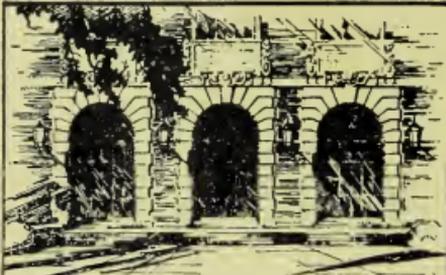


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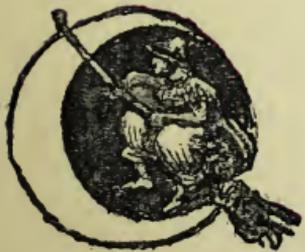
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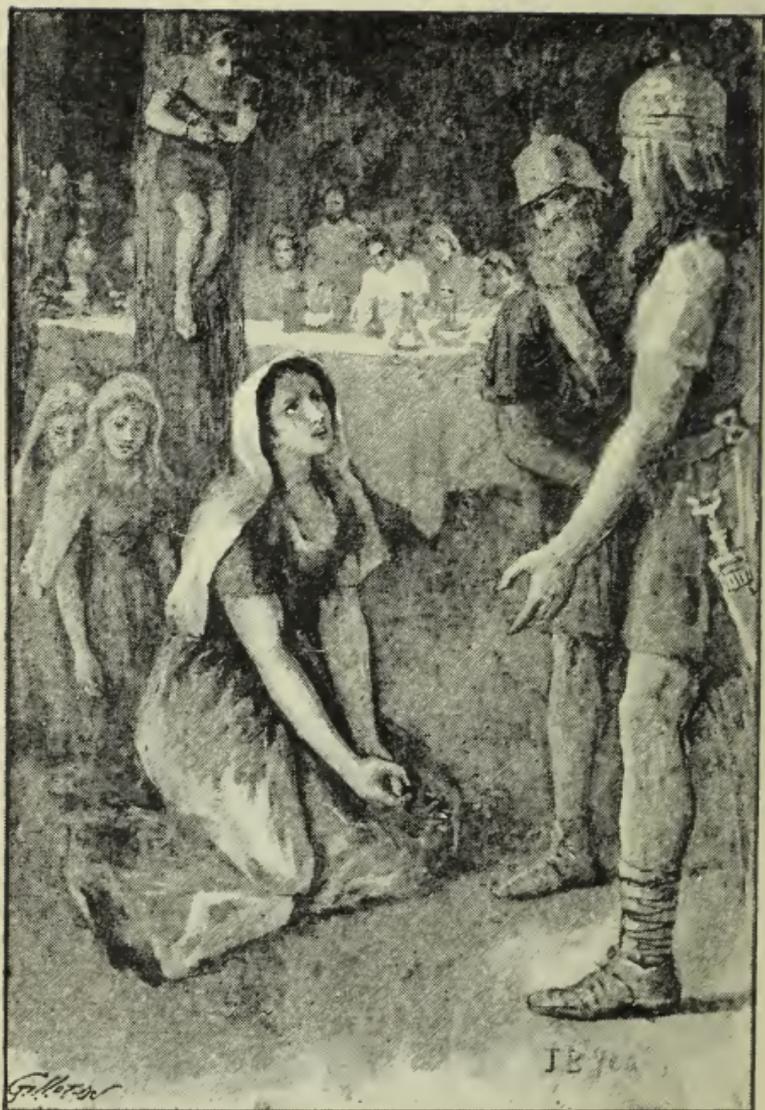
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THE CURMUDGEON'S WIFE INTERCEDES FOR HIM WITH FINN.

FINN
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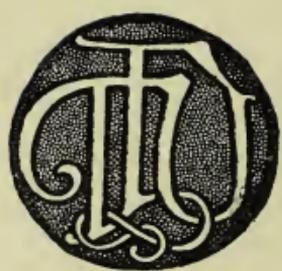
BY
STANDISH O'GRADY

AUTHOR OF 'RED HUGH'S CAPTIVITY,' ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY J. B. YEATS

LONDON
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1892

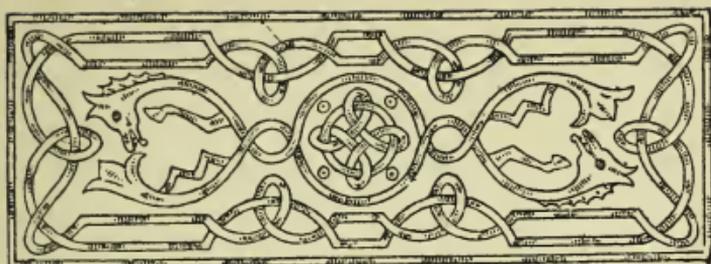


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*Long, long ago beyond the misty space
Of twice a thousand years,
In Erin old there lived a mighty race,
Taller than Roman spears.*

Gen. res. Bay 31 Jan. 51 Bricke. Cow



PREFACE

You have, I am sure, often heard how the Roman Empire was broken up and destroyed by the barbarians of Northern Europe, the Goths, the Vandals, the Huns, the Picts, and Scots, etc., etc. You know too, why God permitted this to be done. It was because the civilised Romans, and the nations whom they made like themselves, lost the great simple virtues of truth, courage, generosity, and the readiness to sacrifice their lives and possessions for the sake of noble objects. We read that Romans at this time would even cut off their thumbs in order to avoid becoming soldiers; for, of course, a young man who had

no thumb to his hand could not be expected to hold a spear strongly, or wield a sword well. In those days the rich Roman became not only very rich, but also selfish and ease-loving, and the poor Roman very poor, so that he cared about nothing but how he might get food in order that he might live; and generally the Roman character changed greatly from what it was in ancient times, for wealth, commerce, civilisation, and peace, however good in themselves, have this tendency, viz. they enfeeble and corrupt men's minds, and make them selfish, lazy, and hard-hearted. Then, as God long ago sent the flood to drown a world which had grown too wicked, so he sent the brave though rude barbarians of northern Europe to destroy the Romans and break their great Empire to pieces.

Woe to the lands, the minstrel sang,
That hear the northern warriors' clang.

You have also read in your English histories how at this time the Romanised

Britons were perpetually invaded and plundered by the Picts and Scots, and then by the Saxons, until they were quite ruined. The Picts and Scots and the Saxons could not have done this in the time of Caractacus and Boadicea.

Now it becomes an interesting question what kind of men these northern barbarians were who did such a great work, and one would like to know how they lived, what they loved and honoured, and what they hated and despised. Of the other barbarous nations other writers will tell you something. I am going to tell you something about the nation which in your histories of England are called the Scots. Now the Scots, who, in alliance with the Picts made such havoc among the degenerate Britons, were in fact the Irish, who at some very early period, overflowing out of Ireland, occupied the western counties of Scotland. The Highlanders and the Irish of Ireland were one race of people whom the old historians called *Scoti* or Scots. They spoke the same

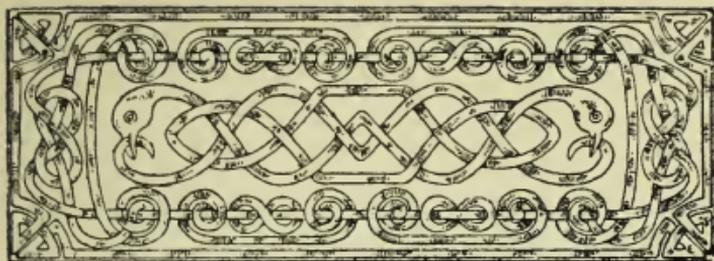
language, and had the same manners and customs, and the same traditions, the same music and the same songs. A great many of their songs and stories lingered a long time in the Highlands, and were believed to have been made by a poet called Ossian. In Ireland a still greater number remained in the minds of the people. These songs and stories, too, were attributed to Ossian or to friends of Ossian, and have been from time to time written down on paper or on parchment. In these stories we learn a great deal about Ossian, his friends and acquaintances, what sort of men they were, and how they lived. I do not say that everything related about them is true, but when we compare these stories with what is known historically about the conquerors of the Roman Empire, we can see that the people amongst whom Ossian lived must have been very like the people of the Ossianic stories, and that Finn, who was the father of Ossian, Oscur his son, Diarmid his chivalrous

cousin, Caelta, MacLewy, and the rest were very brave, upright, true-hearted, and affectionate men, who in their forests and their rude simple homes preserved certain virtues which the Romans and the Romanised Britons had lost in spite of all their wealth. These stories will, I hope, amuse and entertain you, and will also enable you to read some meaning in a word which you have often seen in your histories, but which has had hitherto for you no meaning at all, or perhaps a bad one. The Scots, who with the Picts gave the poor degenerate Britons so many beatings in battle and plundered them far and wide, were essentially somewhat like the men whose characters and manner of living you will find described in these stories. Most of our stories relating to this period are supposed to have been told by Ossian to St. Patrick. Those which I relate are, for the most part, stories told to St. Patrick by Caelta, a cousin of Ossian, and are not so well known. Most of them are, I

think, quite new. If all our Irish Ossianic stories and poems were published, I daresay they would fill a hundred volumes like the present. I have, however, tried to tell these few stories in such a way as to give you a good general idea of the literature as a whole.

Finn and his friends are believed to have flourished in the second and third centuries, that is about two hundred years before the Irish began to break out and attack the Roman Empire in this part of Europe.

The great influence exercised by Finn over the Irish mind was not destroyed, but rather purified and elevated, by the introduction of Christianity. It is distinctly traceable down to the seventeenth century, and though now unrecognised, perhaps still survives, warring strongly, if silently, against the vices which are always connected with civilisation.



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PART I
SAINT AND HERO

B



CHAPTER I

ST. PATRICK AND HIS STRANGE GUESTS

ST. PATRICK and his fellow-missionaries were building a little church made of straight trees interlaced with osiers on the plains of Meath at a place near the river Boyne, westward from Tara. The sun was declining, and the pious Britons worked industriously, making the most of what daylight still remained. A young clerk who was laying the timbers of the roof cried out, 'Look, brothers! What great men are these who come towards us with large strides? Sad yet noble are their faces. Truly,

I have not seen such in this land at any time.' So he stood looking, with a plank in one hand and a hammer in the other.

St. Patrick looked towards Tara and saw ten men coming towards him and now very near. The tallest of the tonsured Gaels and Britons who were with Patrick would not reach to their shoulder-blades, and hardly to the waist of the man who walked before the others and seemed to be their captain. They wore shields and swords, and in their hands carried spears proportioned to their size and strength. Each man's mantle, blue, green, or scarlet, was folded round his shoulders and fastened on the breast by brooches the rings of which were like wheels of gold or silver. Their knees were bare, and their hair, escaped from the brazen helmets, fell in dense curling masses on their shoulders. Their port was majestic, and the meanest of them carried himself like a king. Never-



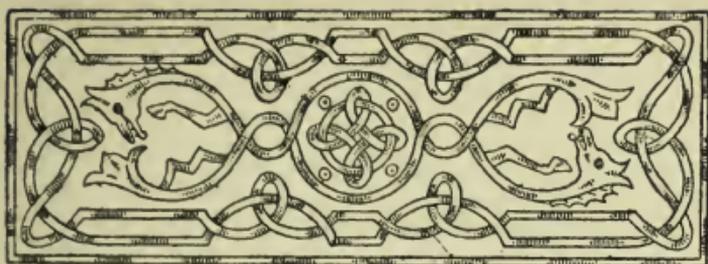
SAINT PATRICK APPROACHING THE GREAT PAGANS.

theless, as the young clerk had said, their countenances were sad, as of men who lacked their comrades, or had recently lost their dear lord.

St. Patrick in his white garments, and bearing his bent staff in his hand, went to meet them, and gave them a respectful and affectionate greeting and bade them a welcome to his small monastery. He conducted them himself to the guest-house. His people brought lavers and washed their feet and hands. They were struck with great awe as they observed the nobleness of the men, their mighty limbs, their tranquillity, and their silence. Food fit for kings was set before them, and old ale in handsome vessels. There, sitting on couches, they ate and drank a little and said nothing, and St. Patrick ministered to them with his own hands, and the more he looked upon them the more he loved them. When all had been served, St. Patrick himself sat down upon a couch over

against their captain, and as he did so the men stood up and made him a reverence and again sat down. Though the young men of the monastery frequently made the circuit of the chamber to pour out ale, they soon found that the men's cups continued full. At a sign from St. Patrick they withdrew; nevertheless the silence was not broken.

The Pagan then raised his eyes and contemplated the Christian for a long time. He knew well the faces of druids, but such a druid as this he had never seen before, and he marvelled at the goodness, refinement, and purity which shone in every feature. St. Patrick on the other hand contemplated the Pagan, his large, bright, peerless eyes and the simplicity and majesty of his aspect, and the more he looked the more he marvelled.



CHAPTER II

ST. PATRICK CONVERSES WITH THE GREAT MEN

WHEN the Saint became aware that the expression of his guest's countenance altered to one of sharp inquiry, and, as if answering his thoughts, he said, 'What wouldst thou, O warrior?' 'Tidings of my dear foster-brother Ossian, O holy druid on whose head has come the razor.'

Ere the Saint could reply a young and very handsome clerk who sat near him started up, smote his hands together, and, signing the air with the

symbol of the cross, cried aloud in the Latin tongue, 'God and his holy angels protect us. My father, this is a dead man. *Occisus est in prælio Gabran*' (he was slain in the battle of Gabra) 'in the reign of Cairbré of the Liffey, son of Cormac mac Art. These men are apparitions, or they are the *Sidhe* (the Shee).'

The youth was Benignus. He was a Gael, and learned in his country's history. What he called 'the Shee' were the gods of the Pagan Irish. At the name of 'Gabra' the men bowed their heads, and their captain put his great hands over his face and wept silently. After a while Patrick said—

'Of thy dear foster-brother Ossian I have no tidings. But who art thou, O noble man, and who are these with thee? I ask that I may be the better able to serve thee.'

A torrent of loving-kindness and compassion poured from the saint's heart towards him as he spoke. Also

he endeavoured to calm the agitation of his young friend and disciple Benignus, who said they were dead men or gods.

‘I am Caelta the son of Ronan,’ answered the large man. ‘We are all that remain in the whole world of Finn’s heroes, unless, mayhap, magnanimous Ossian, his incomparable son, be still alive in some isle of the sea beyond the setting of the sun. Thy druidic community, I perceive, are strangers in Erin. Is the King of Erin kind to thee, who art thyself kind to strangers? Say he is not, O Talkend,¹ and verily he shall be compelled.’

‘Nay,’ answered Patrick, ‘Laegara, son of Nial, hath been very kind to us.’

‘Who is that man?’ said Caelta, more sternly. ‘Are thy spells upon us, O druid, for that man is not in Ireland?’

His voice in its rising wrath was

¹ Talkend means ‘razored head,’ an allusion to the saint’s tonsure.

terrible to hear and shook the guest-house.

‘I am no druid,’ answered Patrick mildly, ‘and have no understanding of spells, charms, and incantations. Truly, Laegara, son of Nial of the Nine Hostages, is now King of Ireland, whoever was King in thy time. Benignus, tell these noble men the pedigree of the King, and how he stands related in descent or otherwise with him who reigned when the battle of Gabra was fought.’

Benignus thereupon spoke out very clearly and fluently, for sweet was his voice, and eloquent was the young man. It was he who used to chant hymns and canticles for Patrick, and revive his spirits when they drooped.

‘Noble strangers,’ he said, ‘the King of Ireland now is indeed Laegara, son of Nial of the Nine Hostages, who was the son of Eocha Moymodōn, who was the son of Murdach, who was the son of Fiecha, who was the son of Cairbré

of the Liffey. And in the reign of Cairbré of the Liffey was fought the great battle of Gabra, where were exterminated the giant race of the Fians, falling by each other's hands in fratricidal warfare, so that only nine men went alive out of the battle around Caelta son of Ronan, and from that day to this they have not been seen. Also there survived Ossian the son of Finn, but he was not in the battle, for he went out of Ireland before that, and there are no tidings of him since he followed the Danaan maiden beyond the setting of the sun.' The men looked at each other in great amazement.

'Where have you been since the battle?' asked Patrick.

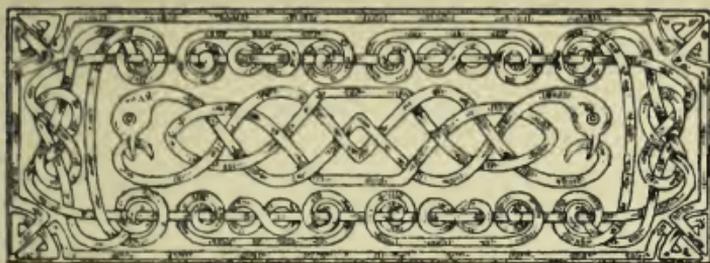
'We went out of the battle,' said Caelta, 'after having raised the tombs of our dead, and after having mourned long, weeping passionately, over the grave of Oscur, to the house of the prophetess and wisest of all women,

Kama, who had cared for and watched over Finn since he was a boy. And she asked tidings of the Fians and why we came to her so few, so sad, and so torn with many wounds, and when we told her she raised up her voice and wept aloud. Then we all wept together, lamenting as it were the end of the world, on account of the great destruction that had come upon the Fians. After that she washed our wounds and bound them up, applying salves and ointments and incantations of power, and gave us the newest of food and the oldest of drink, and sweetly we slept that night in her enchanted house, and our great sorrow departed; and ever delicious fairy music resounded under the hollow dome, so that it was sweeter to be awake there than to sleep. Nevertheless she would not suffer us to go beyond her doors, nor were we ourselves inclined to do so on account of the lassitude and weakness which had come upon us after the battle; yet

we felt no pain or grief, and that indeed surprised us, for it is not usual with good men whose dear friends have been slain to feel such peace of mind as we experienced in the house of the prophetess. Four days and nights we were with her, and on the morning of the fifth I said to my men, "It is time for us to go. Why should we be burthensome to kind hosts? Let us go elsewhere if there are yet in Erin those who will be kind to us on account of our kindness to them in the day of our power."

'When we came to bid the woman farewell, she wept anew a long time, and she said that we would not meet again any more till the day of the final harmonising of all the world's discordant things. And she directed us to come first to this place, where holy druids would be kind to us and instruct us. Verily, O Talkend, our parting from the woman was like the parting of body and soul, and when we put

our feet outside her fairy threshold and saw the green grass and the resplendent sun, full remembrance came upon us again, and great sorrow and weeping, so that with one accord we drew back our feet. But when we thought to recross the threshold, the house which we had left was not seen, nor the woman. There was nothing there save the green hillside and a murmuring stream. Then having wept again, we did as the woman directed, and came to this place. Truly we were under spells in that palace, and our days there were the generations of men.'



CHAPTER III

ANGELS INSTRUCT ST. PATRICK AS TO FINN

PATRICK rejoiced greatly when he heard these words, for he perceived that the men had been miraculously preserved by the power of the Almighty, that he, Patrick, might teach them the true faith, and that they might be baptized by his hands, and he shed tears of joy for that reason, and on account of his ardent affection for the men. Then he arose and kissed the ten men one after another and blessed them, beginning with Caelta, and again

sat down, and drew his white raiment over his face and wept. Then all wept together, the Saint for pure joy and the heroes for pure sorrow on account of the strange things and men amongst whom they had drifted in the tide of time.

After that Patrick made the men drink and forget their many griefs, and he asked Caelta many questions concerning Finn and the Fians and concerning their thoughts and manner of life, and Caelta answered all well, for he was rarely intelligent, and moreover he possessed the gift of eloquence, and Patrick rejoiced listening to him. When their conversation had lasted a good while, Patrick said—

‘How came you, the Fians, to have such power, when the knowledge of the true God was denied to you?’

And Caelta answered—

‘O Talkend, it was because we had truth in our hearts, strength in our hands, and discretion in our tongues.’

Patrick called a young man who was his scribe to take his tablets and write down that speech of the Fian's.

He also asked him what manner of man was Finn.

And Caelta said: 'There has not come upon the earth a man like him since the beginning of the world nor will till the end of time. That, O Talkend, is, in a little, what I have to say concerning Finn. But if I were to pronounce his complete eulogy, the morning with its full light would not find me near the end.'

And of Ossian he said, not that he was a famous poet, but that he was a famous warrior, and renowned above all the rest for magnanimity and liberality. 'Ossian,' he said, 'never asked anything from any man, and never refused any man anything. For himself he was willing to keep only the head with which he ate and the feet with which he walked.'

'That is a great character,' said St.

Patrick, and he bade Bricna, the scribe, write it down. 'It is not greater than the man to whom I attribute it,' said Caelta.

Next day St. Patrick arose while it was still dark, and walked meditating along the banks of the slow-moving royal Boyne, between the trees and the river, revolving many things. As at other times, angels of God met him, and he asked them whether it was displeasing to God that he should feel so much delight in the profane conversation of the great Pagans. And the angels said that it was not, but pleasing, and that Finn, though a Gentile, was nevertheless a prophet without full knowledge, and had prepared the minds of the Gael for the preaching of Christ's gospel, and they also bade him write in a book such things as Caelta might tell him, for the instruction of future generations. 'For truly,' they said, 'the Holy Trinity have been in this place before thee.'

After that the angels left him and St. Patrick returned to the monastery with great joy. The men were still asleep. They slept two days and three nights before the Saint conversed with them again.

Patrick baptized them, and after they had been baptized Caelta put his hand into the hollow of his mighty shield and took out a bar of gold and gave it to Patrick as his baptismal fee. It was as thick as a man's arm and reached from the elbow of the Saint to the first joint of his forefinger.

'It came from a good man,' said Caelta, 'and it goes to another. This was the last payment that I had from my dear lord and friend, Finn the son of Cool, the son of Trenmōr, high captain of the Fianna of Erin.'

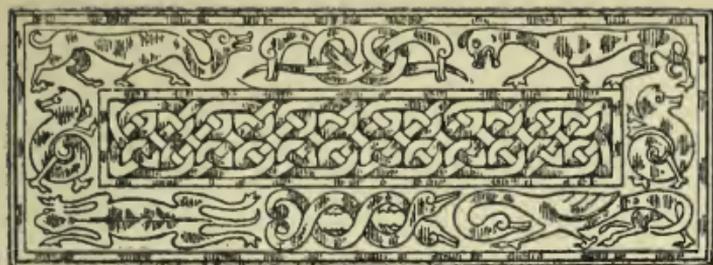
From that bar Patrick made gilding for all his bells and books, and rejoiced to think that his sacred things had their gold from such a source, for the conversation of Caelta and the com-

munications of the angels caused him to perceive that Finn was a seer and a prophet who in his own way, not knowing it, wrought out the will of God amongst the Gael. Also he was careful to record all that Caelta related to him concerning Finn and the Fians.

PART II

FINN

AND THE CURMUDGEON



CHAPTER I

FINN GOES A-HUNTING

FINN and his men went on a hunting expedition to one of his great forests in Leinster, for the Fians had forests in all parts of Ireland, and no one dared to hunt in them or kill any game there without Finn's permission. Early in the morning, before the sun had yet risen, they entered the forest. Each huntsman held back a straining hound by a leash which passed through a ring in the hound's collar. He held in his hands the two ends of the leash ; when he wished to let the hound slip,

he loosed one of the ends of the leash. Before them went the beaters with long sticks, beating the brakes and coppices and rousing the game. Between the places that gave cover for the game there was much open and smooth ground. Finn himself was on the right of the line of huntsmen, leading his favourite hound Bran.

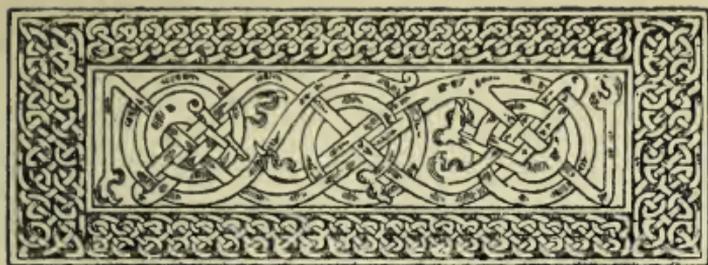
The first animal that they started was a wild boar. He could not be seen from the place where Finn stood, but the sound of the horn on the left gave notice that some great game had been roused, and the cries of the hunters and the loud baying of the hounds showed that it was some great beast. 'That is a boar,' said Finn to the hunter who was next to him. 'He is charging down our way and killing or maiming every dog which is loosed upon him.' Presently the boar broke through a coppice; his eyes were like fire and his white tusks red with blood; the bristles on his neck stood up like rods,

and the froth flew from his mouth like snow. Some of the huntsmen refused to slip their hounds against such a beast. Three were loosed upon him after he passed the coppice; one he tossed over his head, and the second he trampled and maimed, the third only stood at a distance and howled. Then Finn slipped Bran. So swiftly flew Bran upon the boar that her track was like a black and yellow flash over the green turf, and at her baying as she was let loose the hollows of the distant mountains rang, and far away husbandmen labouring in fields said, 'Hark! that is the voice of Bran. The Fians are abroad to day; they have let loose Bran.' Bran seized the huge boar by the throat and shook him to and fro as a puppy-dog shakes a rag.

Then leaving the boar dead, she returned to be caressed and made much of by her master, who said, 'My brave Bran, thou hast not done such a deed since the son of the great en-

chanter Angus Ogue, having taken a boar's form, was dragged down by thee.'

So while the red sun climbed the sky, Finn's men advanced through the forest. The horns continually sounded, and the mingled baying of the hounds, and the cries of the hunters cheering on their dogs, made a sweet music. Many of the poor people of the country, who dwelt in the borders of that forest, stood on the neighbouring hills and watched the scene with great joy. Before noon there were killed many boars and badgers, many an antlered stag, many wolves, and as for hares and such like small game, it would have been hard to count them. So eager were the huntsmen that they did not feel hunger till the sun was nigh his setting.



CHAPTER II

FINN LOOKING FOR HOSPITALITY MEETS A CURMUUDGEON



HEN said Finn to some of his people who knew that country—

‘Is there any lord or wealthy *bru-fir* living hard by, who can give us good entertainment to-night?’

They said, ‘There is not.’

‘I marvel how you can say that,’ said Finn, ‘for it is but little time since I myself saw the mansion of such a one. It is in a green and fertile valley beyond the forest in the west, large and handsome, and the walls white

with lime. I saw an orchard gay with apple-blossom and stacked corn and all the outward signs of good living.'

Thereat they laughed and said—

'We shall get no entertainment there, O captain of the Fianna of Erin. The owner of that house is the least hospitable man in Ireland. Many a stranger has gone thither and departed as he came.'

Finn was very angry, and said—

'I swear by the generous and all-liberal Sun who has ripened that churl's corn and given him wealth and abundance, that he shall yield hospitality to me and the Fians this night with his will or against it.'

Then calling to him a trusty attendant, he said—

'O Dering, go to that man and say that Finn, the son of Cool, Captain of the Fianna Eireen, requests entertainment and rest for his people now spent with the chase and famished with sharp hunger.'

So saying, Finn winded his horn to summon to him his scattered men.

Dering having gone, returned, and standing before Finn, said—

‘O Captain of the Fianna, I went to the man according to thy command. He was sitting at the end of his table with his people about him at supper, which I perceived to be a very meagre repast. His wife sat at his right hand, her look was as kind and gentle as his was not, and she is very beautiful. I walked up the hall to where he sat, and having made a fitting reverence delivered thy message in thy very words. Yet he answered sternly, “Go back and tell thy master that he and his young men may roast their own supper in Fian ovens as they are accustomed to do, and couch themselves in thick brakes, for they are healthy and hardy. From me he will get no entertainment.”’

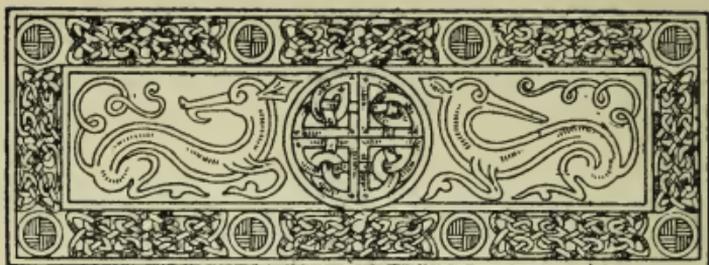
Before he had made an end of speaking Finn strode in anger through

the forest in the direction of the man's house. Finn entered the inhospitable house, where the master had just risen from supper; he seized him with his left hand and threw him on his knees, and while he was in that posture addressed him thus—

‘As thou hast not given hospitality to us willingly thou shalt give it unwillingly. From the rafters of thy house, hanging there with a rope round thy breast, thou shalt this night look down uncomfortably on the consumption of thy goods. Then I think thy covetous soul will be much distressed; and mark this, too, that when I leave in the morning the cord will not be around thy *breast*, that all men may know how loathsome are covetousness and inhospitality in my eyes.’

A long cord was then procured, and when a running loop had been made in it at one end and the hands of the man tied together, it was put round his breast under the arm-pits. In the

centre of the house there was a tall smooth tree which was the main support of the roof and therefore was called the roof-tree. One of Finn's grandsons, holding the end of the cord in his teeth, swarmed up the roof-tree and passing the cord over one of the cross beams, slid down again, bringing the cord with him. Then they hoisted the curmudgeon and drew him swiftly up till his poll struck against the cross beam and they wound the cord round the roof-tree and made it fast. There, pale and astonished, the owner of the house looked down upon the scene while Finn issued his orders to the house-steward and to the servants.



CHAPTER III

THE CURMUDGEON SAVED BY HIS WIFE

THE chamber in which these things were done was the great central hall of the palace. At the end of this hall, facing the door of the house, there was a small door having carved jambs and a carved lintel, which communicated with inner chambers—the quarters which were reserved for women only. Hardly had Finn's people made fast the cord round the foot of the roof-tree when from these inner chambers there arose loud cries and lamentations. Presently the door

was flung open and a young woman beautifully attired stood in the doorway. She was very fair and shone like a star against the dark background. It was the man's wife. Any one looking at him would have supposed that the curmudgeon was made fast in the cord of his slaughter ; but a full account of what had been done was brought to the woman, and she knew that her husband was more frightened than hurt. For a moment she stood still, while her eyes travelled round the great chamber filled with strange forms of men, then letting fall her veil she hastened down, followed by her attendants, who wept and smote their hands together, and cast herself before Finn's feet weeping.

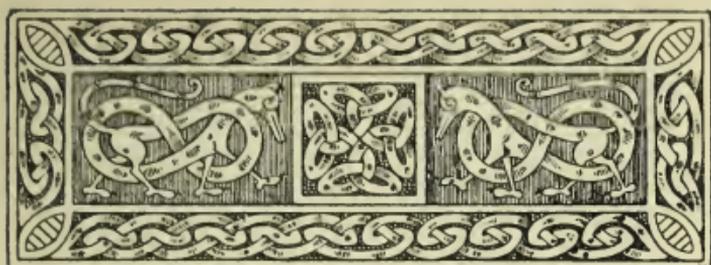
Finn was moved by her beauty and her distress, and said : 'Name thy petition, my child, for it is already granted.'

And she said—

'O Captain of the Fians, spare my

husband, and I promise from him and from myself that all thy people shall be well and liberally entertained, as is only right. I looked for no other end of our slender housekeeping, and lo, I have beside me much store of food and drink reserved for some such day of destruction as hath now come upon us.'

And Finn said: 'O Lady, I perceive that thou art wise as well as fair. Thy boon is granted, and by my right hand I swear that had I known this man was dear to thee, though greatly angered, I would not have put him to such shame.'



CHAPTER IV

GOOD CHEER IN THE HOUSE OF INHOSPITALITY

WHEN the curmudgeon was let down from his uncomfortable position and untied, and Finn and his men left the house and went in quest of the remainder of the Fians. The latter had in the meantime come together from different parts of the great forest to the place where Finn had winded his horn, and when they did not find him there their trackers traced him till they came to a place which commanded a distant view of

that green valley in which was the great white inhospitable house, and lo, from all the chimneys of the same there went up thick rolling pillars of dark smoke to the violet sky, each distinct and straight, for it was a windless evening. When the Fianna saw that sight their laughter was loud and long, yea, though they were sore spent with the chase they laughed till their tears flowed and they leaned against each other for laughing, and one said to another, 'It is easy to see that Finn has paid an early visit to that house.' And also, 'The man who is called Nod must get to himself another name from this night,' for in their language the name Nod meant 'stinginess.'

Then they met Finn, and afterwards all went together to an adjoining lake and bathed there, and the surrounding woods and hills resounded with their cries and joyful exclamations and laughter as they swam to and fro there like waterfowl and beat the still lake

into foaming waves as if a hurricane had descended upon its quiet surface. There was always a lake or river in the neighbourhood of Finn's forests, and when there was not he commanded a lake to be dug. When they came out of the lake their attendants handed to each of them a change of raiment, bright banqueting attire, and after that they all proceeded together joyfully to 'the house of inhospitality.'

Now, though Finn and his companions had often been well entertained in many houses, they agreed that they had seldom been so well entertained as they were that night. For, not only was the fare good and abundant, and the drink likewise, but the banqueting table flashed throughout from end to end with vessels of silver and gold, and cups of dazzling crystal, and the table linen was of the finest texture and inlaid with curious patterns, for by the advice of his prudent wife the man Nod brought forth all his hidden treasures

and jewels of great price, which he had amassed and had stored away in dark places. Moreover, the man and his wife—the man impelled by fear and the woman by her own generous heart—exerted themselves to the utmost in order that every desire of their strange guests might be satisfied. The attendants and the dog-boys and the dogs, the tired beaters, too, were all royally entertained, each according to his degree. Cheerful was the laughter of the heroes in the inhospitable house, and their hearts rejoiced greatly to think that in such a house these things could be. After supper was ended Finn called for music, and his harpers harped before him, and also Ossian, the son of Finn, chaunted for them a tale of some ancient woe, and bowed all their heads and relaxed their hearts. After that they sang Fian songs full-toned and strong, singing loud all together with open mouths, songs of war or of the chase or of adventure,

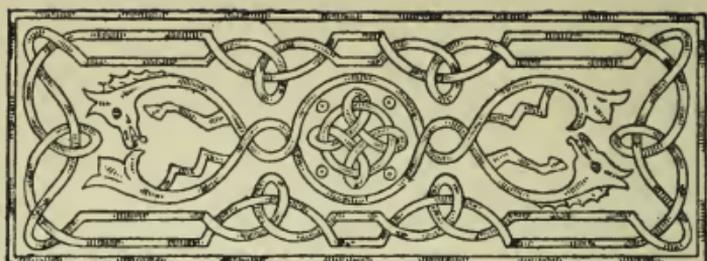
rejoicing in their glory and their matchless career, and far away the Leinstermen heard them, both those who dwelt by the eastern sea and those who lived along the green borders of the Barrow, for it was not a little noise that Finn's men made when they sang. So the Fians passed that evening in the house of inhospitality, and those of Nod's people who witnessed the scene used to speak about it as long as they lived. When it grew towards the hour for sleep Finn called for his little magic tiompan or lyre, of which long since he had mightily deprived Allen, the son of Midna the enchanter, and he gently touched the strings. The virtue of this lyre was such that no man could hear it without sleeping well afterwards. When Finn played on this lyre it was a signal to his men that they should go to rest. This night each hero found a good bed ready to receive him and all of less degree also, according to what was

customary in houses of hospitality or even better, and the hounds too, such as the great boar had not slain, were abundantly provided with clean straw. There Finn and all his people slept sweetly, but the man Nod and his wife took counsel together, and made preparations so that in the morning their guests might break their fast well.

They all breakfasted next morning in the gloaming, and departed with the rising of the sun. Finn saluted the lady respectfully and afterwards her lord cheerfully, only he added with a stern look, 'Come to me to the Hill of Allen on the tenth day.' So Finn and his people and their numerous dogs passed away, and the noisy and many-coloured procession entered the woods, going swiftly, so that soon even the sound of their voices was not heard and a great silence reigned over the whole valley. Nod and his wife were standing together at the door of the mansion, and they

turned and looked at each other without speech.

Nod's substance was not impaired by that extensive billeting of Finn's men and hounds, such was the amount of game, large and small, presented by Finn to the lady of the house as a token and a gift.



CHAPTER V

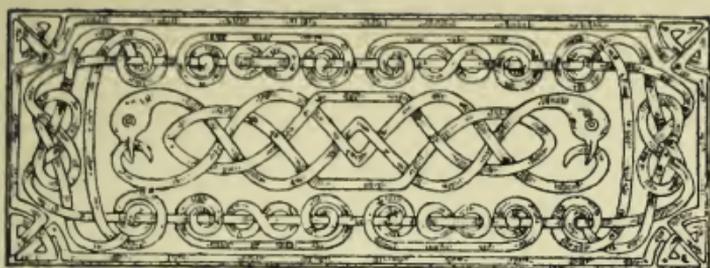
NOD PAYS FINN A RETURN VISIT

THE man Nod was tall and strong, well-shaped and erect, but of a grim and dour aspect, save only when his looks were turned upon his wife and child. His cheeks were hollow and colourless, and though he was young his black hair already showed the blemish of early grayness. He was proud, too, and the indignities which he had endured before the eyes of his wife and his people preyed upon his mind, so that his sleep forsook him and he wandered to and fro by night

and by day like a dead man in motion. On the seventh day his wife brought to him a cunningly-prepared sleeping draught, and that night he slept well, yet on the morrow it was with great difficulty she persuaded him to set out on his journey to the Hill of Allen. Yet he went and two armed men with him. They crossed the Slaney and the Barrow, rivers of Leinster, and crossed the Plain of the Liffey, which is now called the Curragh. Here they were attacked by robbers, whom they defeated. Nod behaved well in the conflict, for though inexperienced in arms he was by no means a coward. On the tenth day, in the forenoon, they saw the camp of the Fians on the Hill of Allen—tents innumerable and banners floating there with many devices. There was one high above all the rest, which showed the likeness of the golden sun half risen from the blue floor of the sea. It was the banner of Finn, and was a sign to all men

that Finn was there and that whoever desired food and drink, or peace and happiness, or the redress of injuries, might come to him, and all who were in any distress.

As Nod drew nigh to the camp he wondered more and more to see how carelessly Finn and the Fians resided on this hill, for there were no ramparts or moats or trenches around the camp, and no towers of defence or of observation, no strong palisades of timber, therefore no gates. Also there were no scouts or sentinels, and no bodies of armed men, keeping the approaches to the camp. The hill too, which was flat on the top, was no more than a great rising ground, and the broad green streets of the camp communicated with the open green plains of Kildare.



CHAPTER VI

NOD MEETS SOME FAMOUS FIANS

TREMBLING and sorely distressed in mind, Nod began to enter the camp. Before him was one very broad green street bordered on both sides by the white brown-roofed tents of the Fians, each tent standing apart by itself. Men and women seemed to dwell together here, for the voices and laughter of both sexes sounded everywhere, and all the people were of great stature, well shaped, and graceful in all their motions and brightly attired. There was a tall, very handsome young man

standing by a tent upon the right side, which was the last there and touched the open country. The young man was talking pleasantly with two maidens who leaned from a window in an upper story of that tent. Yet he was not so much absorbed in the conversation as not to notice the coming of Nod and his company. He had long glossy and curling black hair, which rolled over a scarlet mantle, a round shield on his left arm and a spear in his right, his eyes were of bright hazel with long lashes, his complexion a rich brown, and smiles played ever sweetly round his red lips. Never had Nod beheld such an apparition of youth and beauty. He was tall too and straight and lissom as a young fir-tree which bends to every breath of the wind yet ever recovers its straightness.

The youth approached Nod, and when he had saluted him courteously and saluted also the man's servants one by one, he said—

‘My lord Finn bade me meet thee and conduct thee through the camp to his tent. My own name is Diarmid.’

As they went through the camp, Nod, who looked around him eagerly on every side, said—

‘I see here on the left one strange tent standing by itself in a hollow. It is black, both sides and roof, and the banner over it is black with a pale device. There is a black man standing at the door, and two black hounds are beside him.’

‘Look no more,’ said Diarmid, ‘or it will be the worse for thee. I see him not, yet well I know that he is there. Few of us ever see him. His name is Dara-duff, from the Black Mountain of the North.’

Presently a company of young Fians met them, descending the slope of the hill, and laughing much as they came. They enclosed in their midst a man of great size, whose head was bald. He was fat, with a very big stomach, and

his eyes twinkled with laughter and twinkled more as he drew nigh, and took note of the stranger's appearance.

He accosted Nod with mock politeness.

'Happy art thou,' he said, 'O illustrious stranger, for it is not necessary for thee at any time to declare thy name and breeding, for Nod is in thine eye and cut out and carved all over thy countenance.'

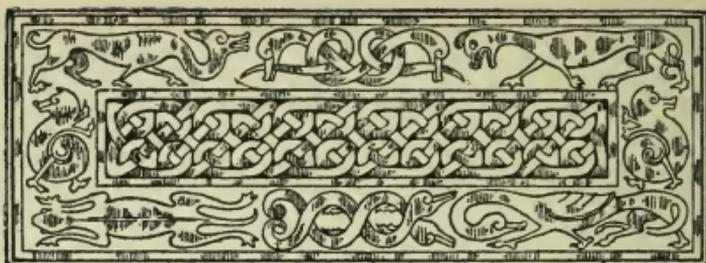
Diarmid's anger arose at this. He raised the haft of his spear, and, as the fat man turned to flee, brought it down with a resounding noise upon the other's broad back. He uttered also a fierce rebuke. Many of the Fians stood at the doors of their tents watching this scene, and when they saw the man beaten they laughed sweetly and said—

'O Conan, thou wilt find a better subject for thy jibes and jests another time.'

The fat man walked away crest-fallen, and wiped a big tear from

either eye. Now on the right sounded music and drums, trumps and trumpets of many kinds, so gay and exhilarating that Nod's sad heart leaped with animation as he heard it. Presently a battalion, emerging from the tents, crossed the green way swiftly, and disappeared on the left. They had a banner which showed the rowan-tree with green leaves and scarlet clusters of berries woven on a white ground. Then a troop of light-footed youths ran past them; beside each youth a hound bounded, led in leashes of white bronze or glistening silver.

Many bright or strange sights were seen by Nod that day, as he went with Diarmid through the mighty camp of the Fianna. Save the two already mentioned, there was no one who showed any blemish. All were of great size, well shaped and handsome, and every eye bright with the light of life. Through such sights and sounds Nod drew nigh to Finn.



CHAPTER VII

FINN AT HOME



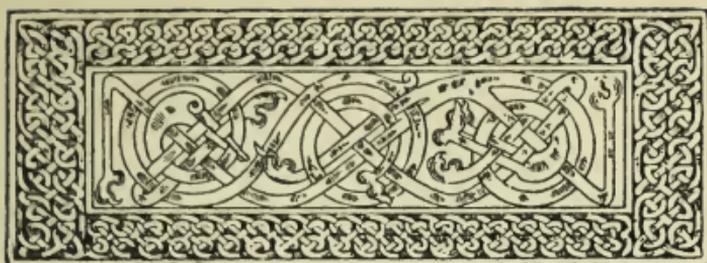
THE door of Finn's tent was open, and so wide that an army might march through it. As Nod drew nigh trembling he heard low, very sweet music, like that of a recorder perfectly played, only sweeter. Then he saw within the tent a man of great size sitting upon a couch, whose hair was like snow and glittered like boiling silver poured out of the crucible. It was Finn. A young man whose name was Oscur sat beside him. He leaned his head upon Finn's shoulder and held Finn's left hand

in his right. Behind Finn stood Dering, and upon the floor at Finn's feet sat another young man who whistled. It was his whistling that Nod mistook for the music of a recorder.

His name was MacLewy. It was one of Finn's chief pleasures listening to that young man as he whistled. Many of Finn's chief men were there standing or sitting through the great tent. There were daughters and granddaughters of Finn there too.

Finn saw Nod through the open door, and started up and hastened towards him, and he took him by the hand and led him into the tent joyfully and affectionately, and made him sit in his own seat. Finn's people also, both men and women, welcomed him with shining faces and pleasant words, and they set before him a small beechen table round and very white, and put before him such viands as they had by them, also a carved mether having four silver corners and two silver handles,

and Finn himself poured out the ale. When Nod saw all this, and how he, a man of no repute in Erin, or of bad repute, nay the worst, was received here with so much kindness, then the vein of penury that was in Nod's heart brake. He put his hands before his face and bowed his head and wept aloud. When he had made an end of weeping Finn put his hand gently on his shoulder and said, 'I know it all, my son. Eat and drink a little now, and afterwards one of my young men will lead thee to the guest chamber. There thou shalt have change of raiment and all else that thou needest, and he will be thy companion till the evening. Thou must sup with me here this night and remain with me many days, for thou hast suffered much, but now thou shalt suffer no more.



CHAPTER VIII

HOW MACLEWY CAME TO FINN

BEFORE proceeding farther with Nod's story, I desire to tell something about two young men whom Nod found in the camp, namely, the youth who was whistling for Finn in his tent and the very handsome youth who met Nod and conducted him through the camp to Finn. And first concerning MacLewy, whose whistling was so delightful to Finn.

Finn had a daughter named Lewy, and Lewy had a son who, as he had no other name, was called Lewy's son

or MacLewy. It was he who sat whistling before Finn when Nod was approaching Finn's tent. When this youth was born his mother considered with herself to whom she would send him to be nursed. There was a celebrated nurse and instructor of children in those days called Mong-finn or Fair-hair. She had nursed and brought up in her time eight hundred shield-armed warriors who were admitted into Finn's army. Lewy sent her child to her to be nursed and educated. When the boy was twelve years old the woman gave him a spear, sword, helmet, and shield, and sent him to Finn.

'Thou art a child,' said Finn.

'I am a man,' answered the boy.
'Try me.'

'Dost thou know the seven severe proofs to which I put candidates?' said Finn.

'I know them,' said the boy, 'I did not come here to be engaged in

conversation, but to be proved; and make your proofs stiff, for I promise you that they will be a laughing-stock when I have done with them.'

At that Finn flushed and said, 'Beware of pride and vainglory, my son; they soon come to a fall.'

'Not where there is a corresponding or even excessive degree of merit to support them,' answered the lad unabashed.

'Make me a poem according to the rules of the Imbus-for-Osna,' said Finn, 'every second line rhymed and every other line assonanced, and with three alliterations in every line. Let the theme be thy coming to Finn's house.'

The boy made the poem on the spot, magnifying himself and censuring the manner of his reception. Also he glanced disparagingly at certain of the great men who stood around, Gaul mac Morna, Ossian, and others, mingling satire with his song.

‘Thou art indeed an astonishing youth,’ said Finn.

‘I thought I would astonish thee before our interview came to an end,’ answered the lad.

‘Hold out thy spear,’ said Finn. ‘Nay, lad, that will not do. Take it by the extreme end, hold it at an equal distance from the ground along its whole length, and thyself perfectly upright the while.’

The lad held the spear-end not in his hand but with three fingers only; ‘Doth it tremble?’ he said.

Unwillingly, and yet gladly too, they all had to admit that it did not.

‘That will do,’ said Finn; ‘I shall put thee to no more proofs after that.’

‘That is to deprive me of my glory,’ said the boy; ‘I see that you are all jealous of me already.’

‘Hast thou any amiable accomplishment?’ said Finn. ‘Canst thou play on an instrument?’

‘Set a battalion before me,’ answered the boy; ‘and me before it with my weapons of war in my hands, I will play upon it finely.’

‘I mean a musical instrument,’ said Finn, laughing.

‘Yes,’ said he; ‘I play on an instrument.’

‘Is it with thee?’ said Finn.

‘It is indeed,’ he replied, ‘now, and at all times. It is a flute, alive, red, flexible, with ivory keys white as May blossom.’

‘It is thy mouth,’ said Finn; ‘now play for us.’

The youth whistled, and never before or since did such music pass the human lips. All who were in that presence wept save Finn only.

‘Stop now,’ said Finn; ‘before my mighty men are dissolved away in salt rivers. Whose son art thou?’

‘I am the son of Lewy, and the grandson of Finn. Of my father I have no knowledge and no care.’

‘Thou art my man from this day forth,’ said Finn. The lad put his right hand into the right hand of his grandfather and became his man.



CHAPTER IX

MACLEWY GETS INTO TROUBLE

FROM the day that MacLewy came into the camp there was no peace in it, but all was disorder, confusion, noise, and quarrelling. There were the howling of dogs furiously chastised, and the noise of loud vauntings with fierce recriminations, and disturbances at ale feasts, and frequent rushings of Finn's champions through the camp to separate men engaged in deadly combat. It seemed as if the very genius of discord, confusion, and civil war were let loose in Finn's fraternal

and affectionate host. One morning Dering awaked Finn and said, 'There is some great thing forward to-day, O Finn. Come forth at once.' Finn came to the door of his tent and there he saw the seven standing battalions of the Fians drawn up before him in marching array, and over every battalion its own ensign, and gloom, wrath, and mutiny in every face. When Finn appeared the seven captains stepped forward and stood before him, and they said—

'Choose this day, O Finn, between thy grandson and the army. If Mac-Lewy remains with thee, *we* go; if we remain with thee the boy goes.'

At that the army shouted approval, and that shout went across the sea and was heard in the court of Arthur, high King of the Britons.

With difficulty Finn pacified the host on that occasion. He promised them that he would send away his grandson if within a given time he

could not tame his wild untutored heart.

‘Why is the host so enraged with thee?’ said Finn.

‘It is because I am the best man amongst them,’ said the lad; ‘and is it I, thy grandson, who must instruct thee that surpassing merit always provokes envy, jealousy, and hatred?’

‘Nay, nay, lad,’ said Finn; ‘Cuculain, son of Sualtam, was without dispute the greatest hero in his time, and also the best beloved. And remember what the historians record concerning him—

He spake not a boasting word .
Nor vaunted he at all,
Though marvellous were his deeds.’

Finn took the lad to himself and trained and tutored him till he tamed his wild heart, and when his cure was complete he gave him back to the host, and after that none of Finn’s men was more admired and loved than was MacLewy.

Finn’s precepts which he used in the

instruction of MacLewy were repeated to St. Patrick by Caelta, and St. Patrick bade his scribe write them in a book, and ordered his people to use them in the instruction of princes.

Here are some of them :—

Pursue mildness, son of Lewy.

Don't beat hounds without good cause.

Don't censure high chiefs.

Keep two-thirds of thy politeness for women
and humble people.

Don't rage against the rabble.

Strive to hold others in esteem and to
like them ; so the host will not be offended
though thou art loud and noisy.

Trust not in thy courage and thy great
strength, but consider well thy arms and
thy armour. Then with confidence bend
thy knee to the battle, and thy brow to
the pale fierce fight, etc. etc.



CHAPTER X

HOW DIARMID CAME TO FINN



SCORE of young warriors burst from the wide doors of Mongfinn's house and ran joyfully across the lawn. Their polished shields leaped upon their backs as they ran. It was May morning. It had rained during the night, but the sun now shone brightly and the wet fields and trees glistened in his rays. The youths were Mongfinn's finished scholars. They came fresh from her hands, each of them with her kiss and her blessing on his head. Whither did they run so swiftly

and with such joyful cries and exclamations? To the Hill of Allen, to Finn, to be entered in the roll of his men, in case they should pass the examination; and all felt sure that they would pass.

Leaving the lawn they struck a narrow path in the woods and ran on, one by one, making pleasant echoes in the still forest. When they emerged from the forest they came to a rocky ravine through which a torrent rushed. There were stepping-stones in the torrent, but they were now hidden, for the torrent was greatly swollen; a brown swirling mass of rough water rushed down the ravine.

Nothing daunted, the foremost of the party ran to the torrent, holding his two spears in front of him with the hafts forward, as boys now use leaping poles. He planted these on the edge of the torrent, and springing upwards, rose between them and propelled himself clear across the water. The rest

did the same, only the youngest of the party fell back once, not having sprung with sufficient force, but encouraged by the rest he succeeded at the second attempt.

As they were proceeding on their journey they heard a groan, and looking back, saw an aged woman leaning on a staff on the far side of the torrent, a little out of the way. She said, 'You who are so young, strong, and happy, have pity on one who is old, weak, and sorrowful, for I cannot cross this wild torrent without aid.'

'We cannot,' they answered; 'we are bound for the court of the most splendid captain on earth, and we must not appear in his presence in raiment soiled and dripping. Some strong churl will soon pass this way and take thee over the torrent.'

So they went on their way, but not all. One of them, a tall and very beautiful stripling, stayed behind. His name was Diarmid. A second time

he bounded lightly over the torrent, and having saluted the old woman respectfully, he raised her in his young strong arms and bore her through the ford. The torrent reached to his shoulders and was so violent that no ordinary man could have resisted it. Yet he reached the other side safely, and set her down carefully. As he was about to run forward again, he was aware of a tall, stately, and beautiful woman who stood by his side equipped like a warrior, her countenance so bright that it dazzled him to look upon it. Beside her stood a tall man, as glorious as the woman, but not armed. He smiled on the lad. 'I know thee, O Angus,' said the youth. 'Wherefore hast thou played this trick upon me?' 'To prove thy chivalry,' he answered. Then the man and the woman wrapped themselves in their magic mantle of woven air and were no more seen.

Diarmid pursued his party and came

up with them as they were entering the camp.

When they came before Finn all the rest looked bright and clean and pleasant to the eye, but Diarmid's scarlet mantle, all but a little of it, was stained brown with the muddy water, and his white tunic with gold buttons was also defiled, and he looked like a spot in the midst of his comrades. When Finn saw him he said sternly, 'Thou hast been wading in torrents to-day.'

'I have,' said Diarmid.

'Why did you not leap them like your comrades,' said Finn.

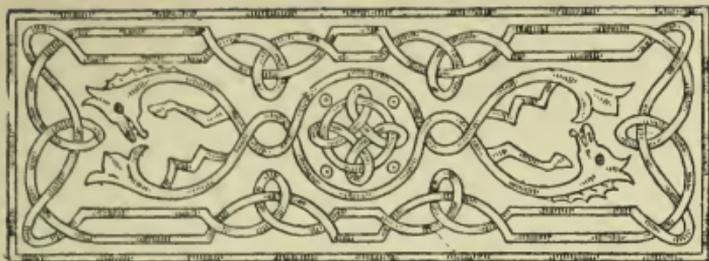
'That I cannot tell,' answered the young man, with a blush.

Then Finn looked fixedly at him and said, 'I can. I see thee crossing a swollen torrent with an aged woman in thy arms. And thou hast seen a glorious sight. It is still shining in thy face and in thy eyes. Thou shalt have success

in war and success in love. All things good and nothing bad shall ever be told concerning thee at all time, and thy glory will last till the end of the world.'

The woman whom Diarmid met at the torrent was the war-goddess of the Gael: the man was Angus Ogue, son of the Dagda, the god of youth and beauty, from the fairy Brugh on the Boyne.

I lingered on the royal Brugh which stands
By the dark-rolling waters of the Boyne
Where Angus Ogue magnificently dwells.



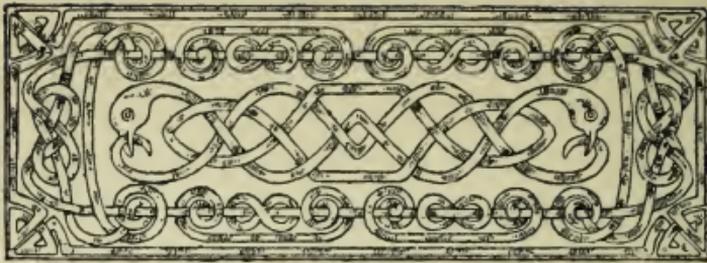
CHAPTER XI

NOD'S LIFE ON THE HILL

BEFORE he came to Finn's camp Nod lived alone in solitary grandeur in the midst of inferiors. Now he lived amongst superiors, which at first made him ashamed, but by degrees his shame vanished and he began to be happy. Soon he made dear friends and comrades, and after that one day seemed to him more joyful than another. He learned the proper management of his weapons in offence and defence. He delighted to watch trials with hounds. He received as a gift

from one of his new friends a beautiful hound, whom he called Son-of-the-Eagle. He went to his first hunting shortly after that, leading the dog with him. It was in a forest belonging to Finn, in the country called Teffia. There Son-of-the-Eagle had the good fortune to hold a fine boar. Nod despatched the boar with a well-aimed thrust of his spear. His new comrades praised him and the dog warmly. It so chanced that while Nod was with Finn one of Finn's forests in the North of Ireland was disturbed by a lawless chief dwelling in the neighbourhood. Finn sent a troop to chastise him, and Nod was permitted to accompany the troop as a volunteer. Nod acquitted himself well in that expedition and was brought back to the Hill on a litter between four comrades, wounded but happy. He was indeed sore wounded, yet his recovery was rapid, so pure was his blood, and so light, gay, and alert his spirit. Nod could not believe

that the world held so much happiness as seemed to fill the air upon the Hill of Allen. He went on two fishing expeditions to the Shannon, when he and his friends built for themselves booths by the river and had good sport, but wherever he went he was always glad to return to the camp on the Hill. Cheerfully he arose in the morning and sweetly he slept at night.



CHAPTER XII

NOD AND THE DRAGON

WHILE Nod was on the Hill of Allen there came messengers from the west imploring Finn's assistance against a great water-dragon, which had newly come to the country, and had taken up his abode in Lough Derg, which is a great fresh-water sea formed by the river Shannon.

Such a dragon, they said, was never seen before in Ireland. He was more terrible, they said, than any of the numerous dragons which Finn had formerly slain.

Finn had killed dragons, monsters, apparitions, and savage beasts without number, and was enraged that another of that bad race should fear him and his men so little as to take up his abode in the midst of the island and lay waste the surrounding country.

This dragon killed and ate not cattle only, but men and women, and as he rolled through the country he destroyed forests and houses. He was of a blue colour, they said, and had a mane like a horse. Nearly every one who saw him died of fright.

Finn announced the news to his men, and they at once called upon him to lead them against the monster. All Finn's young men rejoiced greatly at this adventure, for the young men had never been at the killing of any serpent or monster, only they used to hear their seniors tell many tales concerning such adventures.

So they all went westward to the Shannon with great joy. When they

reached Lough Derg the water of the lake was still and smooth. There was nothing to indicate that a terrible monster lay concealed in the depths. Some, more fanciful than the rest, declared that they saw a certain dark shadow, which they said showed the outlines of the beast's form at the bottom of the lake. Then they shouted all together and beat their swords against their shields in order to awaken the monster, and certainly if he could be awakened the noise they made was loud enough to rouse him. Presently there was an agitation in the water, which rose up like a mound in the midst of the lake, soon forming into waves and billows, and a dark-blue mass lifted itself out of the water.

It was the monster's head and neck : he had a mane like a horse. Then two eyes like two lamps showed themselves and glared at the Fians. The younger men, who were so anxious to hunt a dragon, now trembled and gradually

moved away from the bank of the river. They were not expecting such a prodigy. When he saw the enemy the serpent raised his tail out of the water, and lashed the lake into storm in his fury, so that the spray fell all round the country for miles. Every Fian was as wet as if he had been dipped in the lake. Now the serpent roared with a voice like thunder, chilling the blood of the bravest of the Fians. His open red mouth was as wide as the gate of a city. This dragon was blue and had no wings or legs. He was in fact a monstrous serpent. He rolled on to the shore, and though many of the Fians gave back before him the majority did not. They surrounded him by the hundred, darting their spears against him, cutting at him with their swords, and though he rolled over and crushed them by the score, others supplied the places of those who fell. Finn from his place saw that the serpent was devouring his men. With his great red tongue

he swept them into his mouth, using it as a mower uses his scythe. No one behaved more bravely than Nod, yet he was one of those whom the serpent devoured. Above the din of the battle Finn heard the lamentation and wailing of his men, as they disappeared in clusters down the serpent's red throat.

'My dead will soon be more numerous than my living,' said Finn, and so saying, he sent *Oscur* against the reptile. If *Oscur* could not kill him, no one else could save perhaps Finn himself, and it was now a great many years since Finn had engaged in conflict with a beast of the kind. *Oscur* stepped down valiantly to the serpent, and poisoning it, cast his spear at the beast's head. The rush of *Oscur's* spear through the air was like the raging of a hurricane through a forest. But the beast was invulnerable. *Oscur's* first spear and second spear sprang back from the serpent's tough

hide as a ball springs back from a wall. When Finn saw that, he called to him his son, Dara, who was a very active and intrepid youth, and he said to him, 'Dara, I must go myself against this monster. Watch me, and when I say "leap," then lightly and valiantly spring into the dragon's mouth, sword in hand, and cut him open from the inside. There only he is vulnerable.' Oscur was still engaged with the serpent, and though he could not wound the serpent owing to the thickness of the skin, he yet held him in check. Finn, without sword, shield, or spear, ran past Oscur and plunged his two hands into the great hairy mane of the beast.

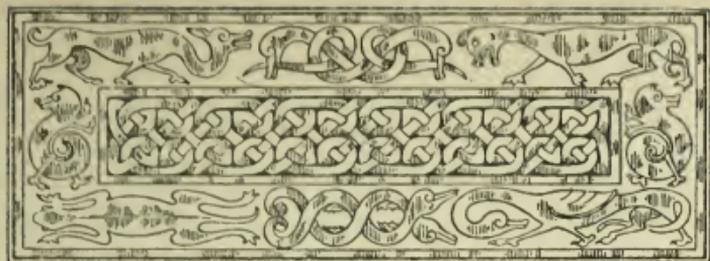
As soon as he got a firm grip, using his utmost strength, he raised the serpent into the air and then threw him again upon the ground, belly upwards. 'Leap,' cried Finn. Dara forthwith sprang as he was, all armed, and his sword in his hand, into the serpent's mouth,

and descended into his terrible throat. There Dara, as soon as he could secure a footing, and indeed that was not easy, cut a slit in the serpent's throat, and continuing cut it downwards for twenty yards. Dara came out all red, but erect, with his sword still in his hand, and behind him in bloody heaps rolled out all the warriors whom the serpent had swallowed. The serpent was partly choked by Finn, and partly killed by Dara's sword. Dara won great honour by this adventure. This was looked upon as one of the bravest leaps ever made in Ireland, and it must be confessed that it is not every one who would spring into the throat of a dragon. Dara was called Dara the Red after that, viz. Dara Derg. Dara did many other brave feats in his time, but this was regarded as his masterpiece. A river of blood rolled from the serpent into the lake, and after this the lake was called Lough Derg, *i.e.* the Red Lake.

Nod, as you may imagine, was not ready to engage in other adventures for some time after this. When taken from the bloody heaps that rolled from the serpent, and when he was washed, it was found that there was no hair on his head, and his broken armour was crushed everywhere into his mangled body.

A couch of healing was a second time made for Nod, and Finn's surgeons and his beautiful nursing - women attended him, and Finn himself, with pleasant words, came every day to his bedside. Yet, in spite of his sufferings, no sooner was Nod healed than he clamoured to be led against the only hydra known to exist in Ireland. It was a black female serpent called Ethnea, which dwelt in a gloomy tarn then called from her Lough Ethnea, but which is now called Glendalough. Such a torrent of warlike ardour and love of adventure now flowed perpetually from Nod's heart.

Finn would not attack that serpent because it was foretold to him that her destruction was reserved for a holy druid of the coming time, whose name would be Caomgen (*i.e.* Beautiful-Born) or, as we pronounce the word, Kevin. That serpent is supposed to have been the death-goddess of the Gael. The holy youth Saint Kevin, Christ's servant, destroyed her in the power of Almighty God, maker of all worlds.



CHAPTER XIII

THE LAST OF NOD

IT was evening in Nod's valley and the sun was descending. The summer was over, and the autumn and winter were in the air. Nod's wife was in her house, guiding and directing her people, who were making the winter store of candles. One of the out-door thralls ran in and said—

‘O lady, there is a brilliant company of young heroes coming to the house.’

‘They shall be welcome,’ said Nod's wife. ‘What kind of man is the leader of the band?’

‘He is young,’ answered the other, ‘tall, and very handsome, with abundant hair as black as the raven, and his complexion clear, so that the blood shows like scarlet in his cheek. He is gay and cheerful, talks and laughs much, and with his spear points out distant places to his companions. There are a score of young men with him, all of a noble appearance, also a company of little boys riding on horses.’

‘That young man is my husband and your lord,’ said Nod’s wife to her people, but they answered firmly that he was not.

Then she threw round her shoulders her best mantle and clasped it in front with a shining brooch, and, followed by her personal attendants, went out to meet the company, leading her little son by the hand.

The young man was indeed Nod, but so altered that no one in the palace, save his wife only, recognised

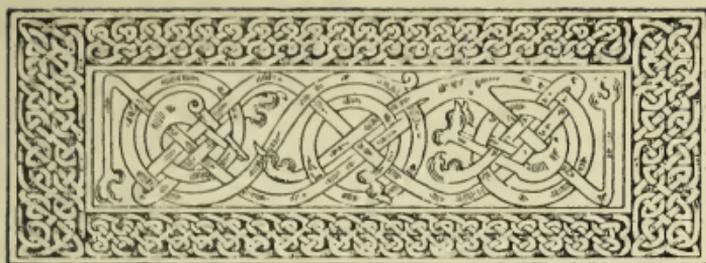
him. All the early grayness had gone from his hair, and his cheeks were full and rosy and his eyes bright, so that one could hardly desire to see a happier, or handsomer, or more attractive young man than was Nod after his six months' visit to Finn and his stay amongst the Fians. Finn used to billet his men upon the country during the winter, and Nod undertook to entertain, that winter, as many men as he would be permitted to take with him. The boys riding on horses were the sons of divers of his new friends. They were to be his foster-children, to be brought up in his house along with his own son. Very joyful was the meeting between husband and wife on that occasion.

Here, then, we will take leave of Nod and his wife. I have only further to add that Nod became as famous for hospitality as he had been formerly notorious for the want of it. So greatly was he changed that he was

said to be the third most hospitable man of his time in all Ireland.

Let me add that Nod was not so much a penurious man as penury itself and dark, fierce selfishness, and the story shows how Finn by force, example, and precept, taught the men of Ireland to live in a more generous, kindly, and human manner than they had done. Those who look deeper into these strange stories will find that the numerous serpents which Finn slew were ugly practices and savage unnatural habits. Finn, like the Greek Apollo and the Greek Hercules, was famous as a serpent-slayer.

The following story will not be pleasing to those who think that the famous King Arthur could do nothing wrong. It is pleasant, however, to find that two such illustrious men as Finn and Arthur, though they had their quarrel, finally became good friends.



CHAPTER XIV

FINN AND KING ARTHUR

ONE day Finn hunted his forest of Ben Edar; that was the old name of the Hill of Howth, near Dublin.

The game of this forest were wild oxen. Only the best dogs were brought out that day, for the urus was an animal of great size, strength, and ferocity. Finn invited Arthur, King of the Britons, to share in that hunt. Arthur came in his galley with twenty-seven men, and took up his station at the head of the harbour, in order to turn back the wild oxen should they take

to the water when hard pressed by the hounds. Finn sat on a rock called the Cairn of Fergal, midway between the top of the hill and the sea, rejoicing in the music of the crying hounds, the roaring of the oxen, and the shouting of his men.

Three dogs chanced to pursue a great ox along the shore of the harbour and dragged him down close to where Arthur stood.

‘There are not in the world hounds like these,’ said his men to Arthur, ‘and let us now put them on board our galley and sail away before the Fians break through the woods and come to us.’

Arthur consented. They put the dogs on board the galley, hoisted sail, and, grasping their oars, lashed the blue sea into foam. Presently there was nothing visible of Arthur and his people save a faint white track on the distant horizon. The dogs were Bran, and the Leopard, and a third called

Adnuail. When they put to shore in Briton-land they went straight to the mountain of Lodan, the son of Lear, and hunted that forest with great joy and signal success. No one, not even Finn, seated though he was upon the cairn, saw the taking of the dogs.

In the evening, after Finn had divided the spoil, the dogs were counted, as was customary with them, and their tale was three short. Finn called out the names, and Bran, the Leopard, and Adnuail were missing. There was great sorrow amongst the Fians at the loss of their three matchless hounds which were the glory of the western world, and many of the men wept. Then Finn called for pure water, and when he had washed his hands he put his thumb to his divining tooth, and it was revealed to him that Arthur had taken away the hounds to Briton-land and was hunting the mountain of Lodan, the son of Lear.

Finn selected nine men to go in

pursuit of the hounds, with Gaul mac Morna for their captain, and Oscur, son of Ossian, to crush every enemy in their path. The nine went to the top of the Hill, in the gray dawn of the day, and looked across the sea to Mananān's Island and 'fasted upon him,' that he should send them his magic boat. They were not long there, when they saw the boat coming. It had no sails and no oars. There was not a man on board, yet the boat leaped and sprang from wave to wave, glittering with gold and pearl. She came to the harbour of Ben Edar, and the nine men got on board, and again the bark beat out into the open sea conducting the heroes to Briton-land. They disembarked and marched to the mountain of Lodan and searched the forest through, till they came to the great booth which Arthur and his men had made for themselves. Arthur and his men were at supper when Finn's people entered the booth.

Arthur welcomed them and bade them sit down to supper.

‘We are come for Finn’s dogs,’ said Gaul mac Morna. ‘If we are to have them peaceably we will accept your hospitality. If not, look to your arms, for we will not leave this house without bringing our dogs with us.’

‘Then you will not leave this house at all,’ said Arthur. ‘For I give you my word, that I would rather see all Finn’s men rolled in bloody shrouds than surrender these dogs. And as you are bent upon war, war you shall have.’

Then weapons screeched and flashed, and a terrible and murderous battle ensued, and the end of the fighting was, that all Arthur’s men were slain, and he himself was wounded. Finn’s men were closing in upon him to slay him, when Oscur son of Ossian sprang forward, and throwing one arm round Arthur, stood against the eight, though their battle-fury was on them,

and that was no small proof of Oscur's intrepidity and no small proof of his warlike prowess, when the eight gave back and let him have his way.

They buried the dead honourably, and set up their mounds and pillar stones, and returned as they came, bringing the three hounds and Arthur. Ere they left the palace, Gaul spied in one corner of it a great gray steed, and in another a beautiful bay mare. He took them with him as plunder. There were no horses like them in the world.

When they brought Arthur before Finn, Finn asked him why he had done that deed, and Arthur bade him look at the hounds and he would cease to be surprised. He also added, 'O Finn, thou hast thy compensation already for that wrong, for I have lost many dear comrades, and my two matchless steeds; keep them, and let the quarrel between us end here.'

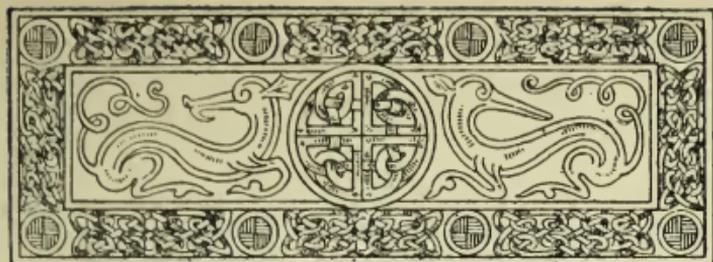
Finn was satisfied with that proposal,

and Arthur remained with him till he was healed, and when he departed Finn dismissed him with kind words, rich and numerous gifts, and a guard of honour. All the horses that were in Erin after that descended from the two steeds which Gaul mac Morna took out of Arthur's house in the mountain of Lodan the son of Lear.

Finn and his men, however, only used horses for racing. They were themselves infantry, and went always on foot. Yet they were fond of horses and had them in great numbers. The following is a verse in one of Caelta's poems which he recited for St. Patrick :—

Three rivers, that used to pour from Finn's
 camp
 On a May-day morning when the sun shone
 brightly,
 A river of men and a river of horses and
 a river of hounds.

PART III
FINN
AND THE HISTORIAN



CHAPTER I

THE HISTORIAN HAS A WELCOME VISITOR

AT the end of a day's hunting Finn and Dering found themselves alone with their two dogs. When Finn wound his horn there was no answering horn. They then went forward, looking around on every side for some sign of human habitation. At last they saw a light and went towards it. The light came from a large shining lamp set in the gate-tower of a handsome dwelling-place. There was a moat, and inside the moat a wall, and within the wall a

good-sized house with trees around it. The drawbridge which spanned the moat was drawn up, but on the side of the moat on which the two men stood was an iron gong, and beneath it a stout club. Dering seized the club and beat upon the gong.

The people of this fort had already retired to rest, but the master was awake. He was sitting beside his fire, arranging a number of beechen tablets on which many things seemed to have been written in strange letters. In fact the man was reading, for in those days books were made of timber. The beechen tablet which he held in his hand contained the history of Finn and his men. He had written this history himself, and was getting the tablets into better order, and lamenting that there were so many things in Finn's history with which he was not acquainted. At the other side of the fire was a boy very sleepy and nodding.

Said the man, 'Oh, that Finn might

lose his way some night when he is hunting, and come here for rest and refreshment. He would tell me the things I want to know. Then I could fill up these empty tablets. Boy,' he said, 'have not the Fianna been hunting all day in the next forest.'

'Truly, O master,' said the boy; 'I myself ran from height to height watching them, but the chase passed away south-westward.'

The man groaned. Just then both man and boy started from their seats, for they heard the thunderous roar of the great iron gong struck by the hand of Finn's man.

'Run, boy,' said the man of the house; 'see who is at the gate and bring me word.'

The boy ran, climbed into the gate tower, and swiftly returned.

'My lord,' he said, 'there are without two men of great stature. The elder and taller of the two is the most beautiful being that these eyes ever

saw. His hair is pure white and rolls in masses over the scarlet mantle that surrounds mighty shoulders; his complexion is fresh and ruddy, and his eyes are blue. There is beside him a hound which he leads by a chain of silver attached to a collar of gold. That hound is a wonder. She has a small head, eyes as terrible as a dragon, and a white spot on her black breast. The man's companion is brown-haired, and he leads by a bronze chain a spotted leopard.'

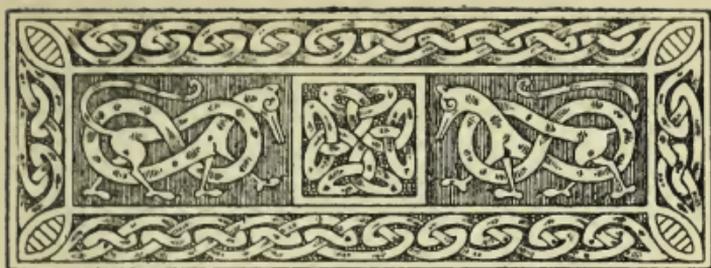
'Put wings to thy feet, lad,' cried the old man in great excitement; 'raise the portcullis and let fall the bridge, for the men are Finn and his man Dering, and thy leopard is only Bran's spotted sister. Haste! haste!'

Meantime Dering would have once more thundered upon the gong, but Finn restrained him.

The old man joyfully received these welcome guests. As all his people had been awakened by the thunder which

Dering had roused from the gong, an excellent supper was soon got ready for the two Fians. Bran and the Leopard had their supper that night served to them in a silver dish, a vessel of great price, for it was the proudest and happiest night in that old man's long life, and well he knew that not Finn only, but those two dogs, would be famous while night and day endure. When they had had their supper Bran and the Leopard came and lay down upon the hearth before the fire, and the old man scanned them closely with great awe and reverence. Bran's ears were red, her legs yellow, the rest of her body was black, save for a round white spot on her breast, and a starry shower of white over her loins. The Leopard was spotted yellow throughout on a ground of black, the spots growing smaller and more frequent towards the neck, and very small upon the head and ears. Of the two, the Leopard seemed to be the more powerful, and

Bran the swifter and more spirited.
Both dogs were sleek and glossy.
There was no beast in the world which
they would not overtake and pull
down. The Leopard's real name was
Sgeolan.



CHAPTER II

FINN'S HUMBLE RELATIONS

I LIKE thee well, old man, for many things,' said Finn, who had now ended his supper. 'Thou hast entertained us nobly and like a king, without officiousness or too hospitable zeal, and hast suffered us to eat our supper in peace, which hungry men like best. I perceive, too, that thou art a lover of dogs like myself, and that there flows from thee a strong torrent of affection and admiration for my two matchless hounds ; and if a man loves my dogs, he shall ever be dear to me.

I perceive, also, that thou art a historian, and historians are very dear to me.'

The old man answered, 'O captain of the Fianna, thy dogs are famous over the whole world, and will be famous to the world's end; nor am I surprised at their glory when I look upon them, and this is the first time I have seen them near at hand. Often have I inquired concerning their birth and breeding, but no man could relate it. The wisest of them said it is unknown.'

'It is unknown,' said Finn.

'I would give much to learn,' said the old man.

'Many have expressed the same wish,' answered Finn.

The old man set drinking vessels on a small table near the fire, also a great measure of ale, and when the two guests had washed their hands in ewers of water, and dried them in napkins, they drew nigh to the fire.

Finn blessed the man and his house, and took a deep draught, draining the last drop from the huge tankard, while the old man wondered.

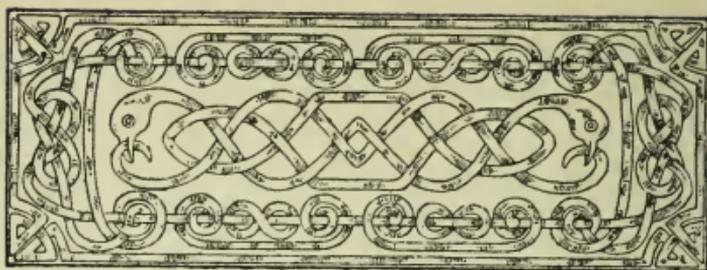
Finn looked earnestly at him and said—‘Bid the servants go to bed, and I will tell thee. I will tell thee other things, too, and thou shalt fill thy empty prepared staves.’

The old man obeyed joyfully, and when he had shut and bolted the doors of the chamber, he returned. He thought his heart would break with excess of joy. Then he sat down at the one side of the fire, and, for the first time, looked at Finn towering on the other, his mighty limbs and huge knotted knees, and his countenance like the sun.

‘Long ago,’ said Finn, ‘for no man who now lives remembers these things, when my first passion for hounds came upon me, I was in my booth on the slopes of the Slieve Bloom Mountains. It was night, and I in my bed. With-

out a storm raged, and the roar of the forest surrounded me, with thunder and lightning and the rushing of rain. I lay awake rejoicing in the uproar ; but while I listened I heard amid the noise a very small and delicate sound, like the tinkling of some exquisitely modulated tympan, exceeding sweet. I must tell thee, too, that ere this my mother's sister was lost and could nowhere be found, and it was supposed that she had been spirited away by the Fomorian enchanters, and was seen subsequently in the form of a beautiful hound. I heard a knocking at the door of the booth, and when I opened it, I was at first dazzled with the flood of light which came in through the door. I thought it was very near lightning. Then I perceived a woman standing there, tall, and wondrous beautiful, with a closed basket in her hand. She gave me the basket, and said—" I have brought these to thee, O Finn, for I have always heard that cousins should

be cousinly." I saw no more of the woman, and when I drew back into the booth and had stirred up the embers and made a blaze, I opened the basket and discovered there two blind puppies of exactly the same colour as those which lie before thee on the hearth. They have been with me ever since,' said Finn, 'and they are with me now. These hounds, then, matchless for beauty, speed, courage, strength, and intelligence, are my own cousins,' said Finn.



CHAPTER III

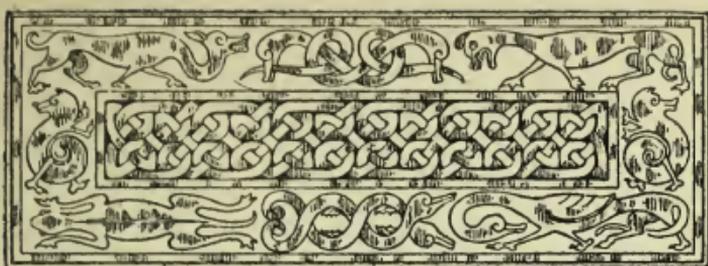
FINN TELLS ABOUT HIS CHILDHOOD

‘**I**N victories and blessings for ever, O captain of the Fians of Fail,’ answered the old man. ‘That, indeed, is a strange and memorable story, nor am I surprised at it when I contemplate their beautiful proportions, and think of their rare intelligence and sagacity, of which I have heard many things. And now, O Finn, if it would not be irksome to thee, I would gladly learn somewhat of thy boyish life. As long as I can remember thou hast been famous and powerful, ruling in the midst of thy

unconquerable warriors and indefatigable hunters. But men tell vaguely of a time, long ago, when thou wert solitary and surrounded with peril of many kinds. They also say that the sons of Morna searched the world for thee, to slay thee, when thou wert a young child. But of these things they speak vaguely. If it would not weary thee, I would gladly learn these things with more exactness from thy own eloquent and correctly-speaking lips.'

'I will tell thee somewhat,' said Finn. 'It will not weary me, for I am by nature eloquent, and speech flows from me without effort. I was a babe in the cradle when that great battle was fought in which my father was slain. The conquerors, viz. the sons of Morna, forthwith spread themselves over Ireland with the object of exterminating all my father's sons and grandsons, and, in fact, our whole race. A fierce company came straight from

the battle to my mother's house to kill me. No news of the battle had yet reached my mother, when two strange women entered the house, snatched me from the cradle before her eyes, and fled. They were leaving the palace by one door when my enemies were entering by the other. The latter gave chase, but they might as well have chased the wind as chased those women. The women brought me to the depths of the forests which clothe the Slieve Bloom Mountains. There I was weaned, and dwelt as a child with the two women in the forest, cowering low before the wrath of the sons of Morna, whose trackers and searchers continued seeking for me. That was how I survived the slaughter of all my father's house.'



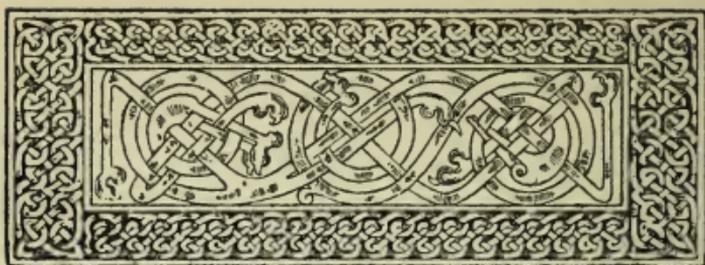
CHAPTER IV

FINN'S FIRST QUARRY

‘**I** WOULD know now, O Finn,’ said the old man, ‘what game, bird or beast, first fell by thy hand. Now indeed thou art a mighty hunter, thy forests are everywhere, and thy game-laws embrace all Erin. Few are the houses in which a hound-whelp is not being reared for thee, and, truly, the great game and the small which fall before thee in any one year, who could number? But of all fame there is a beginning, as the mightiest river has a small source.’

‘That is true,’ said Finn, ‘and I will tell thee. Afterwards my protectors fled with me out of the Slieve Bloom Mountains, for the sons of Morna discovered my retreat, and they put a ring of men and dogs round the mountains, and were closing inwards. Nevertheless, the heroines bore me safely through them all, and fled with me into the extreme west of Munster, beyond the beautiful glen which is called Glengariffe, to a place on the haven of Bera, which is known as Dunboy. There they built a hut on the edge of a wood close to a small lake. I used to play on the shore of the lake, and send smooth finger stones skimming along the surface, and soon began to shoot very straight and far. One day a wild duck came sailing past with her brood of twelve ducklings. I took a good aim at her with a carefully-selected stone. She saw the missile approaching, leaping from point to point on the smooth water, and with her wings began to

beat the water in the act of raising herself for flight. Yet the stone struck and cut off her two wings. The bird, accompanied by her orphaned brood, drifted towards the shore, and when I could reach her, I seized her joyfully, and also took and put in my bosom the twelve ducklings, and so hastened to the house, where the heroines praised me much for my skill and success. The plucking, the roasting, basting, and carving of that duck gave these persons and myself as much pleasure as was ever got out of any similar adventure. That,' said Finn, 'was my first exploit as a hunter.'



CHAPTER V

FINN AND THE POETS

‘**I**T is reported,’ said the old man, ‘that no one understands or loves poetry better than thyself, and I know that no youth can be enrolled amongst thy Fians unless he can make a good poem.’

‘I myself made that law,’ said Finn, ‘for many good reasons, and chiefly for this, that youths who love poetry are more readily inflamed to the performance of great deeds, are more obedient to their captains, and hold their banner and their battalion in greater esteem.’

One rude bone-hewer may indeed conquer a youth of the kind I love, but set against each other two armies, one of warlike boors and the other such as are my Fians, and they are not to be compared.

‘ My own poetic nature I inherit from my mother. It was she who composed that lullaby which begins, “ Sleep, my child, in soft slumber sleep.” She came secretly to the place where the heroines guarded me, and took me in her arms and to her bosom and sang that lullaby and departed.

‘ After the first hunting exploit which I have described, I hunted perpetually, and got food for my protectors. Then the passion of poetry grew upon me. There were six poets who lived together in a dell in the Galtee Mountains. I abandoned my protectors and went to live with them, and they taught me. I lived with these sons of wisdom and beauty till one day when a robber and plunderer out of Leinster came and

slew them all and took me away captive, and compelled me to live with him in his den, which, like a stork's nest, was in the midst of a cold, bleak, desolate marsh, a wide watery expanse of sorrow.

'Afterwards, when I was a young man, I came to the beautiful Boyne, hearing that the wisest men were there. I became servant to a man who called himself Finn ; my own name then was Demna. It chanced that the day I entered his service he had taken a salmon in the pool of the Boyne which is called Linn Fec. He bade me bake the salmon and serve it. When I set the salmon before him, he asked me whether I had tasted the fish. I said, "no," but that I had touched it with my thumb to know if it were sufficiently baked, and afterwards put my burned thumb to my mouth. "Alas," he said, "the prophecy is fulfilled. This fish is not for me, but for thee. It is the Salmon of Knowledge, and thou art the true Finn, about whom the prophets

have been prophesying from ancient days. Sit in my place and eat the fish." So I sat in his place and ate the Salmon of Knowledge. That is the reason why, when I put my thumb under my divining tooth, the knowledge of things past and to come is revealed to me.

'I remained on the banks of the Boyne with the wise men there till I had mastered all the mysteries of poetry and all the knowledge which is contained in that art. On the day that I was initiated and admitted a member of their learned company, I composed a poem in proof of my poetic skill.'

'Prithee repeat it for me,' said the old man.

Finn repeated it.

'May-day! delightful time! how
 beautiful the colour,
 The blackbirds sing their full lay.
 Oh that Laeg were here.
 The cuckoos sing in constant strains.
 How welcome the noble

Brilliance of the season ever. On
the margin of the branchy woods
The summer swallows skim the
streams.

The horses seek the pool.

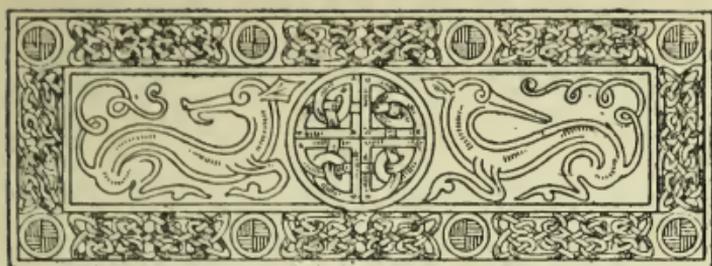
The heath spreads out its long hair.

The weak white bog-down grows.

Sudden consternation attacks the
signs. The planets in their course
running exert an influence.

The sea is lulled to rest, flowers
cover the earth.'

Finn repeated the poem slowly in order that the old man might remember it. The metre was complicated and intricate, and the poem throughout riveted with many shining alliterations, so that it might be the more easily remembered, and defy the assaults of time.



CHAPTER VI

FINN REVEALS HIMSELF FURTHER

IT is on account of my poetic nature and my close intimacy with many excellent poets that I have pleasures which are not usually enjoyed by warriors and hunters. Dear to me is the cry of sea-gulls and the thunder of the great billows of the Atlantic against the cliffs of Erris, the washing of water against the sides of ships, and the sound, foam, and motion behind them as they cleave the fluid sea, for not dearer to me is the firm earth than the never-resting ocean. I love to hear

the clear flute of the blackbird in the morning, and the thrush's song as he sits by himself and sings when the sun goes down. The beautiful changes of the varying year are sweet to me, and truly there are not many sights and sounds that I do not love, or from which I do not derive pleasure, so that solitude is no more irksome to me than company, and yet I am the most sociable of men; so that I do not surround myself with guards and royal state, but live simply in the midst of my people, like one of themselves, for I love them well, and well they love me.'

The old man, still thirsting for knowledge, said, 'O Finn, tell me who is the best man and who is the worst among the Fians.'

Finn answered, 'I myself am the best man, and Dara-duff from the Black Mountain is the worst. There is a great deal of life in me,' said Finn; 'and a great deal of life goes out of

me There is death in him, and a great deal of death goes out of him. Yet he never had less power than he has now. Even if I could destroy him, I am not permitted to do so, for his roots spring mysteriously out of the roots of the world. He has been in the world always, and will be in it till the end of time.'

'Tell me next, O Finn, if I may ask that question, what gods are most worshipped by thee?'

Finn answered wrathfully, 'I worship no gods; for these sorcerers and enchanters of Erin who, because they are invisible and immortal and possess certain powers, are worshipped by the vulgar, are not revered at all by me. I fear them not and never have feared them, but I think they fear me. The glorious sun I worship, and the firmament with its flashing lights, and the unseen wonderful wind, and the strong earth, and the illimitable ocean, for they are everlasting divine powers

proceeding from some source diviner still. But as for those people who skulk invisible in the hills and frighten simple folk so that they make to them costly offerings, yea, have slain in their honour their own children, I regard them not at all, and that they know.'

The old man trembled when he heard these daring words. Nevertheless, in his secret heart he rejoiced to think that a man could be so brave.

'Dismiss me now to my rest and my slumber, O amiable and much-inquiring historian!' said Finn; 'for I arose early this morning, and that was an early rising when a man could not see the sky between his outspread fingers, or distinguish the leaves of the oak from those of the beech.'

While this conversation lasted Dering had shown no signs of sleep or drowsiness; he sat erect, listening with bright eyes.

In the morning Finn asked the historian many questions concerning

his manner of work, and commended him, and gave him good counsel, as, for example, 'that he should not, in making his histories, concern himself exclusively with wars and things horrible, but should tell also of the common daily life of men and women; let women and children,' he said, 'be frequent in your stories, for they are the light of life, nor let the sun be long absent from your tale, seeing that he himself is never long absent from us. Also,' he said, 'I perceive there is some domestic sorrow in thy mind. What is it?'

The old man said that he had a very dear grandson who was sick of a decline.

'Bring him to me,' said Finn.

Finn looked upon the lad and asked whether there was a well of pure water in the neighbourhood, and when they answered him 'Yes,' he bade them lead him to it.

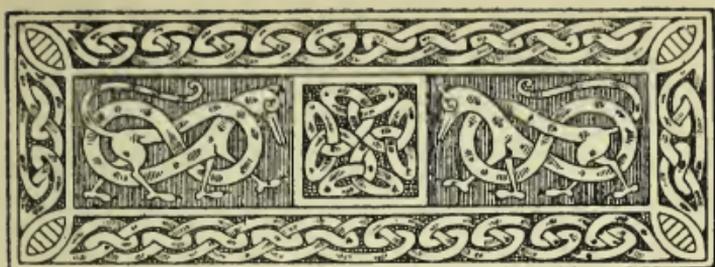
There he scooped up the sparkling

water in the hollow of his right hand, and when he had spoken some poetry in a strange tongue, he gave to the young man to drink. From that day the youth steadily recovered.

Finn caused the whole household to come before him. He spake kind words to them all, and he blessed the old man and his people, and went away with Dering and the dogs, and they saw him no more.

PART IV

THE COMING OF FINN



CHAPTER I

NOBLE ANCIENTS IN ADVERSITY

NOW that you are sufficiently acquainted with Finn as he appeared in the fulness of his power and glory, I desire to let you see him in his youth, while he was struggling upwards out of obscurity, when he was friendless, solitary, and surrounded by enemies. The lesson taught by Finn in his power is the lesson of flowing goodwill towards men. From his youth we learn the lesson of cheerfulness and courage.

In the heart of Connaught, a deep trackless forest, and in the heart of

the forest a rude booth of timber, rudely roofed with rushes and heather. Brushwood grew above it and around it, so that one might pass many times and almost touch the house without discovering it. In this booth, one wild December evening, half a dozen old men—very old men—sat crouched around a small fire of sticks. They were clad in ancient rags, and in skins; their faces were thin and hunger-bitten; their fingers long, lean, and crooked. The meanest of them looked a king. Fate had pressed very hard on these old men, but had not conquered them, and their eyes shone under most rigid brows. Who were these noble old men clad in rags and skins, nourishing here in poverty and famine some unconquerable resolution? I shall tell you.

The captain of the Fians in his time was Cool, son of Trenmōr, the mightiest of the Fian captains down to his time, and Cool, remember, was the father of Finn. Then the sons of Morna

revolted against him, saying that Gaul mac Morna, their brother, was the better man, and should be captain. Each party drew together an army, and the battle for the Fian leadership was fought on the banks of the Liffey. There Cool was defeated and slain ; the sons of Morna triumphed and raised their brother Gaul to the leadership. Luchat Mael was the champion who slew Cool and took from him his satchel, which contained the jewels of sovereignty and right leadership. He slung it to his own girdle. While he kept that bag, the tyranny of the sons of Morna was secure, and it was supposed that there was not a champion in the world who could conquer Luchat Mael. What these jewels were is not rightly known, but there was great power and virtue in them.

After the battle, the sons of Morna went through Ireland exterminating all the breed and seed of the overthrown

family. Nearly all the warriors of Cool who escaped from the battle were obliged to make terms with the new tyranny, and swear allegiance to Gaul mac Morna. A very few did not. These were the old men whom we saw, clad in rags and skins, crouching around their feeble fire in the booth in the forest.

At first they lived by hunting, poaching it might be called, for all the forests and all the game belonged now to Gaul mac Morna. They shifted from mountain to mountain and forest to forest, from lake to river and river to lake, for the trackers and searchers of the sons of Morna were on their traces. Finally they were pressed into greater confinement, so that they could only hunt by night and by stealth, and while one man speared a salmon, there was another who kept watch, and oftentimes they were acquainted with the soreness of famine. Yet even thus they refused to make terms with the new tyranny.

‘To the sons of Morna,’ they said, ‘we will oppose a resolution which hunger and death shall never break.’ But hardship and years began to tell upon their iron frames, and their great limbs wasted away. Then some of them grew too old to do anything but sit by the fire and keep it alive, while those who were not so old set traps and springes near the cabin, and sometimes snared a few birds and small game, and sometimes did not. Often the very old warriors turned hungry eyes on the others as they came back empty-handed, but no word of reproach was ever uttered, nor at any time one word signifying that famine had expelled their heroic determination from their hearts.

This night the younger men returned, bringing with them a red-winged thrush. Silently they plucked the bird and suspended it over the red embers by a twine of twisted grass. Grimly the seniors smiled as the small bird re-

volved over the glowing embers and dropped its scant fatness, which hissed slightly as it met the fire. They thought of nights in the Speckled House on Hill of Allen long ago, the feasts there, the strong carousing, and all the joyous and glorious days and nights of their youth, when Cool, son of Trenmōr, their captain, was strong and unsubdued.

‘Brothers, we are coming very near the end,’ said one noble elder. ‘There is little nourishment in this thrush, and yesterday and the day before we had not even a thrush. Be it so, but I would like to die hearing that the tyranny of the sons of Morna was shaken.’

‘Dear friend, that thou shalt both hear and see,’ answered the one relative of Cool who had escaped the fury of the Clanna Morna and the hosts of their trackers. His name was Crimall, son of Trenmōr; he was chief over them. ‘It was surely foretold to me,

how, by a friendless and solitary youth, a banned, outlawed child of the wilderness, the sovereignty of the sons of Morna would be overthrown.'

'That we believe,' they said, 'for it was surely prophesied, but not that the youth in skins would arise in our time.'

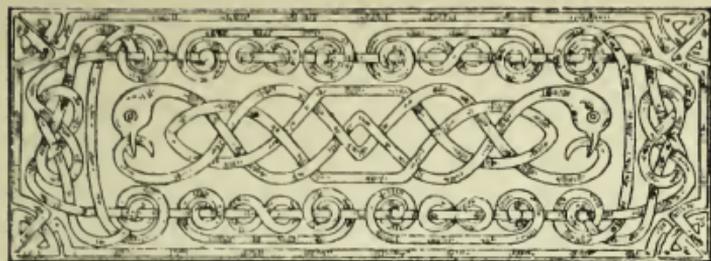
The bird being now roasted, Crimall made an even division of the same, viz. a seventh part to each man. Then he said, 'O my coevals, listen to me. I now tell you tidings which I have concealed for a dark hour like this. The youth of many prophecies has appeared and there is perplexity in the councils of Gaul mac Morna. He and his fierce warriors are already looking for the end.'

In spite of sore famine the old men dropped their morsels and gazed upon the withered senior. 'Yes, dear and faithful brothers,' continued Crimall, 'he has appeared; now from one point, now from another, he descends upon them out of the wilderness to burn and

to slay, and again the wilderness covers him. He has the strength of a hundred men ; he is swifter than a deer, terrible as a dragon, and glorious as the sun on his fiery wheels. So much I know for a certainty ; the end truly draweth nigh. We, the few and faithful, will again sit at the right hand of our own Fian-captain, in the flashing hall of the Tech Brac, on the flat-topped hill.'

'Oh, that we could believe thy words, Crimall, strong-hearted and wise, but even while we speak, the trackers of the Clanna Morna may be at the door, and the youngest of us has not strength even to raise the heavy swords, which were like switches in our hands while our power and manly force were still with us.'

'Hark,' said one of them, 'even now I hear some man bursting through the brushwood and young trees. Stand to your weapons, my brothers ; it is an enemy, for friends in all broad Erin we have none.'



CHAPTER II

THE OLD MEN HAVE A STRANGE GUEST

IT was pitiful to see the response to this challenge, for, though all stood up and sought to arm themselves and stand on their defence, they were not able. With difficulty they raised their mighty shields, and their huge swords trembled in their ancient and nerveless hands.

Some one knocked at the door, and, as it seemed, with the butt-end of a great spear, the weak door was splintered with the blow. The strongest and youngest of the Fians stood behind

the door and cried, 'Art thou a friend or an enemy?'

'A friend,' answered a young, cheery, and laughing voice from without.

'Unbar the door,' cried old Crimall. 'Deceit is not an attribute of the Clanna Morna—I will do them that justice. There was no lying or treachery found amongst them at any time. Unbar the door.'

'There is mockery in the voice,' said the old Fian. 'It is the voice of one who laughs.'

'Nay, not mockery,' answered Crimall, 'but laughter only. It is the laughter of a young and happy heart. Unbar the door.'

The old Fian unbarred the door, and a young man, large and mighty-thewed, entered the booth laughing, his whole face suffused with sparkling tides of some great joy. He was white and ruddy, his bright face lit up the whole gloomy chamber of age and sorrow. His lips and cheeks were

smooth, the golden masses of his hair rolled over his wide shoulders. He wore a huge rough mantle of many skins of wild-boars sewn together; his shirt was of deer-skin laced with leathern thongs; his knees bare, and his moccasins of untanned hairy ox-hide. He carried a great shield and spear; the bright end of a scabbard projected below his black skin-cloak. He came straight to Crimall and bending low in reverence said—

‘Noble elder, I am a hunter lost in these woods. I seek supper and a bed, for I am homeless and supperless.’

‘Thou art right welcome, O youth,’ said Crimall. ‘We too are hunters, but fortune has not smiled on our labours this day. Nevertheless what we have with us in the booth is thine.’

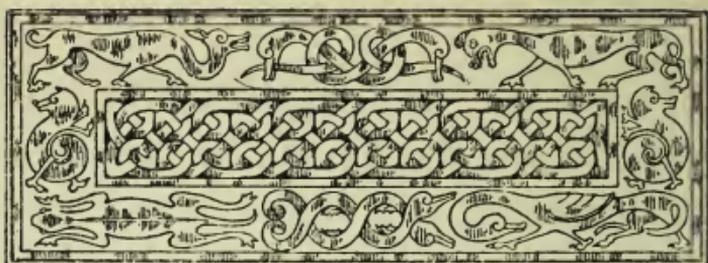
A sylvan seat, which, indeed, was only the sawn end of a tree, was set before the fire for the young hero, and while he conversed with Crimall, the others contributed their small fragments.

Then a platter containing the just dismembered bird was given to him.

‘Would we had better to offer thee, O illustrious youth whom the gods love, but we can give thee pure water from the spring and a pleasant bed of heather and rushes, and our young men will rise early in the morning and search the snares and springes. Haply some birds or animals may be taken therein on which thou mayest break thy fast well. Music we cannot give thee, for music hath not been heard amongst us for a long time ; but there is one amongst us who is a good historian, and will entertain thee with stories of old times till sweet sleep makes heavy thine eyelids.’

The laughing light died out of the young man’s eyes and lips, as the glittering sunshine glancing on a million waves fades from the sea when a black cloud comes over the sun. He looked at the wretched repast upon the beechen platter, the little fragments in number

the same as the number of the old men. He marked their hollow gray faces and their eyes bright with famine, bright too just then with the light of kindness and goodwill. He laid the platter on the ground beside him, and put his great hands before his face, and bowed down his head and wept. The old men preserved silence. Youth, they thought, hath many sorrows which cold age cannot comprehend.



CHAPTER III

THE GUEST PROVES HIMSELF AN EXPERT HUNTER

WHEN the boy had made an end of weeping, he stood up and said—

‘Noble old men, good fortune in hunting doth not fall to every one each day, but sometimes one man meets with it, and sometimes another. Ill fortune was yours to-day and may be mine to-morrow, but this day success has attended my hunting, and there is with me a sufficiency of food for all. Put on the fire, I pray you, fresh timber, not little sticks but big

logs, and make a good fire, for we shall all feast well to-night.'

So saying he left the booth, while the old men, wondering, gazed at one another, and presently reappeared bending in the low doorway and bearing a deer on his shoulders, the two fore legs caught in one hand on his breast, and the two hind legs in another, while the head, with lolling tongue and branching antlers, hung down on one side. It was no fallow-deer, but a great red-deer of the forest, a buck, very large and fat. Out over his head then he flung the huge carcass, which fell with a heavy dull sound and a clash of the clattering antlers on the floor of the booth, and went out, and returned carrying in his right hand a tusked boar held by the bristling hure, and in his left a sow grasped by a leg, and flung them down beside the deer. He returned once more trailing behind him a long string of small game, hares and badgers, wild geese and swans, fastened together by

a stout cord of cut and twisted hide, so that all the farther end of the booth was heaped with birds and beasts.

‘Truly thou art a mighty hunter, O brave and generous youth,’ said Crimall, ‘but bring in now thy hounds. Why shouldst thou leave them without? We too, alas! love hounds, and thine will be most welcome at our hearth.’

‘Truly there are no hounds with me,’ said the lad. ‘Whatever be the powers that fashioned me, they have made my limbs swift and tireless, so that even the red-deer are not apt to escape from me when I get upon their traces. Yet, why should I boast? You, too, have doubtless in your day run down swift game. Verily, the tongue of youth is apt to be loud in declaring its own glory. Here I think is a sufficiency of meat, and I chance to have bread too, for I am not a hunter only, but a warrior and spoiler; I sacked a lime-white noble Dûn this day, and have brought with me some of the spoil.’

He went out and returned bearing a great leathern sack in one hand, which he flung upon the floor. Sweetly, with a musical sound of ringing metal, that sack fell on the hard floor, and from the mouth of the sack rolled a great horn rimmed with silver, and a silver cup which had eyes of crystal in it. In the other hand he bore what seemed one long pillar. The end of that pillar he planted firmly in the ground, and it stood there upright. There were three score large cakes in that pillar. Through each cake ran a spear, and the head of the spear was thrust into the floor. From the pillar he took a score of cakes and laid them on the hearth, and again addressed the astonished elders.

‘A sufficiency of pure water, noble seniors, is right welcome at times, and ever in the morning and in the afternoon, before the declining of the sun. Then indeed no other beverage is more invigorating to the hunter, but at night and when friends meet and feast to-

gether joyfully, old strong ale bears the bell, if I, a mere lad, may speak thus confidently before seniors and superiors.'

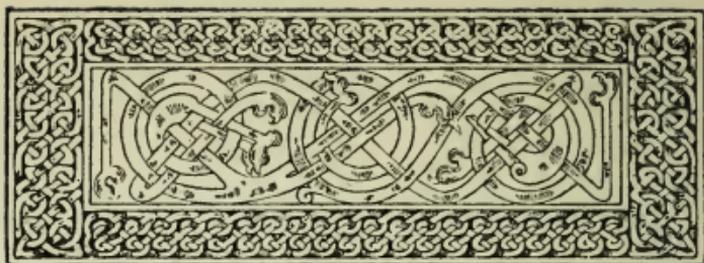
'Truly, my son,' said old Crimall, 'thou hast spoken aright, and according to the traditional wisdom of the ancients—

For the hunter in his glad labours
The pure cold glittering spring,
And for the warrior when he bends his knee
to the battle
And his brow to the pale fierce fight ;
But there is no feasting without ale.

Nevertheless, on this occasion, pure water must serve our needs.'

'Say not so, father,' answered the youth laughing. From his very hair light seemed to radiate, and the clatter of his skins sounded like sweet music in the old men's ears. He went to the door and plucked up the tree that served for the door-jamb, and then smaller trees that were next to it, so that the whole house shook, and the roof was drawn awry. He went out

into the night and returned kicking before him through the doorway a great barrel, and then a second, and then a third, and he set them on end next the side wall in a row, and broke open one of them with a downward slap of his hand, plucked out and threw aside the broken staves, and took the sack by the end and shed out a score of great cups and goblets that flashed and twinkled as they rolled on the floor, and set eight of them on the unopened barrels, so that any one choosing to do so might drink, and kicked the rest into the back part of the booth.



CHAPTER IV

FINN

‘**H**AST thou any other surprises in store for us, O youth, beloved of the gods?’ said Crimall, who trembled as he spoke, for fear and hope made him like ice and fire.

‘What thing above all other things in the world wouldst thou see with greatest joy, son of Trenmōr, son of Basna?’

And Crimall answered straight—

‘The bag that was at my brother’s girdle in the battle of Cnoqa, with his jewels of sovereignty and power within it, and the head of Luchat Mael, and

both in the hands of my brother's only son.'

'I have them with me,' cried the lad, as he threw back his boar-skin mantle, and held out the jewel-bag in one hand and a huge black head in the other. 'Here is Cool's treasure-bag and the treasures in it, and here is Luchat Mael's head, whom I met and slew this day in fair fight, and I am Cool's youngest son whom the druidesses bore away after the battle, and I am waging war on the Clanna Morna and rending their tyranny, and all Ireland is a shaking sod under my feet.'

Then the old men all together cried aloud for joy, yea, they screamed together like eagles or the sea-gulls of the cliffs of Erris when they wheel and cry in their multitudes between the gray cliffs and the sea, so the old men cried; and they flung their arms around the youth and kissed his head and his cheeks, and his shoulders, his hands, and feet, and wept till their

voices were choked with lamentation, and their eyes became like rivers of salt water, and a third part of the night went by before they made an end.

Afterwards they washed their faces in pure water, and laughed as much as before they wept. Then they turned their minds to supper, and skinned and cut up the game, and roasted great steaks of venison on the red embers. Also they cleared out the old disused Fian oven, and stewed and seethed great quantities of flesh in steam, and if they had any bright attire left, or any ornament, it was brought forth, and they ate, and drank, and caroused, and related to each other their many adventures, and the old men ever kept their eyes upon Finn and noted every word that came from his mouth.

When they had conversed for a long time, Finn said: 'Now, if it is pleasing to you, I will play for you on my *clairsech* and sing, for what is a feast without music and singing?' From his

great boarskin mantle then he produced a little harp and removed the sheath of fine soft white doeskin, and, when he had turned the pegs and brought the strings to the correct tone, he said : ' I will sing you my own songs, that you may judge of my proficiency in poetry, as I learned it from the six poets with whom I associated in the woody dells of Slieve Crot.' He sang for them a song in praise of the wind, beginning—

Sweet to me is the voice of the wind,
Alike when he whispers in the leaves
And when he sounds his strong *dord* in the
tree-tops,
Bending the forests in his wrath.

He sang a second song in praise of the sea, ' the boundless unconquerable realms of Lir,' and a third in honour of the sun, and a fourth in honour of the earth.

Crimall said, ' Those are good songs, my son. I like thy verses well and especially those in honour of the firm, strong, rocky, and all-supporting earth.

We, the Fians of thy sire, were accustomed to kiss the earth three times before we went into any battle.'

'That custom shall be maintained,' said Finn ; and then he said, 'I have a wonder with me, that is to say, a man and a woman, and they are not seen. The man's height is the span of my hand, and the woman's somewhat less, and there are not in the seen worlds, or in the unseen, a pair of singers and musicians like them. Cnu-Derole and Blana, sing and play for the noble Fians, who were my father's dear friends and comrades.'

Thereat the Fians heard slow, sweet, fairy music and singing, strange, unearthly harmonies and songs in an unknown tongue, low, faint, and remote. The Fians wept hearing them.

'They are husband and wife,' said Finn ; 'and they never cease to be in love with each other. They are with me always, and I am as dear to them as they are to me.'

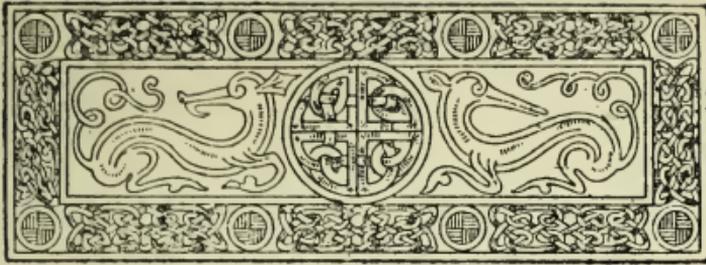
‘You have another wonder at your girdle,’ said Crimall, ‘though you know it not. I mean the inexhaustible horn that is in thy father’s treasure-bag. Wash thy hands, my son, and be not afraid to remove it. It is wrapped in the skin of an ermine.’ Finn washed his hands, and took out the horn, and removed the ermine skin. The horn was rimmed with silver and had little breastplates of crystal, like eyes. ‘Fill the horn,’ said Crimall, ‘and hand it to me.’ Finn did so, and Crimall took a long, deep draught out of it, and handed it to the old man who sat next him, who did the same, and handed it to a third. So it came to Finn last, who thought that he surely would empty the horn; but when he gave over, the horn was not half empty, and when he put it again in Crimall’s hands it was full to the brim and overflowing. Crimall took the goblet and emptied it into the fire. There went up from the fire a thick blue smoke,

shot with stars and lightnings, and a sweet perfume filled the whole booth.

‘That is indeed a wonder,’ said Finn; ‘this goblet must be one of the marvels of the earth.’

‘It is,’ said Crimall; ‘the name of it is Elba. I shall tell thee its story another time. I have shown thee its properties now to teach thee the nature of the treasures contained in that bag, in order that you may cherish and safeguard it. That horn has other properties also. If it is filled with water, he who drinks will find in it the liquor that he likes best, and this will happen whether the horn be filled with fresh water from the spring or with salt water from the sea. That bag is filled with instruments of enchantment.’ Finn carefully wrapped up the goblet and put it back into the bag.

Finn, of course, told the old men all his history. The following is his account of the way in which he won his wife.



CHAPTER V

FINN'S LOVE STORY

AFTER I escaped from the watery stronghold of that robber who had slain my friends and tutors, the six poets, I was with the two heroines once more in the Slieve Bloom forests. I used to hunt for them continually, and our larder was never empty. When I next went abroad, I came to Bantry, on the shore of the great bay of Bera in the south. I offered my services to the King of Bantry. He asked me what I could do, and I said I could hunt. The King of Bantry made me

his hunter. I used to hunt for him in the woods and mountains of the wild adjoining country. There was one spot there very dear to me on account of its beauty; it is called the Rough Glen (Glen-gariffe). There are beautiful little bays and inlets of the sea there, and overhanging mountains, and streams, and delightful woods. The birds sing there in the winter. Once while I was hunting at a distance from home, I saw a number of people assembled, kings, and nobles, and noble ladies in holiday attire—a very gay and delightful scene. I came to the assembly and mingled with the wild people of the district who were onlookers. No one knew me in that place, nor was it known anywhere, save to my two benefactresses, that I was the lost son of Cool, son of Trenmōr. Amongst the noble ladies was one seated on a throne, with others in attendance on her, and guards. She was young, but looked proud and dis-

dainful. Never before in dreams or with my waking eyes had I seen any maiden so beautiful. I turned to a bystander and said, "Who is this princess who is like the morning star, and what is the meaning of this assembly?" She heard me, for there was a waiting silence upon the assembly, and turned her eyes towards me. Then she started, as I thought, and blushed and looked away quickly.

'The bystander answered, "Thou art surely a stranger in this country. That princess, who is like the morning star for beauty, is the only daughter of the King of Rushy Ciarra. Many noble youths and famous champions have sought her in marriage, but from the first she declared that it was a *ges* to her" (a druidic commandment) "not to marry any man who could not leap yonder deep cleft in the mountain side; and truly it is an awful leap, and those who have attempted it are at the bottom of the cleft. There has been

no relenting in her, and no compassion, so powerful is the *ges*, as some think, or so great is her love of virginity, as others say. This morning a king's son named Crimthann hath promised to leap the chasm or perish there like others."

'I pressed through the wild people, and knew that she was ever aware of my doings even when pride restrained her from looking towards me. I was clad in my skins, and these fastened together in any wise. I came to the nobles, and saluting them respectfully, asked whether I might pass through that presence and examine the cleft. For answer two of them undertook to push me back, but I stood like a rock against them, and they and others at the same time raised against me their voices and their weapons. The maiden was agitated and alarmed at this, and said, "Let the hunter youth examine the cleft if it be pleasing to him. See you not that he is a stranger?"

All in my skins as I was, truly a wild spectacle, I bowed low to the maiden, and thanked her for her courtesy, and went to the chasm's edge. Far below, a torrent ran through the ravine, so distant that it was dumb ; and at the other side were sharp crags and crooked points of rock. I measured the distance with my eye, and felt certain that I could make the leap, for, owing to my manner of life, I was truly a good leaper. I returned, and, because I had found favour in her eyes, came and took my stand amongst the nobles and men of war, and was well received by them on this second occasion.

‘Then from the west there came a splendid company, led by a young man nobly attired, wearing a brooch of gold in his five-times-folded mantle ; a very graceful youth, whose form and shapely limbs seemed to promise success in that venture, so that the blood seemed to stand still in my heart, for fear that he might succeed, and when I looked

to the maid she was pale, too, fearing that the young man might accomplish the leap.

‘He approached, and having made her a reverence, and addressed her and her people in an eloquent manner, he withdrew, and stripped off his mantle and jerkin of fine satin, so that there was upon him only a close-fitting light shirt. He took off his shoes, too, and put on others carefully prepared for such a feat. Then, when he was in readiness, a trumpet sounded, and he ran towards the chasm, having the fleetness of a deer and the gracefulness of a fawn, so that I said, “Surely the man will leap the cleft and I shall die.” But when he neared the chasm and saw the crooked rocks and crags at the other side, and became aware of the dark, fearsome depths of the ravine, he hesitated and swerved, baulking the leap. Then the maiden looked at me, and from her two eyes, and her lips, and her whole countenance, I saw love

for myself pour forth in torrents, and she saw the same flow from me to her, for no one observed us on that occasion.

‘The young man, Crimthann, after he had been encouraged by his people, addressed himself to the leap a second time, and yet a third, but he ever swerved, baulking the leap; and in the end broke into tears and went away. Then I arose, and taking courage, stood before the throne and offered to take the leap which Crimthann had refused, if the maid would accept me for her husband. She was silent and pale with terror, and did not answer. Her father and the attendant nobles told me that she would not, and, laughing, they bade me save my neck for the service of my king, and that whole bones were better than broken ones, and other such-like speeches.

‘I said that I would not take an answer from them, only from the damsel, that it was her and not any of them-

selves I desired to marry. She said somewhat in a low voice to her father. He raised his head and said, laughing—

“She says that she never saw any one worse dressed.”

‘That may be,’ I answered, ‘but it is not my skins that I propose as a husband, but myself, and my question is not answered.’

‘After a further colloquy her father spoke again and said—

“My daughter is sorry to have taunted thee with thy attire, and she could wish her husband in other things to resemble thee, but will not consent to the leap.”

‘Then,’ said I, ‘if the damsel will not give me the same promise that she made to others, I shall leap the chasm notwithstanding, and having reached the far side I shall return to my lord.’

‘When she heard that, and saw that I was fully determined, she burst into tears and consented, and her father said—

“ I am truly sorry for thee, O brave youth, and how shall I make an excuse to thy lord, who is my foster-brother, when he learns that between us we have killed his man ? ”

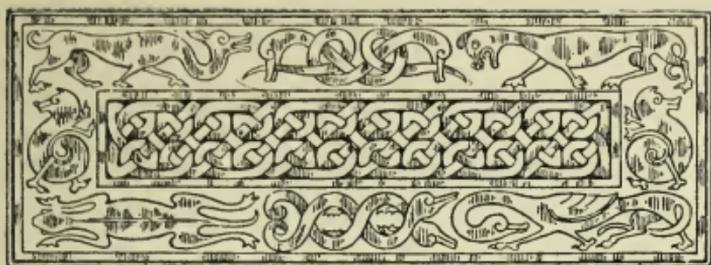
‘ Then rejoicing, I chose my distance from the chasm’s edge, and I threw off none of my attire, only laced it with a thong close to me that the skins might not impede me in my flight over the cleft. And I ran to the edge and sprang, though a woman’s scream rang in my ears, and rose with an airy bird-like motion, and lighted with my two feet on the other side on smooth ground beyond the rocks, and in like manner I sprang back, and I approached the noble company and asked them whether that was sufficient, speaking deliberately, for I was in no way exhausted or out of breath. They were astonished and pale, but when I offered to do it again they said that it was enough.

‘ In this manner I won my dear wife.

‘ I went with that company to the

King of Rushy Ciarra's palace, and I got there splendid raiment fit for a king's son, and our marriage was celebrated with great honour. And now, dear friends, I tell you one of my secrets. There is a prophetic faculty with my wife, and the vision of unseen things. It was revealed to her that my death would come swift and bloody in any year in which I might neglect to take that leap both backwards and forwards on the first day of May, from the East to the West at the rising of the sun, and from the West to the East at his setting.'

When Finn lay down and slept that night the old men conversed with each other joyfully in low tones, but indeed that precaution was not necessary, for Finn's sleep could not be disturbed or broken by the voices of friends.



CHAPTER VI

THERE WAS FEAR IN TARA

IT was the Eve of Samhain, which we Christians call All Hallows' Eve. From of old it was a night on which many strange things used to happen. In fact it was a great festival with our Pagan ancestors.

The King of Ireland sat at supper in his palace at Tara. All his chiefs and mighty men were with him. This king was called Conn, and surnamed the Hundred-Fighter. He was a celebrated king, very big and strong, red-haired and blue-eyed. On his

right hand was his only son, Art the Solitary, so called because he had no brothers. The sons of Morna, who kept the boy Finn out of his rights and were at the time trying to kill him if they could, were here too. Chief amongst them was Gaul mac Morna, a huge and strong warrior, and captain of all the Fians ever since that battle in which Finn's father had been killed. There is a heroic story told about this Gaul which shows that he was as brave as he was strong. Once he was about to engage in a great battle, and his generals pointed out to him that by making a night attack upon the enemy's camp, an easy victory might be won. Gaul answered: 'When as a boy I first took arms of chivalry and was presented with my weapons, I swore that I would never attack an enemy by night, or use against him any stratagem or unfair advantage. That promise I have kept down to the present time; I will not break it now,

and I will not break it while I live.'

You may remember that when Finn knocked at the door of the booth in which the old Fians were assembled, and called himself their 'friend,' Crimall ordered the door to be opened, for he knew that neither Gaul nor any of his people could use the deceit of calling himself a friend in order to gain an unfair advantage. In fact, none of the Fians at any time were ever accused of telling a lie. 'We, the Fians, never lied,' sang Ossian; 'falsehood was never attributed to us.'

Gaul and his mightiest men were here to-night. The great long table was spread for supper. A thousand wax candles shed their light through the chamber, and caused the vessels of gold, silver, and bronze to shine. Yet, though it was a great feast, none of these warriors seemed to care about eating or drinking; every face was sad, and there was little conversation, and

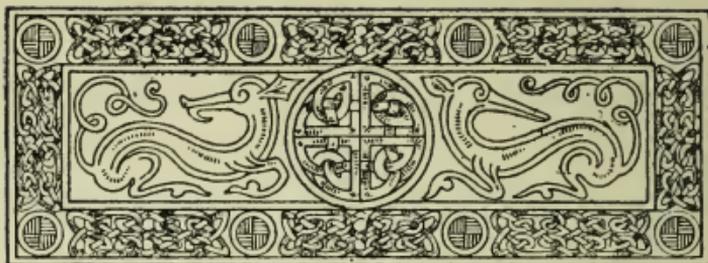
no music. It seemed as if they were expecting some calamity. Conn's sceptre, which was a plain staff of silver, lay beside him on the table, and there was a canopy of bright bronze over his head. Gaul mac Morna, captain of the Fians, sat at the other end of the long table. Every warrior wore a bright banqueting mantle of silk or satin, scarlet or crimson, blue, green, or purple, fastened on the breast either with a great brooch or with a pin of gold or silver. Yet though their raiment was bright and gay, and though all the usual instruments of festivity were there, and a thousand tall candles shed their light over the scene, no one looked happy.

Then was heard a low sound like thunder, and the earth seemed to tremble, and after that they distinctly heard a footfall like the slow, deliberate tread of a giant. These footfalls sent a chill into every heart, and every face, gloomy before, was now pale.

The king leaned past his son Art the

Solitary, and said to a certain druid who sat beside Art, 'Is this the son of Midna come before his time?' 'It is not,' said the druid, 'but it is the man who is to conquer Midna. One is coming to Tara this night before whose glory all other glory shall wax dim.'

Shortly after that they heard the voices of the doorkeepers raised in contention, as if they would repel from the hall some one who wished to enter, then a slight scuffle, and after that a strange figure entered the chamber. He was dressed in the skins of wild beasts, and wore over his shoulders a huge thick cloak of wild boars' skins, fastened on the breast with a white tusk of the same animal. He wore a shield and two spears. Though of huge stature his face was that of a boy, smooth on the cheeks and lips. It was white and ruddy, and very handsome. His hair was like refined gold. A light seemed to go out from him, before which the candles burned dim. It was Finn.



CHAPTER VII

FINN SECURES A PROMISE WITH GUARANTEES



HE stood in the doorway and cried out in a strong and sonorous but musical voice: 'O Conn the Hundred-Fighter, son of Felimy, the righteous son of Tuthal the legitimate, O King of the Kings of Erin, a wronged and disinherited youth, possessing nowhere one rood of his patrimony, a wanderer and an outlaw, a hunter of the wildernesses and mountains, claims hospitality of thee, illustrious prince, on the eve of the great festival of Samhain.'

‘Thou art welcome whoever thou art,’ answered the king, ‘and doubly welcome because thou art unfortunate. I think, such is thy face and form, that thou art the son of some mighty king on whom disaster has fallen undeserved. The high gods of Erin grant thee speedy restoration, and strong vengeance of thy many wrongs. Sit here, O noble youth, between me and my only son, Art, heir to my kingdom.’

An attendant took his weapons from the youth and hung them on the wall with the rest, and Finn sat down between the King of Ireland and his only son. Choice food was set before him which he ate, and old ale which he drank. From the moment he entered no one thought of anything but of him. When Finn had made an end of eating and drinking he said to the king—

‘O illustrious prince, though it is not right for a guest to even seem to observe aught that may be awry, or

not as it should be in the hall of his entertainer, yet the sorrow of a kindly host is a sorrow too to his guest, and sometimes unawares the man of the house finds succour and help in the stranger. There is sorrow in this chamber of festivity. If any one who is dear to thee and thy people happens to be dead, I can do nothing. But I say it, and it is not a vain boast, that even if a person is at the point of death, I can restore him to life and health, for there are marvellous powers of life-giving in my two hands.'

Conn the Hundred-Fighter answered, 'Our grief is not such as you suppose, and why should I not tell a cause of shame, which is known far and wide? This, then, is the reason of our being together, and of the gloom which is over us. There is a mighty enchanter whose dwelling is in the haunted mountains of Slieve Gullion in the North. His name is Allen, son of Midna, and his enmity to me is as

great as his power. Once every year, at this season, it is his pleasure to burn Tara. Descending out of his wizard haunts, he standeth over against the city and shoots balls of fire out of his mouth against it till it is consumed. Then he goes away mocking and triumphant. This annual building of Tara, only to be annually consumed, is a shame to me, and till this enchanter declared war against me, I have lived without reproach.'

'But,' said Finn, 'how is it that thy young warriors, valiant and swift, do not repel him, or kill him?'

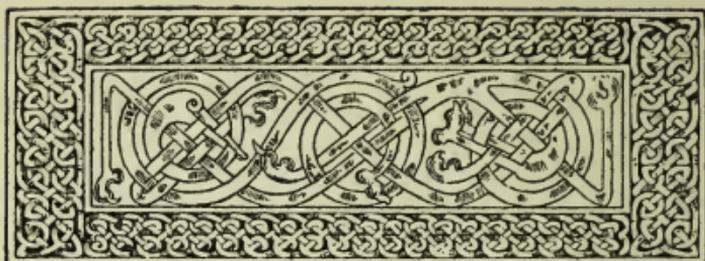
'Alas!' said Conn, 'all our valour is in vain against this man. Our hosts encompass Tara on all sides, keeping watch and ward when the fatal night comes. Then the son of Midna plays on his druidic instruments of music, on his magic pipe and his magic lyre, and as the fairy music falls on our ears, our eyelids grow heavy, and soon all subside upon the grass in deep slumber.'

So comes this man against the city and shoots his fire-balls against it, and utterly consumes it. Nine years he has burnt Tara in that manner, and this is the tenth. At midnight to-night he will come and do the same. Last year (though it was a shame to me that I, who am the high king over all Ireland, should not be able myself to defend Tara) I summoned Gaul mac Morna and all the Fians to my assistance. They came, but the pipe and lyre of the son of Midna prevailed over them too, so that Tara was burned as at other times. Nor have we any reason to believe that the son of Midna will not burn the city again to-night, as he did last year. All the women and children have been sent out of Tara this day. We are only men of war here, waiting for the time. That, O noble youth, is why we are sad. The "Pillars of Tara" are broken and the might of the Fians is as nought before the power of this man.'

‘What shall be my reward if I kill this man and save Tara?’ asked Finn.

‘Thy inheritance,’ answered the king, ‘be it great or small, and whether it lies in Ireland or beyond Ireland; and for securities I give you my son Art and Gaul mac Morna and the chiefs of the Fians.’

Gaul and the captains of the Fianna consented to that arrangement, though reluctantly, for their minds misgave them as to who the great youth might be.



CHAPTER VIII

FINN TRIUMPHS

AFTER that all arose and armed themselves and ringed Tara round with horse and foot, and thrice Conn the Hundred-Fighter raised his awful regal voice, enjoining vigilance upon his people, and thrice Gaul mac Morna did the same, addressing the Fians, and after that they filled their ears with wax and wool, and kept a stern and fierce watch, and many of them thrust the points of their swords into their flesh.

Now Finn was alone in the banquetting chamber after the rest had gone

out, and he washed his face and his hands in pure water, and he took from the bag that was at his girdle the instruments of divination and magic, which had been his father's, and what use he made of them is not known, but ere long a man stood before him, holding a spear in one hand and a blue mantle in the other. There were twenty nails of gold of Arabia in the spear. The nails glittered like stars, and twinkled with live light as stars do in a frosty night, and the blade of it quivered like a tongue of white fire. From haft to blade-point that spear was alive. There were voices in it too, and the war-tunes of the enchanted races of Erin, whom they called the Tuatha De Danan, sounded from it. The mantle too, was a wonder, for innumerable stars twinkled in the blue, and the likeness of clouds passed through it. The man gave these things to Finn, and when he had instructed him in their use he was not seen.

Then Finn arose and armed himself, and took the magic spear and mantle and went out. There was a ring of flame round Tara that night, for the Fians and the warriors of Conn had torches in their hands, and all the royal buildings of Tara showed clear in the light, and also the dark serpentine course of the Boyne, which flowed past Tara on the north; and there, standing silent and alert, were the innumerable warriors of all Erin, with spear and shield, keeping watch and ward against the son of Midna, also the Four Pillars of Tara in four dense divisions around the high king, even Conn the Hundred-Fighter.

Finn stood with his back to the palace, which was called the House-of-the-going-round-of-Mead, between the palace and Conn, and he grasped the magic spear strongly with one hand, and the mantle with the other.

As midnight drew nigh, he heard far away in the north, out of the

mountains of Slieve Gullion, a fairy tune played, soft, low, and slow, as if on a silver flute; and at the same time the roar of Conn the Hundred-Fighter, and the voice of Gaul like thunder, and the responsive shouts of the captains, and the clamour of the host, for the host shouted all together, and clashed their swords against their shields in fierce defiance, when in spite of all obstructions the fairy music of the enchanter began to steal into their souls. That shout was heard all over Ireland, echoing from sea to sea, and the hollow buildings of Tara reverberated to the uproar. Yet through it all could be heard the low, slow, delicious music that came from Slieve Gullion. Finn put the point of the spear to his forehead. It burned him like fire, yet his stout heart did not fail. Then the roar of the host slowly faded away as in a dream, though the captains were still shouting, and two-thirds of the torches fell to the ground. And now succeeding the

flute music, sounded the music of a stringed instrument exceedingly sweet. Finn pressed the cruel spear-head closer to his forehead, and saw every torch fall, save one which wavered as if held by a drunken man, and beneath it a giant figure that reeled and tottered, and strove in vain to keep its feet. It was Conn the Hundred-Fighter. As he fell there was a roar as of many waters ; it was the ocean mourning for the high king's fall. Finn passed through the fallen men and stood alone on the dark hill-side. He heard the feet of the enchanter splashing through the Boyne, and saw his huge form ascending the slopes of Tara. When the enchanter saw that all was silent and dark there he laughed, and from his mouth blew a red fire-ball at the Teck-Midcuarta, which he was accustomed first to set in flames. Finn caught the fire-ball in the magic mantle. The enchanter blew a second and a third, and Finn caught them both. The

man saw that his power over Tara was at an end, and that his magic arts had been defeated. On the third occasion he saw Finn's face, and recognised his conqueror. He turned to flee, and though slow was his coming, swifter than the wind was his going, that he might recover the protection of his enchanted palace before the 'fair-faced youth clad in skins' should overtake him. Finn let fall the mantle as he had been instructed, and pursued him, but in vain. Soon he perceived that he could not possibly overtake the swift enchanter. Then he was aware that the magic spear struggled in his hand like a hound in the leash, 'Go then if thou wilt,' he said, and poising, cast the spear from him. It shot through the dark night hissing and screaming. There was a track of fire behind it. Finn followed and on the threshold of the enchanted palace he found the body of Midna. He was quite dead, with the blood pouring

through a wound in the middle of his back, but the spear was gone. Finn drew his sword and cut off the enchanter's head and returned with it to Tara. When he came to the spot where he had dropped the mantle, it was not seen, but smoke and flame issued there from a hole in the ground. That hole was twenty feet deep in the earth, and at the bottom of it there was a fire always from that night, and it was never extinguished. It was called the fire of the son of Midna. It was in a depression on the north side of the hill of Tara, called the Glen of the Mantle, *Glen-a-Brat*.

Finn, bearing the head, passed through the sleepers into the palace and spiked the head on his own spear, and drove the spear-end into the ground at Conn's end of the great hall. Then the sickness and faintness of death came upon Finn, also a great horror and despair overshadowed him, so that he was about to give himself up for utterly

lost. Yet he recalled one of his marvellous attributes, and approaching a silver vessel, into which pure water ever flowed and which was always full, he made a cup with his two hands and lifting it to his mouth drank, and the blood began to circulate in his veins, and strength returned to his limbs, and the cheerful hue of rosy health to his cheeks.

Having rested himself sufficiently he went forth and shouted to the sleeping host, and called the captains by their names, beginning with Conn. They awoke and rose up, though dazed and stupid, for it was difficult for any man, no matter how he had stopped his ears, to avoid hearing Finn when he sent forth his voice of power. They were astonished to find that Tara was still standing, for though the night was dark, the palaces and temples, all of hewn timber, were brilliantly coloured, and of many hues, for in those days men delighted in splendid colours.

When the captains came together Finn said, 'I have slain Midna.' 'Where is his head?' they asked, not that they disbelieved him, but because the heads of men slain in battle were always brought away for trophies. 'Come and see,' answered Finn. Conn and his only son and Gaul mac Morna followed the young hero into the Teck-Midcuarta where the spear-long waxen candles were still burning, and when they saw the head of Midna impaled there at the end of the hall, the head of the man whom they believed to be immortal and not to be wounded or conquered, they were filled with great joy, and praised their deliverer and paid him many compliments.

'Who art thou, O brave youth?' said Conn. 'Surely thou art the son of some great king or champion, for heroic feats like thine are not performed by the sons of inconsiderable and unknown men.'

Then Finn flung back his cloak of

wild boars' skins, and holding his father's treasure-bag in his hand before them all, cried in a loud voice—

‘I am Finn, the son of Cool, the son of Trenmōr, the son of Basna, I am he, whom the sons of Morna have been seeking to destroy from the time that I was born ; and here to-night, O king of the kings of Erin, I claim the fulfilment of thy promise, and the restoration of my inheritance, which is the Fian leadership of Fiall.’ Thereupon Gaul mac Morna put his right hand into Finn's, and became his man. Then his brothers and his sons, and the sons of his brothers did so in succession, and after that all the chief men of the Fians did the same, and that night Finn was solemnly and surely installed in the Fian leadership of Erin, and put in possession of all the woods and forests, and waste places, and all the hills, and mountains, and promontories, and all the streams and rivers of Erin, and the harbours and estuaries, and the harbour-

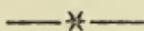
dues of the merchants, and all ships, and boats, and galleys with their mariners, and all that pertained of old time to the Fian leadership of Fail.

THE END

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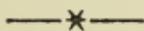
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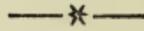
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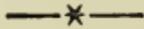
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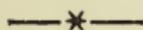


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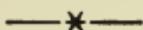
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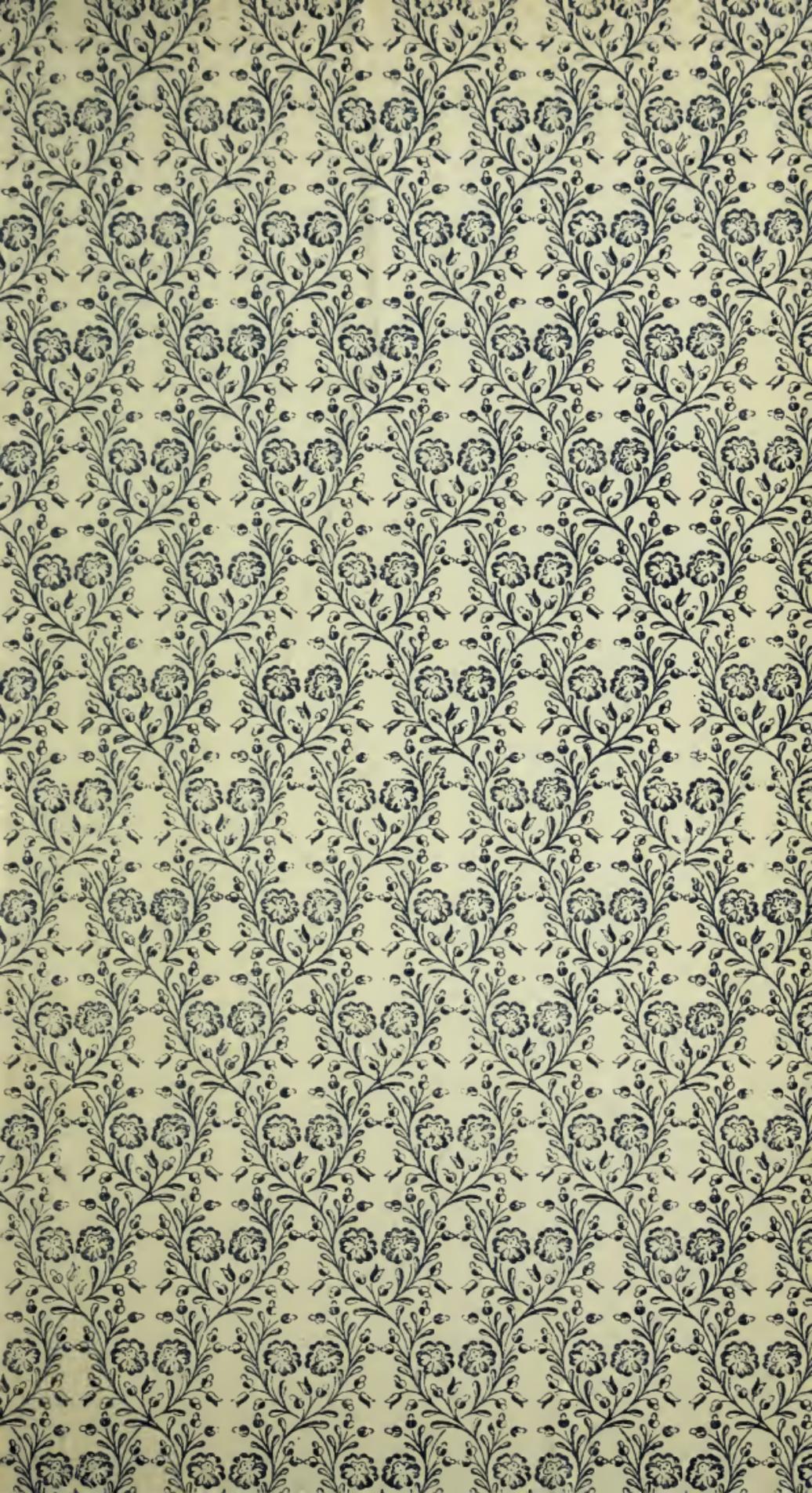
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