men of Erin, and that am I not. Still, however slight his help, it shall not come to his lord past me."

Thus were the henchmen: two brothers were they, namely, Id son of Riangabair, and Laeg son of Riangabair. As for Id son of Riangabair, he was then watching his brother thus making the dam till he filled the pools and went to set the Gae Bulga downwards. It was then that Id went up and released the stream and opened the dam and undid the fixing of the Gae Bulga. Cuchulain became deep purple and red all over when he saw the setting undone on the Gae Bulga. He sprang from the top of the ground so that he alighted light and quick on the rim of Ferdiad's shield. Ferdiad gave a strong shake to the shield, so that he hurled Cuchulain the measure of nine paces out to the westward over the ford. Then Cuchulain called and shouted to Laeg to set about preparing the Gae Bulga for him. Laeg hastened to the pool and began the work. Id ran and opened the dam and released it before the stream. Laeg sprang at his brother and they grappled on the spot. Laeg threw Id and handled him sorely, for he was loath to use weapons upon him. Ferdiad pursued Cuchulain westwards over the ford. Cuchulain sprang on the rim of the shield. Ferdiad shook the shield, so that he sent Cuchulain the space of nine paces eastwards over the ford. Cuchulain called and shouted to Laeg, and bade him stop the stream and make ready the spear. Laeg attempted to come nigh it, but Ferdiad's charioteer let him not, so that Laeg turned on him and left him on the sedgy

bottom of the ford. He gave him many a heavy blow with clenched fist on the face and countenance, so that he broke his mouth and his nose and put out his eyes and his sight, and left him lying wounded and full of terror. And forthwith Laeg left him and filled the pool and checked the stream and stilled the noise of the river's voice, and set in position the Gae Bulga. After some time Ferdiad's charioteer arose from his death cloud, and set his hand on his face and countenance, and he looked away towards the ford of combat and saw Laeg fixing the Gae Bulga. He ran again to the pool and made a breach in the dike quickly and speedily, so that the river burst out in its booming, bounding, bellying, bank breaking billows making its own wild course. Cuchulain became purple and red all over when he saw the setting of the Gae Bulga had been disturbed, and for the third time he sprang from the top of the ground and alighted on the edge of Ferdiad's shield, so as to strike him over the shield from above. Ferdiad gave a blow with his left knee against the leather of the bare shield, so that Cuchulain was thrown into the waves of the ford.

Thereupon Ferdiad gave three severe woundings to Cuchulain. Cuchulain cried and shouted loudly to Laeg to make ready the Gae Bulga for him. Laeg attempted to get near it, but Ferdiad's charioteer prevented him. Then Laeg grew very wroth at his brother and he made a spring at him, and he closed his long, full valiant hands over him, so that he quickly threw him to the ground and straightway bound him. And then he went from him quickly and courageously, so that he filled the pool and stayed the stream and set the Gae Bulga. And he cried out to Cuchulain that it was served, for it was not to be discharged without a quick word of warning before it. Hence it is that Laeg cried out: —

“Ware! beware the Gae Bulga,
Battlewinning Culann's hound!” *et reliqua.*

And he sent it to Cuchulain along the stream.

Then it was that Cuchulain let fly the white Gae Bulga from the fork of his irresistible right foot. Ferdiad began to defend the ford against Cuchulain, so that the noble Cu arose with the swiftness of a swallow and the wail of the storm-play in the rafters of the firmament, so that he laid hold of the breadth of his two feet of the bed of the ford, in spite of the champion. Ferdiad prepared for the feat according to the testimony thereof. He lowered his shield, so that the spear went over its edge into the watery, water cold river. And he looked at Cuchulain, and he saw all his various, venomous feats made ready, and he knew not to which of them he should first give answer, whether to the ‘Fist's breast spear,’ or to the ‘Wild shield's broad spear,’ or to the ‘Short spear from the middle of the palm,’ or to the white Gae Bulga over the fair, watery river.

When Ferdiad saw that his gilla had been thrown and heard the Gae Bulga called for, he thrust his shield down to protect the lower part of his body. Cuchulain gripped the short spear which was in his hand, cast it off the palm of his hand over the rim of the shield and over the edge of the corselet and horn skin, so that its farther half was visible after piercing his heart in his bosom.

Ferdiad gave a thrust of his shield upwards to protect the upper part of his body, though it was help that came too late. The gilla set the Gae Bulga down the stream, and Cuchulain caught it in the fork of his foot, and when Ferdiad raised his shield Cuchulain threw the Gae Bulga as far as he could cast underneath at Ferdiad, so that it passed through the strong, thick, iron apron of wrought iron, and broke in three parts the huge, goodly stone the size of a millstone, so that it cut its way through the body's protection into him, till every joint and every limb was filled with its barbs.

“Ah, that now sufficeth” sighed Ferdiad: “I am fallen of that! But, yet one thing more: mightily didst thou drive with thy right foot. And 'twas not fair of thee for me to fall by thy hand.” And he yet spake and uttered these words: —

“O Cu of grand feats,
Unfairly I'm slain!
Thy guilt clings to me;
My blood falls on thee!

“No meed for the wretch
Who treads treason's gap.
Now weak is my voice;
Ah, gone is my bloom!

“My ribs' armour bursts,
My heart is all gore;
I battled not well;
I'm smitten, O Cu!

“Unfair, side by side,
To come to the ford.
'Gainst my noble ward
Hath Medb turned my hand!
“There'll come rooks and crows
To gaze on my arms,
To eat flesh and blood.
A tale, Cu, for thee!”

Thereupon Cuchulain hastened towards Ferdiad and clasped his two arms about him, and bore him with all his arms and his armour and his dress northwards over the ford, that so it should be with his face to the north of the ford the triumph took place and not to the west of the ford with the men of Erin. Cuchulain laid Ferdiad there on the ground, and a cloud and a faint and a swoon came over Cuchulain there by the head of Ferdiad. Laeg espied it, and the men of Erin all arose for the attack upon him. “Come, O Cucuc” cried Laeg; “arise now from thy trance, for the men of Erin will come to attack us, and it is not single combat they will allow us, now that Ferdiad son of Daman son of Darè is fallen by thee.”

“What availeth it me to arise, O gilla” moaned Cuchulain “now that this one is fallen by my hand?”

In this wise the gilla spake and he uttered these words and Cuchulain responded: —

Laeg: “Now arise, O Emain’s Hound;
 Now most fits thee courage high.
Ferdiaid hast thou thrown — of hosts —
 God’s fate! How thy fight was hard!”

Cuchulain: “What avails me courage now?
 I’m oppressed with rage and grief,
 For the deed that I have done
 On his body sworded sore!”

Laeg: “‘T becomes thee not to weep;
 Fitter for thee to exult!
Yon red-speared one thee hath left
 Plaintful, wounded, steeped in gore!”

Cuchulain: “Even had he cleaved my leg,
 And one hand had severed too;
Woe, that Ferdiaid — who rode steeds —
 Shall not ever be in life!”

Laeg: “Liefer far what’s come to pass,
 To the maidens of Red Branch;
 He to die, thou to remain;
They grudge not that ye should part!”

Cuchulain: “From the day I Cualnge left,
 Seeking high and splendid Medb,
Carnage has she had — with fame —
 Of her warriors whom I’ve slain!”

Laeg: “Thou hast had no sleep in peace,
 In pursuit of thy great Táin;
Though thy troop was few and small,
 Oft thou wouldst rise at early morn!”

Cuchulain began to lament and bemoan Ferdiaid, and he spake the words:

“Alas, O Ferdiaid” spake he “’twas thine ill fortune thou didst not take counsel with any of those that knew my real deeds of valour and arms, before we met in clash of battle!

“Unhappy for thee that Laeg son of Riangabair did not make thee blush in regard to our comradeship!

“Unhappy for thee that the truly faithful warning of Fergus thou didst not take!

“Unhappy for thee that dear, trophied, triumphant, battle victorious Conall counselled thee not in regard to our comradeship!

“For those men would not have spoken in obedience to the messages or desires or orders or false words of promise of the fair-haired women of Connacht.

“For well do those men know that there will not be born a being that will perform deeds so tremendous and so great among the Connachtmen as I, till the very day of doom and of everlasting life, whether at handling of shield and buckler, at plying of spear and sword, at playing at draughts and chess, at driving of steeds and chariots.”

And he spake these warm words, sadly, sorrowfully in praise of Ferdiad: —

“There shall not be found the hand of a hero that will wound warrior’s flesh, like cloud coloured Ferdiad!

“There shall not be heard from the gap the cry of red-mouthed Badb to the winged, shade speckled flocks!

“There shall not be one that will contend for Cruachan that will obtain covenants equal to thine, till the very day of doom and of life henceforward, O red cheeked son of Daman!” said Cuchulain.

Then it was that Cuchulain arose and stood over Ferdiad: “Ah, Ferdiad” spake Cuchulain “greatly have the men of Erin deceived and abandoned thee, to bring thee to contend and do battle with me. For no easy thing is it to contend and do battle with me on the Raid for the Kine of Cualnge! And yet, never before have I found combat that was so sore or distressed me so as thy combat, save the combat with Oenfer Aifè, mine one own son.” Thus he spake, and he uttered these words: —

“Ah, Ferdiad, betrayed to death.
Our last meeting, oh, how sad!
Thou to die, I to remain.
Ever sad our long farewell!

“When we over yonder dwelt
With our Scathach, steadfast, true,
This we thought till end of time,
That our friendship ne’er would end!

“Dear to me thy noble blush;
Dear thy comely, perfect form;
Dear thine eye, blue-grey and clear;
Dear thy wisdom and thy speech!

“Never strode to rending fight,
Never wrath and manhood held,
Nor slung shield across broad back,
One like thee, Daman’s red son!

“Never have I met till now,
Since I Oenfer Aifè slew,
One thy peer in deeds of arms,
Never have I found, Ferdiad!

“Finnabair, Medb’s daughter fair,
Beauteous, lovely though she be,
As a gad round sand or stones,
She was shown to thee, Ferdiad!”

Then Cuchulain turned to gaze on Ferdiad. “Ah, my master Laeg” cried Cuchulain, “now strip Ferdiad and take his armour and garments off him, that I may see the brooch for the sake of which he entered on the combat and fight with me.” Laeg came up and stripped Ferdiad. He took his armour and garments off him and he saw the brooch and he placed the brooch in Cuchulain’s hand, and Cuchulain began to lament and complain over Ferdiad, and he spake these words: —

“Alas, golden brooch;
Ferdiad of the hosts,
O good smiter, strong,
Victorious thy hand!

“Thy hair blond and curled,
A wealth fair and grand.
Thy soft, leaf-shaped belt
Around thee till death!

“Our comradeship dear;
Thy noble eye’s gleam;
Thy golden-rimmed shield;
Thy sword, treasures worth!

“Thy white-silver torque
Thy noble arm binds.
Thy chess-board worth wealth;
Thy fair, ruddy cheek!

“To fall by my hand,

I own was not just!
'Twas no noble fight.
Alas, golden brooch!

“Thy death at Cu’s hand
Was dire, O dear calf!
Unequal the shield
Thou hadst for the strife!

“Unfair was our fight,
Our woe and defeat!
Fair the great chief;
Each host overcome
And put under foot!
Alas, golden brooch!”

“Come, O Laeg my master” cried Cuchulain; “now cut open Ferdiad and take the Gae Bulga out, because I may not be without my weapons.” Laeg came and cut open Ferdiad and he took the Gae Bulga out of him. And Cuchulain saw his weapons bloody and red-stained by the side of Ferdiad, and he uttered these words: —

“O Ferdiad, in gloom we meet.
Thee I see both red and pale.
I myself with unwashed arms;
Thou liest in thy bed of gore!

“Were we yonder in the East,
Scathach and our Uathach near,
There would not be pallid lips
Twixt us two, and arms of strife!

“Thus spake Scathach trenchantly,
Words of warning, strong and stern:
‘Go ye all to furious fight;
German, blue eyed, fierce will come!’

“Unto Ferdiad then I spake,
And to Lugaid generous,
To the son of fair Baetan,
German we would go to meet!

“We came to the battle rock,
Over Lake Linn Formait’s shore.
And four hundred men we brought
From the Isles of the Athissech!

“As I stood and Ferdiad brave
At the gate of German’s fort,

I slew Rinn the son of Nel;
He slew Ruad son of Fornel!

“Ferdiaid slew upon the slope
Blath, of Colba ‘Red-sword’ son.
Lugaid, fierce and swift, then slew
Mugairne of the Tyrrhene Sea!

“I slew, after going in,
Four times fifty grim, wild men.
Ferdiaid killed — a furious horde —
Dam Dremenn and Dam Dilenn!

“We laid waste shrewd German’s fort
O’er the broad, bespangled sea.
German we brought home alive
To our Scathach of broad shield!

“Then our famous nurse made fast
Our blood pact of amity,
That our angers should not rise
’Mongst the tribes of noble Elg!

“Sad the morn, a day in March,
Which struck down weak Daman’s son.
Woe is me, the friend is fall’n
Whom I pledged in red blood’s draught!

“Were it there I saw thy death,
Midst the great Greeks’ warrior bands,
I’d not live on after thee,
But together we would die!

“Woe, what us befel therefrom,
Us, dear Scathach’s fosterlings,
Me sore wounded, red with blood,
Thee no more to drive thy car!

“Woe, what us befel therefrom,
Us, dear Scathach’s fosterlings,
Me sore wounded, stiff with gore,
Thee to die the death for aye!

“Woe, what us befel therefrom,
Us, dear Scathach’s fosterlings,
Thee in death, me, strong, alive.
Valour is an angry strife!”

“Good, O Cucuc” spake Laeg “let us leave this ford now; too long are we here!”

“Aye, let us leave it, O my master Laeg” replied Cuchulain. “But every combat and battle I have fought seems a game and a sport to me compared with the combat and battle of Ferdiad.” Thus he spake, and he uttered these words: —

“All was play, all was sport,
Till came Ferdiad to the ford!
One task for both of us,
Equal our reward.
Our kind, gentle nurse
Chose him over all!

“All was play, all was sport,
Till came Ferdiad to the ford!
One our life, one our fear,
One our skill in arms.
Shields gave Scathach twain
To Ferdiad and me!

“All was play, all was sport,
Till came Ferdiad to the ford!
Dear the shaft of gold
I smote on the ford.
Bull-chief of the tribes,
Braver he than all!

“Only games and only sport,
Till came Ferdiad to the ford!
Lion, furious, flaming, fierce;
Swollen wave that wrecks like doom!

“Only games and only sport,
Till came Ferdiad to the ford!
Lovèd Ferdiad seemed to me
After me would live for aye!
Yesterday, a mountain’s size —
He is but a shade today!

“Three things countless on the Táin
Which have fallen by my hand:
Hosts of cattle, men and steeds,
I have slaughtered on all sides!

“Though the hosts were e’er so great,
That came out of Cruachan wild,
More than third and less than half,
Slew I in my direful sport!

“Never trod in battle’s ring;

The Táin Bó Cúalnge

Banba nursed not on her breast;
Never sprang from sea or land,
King's son that had larger fame!"

Thus far the Combat of Ferdiad with Cuchulain and the Tragical Death of Ferdiad.