



Sources: George Henderson, *Fled Bricrend* (ITS II) (Dublin, 1899). Ed.
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INTRODUCTION

A large selection of the best-loved Irish legends are enjoyed by children from generation to generation. They have been told for hundreds of years and are part of Irish history. With stories of great giants, clever warriors. Jealous queens, leprechauns, fairies and magical and mystical creatures, there is something for everyone to enjoy.

My fascination with Ireland, the Irish people and - well everything Irish has been with me for a lifetime, and so shall be and has been passed on to my own children, my son having 'half' his roots in Ireland. Ireland is a land of myth and fantasy and a subject I will ne'er become weary of. Enjoy this adaptation. For easier uploading, I have excluded pictures. I extend my thanks to all my sources, known and unknown and all those who made possible the research.

Donnette

The Ulster Cycle

Bricriu's Feast

Bricriu Poison-tongue held a great feast for Conchobar Mac Nessa and for all the Ulstermen. The Preparation of the feast took a whole year. For the entertainment of the guests a spacious house was built by him. He erected it at Dun Rudraige after the likeness of the Red Branch in Emain Macha. Yet it surpassed the buildings of that period entirely for material, for artistic design, and for the beauty of architecture-its pillars and frontings splendid and costly, its carving and lintel-work famed for magnificence. The house was made in this fashion: on the plan of Tara's Mead-Hall, having nine compartments from fire to wall, each fronting of bronze thirty feet high, overlaid with gold. IN the fore part of the palace a royal couch was erected for Conchobar high above those of the whole house. It was set with carbuncles and other precious stones which shone with a luster of gold and silver, radiant with every hew, making night like day. Around it were placed the twelve couches of the twelve tribes of Ulster. The nature of the workmanship was on a par with the material of the edifice. It took a wagon team to carry each beam and the strength of seven Ulstermen to fix each pole, while thirty of the chief artificers of Erin were employed on its erection and arrangement.

Then a balcony was made by Bricriu on a level with the couch of Conchobar and as high as those of the heroes of valor. The decorations of its fittings were magnificent. Windows of glass were placed on each side of it, and one of these was above Bricriu's couch, so that he could view the hall from his seat, as he knew the Ulstermen would not allow him within.

When Bricriu had finished building the hall and the balcony, supplying it with both quilts and blankets, beds and pillows, providing meat and drink, so that nothing was lacking, neither furnishings nor food, he straightway went to Emain Mach to meet Conchobar and the nobles of Ulster.

It fell upon a day when there was a gathering of the Ulstermen in Emain. He was at once made welcome, and was seated by the shoulder of Conchobar. Bricriu addressed himself to him as well as to the body of Ulstermen. "Come with me," said Bricriu, "to partake of a banquet with me."

"Gladly," rejoined Conchobar, "if that please the men of Ulster,"

Fergus Mac Roig and the nobles of Ulster made answer, "No; for if we go our dead will outnumber our living, when Bricriu has incensed us against each other."

"If ye come not, worse shall ye fare," said Bricriu.

"What then," asked Conchobar, "if the Ulstermen go not with the?"

"I will stir up strife," said Bricriu, "between the kings, the leaders, the heroes of valor, and the yeomen, till they slay one another, man for man, if they come not to me to share my feast."

"That shall we not do to please thee," said Conchobar.

"I will stir up enmity between father and son so that it will come to mutual slaughter. If I do not succeed in doing so, I will make a quarrel between mother and daughter. If that does not succeed, I will set each of the Ulster women at variance, so that they come to deadly blows till their breasts become loathsome and putrid"

"Sure it is better to come," said Fergus.

"Do ye straightway take counsel with the chief Ulstermen,"

said Sencha son of Ailill.

"Unless we take counsel against this Bricriu, mischief will be the consequence," said Conchobar.

Thereupon all the Ulster nobles assembled in council. In discussing the matter Sencha counseled them thus: "Take hostages from Bricriu, since ye have to go with him, and set eight swordsmen about him so as to compel him to retire from the house as soon as he has laid out the feast."

Furbaide Ferbenn son of Conchobar brought Bricriu their reply and explained the whole matter.

"It is happily arranged," said Bricriu.

The men of Ulster straightway set out from Emain Macha, host battalion, and company, under king, chieftain, and leader. Excellent and admirable the march of the brave and valiant heroes to the palace.

The hostages of the nobles had gone security on his behalf, and Bricriu accordingly considered how he should manage to set the Ulstermen at variance. His deliberation and self-scrutiny being ended, he betook himself to the presence of Loegaire the Triumphant son of Connad mac Iliach. "Hail now, Loegaire the Triumphant, thou mighty mallet of Brfeg, thou hot hammer of Meath, flame-red thunderbolt, thou victorious warrior of Ulster, what hinders the championship of Ulster being thine always?"

"If so I choose, it shall be mine," said Loegaire.

"Be thine the sovereignty of the nobles of Erin," said Bricriu, "if only thou act as I advise."

"I will indeed," said Loegaire.

"Sooth, if the Champions's Portion of my house be thine, the championship of Emain is thine forever. The Champion's Portion of my house is worth contesting, for it is not the portion of a fool's house," said Bricriu. "Belonging to it is a caldron of full generous wine, with room enough for three of the valiant heroes of Ulster; furthermore a seven-year-old boar; nought has entered its mouth since it was little save fresh milk and fine meal ins springtime, curds and sweet milk in summer, the kernel of nuts and wheat in autumn, beef and broth in winter; a cow-lord full seven-year-old; since it was a little calf neither heather nor twig-tops have passed its lips, nought but sweet milk and herbs, meadow-hay and corn. Add to this five score cakes of wheat cooked in honey. Five-and -twenty bushels, that is what was supplied for these five-score cakes--four cakes from each bush. Such is the champions portion of my house. And since thou art the best hero among the men of Ulster, it is but just to give it to thee, and so I wish it. By the end of

the day, when the feast is spread out, let thy charioteer get up, and it is to him the champion's portion will be given."

"Among them shall be dead men if it is not done so," said Loegaire. Bricriu laughed at that, for it pleased him well.

When he had done inciting Loegaire the Triumphant to enmity, Bricriu went to Conall the Victorious. "Hail to thee, Conall the Victorious! Thou art the hero of victories and of combats; great are the victories thou hast already scored over the heroes of Ulster. By the time the Ulstermen go into foreign bounds thou art three days and three nights in advance over many a ford; thou protectest their rear when returning so that an assailant may not spring past thee nor through thee nor over thee; what then should hinder the Champion's Portion of Emain being thine always?" Though great his treachery with regard to Loegaire, he showed twice as much with Conall the Victorious.

When he had satisfied himself with inciting Conall the Victorious to quarrel, he went to Cu Chulainn. "Hail to thee, Cu Chulainn! Thou victor of Breg, thou bright banner of the Liffey, darling of Emain, beloved of wives and of maidens, for thee today Cu Chulainn is no nickname, for thou art the champion of the Ulstermen. Thou wardest off their great feuds and forays; thou seekest justice for each man of them; thou attainest alone to what all the Ulstermen fail in; all the men of Ulster acknowledge thy bravery, thy valor, and thy achievements surpassing theirs. What meaneth therefore thy leaving of the Champion's Portion for some one else of the men of Ulster, since no one of the men of Erin is capable of contesting it against thee?"

"By the gods of my tribe," said Cu Chulainn, "his head shall be lost who comes to contest it with me." Thereafter Bricriu severed himself from them and followed the host as if no contention had been made among the heroes.

Whereupon they entered Bricriu's stronghold, and each one occupied his couch therein, king, prince, noble, yeoman, and young hero. The half of the hall was set apart for Conchobar and his retinue of valiant Ulster heroes; the other half was reserved for the ladies of Ulster attending on Mugan daughter of Eochaid Fedlech, wife of Conchobar. Those who attended on

Conchobar were the chief Ulster warriors with the body of youths and entertainers.

While the feast was being prepared for them, the musicians and the players performed. The moment Bricriu spread the feast with its savories he was ordered by the hostages to leave the hall. The straightway got up with their drawn swords in their hands to expel him. Whereupon Bricriu and his wife went out to the balcony. As he arrived at the threshold of the stronghold he called out, "That Champion's Portion, such as it is, is not the portion of a fool's house; do ye give it to the Ulster hero ye prefer for valor." And then he left them.

Then the waiters got up to serve the food. The charioteer of Loegaire the Triumphant, that is, Sedlang mac Rianganabra, rose up and said to the distributors; "Give to Loegaire the Triumphant the Champion's Portion which is by you, for he alone is entitled to it before the other young heroes of Ulster."

Then Id mac Rianganabra, charioteer to Conall the Victorious, got up and spoke to like effect. And Loeg mac Rianganabra spoke as follows: "Bring it to Cu Chulainn; it is no disgrace for all the Ulstermen to give it to him; it is he that is most valiant among you."

"That's not true," said Conall the Victorious and Loegaire the Triumphant.

They got up upon the floor and donned their shields and seized their swords. They hewed at one another until half the hall was an atmosphere of fire with the clash of sword- and spear-edge, the other half one white sheet from the enamel of the shields. Great alarm got hold upon the stronghold; the valiant heroes shook; Conchobar himself and Fergus mac Roig were furious on seeing the injury and injustice of two men attacking one, namely Conall the Victorious and Loegaire the Triumphant attacking Cu Chulainn. There was no one among the Ulstermen who dared separate them until Sencha spoke to Conchobar: "Part the men," said he.

Thereupon Conchobar and Fergus intervened; the combatants immediately let drop their hands to their sides. "Execute my wish," said Sencha.

"Your will shall be obeyed," they responded.

"My wish, then," said Sencha,"is to-night to divide the Champion's Portion there among all the host, and after that to decide with reference to it according to the will of Ailill mac Matach, for it is accounted unlucky among the Ulstermen to close this assembly unless the matter be adjudged in Cruchan."

The feasting was then resumed; they made a circle about the fire and got drunken and merry.

Bricriu, however, and his queen were in their balcony. From his couch the condition of the palace was visible to him, and how things were going on. He exercised his mind as to how he should contrive to get the women to quarrel as he had the men. When Bricriu had done searching his mind, it just chanced as he could have wished that Fedelm Fresh-Heart came from the stronghold with fifty women in her train, in jovial mood. Bricriu observed her coming past him. "Hail to thee to-night, wife of Loegaire the Triumphant! Fedelm Fresh-Heart is no nickname for thee with respect to thy excellence of form and wisdom and of lineage. Conchobar, king of a province of Erin, is thy father, Loegaire the Triumphant thy husband; I should deem it but small honor to thee that any of the Ulster women should take precedence of thee in entering the banqueting-hall; only at thy heel should all the Ulster women tread. If thou comest first into the hall to-night, the sovereignty of queenship shalt thou enjoy over all the ladies of Ulster forever." Fedelm at that takes a leap over three ridges from the hall.

Thereafter came Lendabair daughter of Eogan mac Durthacht, wife of Conall the Victorious. Bricriu addressed her saying. "Hail to thee, Lendabair! For thee that is no nickname; thou art the darling and pet of all mankind on account of thy splendor and of thy luster. As far as thy husband hath surpassed all the heroes of mankind in valor and in comeliness, so far hast thou distinguished thyself above the women of Ulster." Though great the deceit he applied in the case of Fedelm, he applied twice as much in the case of Lendabair.

Then Emer came out with a half hundred women in her train.. "Greeting and hail to thee. Emer daughter of Forgall Monach, wife of the best man in Erin! Emer of the Fair Hair is no nickname for thee; Erin's kings and princes contented for thee in jealous rivalry. As the sun surpasseth the stars of heaven, so far dost thou outshine the women of the whole world in form and

shape and lineage, in youth and beauty and elegance, in good name and wisdom and address." Though great his deceit in the case of the other ladies, in that of Emer he used thrice as much.

The three companies thereupon went out until they met at a spot three ridges from the hall. None of them knew that Bricriu had incited them one against the other. To the hall they straightway return. Even and easy and graceful their carriage on the first ridge; scarcely did one of them raise one foot before the other. But on the ridge following, their steps were shorter and quicker. On the ridge next to the house it was with difficulty each kept up with the other; so they raised their robes to the rounds of their hips to complete the attempt to go first into the hall. For what Bricriu had said to each of them with regard to the other was that whosoever entered first should be queen of the whole province. The amount of confusion then occasioned by the competition was as it were the noise of fifty chariots approaching. The whole stronghold shook and the warriors sprang to their arms and tried to kill one another within.

"Stay," cried Sencha; "they are not enemies who have come; it is Bricriu who has set to quarreling the women who have gone out. By the gods of my tribe, unless the door be closed against them, our dead will outnumber our living." Thereupon the doorkeepers closed the doors. Emer, the daughter of Forgal Monach, wife of Cu Chulainn, by reason of her speed, outran the others and put her back against the door, and straightway called upon the doorkeepers before the other ladies came, so that the men within got up, each of them to open the door for his own wife that she might be the first to come in. "Bad outlook tonight," said Conchobar. He struck the silver scepter that was in his hand against the bronze pillar of the couch, and the company sat down.

"Stay," said Sencha; "it is not a warfare of arms that shall be held here; it will be a warfare of words." Each woman went out under the protection of her husband, and then followed the "Ulster Women's War of Words

(The series of rhetorical speeches in which the women enumerate the virtues of their respective husbands is omitted.)

Thus did the men in the hall behave on hearing the laudatory address of the women- Logarire and Conall each sprang into his hero's light, and broke a stave of the palace at a like level with themselves, so that in this way their

wives came in. Cu Chulainn upheaved the palace just over against his bed, till the stars of heaven were to be seen from underneath the wattle. By that opening came his own wife with half a hundred of her attendants in her train, as also a hundred in waiting upon the other twain. Other ladies could not be compared with Emer, while no one at all was to be likened to Emer's husband. Thereupon Cu Chulainn let the palace down until seven feet of the wattle entered the ground; the whole stronghold shook, and Bricriu's balcony was laid flat to the earth in such a way that Bricriu and his queen toppled down until they fell into the ditch in the middle of the courtyard among the dogs. "Woe is me," cried Bricriu, as he hastily got up, "enemies have come into the palace." He took a turn round and saw how it was lop-sided and inclined entirely to one side. He wrung his hands, then betook himself within, so bespattered that none of the Ulstermen could recognize him.

Then from the floor of the house Bricriu made speech: "Alas! That I have prepared you a feast, O Ulstermen. My house is more to me than all my other possessions. Upon you, therefore, it is taboo to drink, to eat, or to sleep until you leave my house as you found it upon your arrival."

Thereupon the valiant Ulstermen went out of the house and tried to tug it, but they did not raise it so much that even the wind could pass between it and the earth. That matter was a difficulty for the Ulstermen. "I have no suggestions for you," said Sencha, "except that you entreat of him who left it lop-sided to set it upright."

Whereupon the men of Ulster told Cu Chulainn to restore the house to its upright position, and Bricriu made a speech: "O king of the heroes of Erin, if you set it not straight and erect, none in the world can do so." All the Ulstermen then entreated Cu Chulainn to solve the difficulty. That the banqueters might not be lacking for food or for ale, Cu Chulainn got up and tried to lift the house at a tug and failed. A distortion thereupon got hold of him, whilst a drop of blood was at the root of each single hair, and he drew his hair into his head, so that, looked on from above, his dark-yellow curls seemed as if they had been shorn with scissors, and taking upon himself the motion of a millstone he strained himself until a warrior's foot could find room between each pair of ribs.

His natural resources and fiery vigor returned to him, and he then heaved the house aloft, and set it so that it reached its former level. Thereafter

the consumption of the feast was pleasant to them, with the kings and the chieftains on the one side round about Conchobar the illustrious, the noble high-king of Ulster.

Again it was their hap to quarrel about the Champion's Portion. Conchobar with the nobles of Ulster interposed with the view of judging between the heros. "Go to Cu Roi mac Dairi, the man who will undertake to intervene," said Conchobar.

"I accept that," said Cu Chulainn.

"I agree," said Loegaire,

"Let us go then," said Conall the Victorious.

"Let horses be brought and thy chariot yoked ,O Conall," said Cu Chulainn.

"Woe is me!" cried Conall.

"Every one," said Cu Chulainn, "knows the clumsiness of thy horses and the unsteadiness of thy going and thy turnout; thy chariot's movement is most heavy; each of the two wheels raises turf every way thy big chariot careers, so that for the space of a year there is a well-marked track easily recognized by the warriors of Ulster."

"Dost thou hear that, Loegaire?" said Conall.

"Woe is me!" said Loegaire. "But I am not to blame or reproach. I am nimble at crossing fords, and more, to breast the storm of spears, out-stripping the warriors of Ulster. Put not on me the pretense of kings and champions against single chariots in strait and difficult places, in woods and on confines until the champion of a single chariot tries not to career before me."

Thereupon Loegaire had his chariot yoked and he leaped into it. He drove over the Plain-of -The-Two-Forks, of the Gap-of -the-Watch, over the Ford of Carpat Fergus, over the Ford of the Morrighu, to the Rowan Meadow of the Two Oxen in the Fens of Armagh, by the Meeting of the Four Ways past

Dundalk, across Mag Silcech, westwards to the slope of Breg. A dim, dark, heavy mist overtook him, confusing him in such a way that it was impossible for him to fare farther. "Let us stay here," said Loegaire to his charioteer, "until the mist clears up." Loegaire alighted from his chariot, and his gille put the horses into the meadow that was near at hand.

While there, the gillie saw a huge giant approaching him. Not beautiful his appearance: broad of shoulder and fat of mouth, with sack eyes and a bristly face; ugly, wrinkled, with bushy eyebrows; hideous and horrible and strong; stubborn and violent and haughty; fat and puffing; with big sinews and strong forearms; bold, audacious, and uncouth. A shorn black patch of hair on him, a dun covering about him, a tunic over it to the ball of his rump; on his feet old tattered brogues, on his back a ponderous club like the wheel-shaft of a mill.

"Whose horses are these, gillie?" he asked, as he gazed furiously at him.

"The horses of Loegaire the Triumphant."

"Yes! A fine fellow is he!" And as he thus spoke he brought down his club on the gillie and gave him a blow from top to toe.

The gillie gave a cry, whereupon Loegaire came up. "What is this you are doing to the lad?" asked Loegaire.

"It is by way of penalty for damage to the meadow," said the giant.

"I will come myself, then," said Loegaire; and they struggled together until Loegaire fled to Emain leaving his horses and gillie and arms.

Not long thereafter Conall the Victorious took the same way and arrived at the plain where the druidical mist overtook Loegaire. The like hideous black, dark cloud overtook Conall the Victorious, so that he was unable to see either heaven or earth. Conall thereupon leapt out and the gillie unharnessed the horses in the same meadow. Not long thereafter he saw the same giant coming towards him. He asked him whose servant he was.

"I am the servant of Conal the victorious," he said.

"A good man he!" said the giant, and he raised his hands and gave the gillie a blow from top to toe. The fellow yelled. Then came Conall. He and the giant came to close quarters. Stronger were the wrestling turns of the giant, and Conall fled, as Loegaire had done, having left behind his charioteer and his horses, and came to Emain.

Cu Chulainn then went by the same way till he came to the same place. The like dark mist overtook him as fell upon the two proceeding. Cu Chulainn sprang down, and Loeg brought the horses into the meadow. He had not long to wait until he saw the same man coming towards him. The giant asked him whose servant he was.

"Servant to Cu Chulainn."

"A good man he!" said the giant, plying him with the club.

Loeg yelled. Then Cu Chulainn arrived. He said the giant came to close quarters and either rained blows upon the other. The giant was worsted. He forfeited horses and charioteer, and Cu Chulainn brought along with him his fellow's horses, charioteers, and accouterments, till he reached Emain in triumph.

"Thine is the Champion's Portion", said Bricriu to Cu Chulainn, and to the others, "well I know from your deeds that you are in no way on a par with Cu Chulainn."

"Not true, Bricriu," said they, "for we know it is one of his friends from the fairy world that came to him to play us mischief and coerce us with regard to the championship. We shall not forgoe our claim on that account."

The men of Ulster, with Conchobar and Fergus, failed to effect a settlement. And the conclusion the nobles in Conchobar's following arrived at was, to accompany the heros and have the difficulty adjudged at the abode of Ailill mac Mattach and of Medb of Cruchan Ai with reference to the Champion's Portion and the mutual rivalry of the women. Fine and lovely and majestic the march of the Ulstermen to Cruchan. Cu Chulainn, however, remained behind the host entertaining the Ulster ladies, performing nine feats with apples and nine with knives, in such wise that one did not interfere with the other.

Loeg mac Riababra then went to speak to him in the featstead and said: "You sorry simpleton, your valor and bravery have passed away, the Champion's Portion has gone from you; the Ulstermen have reached Cruchan long since."

"Indeed we had not at all perceived it, my Loeg. Yoke us the chariot, then," said Cu Chulainn. Loeg accordingly yoked it and off they started. By that time the Ulstermen had reached Mag Breg, Cu Chulainn, having been incited by his charioteer, traveled with such speed from Dun Rudraige, the Grey of Macha and the Black Sainglenn racing with his chariot across the whole province of Conchobar, across Sliab Fuait, and across Mag Breg, that the third chariot arrived first in Cruchan.

In virtue then of the swiftness and impetuous speed with which all the valiant Ulstermen reached Cruchan under the lead of Conchobar and the body of chiefs, a great shaking seized Cruchan, till the war-arms fell from the walls to the ground, seizing likewise the entire host of the stronghold. Till the men in the royal keep were like rushes in a stream. Medb thereupon spoke: "Since the day I took up home in Cruchan I have never heard thunder, there being no clouds." Thereupon Finnabair, daughter of Ailill and Medb, went to the balcony over the high porch of the stronghold. "Mother dear," said she, "I see a chariot coming along the plain."

"Describe it," said Medb, "its form, appearance, and style; the color of the horses; how the hero looks, and how the chariot courses."

(Here follows a conventional description in highly embroidered rhetoric of the chariots and personal appearance of Loegaire and Conall. This, as well as the description of Cu Chulainn's chariot, is omitted. The narrative is resumed with the description of Cu Chulainn himself, long famous with Gaelic literary men and professional story tellers.)

"In the chariot a dark, melancholy man comeliest of the men of Erin. Around him a soft crimson pleasing tunic fastened across the breast, where it stands open, with a salmon-brooch of inlaid gold, against which his bosom heaves, beating in full strokes. A long-sleeved linen kirtle with a white hood, embroidered red with flaming gold. Set in each of his eyes eight red dragon gem-stones. His two cheeks blue-white and blood-red. He emits sparks of fire and burning breath, with a ray of love in his look. A shower of pearls, it seems, has fallen into his mouth. Each of his two eyebrows as black as the

side of a black spit. ON his two thighs rests a golden-hilted sword and fastened to the copper frame of the chariot is a blood-red spear with a sharp mettlesome blade on a shaft of wood well fitted to his hand. Over both his shoulders a crimson shield with a rim of silver, chased with figures of animals in gold. He leaps the hero's salmon-leap into the air and does many like swift feats besides. Such is the chief of a chariot-royal. Before him in that chariot is a charioteer, a very slender, tall, much freckled man. On his head very curled bright-red hair, with a fillet of bronze upon his brow which prevents the hair from falling over his face. On both sides of his head patins of gold confine the hair. A shoulder-mantle about him with sleeves opening at the two elbows, and in his hand a goad of red gold with which he guides the horses.

"Truly, it is a drop before a shower; we recognize the man from his description," said

Medb

An ocean fury, a whale that rages, a fragment of flame and fire;

A bear majestic, a grandly moving billow,

A beast in maddening anger:

In the crash of glorious battle

Through the hostile foe he leaps,

His shout the fury of doom;

A terrible bear, he is death to the heard of cattle:

Feat upon feat, head upon head he piles.

Praise ye the hearty one he who is completely victor.

As fresh malt is ground in the mill shall we be ground by Cu Chulainn.

"By the god of my people," said Medb, "I swear if it be in fury Cu Chulainn comes to us, like as a mill of ten spokes grinds very hard malt, so he alone will grind us into mould and gravel, should the whole province attend on us in Cruchan, unless his fury and violence are subdued."

"How do they come this time"" said Medb.

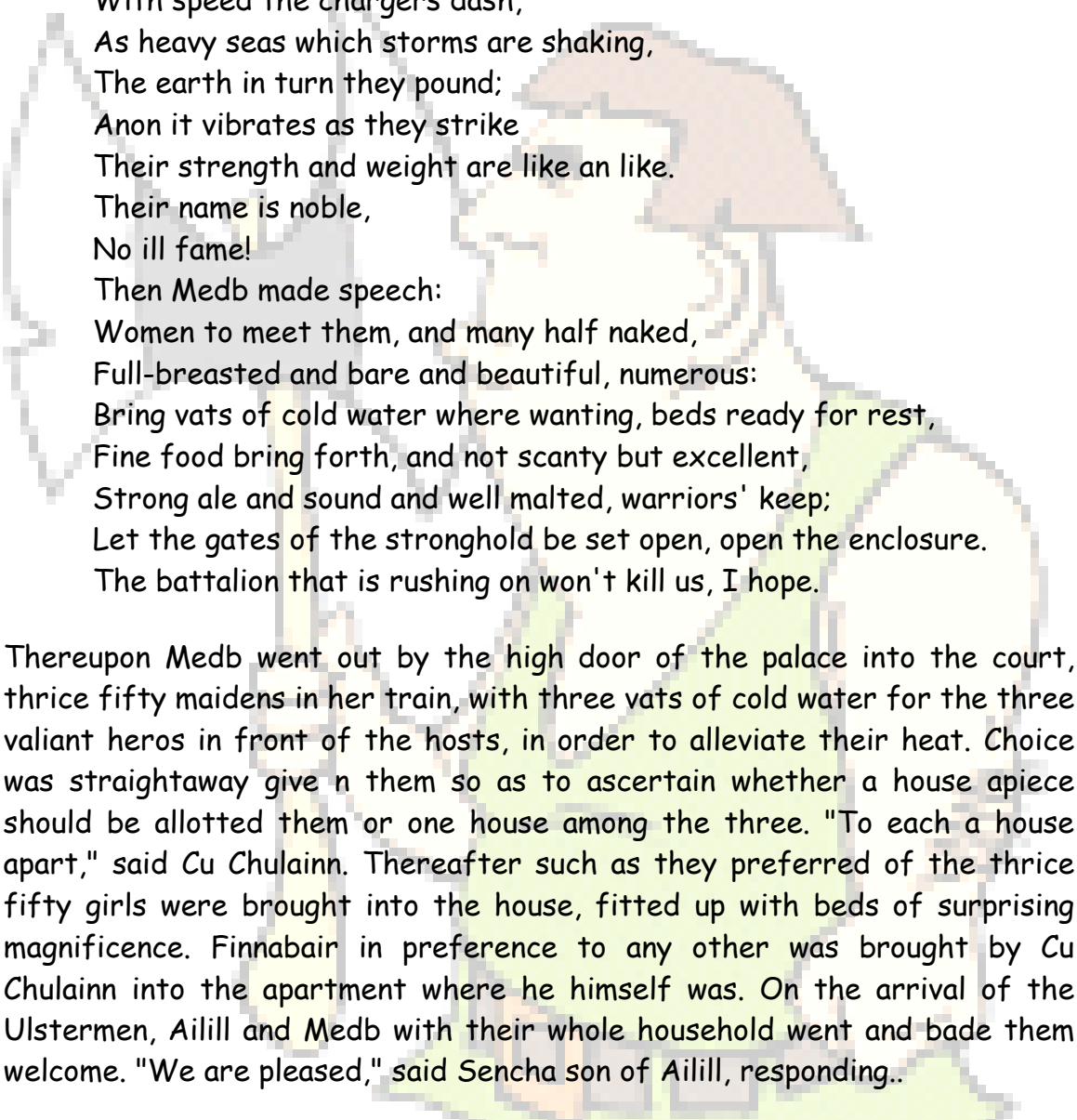
Wrist to wrist and palm to palm,

Tunic to tunic they advance,

Shield to shield and frame to frame.

A shoulder-to-shoulder band,

Wood to wood and ear to ear,



This they are all, fond mother,
As thunder when crashing on the roof,
With speed the chargers dash,
As heavy seas which storms are shaking,
The earth in turn they pound;
Anon it vibrates as they strike
Their strength and weight are like an like.
Their name is noble,
No ill fame!
Then Medb made speech:
Women to meet them, and many half naked,
Full-breasted and bare and beautiful, numerous:
Bring vats of cold water where wanting, beds ready for rest,
Fine food bring forth, and not scanty but excellent,
Strong ale and sound and well malted, warriors' keep;
Let the gates of the stronghold be set open, open the enclosure.
The battalion that is rushing on won't kill us, I hope.

Thereupon Medb went out by the high door of the palace into the court, thrice fifty maidens in her train, with three vats of cold water for the three valiant heroes in front of the hosts, in order to alleviate their heat. Choice was straightaway given them so as to ascertain whether a house apiece should be allotted them or one house among the three. "To each a house apart," said Cu Chulainn. Thereafter such as they preferred of the thrice fifty girls were brought into the house, fitted up with beds of surprising magnificence. Finnabair in preference to any other was brought by Cu Chulainn into the apartment where he himself was. On the arrival of the Ulstermen, Ailill and Medb with their whole household went and bade them welcome. "We are pleased," said Sencha son of Ailill, responding..

Thereupon the Ulstermen came into the stronghold, and the palace is left to them as recounted, viz, seven circles and seven compartments from fire to partition, with bronze frontings and carvings of red yew. Three stripes of bronze in the arching of the house, which was of oak, with a covering of shingles. It had twelve windows with glass in the openings. The couch of Ailill and Medb in the center of the house, with silver frontings and stripes of bronze round it, with a silver wand by the partition facing Ailill, that would reach the mid hips of the house so as to check the inmates unceasingly. The Ulster heroes went round from one door of the palace to the other, and the

musicians played while the guests were being prepared for. Such was the spaciousness of the house that it had room for the hosts of valiant heroes of the whole province in the retinue of Conchobar. Moreover, Conchobar and Fergus mac Roig were in Ailill's apartment with nine valiant Ulster heroes besides. Great feasts were then prepared for them and they were there until the end of three days and three nights.

Thereafter Ailill inquired of Conchobar with his Ulster retinue what was the purpose of the visit. Sencha related the matter on account of which they had come, viz, the three heroes' rivalry as to the Champion's Portion, and the lady's rivalry as to precedence at feasts--" they could not stand being judged anywhere else than here by thee." At that Ailill was silent and was not in a happy mood. "Indeed," said he, "it is not to me this decision should be given as to the Champion's Portion, unless it be done from hatred."

"There is really no better judge," said Sencha.

"Well," said Ailill, "I require time to consider. For that then three days and three nights suffice for me," said Ailill.

"That would not forfeit friendship," answered Sencha.

The Ulstermen straightway bade farewell; being satisfied, they left their blessing with Ailill and Medb and their curse with Bricriu for it was he who had incited them into strife. They then departed from the territory of Medb, having left Loegaire and Conall and Cu Chulainn to be judged by Ailill. The like supper as before was given to each on the heroes every night.

One night as their portion was assigned to them, three cats from the cave of Cruacan were let loose to attack them, that is, three beasts of magic. Conall and Loegaire made for the rafters, leaving their food with the beasts. In that wise they slept until the morrow. Cu Chulainn fled not from the beast which was attacking him. When it stretched its neck out for eating, Cu Chulainn gave a blow with his sword on the beast's head, but the blade glided off as it were from stone. Then the cat set itself down. Under the circumstances Cu Chulainn neither ate nor slept, but he kept his place. As soon as it was early morning the cats were gone. In such condition were the three heroes seen on the morrow.

"Does not that trial suffice for adjudging you?" asked Ailill.

"By no means,"[said Conall and Loegaire, "it is not against beasts we are striving but against men."

Ailill, having gone to his chamber, set his back against the wall. He was disquieted in mind, for he took the difficulty that faced him to be fraught with danger. He neither ate nor slept till the end of three days and three nights. "Coward!" Medbh then called him; "if you do not decide, I will".

"Difficult for me to judge them," Ailill said; "it is a misfortune for one to have to do it"

"There is no difficulty," said Medb, "for Loegaire and Conall Cernach are as different as bronze and white bronze; and Conall Cernach and Cu Chulainn are as different as white bronze and red gold".

It was then, after she had pondered her advice, that Loegaire the Triumphant was summoned to Medb. "Welcome O Loegaire the Triumphant," said she; it is meet to give thee the Champion's Portion. We assign to the sovereignty of the heroes of Erin from this time forth, and the Champion's Portion, and a cup of bronze with a bird chased in silver on its bottom. In preference to every one else, take it with thee as a token of award. No one else is to see it until, at the day's end, thou hast come to the Red Branch of Conchobar. ON the Champion's Portion being exhibited among you, then shalt thou bring forth thy cup in the presence of all the Ulster nobles. Moreover, the Champion's portion is therein. None of the valiant Ulster Heroes will dispute it further with thee. For the thing thou art to take away with thee shall be a token of genuineness in the estimation of all the Ulstermen." Thereupon the cup with its full of luscious wine was given to Loegaire the Triumphant. On the floor of the palace he swallowed the contents at a draught. "Now you have the feast of a champion," said Medb; I wish you may enjoy it a hundred years at the head of all Ulster."

Loegaire thereupon bade farewell. Then Conall Cernach was likewise summoned to the royal presence. "Welcome," said Medb, "O Conall Cernach; proper it is to give thee the Champion's Portion, with a cup of white bronze besides, having a bird on the bottom of it chased in gold." Thereafter the cup was given to Conall with its full of luscious wine.

Conall bade farewell. A herald was then sent to fetch Cu Chulainn. "Come to speak with the king and queen" said the messenger. Cu Chulainn at the time was busy playing chess with Loeg mac Riabrabra, his own charioteer. "No mocking!" he said; "you might try your lies on some other fool." He hurled one of the chessmen, and it pierced the center of the herald's brain. He got his eat blow therefrom, and fell between Ailill and Medb.

"Woe is me," said Medb; "sorely doth Cu Chulainn work on us his fury when his fit of rage is upon him." Whereupon Medb got up and came to Cu c and put her two arms round his neck.

"Try a lie upon another," said Cu Chulainn.

"Glorious son of the Ulstermen and flame of the heros of Erin, it is no lie that is to our liking where thou art concerned. Were all Erin's heroes to come, to thee by preference would we grant the quest, for, in regard to fame, bravery, and valor, distinction, youth, and glory, the men of Erin acknowledge thy superiority."

Cu Chulainn got up. He accompanied Medb into the palace, and Ailill bade him a warm welcome. A cup of gold was given him full of luscious wine, and having on the bottom of it birds chased in precious stone. With it, in preference to every one else their was given him a lump as big as his two eyes, of dragonstone. "Now you have the feast of a champion," said Medb. "I wish you may enjoy it a hundred years at the head of all the Ulster heros." "Moreover, it is our verdict," said Ailill and Medb, "inasmuch as thou art not to be compared with the Ulster warriors, neither is thy wife to be compared with their women. Nor is it too much, we think, that she should always precede all the Ulster ladies when entering the Meade Hall. At that Cu Chulainn drank at one draught the full of the cup, and then bade farewell to the king, queen and the whole household.

Thereafter he followed his charioteer. "My plan." Said Medb to Ailill, "is to keep those three heros with us again to-night, and to test them further."

"Do as thou deemest right," said Ailill. The men were then detained and brought to Cruchan and their horses unyoked.

Their choice of food was given them for their horses. Conall and Loegaire told them to give oats two years old to theirs. But Cu Chulainn chose barley grains for his. They slept there that night. The women were apportioned among them. Finnabair, with a train of fifty damsels, was brought to the place of Cu Chulainn. Sadb the Elequent, another daughter of Ailill and Medb, with fifty maids in attendance was ushered into the presence of Conall Cernach. Concend, daughter of Cet mac Matach, with fifty damsels along with her, was brought into the presence of Logaire the Triumphant. Moreover, Medb herself was accustomed to visit the couch of Cu Chulainn. They slept there that night.

On the morrow they arose early in the morning and went to the house where the youths were performing the wheel-feat. Then Loegaire seized the wheel until it reached half up the sidewall. Upon that the youths laughed and cheered him. It was in reality a jeer, but it seemed to Loegaire as shout of applause. Conall then took the wheel. It was on the ground. He tossed it as high as the ridge-pole of the all. The youths raised a shout at that. It seemed to Conall that it was a shout of applause and victory. To the youths it was a shout of scorn. Then Cu Chulainn took the wheel- it was in mid-air he caught it. He hurled it aloft till it cast the ridge-pole from off the hall; the wheel went a man's cubit into the ground in the outside enclosure. The youths raised a shout of applause and triumph in Cu Chulainn's ease. It seemed to Cu Chulainn, however, it was a laugh of scorn and ridicule they then gave vent to.

Cu Chulainn then sought out the womenfolk and took thrice fifty needles from them. These he tossed up one after the other. Each needle went into the eye of another, till in that wise they were joined together. He returned to the women, and gave each her own needle into her own hand. The young warriors praised Cu Chulainn. Whereupon they bade farewell to the king, the queen, and the household as well.

On the arrival of Loegaire, Conall, and Cu Chulainn at Emain Macha, the heros of Ulster ceased their discussions and their babblings and fell to eating and enjoying themselves. It was Sualtam mac Roig, father of Cu Chulainn himself, who that night attended upon the Ulstermen. Moreover, Conchobar's ladder-vat was filled for them. Their portion having been brought into their presence, the waiters began to serve, but at the outset they withheld the Champion's portion from distribution. "Why not give the Champion's

Portion." Said Dubtrach Chafertongue, "to some one of the heros; those three have not returned from the King of Cruchan, bringing no sure token with them, whereby the Champion's Portion may be assigned to one of them."

Thereupon Loegaire the Triumphant got up and lifted on high the bronze cup having the silver bird chased on the bottom. "The Champion's Portion is mine," said he, "and none may contest it with me."

"It is not," said Conall Cernach. "Not alike are the tokens we brought off with us. Yours is a cup of bronze, whereas mine is a cup of white bronze. From the difference between them the Champion's Portion clearly belongs to me."

"It belongs to neither of you," said Cu Chulainn as he got up and spoke. "You have brought me no token that procures you the Champion's Portion. Yet the king and the queen whom you visited were loath in the thick of distress to intensify the strife. But no less than your deserts have you received at their hands."

The Champion's Portion remains with me, seeing I have brought a token distinguished above the rest."

He then lifted on high a cup of red gold having a bird chased on the bottom of it in precious dragon-stone, the size of his two eyes. All the Ulster nobles in the train of Conchobar mac Nessa saw it. "There fore it is I," he said, "who deserve the Champion's Portion, provided I have fair play."

"To thee we all award it," said Conchobar and Fergus and the Ulster nobles as well. "By he verdict of Ailill and Mebh the Champion's Portion is yours."

(At this point there is introduced a short episode in which the three competitors go to be tested by a strange personage called Ereol. The scene then shifts to the banqueting hall of Conchobar.)

"I swear by my people'

s god," said Loegaire the Triumphant and Conall the Victorious, "that the cup you have brought is purchased. Of the jewels and the treasures in your possession you have given to Ailill and Medb for it in order that a defeat might not be on record against you, and that the Champion's Portion might

be given to no one else by preference. By my people's god, that judgment shall not stand; the Champion's Portion shall not be yours."

They then sprang up one after the other, their swords drawn. Straightway Conchobar and Fergus entered, whereupon they let down their hands and sheathed their swords.

"Hold!" said Sencha, "do as I bid."

"We will," they said

(The heroes are then sent to Budi mac m-Bain (Yellow son of Fair), and by him to Uath mac Imomain (Terror son of Great Fear). The episode of Uath consists of a short version of the beheading incident which is recited in more detail later in the part called The Champions Covenant)

The Ulstermen advised them to go to Cu Roi for judgment. To that too they agreed.

On the morning of the morrow the three heroes-Cu Chulainn, Conall, and Loegaire-set off to Cu Roi's stronghold,(Cathair Con Roi). They unyoked their chariots at the gate of the hold, then entered the court. Whereupon Blathnat, Minn's daughter, wife of Cu Roi mac Dairi, bade them a warm welcome. That night on their arrival Cu Roi was not at home, but knowing they would come, he counseled his wife regarding the heroes until he should return from his Eastern expedition into Scythia. From the age of seven years, when he took up arms, until his death, Cu Roi had not reddened his sword in Erin, nor ever had the food of Erin passed his lips. Nor could Erin retain him for his haughtiness, renown, and rank, overbearing fury, strength, and gallantry. His wife acted according to his wish in the matter of bathing and washing, providing them with refreshing drinks and beds most excellent. And they liked it well.

When bedtime was come, she told them that each was to take his night watching the fort until Cu Roi should return. "And, moreover, thus said Cu Roi, that you take your turn watching according to seniority." In whatsoever quarter of the globe Cu Roi should happen to be, every night be chanted a spell over his stronghold, so that the fort revolved as swiftly as a mill-stone. The entrance was never to be found after sunset.

The first night, Loegaire the Triumphant took the watch, inasmuch as he was the eldest of the three. As he kept watch into the later part of the night, he saw a giant approaching him as far as his eyes could see from the sea westwards. Exceedingly huge and ugly and horrible Loegaire thought him, for in height, it seemed to him, he reached the sky, and the reflection of the sea was visible between his legs. Thus did he come, his hands full of stripped oaks, each of which would form a burden for a wagon team of six, at whose root not a stroke had been repeated after a single sword-stroke. One of the stakes he cast at Loegaire, who let it pass him. Twice or thrice he repeated it, but the stroke reached neither the skin nor the shield of Loegaire. Then Loegaire hurled a spear at him but it did not hit him.

The giant stretched his hand toward Loegaire. Such was its length that it reached across the three ridges that were between them as they were throwing at each other, and thus in his grasp the giant seized him. Though Loegaire was big and imposing, he fitted like a year-old child into the clutch of his opponent, who then ground him between his two palms as a chessman is turned in a groove. In that state, half dead, the giant tossed him out over the fort, so that he fell into the more of the ditch at the gate. The fort had no opening there, and the other men and inmates of the hold though Loegaire had leapt outside over the fort, as a challenge for the other men to do likewise.

There they were until the day's end. When the night-watch began, Conall went out as sentry, for he was older than Cu Chulainn. Everything occurred as it did to Loegaire the first night.

The third night Cu Chulainn went out on watch. That night the three Greys of Sescind Uarbell, the three Ox-feeders of Breg, and the three sons of Big-fist the Siren met by appointment to plunder the stronghold. This too was the night of which it was foretold that the Spirit of the Lake by the fort would devour the whole population of the hold, man and beast.

Cu Chulainn, while watching through the night, and many uneasy forebodings. When midnight came he heard a terrific noise drawing near to him. "Holloa,holloa," Cu Chulainn shouted,"who is there? If friends they be, let them not stir; if foes, let them flee." Then they raised a terrific shout at him. Whereupon Cu Chulainn sprang upon them, so that the nine of them fell dead to the earth. He heaped their heads in disorder into the seat of

watching and resumed his post. Another nine shouted at him in like manner he killed three nines, making one cairn of them, heads and accouterments.

While he was there far on into the night, tired and sad and weary, he heard the rising of the lake on high as if it were the booming of a very heavy sea. However deep his dejection he could not resist going to see what caused the great noise he heard. He then perceived the upheaving monster, and it seemed to him to be thirty cubits in curvature above the loch. It raised itself on high into the air and sprang towards the fort, opening its mouth so that one of the halls could go into its gullet.

Then Cu Chulainn called to mind his swooping feat, sprang on high and was as swift as a winnowing riddle right round the monster. He entwined his two arms about its neck, stretched his hand into its gullet, tore out the monster's heart, and cast it from him on the ground. Then the beast fell from the air and rested on the earth, after having sustained a blow on the shoulder. Cu Chulainn then plied it with his sword hacked it to bits, and took the head with him into the sentry-seat along with the other heap of skulls.

While there, depressed and miserable in the morning dawn, he saw the giant approaching him westwards from the sea. "Bad night," says he.

"It will be worse for thee, thou oaf," said Cu Chulainn. Then the giant cast one of the branches at Cu Chulainn, who let it pass him. He repeated it twice or thrice, but it reached neither the skin nor the shield of Cu Chulainn. Cu Chulainn then hurled his spear at the giant, but it did not reach him. Whereupon the giant stretched out his hand towards Cu Chulainn to grip him as he had the others. Cu Chulainn leapt the hero's salmon-leap and called to mind his swooping feat with the sword drawn over the giant's head. As swift as a hare he was, and in mid-air circling round the giant, until he made a water-wheel of him.

"Life for life, O Cu Chulainn," he said

"Give me my three wishes," said Cu Chulainn.

"Thou shalt have them as they come at a breath," he said.

The sovereignty of Erin's heroes be henceforth mine,

The Champion's Portion without dispute,

The precedence to my wife over the Ulster ladies forever.

"It shall be thine," he said at once. Then he who had been talking with Cu Chulainn vanished, he knew not whither.

Then Cu Chulainn mused to himself as to the leap of his fellows had leapt over the fort, for their leap was big and broad and high. Moreover, it seemed to him that it was by leaping that the valiant heroes had gone over it. He tried it twice and failed. "Alas!" said Cu Chulainn, "my exertions for the Champion's Portion have exhausted me, and now I lose it through not being able to take the leap the others took." As thus he mused, he assayed the following feats: he would spring backwards in mid-air a shot's distance from the fort, and then he would rebound from there until his forehead struck the fort. Then he would spring on high until all that was within the fort was visible to him, and again he would sink up to his knees in the earth owing to the pressure of his vehemence and violence. At another time he would not take the dew from off the tip of the grass by reason of his buoyancy of mood, vehemence of nature, and heroic valor. What with the fit and fury that raged upon him he stepped over the fort outside and alighted at the door of the hall. His two foot prints are in the flag on the floor of the hold at the spot where the royal entrance was. Thereafter he entered the house and heaved a sigh.

Then Minn's daughter, Blathnat, wife of Cu Roi, spoke: "Truly not the sigh of one dishonored, but a victor's sigh of triumph." The daughter of the king of the Isle of the Men of Falga (ie. Blathnat) knew full well of Cu Chulainn's evil plight that night. They were not long there when they beheld Cu Roi coming towards them carrying into the house the standard of the three nines slain by Cu Chulainn, along with their heads and that of the monster. He put the heads from off his breast onto the floor of the stead and spoke: "The gillie whose one night's trophies are these is a fit lad to watch the king's stronghold forever. The Champion's Portion, over which you have fallen out with the gallant youths of Erin, truly belongs to Cu Chulainn. The bravest of them, were he here, could not match him in number of trophies."

Cu Roi's verdict upon them was:

The Champion's Portion to be Cu Chulainn's

With the sovereignty of valor over all the gael,

And to his wife the precedence on entering the Mead Hall before all the ladies of Ulster.

And the value of seven bond-maidens in gold and silver Cu Roi gave to Cu Chulainn in reward for his one night's performance. The tree heroes of Ulster straightway bade Cu Roi farewell and kept on until they were seated in Emain Macha before the day closed. When the waiters came to deal and divide, they took the Champion's Portion with its share of ale out of the distribution that they might have it apart. "Indeed, sure are we," said Dubtach Chafertongue, "you think not tonight of contending for the Champion's Portion. Perhaps the man you sought out has undertaken to pass judgment.."

Whereupon said the other folk to Cu Chulainn, "The Champion's Portion was not assigned to one of you in preference to the other. As to Cu Roi's judgment upon these three, not a whit did he concede to Cu Chulainn upon their arriving at Emain." Cu Chulainn then declared that he by no means coveted the winning of it; for the loss thence resulting to the winner would be on a par with the profit got from it. The championship was therefore not fully assigned until the advent of the Champion's Covenant in Emain which follows.

One day as the Ulstermen were in Emain Macha, fatigued after the gathering and the games, Conchobar and Fergus mac Roig, with the Ulster nobles as well, proceeded from the playing field outside and seated themselves in the Red Branch of Conchobar. Neither Cu Chulainn nor Conall the Victorious nor Loegaire the Triumphant were there that night. But the hosts of Ulster's heroes were there. As they were seated, it being eventide, and the day drawing toward the close, they saw a big uncouth fellow of exceeding ugliness drawing nigh them into the hall. To them it seemed as if none of the Ulstermen would reach half his height. Horrible and ugly was the carle's disguise. Next his skin he wore an old hide with a dark dun mantle around him, and over him a great spreading club-tree branch the size of a winter-shed under which thirty bullocks could find shelter. Ravenous yellow eyes he had, protruding from his head, each of the twain the size of an ox-

vat. Each finger was as thick as a person's wrist. In his left hand he carried a stock, a burden for twenty yoke of oxen. In his right hand was an axe weighing thrice fifty glowing molten masses of metal. Its handle would require a yoke of six to move it. Its sharpness such that it would lop off hairs, the wind blowing them against its edge.

In that guise he went and stood by the fork-beam beside the fire. "Is the hall lacking in room for you," said Dubtach Chafertongue to the uncouth clodhopper (bachlach), "that ye find no other place than by the fork-beam, unless ye wish to be an illumination to the house?- only sooner will a blaze be to the house than brightness to the household."

"Whatever property may be mine, you will agree that no matter how big I am the household will be lighted, while the hall will not be burned. That, however, is not my sole function; I have others as well. But neither in Erin nor in Alba nor in Europe nor in Africa nor in Asia, including Greece, Scythia, the Isles of Gades, the Pillars of Hercules, and Bregon's Tower have I accomplished the quest on which I have come, nor a man to do me fair play regarding it. Since ye Ulstermen have excelled all the peoples of those lands in strength, powness and valor; in rank, magnanimity, and dignity; in truth, generosity, and worth, get one among you to rant the boon I ask."

"In truth it is not just that the honor of a province be carried off," said Fergus mac Roig, "because of one man who fails in keeping his word of honor. Death certainly is not a whit nearer to him than to you."

"It is not I that shun it."

"Make thy quest known to us, then," said Fergus.

"Only if fair play is offered me will I tell it."

"It is right to give fair play," said Sencha son of Ailill, "for it is not seemly for a great people to break a mutual covenant over an unknown individual. It seems to us, furthermore, that if you at last find a person such as you seek, you will find him here."

"Conchobar I put aside," said he, "for the sake of his sovereignty, and Fergus mac Roig also on account of his like privilege. These two excepted,

come whosoever of you that may dare, that I may cut off his head tonight, he mine tomorrow night."

"Sure then there is no warrior here," said Dubtach, "after these two."

"By my troth there will be at this moment," cried Munremur mac Gerrcind as he sprung on to the floor of the hall. The strength of Munremur was as the strength of a hundred warriors, each arm having the might of a hundred "centaurs." "Bend down, bachlach," said Munremur, "that I may cut off thy head tonight, thou to cut off mine tomorrow."

"Were that the object of my quest I could get it anywhere." Said the bachlach; "let us act according to our covenant-I to cut off your head tonight, you to avenge it tomorrow night."

"By my people's gods," said Dubtach Chafertongue, "death is thus for thee no pleasant prospect, should the man killed tonight attack thee on the morrow. It is given to thee alone if thou hast the power, being killed night after night, and to avenge it the next day."

"Truly I will carry out what you all as a body agree upon by way of counsel, strange as it may seem to you," said the bachlach. He then pledged the other to keep his troth in the contention as to fulfilling his tryst on the morrow.

With that Munremur took the axe from the ballach's hand. Seve feet apart were its two angles. Then the bachlach put his neck across the block. Munremur dealt a blow across it with the axe until it stood in the block beneath, cutting off the head so that it lay by the base of the fork-beam, the house being filled with blood.

Straightway the bachlach rose, recovered himself, clasped his head, block, and axe to his breast, and mad his exit from the hall with the blood streaming from his neck. It filled the Red Branch on every side. Great was the people/s horror, wondering at the marvel that had appeared to them. "By my people's gods," said Dubtach c, "if the bachlach, having been killed tonight, come back tomorrow, he will not leave a man alive in Ulster. "

The following night he returned, and Munremur shirked him. Then the bachlach began to urge his pact with Munremur. "Truly it is not right for Munremur not to fulfill his covenant with me." That night, however Loegaire

the Triumphant was present. "Who of the warriors that contest Ulster's Champion's Portion will carry out a covenant with me tonight? Where is Loegaire the Triumphant?" said he.

"Here," said Loegaire. He pledged him, too, yet Loegaire did not keep his agreement. The bachlach returned on the morrow and similarly pledged Conall Cernach, who came not as he had sworn.

The fourth night the bachlach returned, and fierce and furious was he. All the ladies of Ulster came that night to see the strange marvel that had come to the Red Branch. That night Cu Chulainn was there also. Then the bachlach began to upbraid them. "Ye men of Ulster, your valor and your prowess are gone. Your warriors greatly covet the Champion's portion, yet are unable to contest it. Where is the mad fellow called Cu Chulainn? I would like to know whether his word is better than the others."

"No covenant do I desire with you," said Cu Chulainn.

"Likely is that, thou wretched fly; greatly dost thou fear to die." Whereupon Cu Chulainn sprang towards him and dealt him a blow with the axe, hurling his head to the top rafter of the Red Branch until the whole hall shook. Cu Chulainn then again caught up the head and gave it a blow with the axe and smashed it. Thereafter the bachlach rose up.

On the morrow the Ulstermen were watching Cu Chulainn to see whether he would shirk the bachlach as the other heroes had done. As Cu Chulainn was awaiting the bachlach, they saw that great dejection seized him. It would have been fitting had they sung his dirge. They felt sure that his life would last only until the bachlach came. Then said Cu Chulainn with shame to Conchobar, "Thou shalt not go until my pledge to the bachlach is fulfilled; for death awaits me, and I would rather have death with honor."

They were there as the day was closing and they saw the bachlach approaching. "Where is Cu Chulainn?" said he.

"Here I am," he replied.

"Thou art dull of speech tonight, unhappy one; greatly you fear to die. Yet, though great your fear, death you have not shirked."

Thereafter Cu Chulainn stretched his neck across the block which was of such size that his neck reached but half way. "Stretch out thy neck, thou wretch," cried the bachlach.

"Thou art keeping me in torment," said Cu Chulainn, "dispatch me quickly. Last night, by my troth, I tormented thee not. Verily I swear that if thou torment me I will make myself as long as a crane above you."

"I cannot slay thee," said the bachlach, "what with the shortness of your neck and your side and the size of the block.."

Then Cu Chulainn stretched out his neck so that a warrior's foot would have fitted between any two of his ribs; his neck he stretched until his head reached the other side of the block. The bachlach raised his axe until it reached the roof-tree of the house. The creaking of the old hide that was about him and the crashing of the axe-both his arms being raised aloft with all his might- were as the loud noise of a wood tempest-tossed in a night of storm. Down it came then on his neck- its blunt side below, all the nobles of Ulster gazing upon them.

"O Cu Chulainn, arise! Of the warriors of Ulster and Erin, no matter their mettle, none is found to compare with thee in valor,bravery , and truthfulness. The sovereignty of the heros of Erin to thee from this hour forth and the Champion's Portion undisputed, and to thy wife the precedence always of the ladies of Ulster in the Mead-Hall. And whosoever shall lay wager against thee from now, as my tribe swears I swear, all his life he will be in danger." Then the bachlach vanished. It was Cu Roi mac Dairi who in that guise had come to fulfill the promise he had given to Cu Chulainn.

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