

The Triumph
and Passing
of Cuchlain,
Stanoish O'Grady

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THE TRIUMPH AND PASSING
OF CUCULAIN



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“So stood Cuculain, even in death's pangs a terror to his enemies and the bulwark of his nation.”

THE TRIUMPH AND PASSING OF CUCULAIN

BY

STANDISH O'GRADY

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"THE COMING OF CUCULAIN"; "IN THE GATES OF THE NORTH";

"THE FLIGHT OF THE EAGLE "

ETC.



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THE TRIUMPH AND PASSING OF CUCULAIN

CHAPTER I

VICTORIOUS MEAVE

“ The splendours of the firmament of time
May be eclipsed but are extinguished not.”

SHELLEY.

WHEN the sun rose over Fremain on the second day of the month of Belthiné, his light was reflected only in the innumerable drops of glistening dew, with which, all over, the immense plain was begemmed, and a happy silence reigned save only for the songs of birds in the early morn, and the cries of pastoral men who kept watch over their roaming herds ; and from the plain a thin, soft, fairy mist went up, the breath of the vernal and dewy earth. For this plain, like the plain of Tara and the Curragh of the Liffey, was sacred and untilled from of yore, since within it Uta the Prosperous had been interred, whose charred bones and much-

lamented ashes there in-urned in their house of unhewn, massive rocks, reposed in the hollow of a mighty cairn, concealing the sad relics of the hero. Green-sided and smooth was this cairn, a grassy and flower-adorned hill, and upon its top there grew a great elm-tree.

Therefore was the plain sacred and untilled, unfurrowed by the plough of any husbandman, nor hardened by his industrious spade. No farmer gathered there corcur or glaisin or rue, nor reaped his flaxen harvest ; but the immense plain lay, from age to age, a pure and undesecrated soil, and there pious meetings were held around the grave of Uta by his people, and there rude parliaments of the princes of the Clan Uta, and there warlike congregations.

When the moon rose over Fremain on the night of the second day of the month of Belthiné, her beams were reflected from the burnished points of innumerable spears, the bright faces of shields, and the ornamented handles of swords, and illuminated a hundred embroidered banners, that floated over the tent-doors of the kings of the Four Provinces of Eire. There a mighty din, a vast, confused uproar, resounded where camped the great host of the men of Meave, returning from the deso-

lation of Ulla ; the neighing of war-steeds, the lowing of herds driven away from their accustomed pastures, and the bleating of countless sheep, the scouring of the armour of warriors, the washing of chariots and the noise of files, the sound of the harp and the cuislenna, the voices of bards and the reciters of tales, and the loud laughter of those who jested and caroused ; and from countless fires ascended sparks and pillars of dark smoke into the night. For at noon that day surged thither the vast army of the Tain, even the rising-out of the four great provinces of Erin, and there they had pitched their camps, according to their septs and nations, with broad streets and squares and market-places. There for the kings and princes and nobles of Erin their artificers had constructed swiftly booths of timber, with the stems of trees set on end in the earth, interlaced with lissom twigs and branches. And now, throughout the vast host, the warriors were cooking supper, and many a Fenian oven was that night made, and many a broad-fronted bullock fell before the brazen axe, while the distributors of ale passed to and fro from cluster to valiant cluster.

So throughout the immense camp were employed the rest of the men of Meave ; but the

captains of territories and the kings and chief warriors, having been bidden to feast with the great Queen, assembled without the royal pavilion, waiting until what time the thrice-blown trumpet should sound. They having come from far from the ends of the camp with their attendants, along the resounding streets and ways stood together conversing. Their armour-bearers stood apart, bearing each man his master's white banqueting shield.

Then sounded from within the first blast of the trumpet, and the armour-bearers entered the pavilion, whose sylvan walls and roof, rough with leaves and boughs, waxen tapers illuminated, tall as a warrior's spear, not permitted in the houses of the nobles, and the many tables shone with the instruments of festivity—vessels of glass and brass, silver and gold. Afar, at the northern extremity of the vast chamber, curtained with a canopy of silver, sat the High King of the Olnemacta, Aileel Mor, son of Rossa Roe, son of Fergus Fairge, holding in his aged right-hand a silver staff, and beside him sat the great Queen. Upon the severed stems of branches, and brazen nails driven hastily into the trees, the armour-bearers hanged the shields of their masters, obeying the voice

of the wise seneschal, awarding to every king, and warrior and captain of territory his place, so that the walls shone anew with the white shields and their painted warlike symbols, and with the spear-heads of shining brass.

A second time the trumpet sounded, and from without, between the armed men who kept the door, entered in the mighty captains of the Tain—giants of the elder time, godlike heroes, and founders of nations and warlike tribes, kings and captains, and fearless champions, the foremost of the chivalry of Erin, long-haired warriors, stately, broad-breasted, having noble eyes. Upon each breast glittered a brooch of gold or silver, or of burnished brass, confining their brattas of silk or fine cloth, purple, or green, or crimson, or of diverse hues. So they entered the pavilion to the hospitable music of the harpers of the king, and sat them down, each champion beneath his own shield. High-raised, at the northern extremity of the pavilion, sat the royal pair ; and high-raised, at the southern extremity, facing the Ard-Rie, sat Fergus Mac Roy, occupying the Champion's Throne, that next in honour to the King's.

• A third time the trumpet sounded, and there poured in the retinues, and the armour-bearers

entering a second time, warriors of lesser note, and the captains of the household troops of Aileel, and sat at the lower tables. To them, in like manner, the seneschal and his servants divided the order of their sitting, and no man disputed his award.

There, then, the great warriors of the Tain feasted, rejoicing in themselves and their matchless Queen. But when they had made an end of eating, the slaves removed the remnant of the banquet and the instruments of the first feast, and went round again distributing abundantly the ruddy, exhilarating ale, and all turned their attention anew to drinking and conversation, all except Fergus, upon whom was the care of the whole host ; but he sat glooming, like a great rock in the glittering noontide sea, while he, in a low voice, conversed with his fellow and dear friend Cairbre, son of Concobar Mac Nessa. So they drank and conversed, till, after a space, Aileel smote with his staff the canopy above his head, and the silver canopy vibrating, sent forth a ringing, gong-like sound which stilled the voices of the heroes, so that no sound was heard save the confused hum of the great camp of the Tain. Straightway, from the lower table, arose a stripling having a bardic

fillet around his temples, and he, crossing to the right side of the pavilion, at the upper end, hard by where the High Queen sat, removed from the wall a harp and its sheath, and presented it, kneeling, to Bricne, the son of Cairbre, Ard-ollav of the Olnemacta. Then the sacred bard drew from its sheath, made of the grey fell of badgers and lined with soft white doeskin, the gold-adorned harp, which had delighted the minds of warriors at many a great feast of the Olnemacta, and removing from them the linen wrappings which preserved them, he tuned the sweetly sounding strings. Anon, beneath his swift and eager hands, there arose a storm of sweet sounds, taking captive the souls of those who listened; but as thunder shower dies away in heavy single drops, so subsided that great prelude, note by sweet dissolving note, and the bard's voice arose singing.

CHAPTER II

OF THE TAIN THUS FAR

“ A hand scattering wealth,
And a light not to be extinguished,
Namely, Cuculain Mac Sualtam,
The eagle of armies and of youth.

“ Agile is he in his boundings,
And swift as the stormy wind ;
As swift as is my gentle, faithful hound
In its noblest contest of speed.”

ANCIENT BARD.

HIS song was of the history of the Tain thus far, each verse musical with rhymes and the charm of measured rhythmic speech, not carelessly improvised with chance words and the random inspiration of the hour, after the manner of many lewd wandering minstrels, but the perfect fruit of solitary labour and much thought, that it might be worthy of the great theme, and worthy of the bards of the Olnemacta before the ollavs and singing-men of the far-coming kings, and, as their race is, not willingly pleased, and also that it might be an enduring monument, to live through many generations in the remembrance of his successors, even the

history of the invasion of Ulster by Queen Meave.

Of the causes of the war first he sang, of the great prowess of the Red Branch, and their haughtiness ; of the pitiless exactions of Athairney, and the death of Mesagera, and of the pride and magnificence of the great northern monarch.

Of the Donn Coalsey next, his attributes, and privileges, and beauty ; of the great insult to Fergus Mac Roy ; of the far-sent summons of the Queen, and the gathering of the chivalry of Erin to the four plains of Ai.

The enumeration of the host then, commencing with the far-summoned kings, those who dwelt by the great southern sea, and those whose Duns looked out on the Muirnict, concluding with the Olnemacta, and the guards and household troops of Aileel, all the nations, septs, and warlike clans who, from far and near, had come together to the great hosting, and he awarded to each its customary honour.

Of the marches of the host of the Tain next, from the day upon which they evacuated the four plains, moving eastwards ; how they crossed the Shannon at the Ford of the son of Lewy, and went over the Boar's Ridge, and

passed by the tomb of the Plain of Nama, hard by Tubber Tusk, and how they traversed successively the long level country in the midst of Erin, Tullach Teora Crioch, and the wood of the fairies, Ocbart and Fair-Glen, and the rugged ground of Gort Slaney, the two Teffias, Carn Aile and Delta.

Of Cuculain then he sang, and the nocturnal slaughter of the men of Meave ; of the compact and the bloody fights on the shores of the Avon Dia, and of Fardia, son of Daman, son of Dary ; of the meeting of the friends, and their giant strife, and of Cuculain perishing alone in the immense forest, somewhere between Fochaine and the sea ; but as he sang there was a sound of sobbing voices in the immense chamber, where wept the friends of Cuculain—his foster-brothers and school-fellows. Yet Fergus Mac Roy wept not, but sat erect in the Champion's Throne, staring out before him, with eyes of iron.

Of the battles of Murthemney then ; of the defeat of brave old Iliach, and the dispersion of his peasants and artizans ; of the fierce attack of Cethern, and his flight, and how they routed Fintann and his northern warriors, and Meann Mac Salcogan ; of the desertion of Roka Mac Athemian, and of that sad civil strife on “ the

plain of the troops of Fionavar " and the death of the gentle, good princess.

Of the desolation of the Plains of Ulla last, when, far and wide, the plunderers of the Tain traversed the rich domain of the Clanna Rury ; of the unaccepted challenges at the gates of Ultonian strongholds, and the dishonour of the champions of the Crave Rue, till then deemed invincible, even Concobar Mac Nessa and his heroes of the Red Branch, once the terror of all Erin, and like gods beholden upon the far northern horizon, and aloud the son of Cairbre chanted their shame, and the warlike star of Emain Macha blasted in a foul eclipse.

So sang the mighty bard of the Olnemacta, chanting thus far the history of the Tain ; but the warriors lifted up their voices and shouted, for their hearts were elated by that noble strain, so that their shout was heard to the ends of the camp, and heard, too, by the sentinels who, far out upon the plain, kept watch, sitting, each man armed in his chariot upon the white moonlit plain, so loud shouted the kings and captains of the Tain around the son of Cairbre, and at the lower tables the bardic students gathered around the pupils of the Ard-ollav, eager to learn from them the words of the noble chant.

It was at this time that Fergus Mac Roy rose from the Champion's Throne, like some vast rock left bare by the down-sinking billow, when after a tempest the great waters along the western shore rise and fall. So seemed the mighty captain of the Tain as he arose, and the assembly was silent until he left the pavilion, and after that many of the younger knights demanded that Bailey Mac Buan should sing. An Ultonian captive he, and doomed ere long to a sorrowful death. Dear was he to the women of Ulla, but he loved a maiden not of his own province, and thus sang the son of Buan to the accompaniment of his small tympan :—

CUCULAIN AND EMER.

CUCULAIN :

“ Come down O daughter of Forgal Manah,
Sweet Emer, come down without fear,
The moon has arisen to light us on our way,
Come down from thy greenan without fear.”

EMER :

“ Who is this that beneath my chamber window
Sends up to me his words through the dim night ?
Who art thou standing in the beechen shadows,
White-browed, and tall, with thy golden hair ? ”

CUCULAIN :

“ It is I, Setanta, O gentle Emer !
I, thy lover, come to seek thee from the north ;
It is I who stand in the beechen shadows,
Sending up my heart in words through the dim night.”

EMER :

" I fear my proud father, O Setanta,
My brothers, and my kinsmen, and the guards,
Ere I come unto thy hands, O my lover !
Through their well-lit feasting chamber I must pass."

CUCULAIN :

" Fear not the guards, O noble Emer !
Fear not thy brothers, or thy sire,
Dull with ale are they all, and pressed with slumber,
And the lights extinguished in the hall."

EMER :

" I fear the fierce watch-dogs, O Setanta,
The deep water of the moat how shall I cross ?
Not alone for myself, I fear, Setanta,
They will rend thee without ruth, Cuculain."

CUCULAIN :

" The dogs are my comrades and my namesakes ;
Like my Luath, they are friendly unto me,
O'er the foss I will bear thee in my arms—
I will leap across the foss, my love, with thee."

EMER :

" Far and wide all the tribes and the nations
Over Bregia, northwards to Dun-Lir,
They are kin to my father and his subjects—
For thy life I fear, O noble Cuculain."

CUCULAIN :

" On the lawn within the beechen shadows
Is my chariot light and strong, bright with gold ;
And steeds like the March winds in their swiftuess
Will bear thee to Dundalgan ere the dawn."

EMER :

" I grieve to leave my father, O Setanta,
Mild to me, though his nature be not mild ;
I grieve to leave my native land, Setanta,
Lusk with its streams and fairy glades.

“ I grieve to leave my Dun, O Setanta,
And this lawn, and the trees I know so well,
And this, my tiny chamber looking eastward,
Where love found me unknowing of his power.

“ Well I know the great wrong I do my father,
But thus, even thus I fly with thee
As the sea draws down the little Tolka,
So thou, O Cuculain, drawest me.

“ Like a god descending from the mountains,
So hast thou descended upon me.
I would die to save thy life, O Setanta,
I would die if thou caredst not for me.”

Now Queen Meave was not the only woman warrior who came upon the Tain: there was also Queen Fleas. She ruled a wide territory on the banks of the Suc, and though once conquered by Meave in an ancient war, was still potent. She was beautiful besides, and between her and Meave there was great jealousy and concealed wrath. She now, seeing that the High Queen was ill-pleased with the praises of the young Ultonian hero, urged her chief bard to sing of the contest for the Championship of Ulla between the three chief heroes of the Red Branch, for she knew that in his lay Cuculain would be again celebrated. Though her beauty was not so all-compelling as Meave's, there were those to whom she seemed more beautiful.

Now, as her bard sang, Queen Meave's fair face darkened.

CUCULAIN RAISED TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

“ What thunder of the hoofs of horses is this ?
What rolling of the wheels of chariots ?
Who are these mighty men that come through the defile
To thy still, gleaming lake, O son of Imomain ?

“ What magic rites of these, what songs of druids
Rending thy Faed-Fia, Mananan ?
Who are these that fear not the face of Uath,
Thy terrible face, O Uath of the Lake ?

“ Laeghaire, son of Conud, son of Iliach,
And Conall, the triumphant, and the third,
Cuculain Mac Sualtam in his boyhood,
Like a star, pure and lustrous in the dawn.

“ They strive for the Champion's seat of Ulla,
And thither to the lake they have come
To abide by the word of the wise Uath,
Dividing to each warrior his due.”

UATH :

“ Why from my face have ye torn
Mananan's veil, whereby we live unseen ?
From my magic labours here by Loch Uath
Ye have roused me now in an evil hour.”

CUCULAIN :

“ Give us pardon for our fault, O mighty Uath,
But these claim the first right against me,
Saying their's is the Champion's Throne of Ulla,
But do thou decide between us three.”

UATH :

“ Go back, foolish boy, to thy tutors,
Strive not with thy betters, Cuculain ;
But do thou, Conall, the victorious,
And Laeghaire, of the triumphs, contend.

" Lay here upon this flag thy head, Iaeghaire,
With my adze I will cut thy neck in twain.
Do this and the glory I will give thee,
And the Champion's Throne of Ulla shall be thine."

" Then fell thy noble countenance, Laeghaire,
And thus sad-browed didst thou reply—
' In the battle-shock contending I will perish,
But not thus, not thus, O son of Imomain.' "

UATH :

" Thou hast won, O son of proud Amargin,
O golden-tressed champion of Emain,
Fearless, bow thee down, Conall, the mighty ,
The glory and the championship are thine."

" Back he shrank, Conall, the victorious,
His heavy-tressed locks shook with rage—
' I care not for glory if thou slay me—
What avails me my glory if I die.'

" Then glowed thy bright face, O Setanta,
And thou layedst thy bright head upon the flag,
Crying, ' Give me the great honour, mighty Uath,
To be Champion of Ulla though I die.

" ' Be my name renowned among the nations,
Be my glory sung through all time,
I shall live in the list of Ulla's champions,
I fear not thy adze, just and wise Mac Imomain.'

" Then the god leaned down over Setanta,
Drawing back the yellow hair from his white neck,
And beside Cuculain upon the flag-stone
His tears rained down for the boy.

" Three times upon thy neck, O Setanta,
He lowered the cold shining brass,
Then he cried, ' Arise, O Setanta !
Rise Champion of Ulla, O fearless Cuculain.' "

CHAPTER III

THE MOR REEGA

“ She could have ta'en
Ixion by the hair and bent his neck.”

KEATS.

THEN Queen Meave, no longer able to contain herself, uttered evil and menacing words against the bards in general, charging them with insolence and ambition, and also against that rival Queen as their ally and protector, whom Queen Fleeas answered with a like scorn and contumely. Moreover, through the vast host and amongst their leaders there was little of unanimity this night because they were returning victorious after the devastation of Ulla and were no longer under fear of any foe, and their thoughts according to their clans, tribes and nations were turned to the division of the mighty creacht which they had brought out of the North. Moreover, Fergus, who alone could have restrained the rising wrath had departed, for tidings had come to him concerning the Red Branch how that the spell of the curse of Macha had been lifted from

their souls, that their hosting had been to Emain, and that they were already on the march.

When Meave heard the words of Fleeas she started up from the banquet table and rushing to the place where were her weapons she turned her around and spoke thus with a countenance of fury, while her eyes sent forth flame.

“ Too soon, O wife of Aileel Finn, dost thou begin to brandish an intemperate tongue, forgetting how late I chastised thee rebellious, when I scattered to the hills all thy mutinous clans, having conquered thee in battle and wasted thy realm and possessed myself of thy herds. Beware lest now, too, with blows I expel thee out of this host, thy soft admiring husband and the singing men thy lovers notwithstanding.”

Then arose Aileel Finn, King of the Gamanradians to protect his wife, and with him the nobles of the Gamanradians and of the Partree, dwellers by the Suc, and arose the Kings of the Ernai and the Clan Dega assisting them. Also arose Eocha Mac Luta, the irresistible might, and with him the chiefs of Ultonian exiles under Cairbré, the fair and great, who were in martial service with Queen Meave. And now indeed it seemed a feast to which the red swineherd of Bove Derg

had come, because any feast to which he came ended in blood and slaughter. For the Mainey's arose on account of their mother and Cet with the giants of Moyrisk in the same cause. So there was a deafening clamour of enraged voices and fierce threats, and already many a shield had been snatched from its place and many a sword screeched from its scabbard, and the stormy chamber was lit with the lightnings of drawn weapons, and fury and madness governed all things.

Amid the uproar Fleas herself moved not, but sat with her countenance pale and distorted and wide-staring eyes, and she screamed such a cry as a woman renders who, in the gloaming sees some intolerable sight, and who dropping her burden stands rooted to the spot. So screamed the prophetic Queen, and simultaneously the regal silver canopy sounded, smitten by the High King. Thereat a sudden silence, and the warriors stood without speech or motion; and in the silence was heard the whimpering of the hounds fleeing terrified into the recesses of the vast chamber. Then also was heard a noise of trampling feet, with sudden fearful questions and short cries, for, without, all was terror and commotion. As when in a

city one hears the rush of crowds when a conflagration has arisen, or a civic tumult with the noise of deadly weapons plied afar, so, to compare great things with small, was the noise of the innumerable trampling feet of those without rushing past the pavilion portending some disaster. Then a second time Fleas cried, and with wide-staring eyes gazed at a certain place. Then all looked thither, and lo ! at the further end of the vast chamber, a shape gigantic, as it were of a woman, seen indistinctly like an image in agitated water, and as if equipped for war, and bearing shield and spear. The apparition came from the north and passed through the chamber.

Said Fleas : “ It is the Mor Reega, the great daughter of Ernmas.” Forthwith up broke the assembly in wild disorder, and some came pouring through the wide doorway, trampling down the guards ; and they brake the bannerstaff on the right side of the door, and the multitude without beheld where the banner of the High Queen of the Olnemacta fell. Others tore asunder the wattled walls of the pavilion, and poured forth out of that chamber horror-stricken. Without there was a burning of innumerable torches, and the whole host was congregated in the great

central square of the camp, and in all the avenues leading thither ; and they surged this way and that, for a rumour had gone abroad, and the seers said that they had seen the great war goddess of the Gael. Then stood the Mor Reega herself, in the midst of the camp of Meave, and shouted three times, and three times the great host of the Tain was confused, and those who fell were trampled upon by the rest, and many of the horses escaped that night, and with their fear-stricken hoofs slew and wounded many warriors.

Now though the seers declared that that apparition of the Mor Reega meant the imminence of war, yet because during the night there were no other portents, and because her intelligencers still reported nothing new from the north, in the morning Queen Meave was happy and reassured. She bad them set her throne upon a knoll from which she could survey the whole camp and the surrounding plains which were filled with vast herds of cattle, the fruit of her great foray. Here she commanded all the kings and captains to wait upon her in order that they might consult concerning the division of that mighty creacht. She became ever more and more surprised and indignant because her

commands were not obeyed, and because she saw the whole host in its tribes and nations marshalled as if for war, in silence, and Fergus Mac Roy moving to and fro amongst the ordered battalions like a shepherd amongst his flocks ; for all trusted in him.

Then Fergus came to the knoll and stood beside the Queen, grave and silent.

CHAPTER IV

DESCENT OF THE RED BRANCH

“ For never since created man
Met such embodied force as matched with these
Could merit more than that small infantry
Warred on by cranes.”

MILTON.

AT first Queen Meave was not aware of the presence of Fergus for her mind was pre-occupied by certain memories and thus she communed with herself.

“ What magic stillness is this that cleaves around the camp like a shroud around the dead, so that voices sound distant and terrible ? I hear not the lowing of the cattle or the bleating of sheep, and my squirrel crouches trembling

in the grass, as though beneath a hovering eagle, and but now I heard, as it were, the voice of a dove addressing me, and it said, "I foresee bloodshed; I foresee power. Cumascrah is no longer under fear in his island, nor Kelkar at Dun Sovarchey, nor Concoabar at Emain Macha, nor Laeghaire beside his lake, nor Conall in Mael Conall. Is it thou, O Faythleen, O fairy prophetess of Temairian hills."

Then sounded hard by the Barr-buah of the Tain, the trumpet-blast of the battle array of the Four Provinces, and afar throughout the camp responded the call of the war horns of every sept and nation, summoning the warriors to arms. Then was the Queen aware that Fergus stood beside her. With two hands she grasped the skirts of his mantle convulsively, and as one drowning lays hold on a floating plank or spar, and she cried :—

"What are these trumpet-calls of preparation, what panic is this that arises from thee and around thee? What commands are these that thou sendest forth not enjoined by me, and this low hoarse swelling note, is it of mutiny or of war? Appease thou the host, O Fergus, for I know not which way to look, but all my mind is confused."

And Fergus said :—

“ Fear not, O Queen, and regard not, for a space, the note of arms. But fear thou to give any commands which are not mine, or to countenance those who may resist me. Henceforth, the warriors of the Tain shall not peacefully divide the booty, eat flesh and drink ale exulting, but stern war awaits them, and the combat of heroes. Ned shall be the prince of their feasting and the croaking of bauvs their pleasant music, for the Red Branch of the Ultonians draweth nigh, fierce as the she-bear following through the forest the track of the hunter carrying in his hands her ravished offspring. Stand here, O wife of Aileel Mor. Seest thou aught yonder above the dark green forest that to the north of this plain stretches from the east westwards ?”

And Queen Meave answered :—

“ I see indeed a confused multitude of flying birds of every kind, small and great, flying thitherward as though terrified from beyond the forest, and they break to the right hand and the left, but some fly towards us, and over us, and they seem to me like sea-birds which flee before an ocean-racking tempest when on the horizon, yet still, and against a clear sky they, with redoubled speed, are seen fleeing shore-

wards, or to the islands and the sheltering recesses of the crannied lofty rocks."

"And now that these have passed away, borne swiftly on panic-stricken wings, seest thou yet aught, O High Queen of the Olnemacta," said Fergus gazing, as he spake, upon the bright-eyed forward-bending Queen.

"Northward, beyond the dark forest, I behold a vision, lovely indeed and beautiful to look upon, and like a work raised by magic power, serene and fair; a soft, white, delicate mist, like most pure wool many times refined; or like fairy snow shed afar over the land; or like the very white upper clouds of heaven unmoved against the blue canopy of the stainless sky. Moreover, from its level floor, as from the face of some beautiful lough, there arise, as it were, tufted isles, with that white soft sea poured around their base, and never, O Fergus, have I sight more beautiful beheld."

"Make keener now thy far-seeing eyes O wife of Aileel, and tell me what thou seest."

"That so serene and still, seems to me, so now no longer, but still with the stillness of some intense and endless life, for within there appears, to me, to exist a rush, and movement, and commotion, to be felt more than seen. Moreover,

I now distinguish innumerable faint twinklings as of stars in the gloaming of the night, and quick sudden flashings, and rapid fires that burn and go out, and are illumed and extinguished, and cross one another's paths through all that snow-like fairy mist, also spots of blackness that move in curved ways and cease not."

"And now, O mistress of many warriors, in this silence of thy own host, already divided into regiments and nations, which stand armed and expectant, hearest thou aught from that far distance, O sovereign of the Tain?"

"I hear a vast confused hum like the murmur of some gigantic hive, when in the spring time there is a noise of preparation amongst its populous youth, an endless roar like the far away roaring of the sea, when in the still moony night its long waves roll up some vast unbroken sand, and I hear, or hardly hear, voices as of gods or giant heroes, and a faint ringing as of brass amid that mysterious mist, and now more clearly I distinguish the flashings, and the stars, and the rapid fires. Amidst the mist there is the beckoning of a gigantic hand, blood-red, and around it, as it were, lightnings. It is the Fomoroh, or the people of Mac Erc, raised by sorcerers from their tombs, or the high gods of

Erin descending visibly out of Tir-na-nog, and the realms of the dead. Stay me not, thou false son of Rossa Roe, take from me thy strong hands, I shall not here await the blasting of the great children of Nemedh."

For the great Queen, trembling, had screamed in her terror, and was hastening to the inner recesses of her pavilion to the shelter of darkness and secrecy, and the protection of her idol-gods. But her Fergus forcibly detained, soothing her terror-stricken soul, and he said :

"Fear not, O mighty Queen, whom spears a hundred thousand defend, and the flower of the warriors of the four great provinces of Eire. What unwarlike panic is this of thine, O mighty sovereign of the Tain—thou, who art the battle-standard of our host? It is not the ancient gods of Erin, nor yet the victorious and mighty children of Dana, but men of mortal frame like ourselves whom, when spears pierce through they perish, and the flame consumes them, or the dark earth enfolds for ever. Yet, truly, O my Queen, not with vain-glorious confidence ought we to meet these warriors who come down against us out of the North, concealed in that phantom mist, for champions, the noblest and greatest beheld by the all-seeing sun, march

hitherwards in its fairy folds. It is the children of Rury whom thou seest ; the giants of the north, collected afar out of their fortresses and their palaces palisaded and trenched from the Red Cataract in the west to the Muir ; heroic champions who fear naught created ; the gathered might of the great Red Branch of the Ultonians, led on by that proud, ruthless monarch of Emain. For, as for that white fairy mist with which, like a fleece of purest wool, thou hast seen the land enwrap, it is the breath of the valiant, and the steam of the breathing of the mighty men of Ulla, and of their gigantic steeds inhaling the sun and wind into their lungs, and expelling it again in steam, and the steam of the sweat of heroes, and from the wet, foamed sides of horses as they run, and owing to their distress in running, and above them, in the still air, it hangs suspended, and they are concealed in its folds. And this is that white fairy mist which thou hast seen.

“ And the tufted isles which thou likenedst to the isles that rise from the face of some still gleaming lake—these are the peaks of the northern hills and the tops of the mountain ranges of the north, standing above the suspended steam of their host. Such are those tufted

isles, and such the white sea that encircles their base.

“ And the lights like quick-glancing stars, the moving fires and flashes of sharp flame—they are the shining of innumerable helmets with their gemlike decorations, the burnished rims of chariots, and the extremities of the poles glittering between the breasts of steeds, and the burning points of spears, and the faces of the moving shields, and the eyes of their innumerable warriors bright with the light of valour, these are those starry twinklings, flashes, and rapid flames. And those swart spots moving in curved ways are the clods cast from the swift hoofs of their galloping steeds, which escape the dashboard of the chariot, and are flung aloft behind the warrior and the charioteer, as their youthful chivalry career, to the right and the left, in front of the host, exulting in their swiftness and might, or gallop forward and await the running ranks of the spearmen.

“ And now, O Queen, thou knowest what is that confused roar like the roaring of the sea, for it is the noise of the movement of the host, the screech of innumerable wheels revolving on their brazen axles, and the sound of the tread of the warriors and the trampling of the hoofs

of horses, the converse of the host as they march, and the war songs of the tribes, expressing their warlike glee as they march, singing, with open mouths, sonorous songs. And as for those more distinct sounds, it is the shouting of mighty captains, and the roar of the bellowing of gigantic kings, far-strident amid the din, when they shout among their nations, and divide the ordered ranks and the squadrons of the chariot fighting chivalry, and the clash of spears upon hollow-ringing shields, when some mighty clan responds to its captain, or gives vent to its own warlike glee.

“And as for that red hand, like lurid flame seen afar through the smoke of a burning dun, it is the Red Hand of Emain Macha, the warlike symbol of the North. It has been woven by immortal hands in a banner white as snow, and now for the first time has that banner been brought forth to war, nor shall it ever be seen in battle again any more to the end of time, and around it then are portents, the shrieking of *bauvs* and battle-furies; the wives of Ned are there, and the spirits that delight in carnage, and dreadful faces, and the flashing of lightnings. And worthy, indeed, of divine presences are those warriors, for they are such as never yet

have been collected in Erin since the days of old, when, at Moy Tura, gods with giants contended for the sovereignty of Fail. The Mor Reega is there, too, far-striding in their midst, and there Lewy, King of Ultonian Fir-bolgs, and the Clan Humor with the Fir-bolgs of the isles."

Then far-off beyond the forest appeared distinctly the mighty host of the Clanna Rury, and men saw the northern terror extending from the east westward, the gigantic spearmen and war horses, the flashing chariots and weapons, and the whole face of their land was lightened with their glory. Then Meave rejoiced, seeing the great intervening forest, saying that the Ultonians would make a huge circuit ; but even while she spoke, there arose a crash, and a noise of a continual downrushing, and black chasms appeared in the green forest. And Queen Meave said :—

" What is this crash, and this noise of continual downrushing, and this agitation of the forest, and the black valleys therein which I see ? "

And Fergus said :—

" It is the noise of the tearing up of that forest, even from the roots, by giants of the Fomoroh so that there may be a clear passage for the chariots and footmen of the Ultonians.

But while he spake, there appeared on the plain northward, in front of the forest, the huge forms of armed men, where the spearmen and footmen of the Clanna Rury were emerging on the plain. Then shouted the men of Meave, and the Northern host shouted in reply, and the solid firmament rang again with that roar of the assembled heroes of all Eire.

That night the host of Concobar Mac Nessa encamped on the edge of the forest and the plain northwards was bright with their innumerable fires.

CHAPTER V

QUEEN MEAVE ADMIRES HER ENEMIES

“ Thus far these beyond
Compare of mortal prowess.”

MILTON.

THROUGH the night the bright stars glowed in heaven, and the red fires burned upon earth, and these dimmed and went out, and those paled around the paling moon, and the sacred morning lightened the east. Then awaked the great host of Meave, and far and wide there was a noise of arms and of preparation for the coming

strife. But when Meave came forth from her tent, surrounded by her guard, and approached her war-car, the whole host was in battle-array, and the great Queen looked in amazement and wonder at the glittering lines of the Clanna Rury and their excelling champions, and thus she questioned Fergus Mac Roy, though at first she was silent and panic-stricken, and her pale countenance grew paler :—

“ O Fergus, who is that mighty champion who stands on the summit of the green knoll, in the centre of their line of battle ? Like a star he glitters in the midst of his men of war. He wears, indeed, the beard of a learned man ; but methinks his vocation is other than to compose lays, such an arm spear-bearing does he extend, giving orders to many chariot-guiding youths who pass swiftly to and from the knoll. On his mighty shield methinks I see the likeness of a woman painted, and around him are heroines with harps, singing. A purple bratta, fastened with a golden brooch, surrounds his shoulders, and a great battle-axe, glittering with gold, is at his girdle. To me he seems like a royal tower, clear seen upon some tall hill.”

Here Fergus Mac Roy answered not at first,

but kept gazing afar, and when he spake, his voice was hoarse and broken.

“ Full well I know thee, bright, treacherous monarch of Emain. A star, indeed ; but like that sworded star which the high gods draw in heaven, when, with war and pestilence, they will scourge the nations of Eire.”

And Cormac Conlingas said :—

“ Thou seest the chief of the chieftains of the whole earth. It is my great father, Concobar, son of Factna, son of Cas, Ard-Rie of all Ulla. Years have not marred his countenance, which is fresh and ruddy, nor his mind for he is mild, and courteous, and keen-thoughted, and eager, nor brought down his courage, for, through our host, he will pass with the strength of a battalion, and terribly beneath their black lashes will blaze his fearless eyes. That shield is the Magic Amulet, renowned in the songs of the bards. Within it dwells a spirit, and a voice cries from it to warn him, and the three royal waves of Eire respond, the Tonn Rury and the Tonn Tuaidhe and the long slow rolling wave of Cliona. At the slaughter of the sons of Usna I heard the voice and after it the roaring of the sea.”

Queen Meave wondered at the great Ard-Rie, and said :—

“ Once, indeed, I beheld him when he was a boy, for he came to Temair with his father, and my father and his then betrothed us to one another. At him the far-coming kings wondered, both on account of his beauty, and because he loved not our pleasures, but went to and fro among the cairns and the tombs of the men of old, and the armour and weapons of ancient heroes preserved in our halls, listening greedily to every lying tale of the bards and antiquaries of Temair. But prithee, O Fergus, who is that great warrior coming from the west, and with him a cohort of chariot-riding chivalry? On foot now he approaches the knoll, and with him two noble boys. Half of this spear would not measure his broad shoulders. A crimson, silken bratta he wears, over which his dense hair rolls bright as refined gold, the gold that boils over the edge of the refiner’s crucible. His eyes blaze terribly and the hue of the foxglove is in his cheek. I would say that he was slothful, but now aroused, and that his soul is possessed with some great wrath.”

And Fergus said :—

“ It is Conall the Victorious, son of Amargin, whose sister is Scaill who is as beautiful as she is tender-hearted and loving. Not with ease

would the rising-out of a territory drive that single hero before them ; and now he is awake and angry on account of the slaying of Cuculain. For they made a vow with one another after this fashion. Said yon hero, 'Thee slain, O Setanta, the sun shall not set before I have avenged thee,' but Cuculain said, "Thy blood shall not be cold upon the earth O Conall before I shall have taken vengeance for thee." And at this, too, is he wroth, namely, that he has left that vow unfulfilled. Like a rock is he steadfast within his armour, and he is lord of all the arts of poison, and of war."

And Cormac Conlingas said :—

"The women of Ulla go pining for his love. He is the greatest as well as the comeliest of the heroes of the North, and he prospers equally in love making and in war. Those royal youths by his side are his two sons, Leix Ken-Mor and Euryal Glun-mar."

Then said Queen Meave :—

"This, indeed, is a most renowned champion. Once he came to Rath Cruhane, and he overcame all my household at throwing of the wheel, but Cuculain doubled his cast. Then I saw him not, for I lay in my chamber weak after the birth of Measa, but I directed a goblet of silver

to be given unto him. He it was who brake that great battle upon the Leinstermen at Ben Edar, and chased Mesgeara across the Liffey, whom he slew at the Ford of Claen. Him, too, at Mac Datho's feast, I beheld when he insulted the Olnemacta, at the dismemberment of the famous black boar, crying aloud with a fierce laugh, 'To you the legs, seeing that they have been at all times your salvation.' Before him then we fled to the Shannon, and he went slaughtering our broken rear through Mid-Erin. Surely, Fergus, thou didst wisely to withstand the departure of the hosts of the Kings of Munster. Look now westward, O Fergus. Who is that noble champion, tall, and of a most knightly bearing, who stands in the midst of his men of war, where the Brosna issues silver-bright from the dark wood? In his hand he holds a long broad-bladed spear, and his bratta is mixed purple and gold. His wheel brooch is of flashing findrinny with a long pin of very bright silver. Around him is a bardic confraternity playing upon musical instruments and singing. Like Concobar Mac Nessa he too wears the beard of a learned man."

And Fergus said :—

“ I know him well ; Laeghaire, son of Conud, son of Iliach, son of Cas, son of Rury. Chivalrous and noble is that champion. None have ever foiled him, and upon him no defeat was ever at any time followed up. Like a great rock, unloosed from its foundations, which lays waste a forest on the steep hillside, will be his passage through our hosts. Well I know thee in peace and war, Laeghaire of the Red Victorious Helmet. Bravest he of the Red Branch after the great son of Amargin.”

And Queen Maeve said :—

“ To him I directed that there should be given a goblet of bright bronze at that contest of the throwing of the wheel. Nevertheless, to my people, he seemed to have the strength of a god until the son of Amargin stripped for the contest, and at him, in turn, they wondered exceedingly until his cast was doubled by Cuculain. Nevertheless, before that great trial and rivalry of strength they two deemed themselves to be the guardians and protectors of Cuculain.”

And so Queen Meave, her fear lost in wonder and awe, kept questioning the exiles concerning the great chieftains of the North—godlike heroes and champions, whom dying, their giant tombs did not all receive, for they left their glory in the

air and their memory in the souls of men ; Kelkar, the great son of Uther, his broad breast hidden by the Gate of Battle ; Owen, son of Durthecht, cunning, brave, and most ruthless ; Cumascra Mend Macha, stammeringly eloquent, the heroic son of Concobar ; Meann, old and unmerciful ; Girgend, father of a beautiful daughter, Mainey Minremar, at whom Inkel wondered on the banks of the Dodder ; Shanka, the broad-browed orator ; Roka Mac Athemain, whom the Ultonians welcomed not, nor censured ; Fergus, king of Rathlin ; Condera, of the Dark Red Shield, and Nuada, of the Candle, and many more renowned in chronicle and song, the flower of the Red Branch when, in that warlike age, like a full wave breaking, the swelling might of the Clanna Rury rolled over and shed itself with a noise of battle, and the shining of heroic deeds, too long forgotten, but not destined for ever to be oblivion's prey.

CHAPTER VI

THE RESURGENCE OF CUCULAIN

“ But a blast met them
Or it was Cuculain.”

ANCIENT BARD.

OF the many single combats and of the great battles which were fought that day it is not my purpose here to write. The history of all these can be found in the ancient books. Suffice it to say, that the valour and the numbers of the host of the Four Provinces and the vast strength and indomitable soul of Fergus Mac Roy, his great authority and his martial skill enabled the army of Meave to prevail over the host of Conco-bar. Defeated though undestroyed were the Red Branch in that battle, so that when night fell it seemed good to Conco-bar and his council that they should erect a great rampart against the next day's onset of the southern host.

This they did drawing together as materials the wrecks of that ravaged forest. Before the rampart they dug a deep foss and piled the excavated earth upon the stockade, making all firm and as they hoped impregnable, but they

left gateways in the rampart by which they might sally forth and again retire.

After that they rested, sad indeed in mind and very weary, but firmly resolved like one man to perish there taking terrible revenges rather than for a single furlong to show their backs to Meave's mighty host, although upon trial it had proved too strong for them, even for them the far-famed children of Rury—hitherto so glorious and unconquerable.

Then in the camp of Meave might be seen the innumerable fires at which her warriors roasted flesh, rejoicing and shouting, while to and fro there went Meave's distributors dividing flour and milk and butter for the making and baking of cakes. Also they poured forth old ale abundantly as much as any one had need. For in the days of the Heroes the children of Eire drank not for drunkenness, but for cheerfulness. So there was a vast rejoicing and a glad uproar in the camp of Meave, but in the camp of the Red Branch all was dark and silent. After a space, too, there was silence on both sides.

That night in the camp of Meave two men were wide awake. One was Fergus, on whom lay the care of the whole host; the other was Aileel Mor, the aged husband of the ever youthful

Meave, but though aged and now unfit for war his mind was ever alert and active. With him was a youth named Fer-loga who loved him and was ever in companionship and attendance. He lay drowned in slumber at the feet of Aileel. From his relaxed right hand the drawn sword which he ever bare safe-guarding the life of the king fell away and lay beside him on the ground, for his lord had permitted him that day to enter the battle. So Aileel lay awake revolving many things and recalling many ancient memories, and marvelling at the great stillness. Then in the stillness he heard a faint far-off tinkling which ceased, but was again heard more clear, and afterwards grew stronger and clearer coming out of the north, and then the trampling of steeds and the roar of revolving wheels. After that there was a noise of glad voices in the camp of the Ultonians, which grew and increased until it ended in a heaven-rending shout. "It is some mighty champion," said he, "coming to the assistance of the Red Branch," and he wondered in vain who that might be. Then he said: "It is Macha herself, builder of Emain Macha, coming out of the unseen world to the aid of her own people in their distress."

He called to Fer-loga, but the youth did not answer, drowned in deep sleep and forespent with great weariness.

In the dawning of the next day the men of Meave perceived that the Ultonians had not fled during the night, and saw how they had raised an immense rampart like a bended bow, the horns resting upon that forest and that it was pierced with gateways and defended by a pass. They made dispositions accordingly for assaulting the same. But they were surprised to find that the Red Branch, not waiting to be assailed, poured forth in torrents both chariots and footmen, diminished indeed in numbers but proud and exulting, and as if sure of victory, and filled the plain.

Thereafter the great battle of the Tain-bo-Cooalney was renewed and many brave deeds done of which I shall here say nothing now, save that again the great numbers and the bravery of the Four Provinces and the valour and wise dispositions of Fergus prevailed against the Red Branch, who were overborne and driven towards their defences.

Now Aileel Mor this day sat upon a throne on a rising ground before the camp with Fer-loga beside him, who surveyed the whole

field of combat and explained all to the King whose eyes were dim with years.

Said Aileel :—

“ What great champions of the Clanna Rury, yet unhurt, still resist the onset of the Four Provinces, O Fer-loga ? ”

And Fer-loga said :—

“ I see, indeed, Concobar Mac Nessa, standing rearward, and from him, like sparks from a flame, there shoot forth on every side, swift-travelling war-cars and fiery youths bringing aid to every part, and I see the great son of Amargin—well, indeed, might the men of Meave remember him, and that terrible shield which the Ultonians call Lam-tapa. Three times yesterday that baleful symbol burned amid the streets of our camp. Also, I see the shield of Laeghaire, son of Iliach, that other pillar of the sovereignty of Concobar. Cumascra Mend Macha is unwounded ; the Gate of Battle, too, I behold, and the Skia-Arglann, and I see that fierce boy who led forth a battalion of the battalions of Temair.”

“ But seest thou none, O Fer-loga, who was not yesterday in the battle ? Surely it was not for some lesser champion that the Ultonians raised, ere midnight, that mighty shout ? ”

“ There is no new champion in their host, O monarch of the Olnemacta. Nevertheless, I perceive one huge warrior, tall and stooping somewhat, who moves fiercely and restlessly around the camp, within the rampart, and I think that I have seen him ere this, and that he sometime occasioned mirth, and quarrelling also, but I cannot clearly remember. Nevertheless, I am conscious of a certain fear as I look upon that hero. Yet, to me, he appears not about to enter the battle this day.”

Then said Aileel, as he listened to the shock of the contending hosts and the loud cries :—

“ How fares the battle now, O Fer-loga ? ”

And Fer-loga said :—

“ Truly it is not an easy thing to quench the torch of valour of the Ultonians. Our host gives back before them, save only where fight the Clans of Moyrisk.”

And Aileel Mor answered :—

“ O, that now I had those strong limbs and that warlike spirit which once were mine, when my mother sent me forth out of Moyrisk as an ally to the ally of the high king of Erin. Many fierce and great champions then I slew, and with difficulty could I repeat even their names.”

And Fer-loga said :—

“Great, indeed, was thy career, and renowned amongst the historians of the Olnemacta, and quickly wouldst thou then have repelled the onset of the son of Amargin, before whom Cathir, son of Eterskel, and the Clan Dega keep continually retreating.”

Then, after a space, Fer-loga and the guards of the king shouted, and Aileel asked the reason of that shout, to whom Fer-loga replied :—

“Cet and thy maternal clans have pierced the centre of the battle of the Ultonians, and already their chariots are rolled back into the foss, and their spearmen are mingled with their chivalry, and their steadfast bands are confused.” “Go back, son of Uther,” cried Fer-loga, “now at last go back.”

And again said Fer-loga :—

“Our host is poured around the horns of their battle, and seek to cut off their retreat to the embankment, and in the centre thy sons and the battalion of Fergus burst between the main army and their retreat. Moreover, further north, Cormac Conlingas hath pierced their line where fight the clans of that other Fergus the great son of Leda. Like arrows from a bow, Fergus Mac Roy lets loose perpetually swift squadrons of chariots, or strong rapid battalions

of spearmen, where their line is broken, that they may pierce through and hold the gates.

“Nevertheless,” said Fer-loga, “before the great central gate Concobar Mac Nessa himself lays waste our host. I see there the high Queen retreat in a panic. Here only is there a stand made, but at all points else they are driven back, or isolated in the midst of our host which pours around them. Like a sinking ship, when the waters roll over her bulwarks, and she trembling prepares to go down into the abyss, so now is the host of the Children of Rury.

“Fergus Mac Roy hath himself advanced against the great son of Nessa. Before him he routs the battalions of Emain Macha. Here, indeed, there is a dire contest, for the Arch-kings of Ulla have met, and the son of Nessa is driven back.”

It was then that the guards of the king ran forward, owing to their anxiety, and in order that they might the better see, and they intercepted the vision of Fer-loga. But Fer-loga roared at them and they fell back to the right hand and the left.

Then said Aileel :—

“How looks the battle now, O Fer-loga?”

And Fer-loga answered :—

“ Like islands in the sea, which swiftly lessen in the rush of a mighty spring-tide, so are the battalions of the Ultonians, and like the foaming edge of the sea where land and water meet, bright with foam, convulsed, loud with the reverberations of the waves, are the borders of their intercepted and surrounded cohorts litten with the flash and glitter of weapons, and with the lightning of blade meeting blade, and spear-point upon brazen armour. Like a wedge the army of Conall Carna stand out into the multitude of the Tain, and Laeghaire Buada fights upon the edge of the foss. Elsewhere the Ultonians contend around the gates, but far the greater part are islanded in the overflowing numbers of the Tain.”

“ What distant moaning is this I hear, O Fer-loga, like the noise of the tumult of waters, when in the still night they roar upon some vast unbroken strand? From the south comes a roaring as of troubled seas, and from the north a blended moan makes answer.”

Him Fer-loga answered but indirectly, for he watched with a passionate concern the combat of Fergus Mac Roy and of Concobar Mac Nessa.

“ Strike again, son of the Red Rossa,” cried Fer-loga. “ Reel and stand not, proud tyrant

of Emain. Concobar reels before the stroke of Fergus. Loud roars his stricken shield, echoing to the Three Waters. The wave of Tu Inver is troubled for its king. The mighty Lir laments in vain for the King of Ulla. In vain Tonn Rury mourns, and Tonn Cleena sends forth a cry."

"How now looks the battle, O Fer-loga, in the open plain, and along the foss and rampart?"

"Not conquered, but as it were trodden out like fire is now the great Red Branch of the Ultonians. Like stars in the dawning day, one by one go out their battle-standards over the plain."

"I hear strange cries, O Fer-loga, and a shrieking of badbs and battle-furies, not as of those that dance amid the slain, exulting in slaughter, and over plains steeped in the blood of heroes, but as of those who go forth to battle with some great unconquered champion, and who cry around him in the air. Before my eyes shadows pass, intermingled with pale glares, running swiftly. As in a vision, I see the children of Maga, and my own sons, and the champions of the Clan Dega. Horribly their eyes look forth from white hollow faces, and their jaws are like those that look for the bandages of death."

“ Surely, O king, these are wild omens to assail thee in thy day of triumph while amid shouts of victory the Four Provinces trample into earth the remnant of the Clanna Rury.”

“ Yet, surely I err not, O Fer-loga. Past me, running westward, I hear a trampling of unseen people fleeing as from the onset of a god. Seest thou aught new in the camp of the Ultonians ?”

“ I see, indeed, that great champion whom I noted erewhile. Now is he infuriated and runs raging around his steeds. Gigantic are they in stature, and, for beauty like those weird horses which they say in the sacred mountains are seen at night grazing beside some fairy lough. Loudly they neigh and shake their tossing manes. Scarcely can he who yokes them buckle the yoke-strap around their brawny necks. One of them is grey, almost to whiteness, and his huge mane tosses loose ; but the other is black as night and his mane is plaited and ribanded.”

“ Describe the charioteer, O Fer-loga. A chill fear grows upon me.”

“ He is red-haired, I think, and a gibné of gold confines his temples. A short inar of deer-skin he wears above the lena, and the sleeve thereof is wide and cut open to the elbow. He is wrathful and impetuous ; yea, most fierce and

infuriated. One would think that he was impotent from exceeding wrath. He shouts as he plies his work, and looks ever towards the chief tent of the quarter of the Clans of Murthemney. Surely I have seen that champion. He resembles the sons of the King of Gabra. For of them there are two who fight among the Ultonians, Id, the charioteer of Conall, and Sheeling, the charioteer of Laeghairé. Now, from its house he draws forth the chariot with an angry rush. I have not seen its like before upon any of the plains of Eiré. Well matches it those giant steeds. The wheels are of burnished brass, and the revolving spokes send forth fiery flashes. The body is green, and the pole ornamented with bands of silver, and where it is made fast to the yoke there is a shining of gold."

"O Fer-loga, there is evil forward. What is that which thou didst prophesy, O fairy prophetess? 'How look my hosts upon Magh Ai? Bloodied all, and crimson.'"

So murmured the king, and he prayed unto his gods. Fer-loga, on the other side, uttered a sudden cry, and, starting backwards, said:—

"But who is this other mighty one running forward past the chariots and the horses, swift as a deer, impetuous as a war-horse, breathing

valour ? Truly the warriors are not born who could resist his onset. Of the race of those who, in the ancient days, fought at Moy Tura for the sovereignty of Erin, is he. So terrible is he, and so beautiful."

"Describe him to me, O Fer-loga. Tell me his tokens that I may know."

"He is fair and ruddy, and his neck and arms which are bared to the shoulder and his limbs below the lena are white like snow. His hair shakes forth a light as he runs. Like a star the burnished cath-barr glitters above his brows. He wears the bratta of a king, and a round golden brooch upon his breast. In his left hand he carries a spear, nor do I think that the son of Mor-Febis, in the prime of his youth, could have raised it from the ground. Yet this youth, be he god or hero, runs through the camp swifter than Ossorian steeds around the raths of Cahir-man when they contend for victory ; lighter is it in his hand than a goad in the hand of a charioteer. This in one hand he carries, and in the other what I deem to be a sling. Beneath the flying crimson bratta his lena is filled with coloured devices."

"Small is the hope thou hast left me, O Fer-loga. Tell me, yet again, his tokens. What is the likeness of his shield ? "

“ As yet I see but the edge. Now, like burning fire he springs to the summit of the rampart. Pale azure, bordered with ruddy gold ; there is a terrible portent in the centre, a boar’s head, black as night, and fiery flashes seem to dart from its eyes.”

“ Have done, O Fer-loga ; it is enough. Now, let the thunder-cloud burst with flame and red ruin over the Olnemacta, for our strength is at an end, and upon the day of our triumph night comes. Let the Fir-bolgs of Iorrus flee to the Shannon, and the sons of Maga be brave only to escape. Fly now beyond Slieve Blahma with the Ernai, O Cairbre the Fair and Great, and to your own territories, ye nobles of Meath and Bregia, ye chivalry of Cahirman and Dinn Rie. Not Fergus, nor the seven Mainey, nor Cet will save you now from the might of that warrior, whose shout, like the shout of Lu contending against the Fomoroh, resounds against the canopy of the sky. O Cailitin, thou mighty wizard, prophetic of evil things, to thee all was revealed. The earth will not breed one like to him, or second. It is the Hound of Murthemney, O Fer-loga, returning again to battle unsubdued. It is Cuculain, the invincible, son of Sualtam.”

So cried the aged king, and wrung his unavailing hands. But he, Cuculain, son of Sualtam, stood afar upon the black rampart of the Clanna Rury, terrible in his beauty, a portent of war clear seen like flame against the dark clouds of the north, returning again to battle unsubdued, and he shouted the war-cry of the Clanna Rury, like the shout of a battalion. Terribly his voice rang across the plain, and like the sound of some mighty trumpet fulfilled by the breath of a giant.

CHAPTER VII

TRIUMPH

Over Breg Ross, over Brainé,
They come along the high way.
By the foot of Baile-in-Bile ;
It is gifted with victories.

He is a valiant Hound who commands it
And a faithful charioteer who guides it.
He is a noble hawk who speeds
His horses to the south.

Woe to the man who is upon the Tulloch
Awaiting the Hound of valour !
I foretold last year
That there would come the heroic Hound.

The Hound of Emain Macha,
A Hound with intermingling of all colours
The Hound of a Territory, the Hound of Battle.
I hear I have heard.

He runneth, and it is not very slowly ;
Though fleet as the wind yet without exertion
But like water from a high cliff
Or like the rapid thunder.

ANCIENT POEM IN CELEBRATION OF CUCULAIN.

WHEN Cuculain and Laeg reached the camp that night Cuculain's wounds were not yet healed. Also a magical oppression and enfeeblement lay heavy upon the hero owing to the arts and spells of that mighty magician and Ard-druid, Cailitin, and through the power of his familiar spirits. The physicians of the Red Branch ministered to him with all their art. They made for him a bed of healing and applied salves and ointments repeating as they did so ancient rhythmic incantations and words of power. Naytheless they had to declare that his debility was beyond their art to heal and that it was a magical oppression emanating from some mighty enchanter which none but the greatest of the great gods of Erin could relax or subdue.

So he lay still as a stone but with wide open eyes full of trouble while Laeg went around distraught with grief and shame. For it had

been in his mind that Cuculain in the midst of his own people and of the Magi of the Crave Rue would have shaken off that oppression, and, resuming his unfathomable power, would effect a great deliverance for his people and for himself win a deathless renown. So he went, chafing, and oft times, without reason, chid the physicians and the attendants and the guards, and he went in and out continually and could abide in no one place.

As it drew towards morning though still dark, there arose from the near forest the low clear note of the unperturbed blackbird, and the glad carol of the unalarmed thrush and of other brave singers in the woods, pretermittng not by one note even then in the midst of this great battle of the Tain-bo-Coolaney, the ancient rites with which, since the beginning of the world, they had been accustomed to hail the sweet coming of Dawn.

Thereat Cuculain smiled and looked at Laeg ; and soon after he fell into a deep sleep.

Now it was an ancient geis with Cuculain, or magical prohibition, long since pronounced and sacredly observed by all, that no one should awake him while he slept. Therefore, when the morn was fully come and when the host was

being marshalled for the war and when he heard the thundering of the great Captains and the shouting of the warriors, Laeg became more and more perturbed in his mind, seeing how Cuculain still slept, peacefully, without any the least sound or motion, and his perturbation increased with the growing roar of the camp on all sides, and as the beautiful Dawn was more and more diffused over the earth.

Therefore, furious and fretful, he kept hastening from Cuculain's tent to the rampart and as quickly returned, or to the stable seeking to pacify the minds of the war horses who, too, were indignant and went nigh to breaking the strong bonds and fastenings which held them, or to the chariot-house where the brass and gold of the great war-car burned like fire and the sprites that were therein muttered and moaned continually. He stood upon the rampart hard by the Gateway of the Clans of Murthemney, his soul confused with a blind rage as past him, continually, there went ox-waggon, laden with the wounded of the Clanna Rury, lying silent upon the blood-soaked rushes. There he stamped upon the rampart, and tore his auburn hair, and ran again to the pavilion of his master where Cuculain still slept. But Laeg wondered

when he saw him, for his countenance was fresher and fairer than before and nobler to look upon and greater seemed the son of Sualtam than at any time since he had attained to manhood and taken his place amongst the warriors of the Red Branch. He longed now to awake him, but did not, for he feared to break the geis. He stood in the door of the rough tree-made tent roofed with rushes, and watched the torch-light flickering on the white forehead and yellow diffused hair of the hero. There listening he heard a voice, a murmur like the murmur of far-off seas and to himself he said :—" Surely one of the Tuatha De Danan is now communing with the spirit of my dear lord."

He was afraid then and withdrawing silently hastened again to the rampart where he watched the battle how it fared, shouting and vociferating, scattering on all sides laudations and imprecations.

So stood Laeg or ran to and fro along the rampart roaring, now all but demented with wrath and shame, for the great host of the Four Provinces was all this time submerging the Clanna Rury. Like the anguish of those who all night long contend with the powers of wind and sea and hope that the day may bring some

relief, but in the grey tempestuous dawn the sea breaks through their riven timbers, and the light of life goes down into darkness and the grave ; such then was the anguish of the Clanna Rury, though no coward hearts were theirs, bard-nourished champions, devoid of fear. For amid the deafening din of the brazen deluge immersing fought on in silence the scattered fragments of the Red Branch—branch now stripped by the wild winds of war—the Clanna Rury, breathing fierce breath, terrible in that dread moment.

Like the arms of some great bay or harbour, there stretched forth into the plain, piercing the multitude of the Tain, the battalions of two great champions, of Conall, son of Amargin, on the east, and of Laeghaire Buada on the west. But far other than a peaceful haven was the wild expanse which they enclosed, rolled over by the waves of war, bright with the glare of battle, loud with the crash of meeting hosts, the clang and reverberation of smitten brass. And now all hope was taken away, for the battalions of the Red Branch were isolated in the midst of the plain, and between them many a rapid cohort of the spearmen of the Queen, and many a swift squadron of her chivalry had rushed, running

straight or aslant, according as they had opportunity, and they were seizing the gates all along the right centre and the left centre, while in the centre the Ard-Ries fought, Fergus against Concobar, and the King of Ulla, being overpowered, kept retreating to the rampart.

At every gateway there was a bridge that crossed the trench, for the stems of trees were extended from bank to bank, and upon them lay others, lying transverse and close together, across which the chariots and the men of war went forth to battle. At each of these gates was stationed a company of warriors, whose duty it was to remove the bridge what time the last of the Clanna Rury should be received within the rampart, in case of disaster, and to cast into the gateway trees, with all their branches. Also, they purposed to run the stems of fir-trees through the forks crosswise so that none from without might remove them.

All this time the star of Emain Macha grew pale. One by one, like lights in a king's banqueting-hall after the guests have departed when the slaves go about and extinguish them, so one by one went down the battle-standards of the Clanna Rury over the plain.

Still hard by the great central gate, and on

the right of where the Ard-Ries fought, floated the Red Hand of Emain Macha, and around it silent, terrible fought the bravest of the Clanna Rury, and thither collected the remnants of every shattered battalion, if by any means they could escape thither.

And now, too, there were strange shapes seen, and discerned abominable forms and were heard shrieks, and horrid laughter, as of those who laughing yell in the insane house, for out of darkness infernal and the caves of death, where the death-god, Iarnmas, wandering, cries amid the darkness to his children, and summons round him the hosts of hell, they arose, passing through the maddened souls of men, and were seen visibly in the light of day, withered, blasted faces, unclean doleful shapes, as of men and women, and where the slaughter was greatest they danced, and raised in their accursed hands the hot blood of heroes with horrid yells. The badbs were there, and the wives of Ned reeled amid the carnage; but far thence fled bright Angus before that ghastly brood. Fair god of the silver-winding Boyne, to thee dearer the music of thy own sweet stream, where beneath Slane it chimes over its pebbly bed, and thy green palace over against Ros-na-Ree, and

sweeter than all strife the melody of thy stricken lute, or lovers' talk beneath the evening star.

Now Laeg had surmised rightly, for to Cuculain sleeping there had appeared a vision. Before him stood a form as of a warrior equipped for battle, but of a stature and beauty greater than human. His face was not clear seen owing to the excessive light.

Said Cuculain :—

“ I know thee, Ioldana. Signifying what hast thou come down now out of the realms of the unseen.”

But that other answered, and his voice was low and grave, musical as the deep strings of the harp, or like the sound of the distant sea :—

“ To aid thee, as I can, dear Setanta. Yet though great my power there is a Power above mine which I serve, and I have been charged to give thee now for thy choosing a long and a prosperous life and a deferred and happy death with Emer to close thy eyes and thy children and grandchildren grieving at thy bedside, or, this day, victory and a great deliverance for thy people and afterwards an early, a violent and a solitary death.”

So saying, he awakened in the mind of Cuculain sweet remembrances of his happy home in

Dun-Dalgan, of his beautiful young wife and of little Connla, his lovingness and childish ways and broken speech: for Fion-Scota, White-flower, was not yet born.

He was silent remembering all this, but not for any comparison or libration of the opposing destinies, and after a while answered.

“On the day, O Lu, in which I took sword I put my hands into the hands of Concobar and declared myself his man, faithful and true, and a true friend and comrade of all the Red Branch. Let me save him and them now to-day from the destruction which is before them and thereafter let my life be short or long as to thee and to the rest may seem good.

“To do this thing now shines for me like a star when one only is in the sky. I would not forsake my king and people in their dark hour, not if I were promised a thousand years of felicity or even thy own immortality, O conqueror of the Fomoroh.”

“Well hast thou chosen, dear son,” said the god, “and thy reward is sure, though I cannot name it, nor can any, for its secret is hid.”

He laid a hand like light upon him and said:—

“Awake now, O Setanta, and go forth to war. Hear how thy people summon thee to

deliver them. Fear not the powers of earth and hell, for I am ever around thee. I have relaxed upon thee the oppression of the Clan Cailitin, and healed thy many wounds, and restored thee to thy ancient prowess ; therefore, thou shalt go boldly against hundreds, and battalions shall not put thee to flight. Moreover, I have poured a magic mist around thee, so that thou shalt seem greater than human, with Panic in front of thee, and Terror issuing out of thy countenance. For in this battle thou shalt be my other self, thou shalt be me. The Clan Cailitin will come against thee with all their wizardry and magic arts, they who have depopulated realms and laid fertile lands waste, and who bring the magnanimity of the proud to baseness and enfeeble the strength of the brave. Reserve thy best power for that battle, dear Setanta, trusting in thy own great heart, for here I shall be weak to sustain thee. Go forth now, O son. Remember thy might and mine. Conquer their allies and conquer them, laying them low to-day if but for a time."

"Nevertheless, few indeed shall thy years be, but while time lasts thy glory shall endure, and thy name shall be known unto the Earth's end. Nor shall thy death come suddenly or without

warning. Thou shalt hear Mac Manar and see Rod, and it is the remnant of the Clan Cailitin who will destroy thee."

Then the divine voice ceased, and Cuculain, awaking, beheld Laeg in the doorway, and heard the roar of the Magic Amulet, the stricken shield of his King, and with it the responsive moaning of the sea, and the triumphant shouts of the Four Provinces. Thereat, a fierce wrath filled all his veins, and he sprang swiftly from his couch and cried to Laeg to don his battle harness. Laeg did so swiftly. First, a soft linen lena of twenty-seven folds next his skin that his armour might not abrade it, and over that his battle-shirt. Seven-fold was that shirt, of seasoned leather, cut from the hide of wild-bulls. It descended upon his thighs, but from the hips downwards it was slashed, that it might not inconvenience him in running, and Laeg fastened the clasps of glittering findrinny. Then, around his waist Laeg clasped the waistpiece, also seven-fold, where more than elsewhere the warrior needs protection. After that, Cuculain put on his outer lena of very fine linen, bordered at the collar and at the extremities with golden thread, and upon which Emer had wrought many fair embroidered forms reaching below his strong

knotted knees ; and above his loud-beating heart he secured it with buttons of silver. Laeg also fastened on his sandals, winding over ankle and instep the pliant thongs, and though in fiery haste turned the ends of the thongs into the containing loops. Over his right shoulder he cast the sword-belt, the belt that sustained Cruaideen, and round his waist his girdle wherein he slung his battle mace and colg and fitted thereto a leathern satchel filled with sling-bolts of iron.

Cuculain then bade him yoke the horses to the war-car and Laeg ran. He himself cast on his shoulders his bratta of crimson silk and bound it in front with the royal brooch hereditary of his kingdom, all shining gold and flashing gems, and great and round like a wheel, and upon his head he set his brazen helmet lined with soft white doe-skin. While he thus armed himself a man, even at a distance, might hear the drumming of his heart and with difficulty might one distinguish the motions of hands for they went like the live lightning. Then he took his shield, Fabane, which had for ensign a black boar's head and of which the white tusks shone terribly. That portent recorded the overthrow of the dark Fomorian powers by Lu from whom

it was a gift. Within it he looked narrowly to see if his battle-stones were in their places, which they were, twelve in number always, ere he went to war. He passed his left arm through the loop of the shield and laid a strong hold on the hand grip. In his right hand he took his great spear, the Gae-bolg, and his sling, the Crann-tabal. Of red yew was that sling, the string of twisted wire of findrinny. It was a geis to him to miss any cast with that sling.

Then sprang forth from the tent the son of Sualtam ; and when he saw the plain and the Red Branch routed a fell rage grew to madness within him, and a cry from unseen mouths arose around him as he ran. Moreover, the son of Lir, the mighty genius of the storm-swept promontories of the sea, waved above him his magic wand, and transformed him as he ran past Laeg and his horses, and sprang to the summit of the rampart. There he shouted the battle cry of the Ultonians. Terribly rang the voice of Cuculain across the battle.

It was then that Fer-loga announced his coming to Aileel, and Aileel prophesied from him the defeat of the mighty host which Queen Meave had gathered out of the Four Provinces.

But he, Cuculain, son of Sualtam, stood afar

upon the rampart of the Clanna Rury, a portent of war clear seen like flame against the dark clouds of the North, terrible in his beauty, and his voice rang across the battle like the shout of a battalion, or the sound of some mighty trumpet explored by the storm-breath of a giant of the Fomoroh. As when mariners in the western main plying southwards past Dun-na-marc and the House of Donn, whose ship the tempest shakes and the wild billows buffet ; and they, in the darkness and the storm, hear around them the thunder of the waves upon iron coasts, who, being impotent, anticipate certain death ; and as when, to them rounding suddenly and un-awares some concealing promontory, there shines far away the ship-protecting light upon that solitary black rock which was the grave of Ir, and afar over the tossing waters there streams the glorious ray, so welcome and so glorious to the defeated Red Branch, whom death and despair now encompassed, over whom rolled the wild waves of war and the brazen billows of the Tain, and when they heard his cry appeared far away, the coming of the son of Suáltam, girt with all the splendour and the power which were shed upon him by Lu and Mananan. Silent then as the grave, and still while one might count

five, became the whole of that war-swept plain, and straightway, with a heaven-cleaving shout, the Clanna Rury sprang triumphant upon their foes.

But Cuculain, planting his great spear in the ground, drew his sling and fitted thereto an iron bolt, where thong and timber joined. In the loop he passed his thumb, and bent the crann-tabal upon his right knee, gazing, as he bent, upon where the remnant of the nations of Cooalney and Murthemney were overborne by the sons of Lon-Cras. Of them two were in front of the others, Finn, the fourth son of Lon-Cras, and Caibdeen the sixth. Lords were they of Teffa, ruling over many tribes, and at that moment Finn had his mace raised in the act of striking one of the vassals of Cuculain. But ere the blow descended, Cuculain slang. Like the sound of a gong was the back-springing sling, and like a fierce blast so hissed the twisted thong of the crann-tabal, and the deadly bolt sped afar. There fell Finn, who had that day slain many of the people of Cuculain, smitten through shield and breast by the unerring missile. Further north, his brother Caibdeen, in his chariot, galloped past a battalion of Cuculain's people, who, having been thrown into confusion,

were pressed close together, and unable to wield their weapons. Along the edge of the disordered mass the scythe of that warrior's chariot share the helpless warriors, guided deftly by the charioteer, but Caibdeen himself stood erect in the chariot, protecting the charioteer with his shield, when once more the crann-tabal sounded. The bolt smote the left-hand steed in the forehead, who, plunging forward, fell, and the chariot was over-turned, and those within it rolled forth upon the plain ; but as Caibdeen was rising from the ground, Cuculain slang a third time and struck him, and the iron bullet passed quite through his head, from temple to temple. Then retreated the sons of Lon-Cras and their nation, and Cuculain's people, with a shout, restored their ranks and renewed the war.

Swifter than words can tell was the slinging of Cuculain, nor might a man discern the rapid movements of his hands, but ever flashed afar the sweep of that bright sling, and ever hissed the sling-thong through the air.

Northwards then slang Cuculain where the Mainey's of the Sea-board were routing the nations of Fergus Mac Leda, and of these he slew three in succession, giving relief to the Ultonians ; and there, too, Fergus Mac Leda again dashed

forward against the men of Meave. Also, on the extreme edge of the battle, northward, he slew three men of great stature, whose names are not recorded. He confused, too, the Clan Tomalta, conspicuous with their blood-red armour and accoutrements, and the Clan Guaire, who fought with great spears ending in a triple prong, and a nation whose name is not recorded, but whose warriors were all armed with battle maces of bright brass. Also he confused and routed the Clan Sibna, and the Clan Murdoc, and the sons of Talc, and slew three dark-browed nobles of the children of Sealem.

So he continued slinging ; and wherever he saw the Ultonians overpowered, at that point he continually slang, shooting over the heads of the Clanna Rury, and the men of Meave kept falling, and the distress of the Ultonians was relieved, and the severe pressure of the foe was relaxed. Moreover, at the appearance of Cuculain, all who fought about the gateway in the left centre of the embankment had themselves retreated ; nevertheless, many of them were intercepted by the Clanna Rury and slain who now released from stress of battle on the front, faced round against those who had gotten in their rear.

Meantime Laeg had harnessed the horses and yoked the chariot, and he sprang thereinto, and guided the steeds straight to the entrance gateway, beside which, upon the right, Cuculain stood slinging. Loud then shouted Laeg to those at the entrance, who were preparing to reconstruct the bridge over the fosse, and they opened to the right hand and the left. For Laeg had leaped into his place in the chariot, and with difficulty did he keep his footing, so wild and unmanageable were the steeds, swifter than the swiftest horses in the chariot race contending for the victory, so eager were they to enter into the battle.

Cuculain heard the roar of the revolving wheels and the thunder of the trampling of the steeds, nevertheless, once again he slang, and struck the foremost champion of the Clan Eocha of Loch Erne, for they were of the army of Meave, though they meared with the western Ultonians, and he snatched his spear from the ground, ready to spring into the chariot. Straightforward then rushed the steeds, raging for the battle, and with the chariot they cleared the deep wide fosse; twenty feet was it in breadth from bank to bank; but hardly had they alighted with a mighty crash on the further

bank, when Cuculain stood by the side of Laeg, having bounded from the lofty rampart, and once more he shouted, and once more the host of Meave was confused, and the Red Branch dashed upon them dealing death.

Moreover, as they went, Laeg ran out in front the great chariot-spear, through its loops beneath the pole, and made it fast at his feet with the brazen clasp ; and with a lever, he unfolded the battalion-rending scythes, to see if they would work freely, so that like some vast bird of war, with out-stretched glittering wings, that chariot seemed to skim the ground.

Now was it that from their lethargic rest awaked the earth-demons, even the nether gods, through whose dark chambers sub-terrene echoed the thunder of the war-steeds' hoofs, and the roof of whose dun profound was shaken with the mighty oscillation. Loud then through the realms of gloom reverberated the voice of Orchil, the sorceress, summoning Fovart and her sisterhood of the Fomorian deep, a gloomy hosting of the nether powers and the earth-fiends arose against the son of Sualtam. Like billows of the sea the firm plain urged by them uplifted itself against Cuculain, so that the chariot-wheels sank into the ground, and the

hoofs of the horses were impeded and their progress was retarded, and their draught distressing. Which seeing, Cuculain addressed the Liath Macha, and said :—

“ O Grey of Macha, it was not thus that thou didst bear into battle thy divine mistress what time she went out against the Fomoroh, but swiftly through wet places and dry, thou didst urge thy course; and O Gray of Macha, the eyes of all Erin are upon thee and me this day.”

Thereat the noble spirit of the Liath Macha was grieved and against the yoke mightily he bent his broad chest with the strength of twenty horses, and out of the earth by main force he drew black Shanglan and the war-car, and then those peerless horses exerted their terrible strength, and through marble and whinstone crashed the revolving wheels of the war-car as the great steeds went on. Behind them the track of the chariot-wheels was like the mearing of a territory. Then saddened and astonished, the earth-demons sank into their deep abode, and again Laeg urged on the steeds of Cuculain straightforward into the thickest throng of the battle.

Far out in front of the chariot then sprang Cuculain, holding the Gae-Bolg in his left hand,

and he put his right hand into the hollow of his shield and began to rain his battle stones into an opposing battalion. First, then, he slew a mighty champion of the Dergtheena, a prince among the nation of Curoi Mac Dary, whose stone-built dun upon the sheer cliff's edge looked over the Atlantic in the land of the Ciarree. Him holding the battle-plough of the Roscathals Cuculain smote through the shield and the left breast, for on his arm the shield still lay, while with mighty hands he grasped the iron-work of that warlike instrument. Then it was that Cuculain saw Lewy Mac Conroi, who was hesitating in his mind whether he would go against Cuculain, and either avenge upon him the death of his father or meet at his hands a hero's death, and put to the proof that dim southern prophecy that by his hands should fall the Hound of Emain Macha, which was true indeed, but the time was not yet.

But as he deliberated, Cuculain, said :—

“ O Lewy Mac Conroi, submit thyself now to me and I will not hurt thee. I have slain thy father, and would not slay thee.”

Loud then in reply rang the spear of the southern hero on Fabane. Nevertheless, though mighty was the strength of the great son of

Curoi Mac Dary, harmless with bent point and splintered tree rebounded the spear of that warrior.

Then ran forward Cuculain, and disarmed him with his irresistible hands, and the companions of Cuculain took him captive.

After that, still hurling the battle stones, he slew two other of the champions of that nation, and before him dispersed the Clans of Slieve Mish. Also he routed the descendants of the ancient Luhara, who dwelt by the hill-enfolden lakes of Locha Lein and thence southwards to Inver Scena and who were surnamed the Flaming; also, a strong battalion from Assaroe, where their territory meared with the Ultonians, and the children of Laegairey of the Bloody Altars. So Cuculain routed the left centre of the host of Meave, and, standing, beckoned Laeg to approach. Bright then with the light of valour was the countenance of Cuculain, as he sprang into the chariot beside Laeg, and sent forth his taunts against the Olnemacta, exulting in his prowess, for not yet was his manhood confirmed, but such was his age, as when youth and manhood join, and still untouched by the razor were his lips, and, for all his heroic greatness, the unbridled wantonness of youth was

strong within him. Moreover, now he had saved the life of his king, and repelled Duvac Dael Ulla on the north, and had routed the battalions of Meave over all the left centre of the Clanna Rury, and there gathered round him, and after him, his ancient comrades and schoolfellows, and dear friends, and the remnant of the Clans of Cooalney and Murthemney, who were subject unto him, and loved him, and a warlike glee and wanton exhilaration filled his spirit. Therefore, when he stood beside Laeg in the chariot, he said :—

“ Guide now the steeds to the right centre of the battle. And this shall be as it were a race of chariots at Tailteen ; so shall I mock and deride the host of the Four Provinces. Therefore, give to me my balls of jugglery.”

And Laeg said :—

“ Thou art a witless idiot, O Setanta. Is this a time to indulge thy mad freaks, when the Olnemacta are routing the Ultonians over all the right centre. If thou carest not for thyself have at least a care for thy charioteer, who, shieldless, hath no protection save what lies in thy skill and warlike prudence, of which right little dost thou possess. Verily, if I return to Emain Macha in safety, never more will I be

charioteer of thine. Truly my brothers made a wiser choice."

And Cuculain answered :—

"When I took thee to be my charioteer, O Laeg, I then said : 'Not beside me or over me shalt thou be smitten by a hostile weapon, but through me ;' and in our many battles, hast thou ever yet received any hurt ? "

Laeg was troubled hearing that word, and he gave Cuculain the balls of glittering brass, and urged on the steeds. Across the plain then they flew, between the Clanna Rury and the Olne-macta, and where they went the men of Meave shrank away. Through a field of slaughter dashed then the war-car, and over the mangled bodies of heroes, and the blood bespattered the war-car, and reddened the tires of the wheels and the spokes. But above the head of Cuculain there was as it were a bright circle, so did he cause those eight balls to revolve, watching warily, nevertheless, lest a spear or a bolt from the men of Meave should smite his charioteer or himself, and the Clanna Rury laughed when they beheld him. Afar off Conco^obar Mac Nessa, wounded, but vigilant, watched his career and antic feats, but the men of Meave were the more terrified.

Nevertheless there came out a great champion of the Olnemacta, and he said that now surely would the Hound fall at his hands, and that he would acquire great renown. Therefore, when Cuculain was looking southwards and upwards, he ran forward from the Olnemacian ranks to slay Cuculain as he passed. But Cuculain, not turning his head aside, but looking straight before him, darted one of the eight balls through his brain, and continued his juggler's wheel with seven.

"I swear the oath of my territories, O Setanta," cried Laeg, "that a prettier feat of war thou hast never yet performed."

The name of the slain man was Cuir, the son of Dalot.

In the end Cuculain cast the balls high aloft, and as they fell, dropped them one by one into their place, and he seized the Gae-Bolg from its socket and again sprang forth upon the chariot-pole. At this moment he heard sobbing voices and a sound of the muffled lamentation of women, and he said :—

"O Fathane and Colla, why do you weep? My end is not yet. I shall this day advance the Red Hand of my nation over all the nations of Eire, and I shall cause to flourish the fair fields of Ulla. Why do you weep?"

And there answered him voices out of the air :—

“ Like a child playing on a tide-surrounded isle art thou this day, O Setanta, upon whom night descends, and the great sea arises irreversible with mutterings and noises, and hungry eyes glare around him from the deep. Against thee now the mighty Cailitin and his wizard sons embattle themselves. Nations they have ruined, and kingdoms made desolate. Yea, against them the high gods wage vain war. As the bright wave, foam-crested, glittering, which the hollow cavern, loud with fearsome echoes, and peopled with abominable shapes, draws within its depths, so shalt thou descend into their pit. Go not southwards, Cuculain. Stay now thy destroying hand, and let the Clanna Rury work their own salvation.”

And Cuculain answered :—

“ Surely I shall go southwards, O fairy queens. Not to husband for my own pleasure have I this great strength which lives within me to-day. Now am I not my own, but I am sent forth by unseen kings, and whither they guide me I will go.”

Then it was that the Clan Cailitin embattled themselves against Cuculain.

Meantime the son of Sualtam had sprung out in front of the chariot, advancing against the men of Meave, but there withstood him Fraech, the son of Fiach, advancing through the ranks of the Olnemacta.

Glorious indeed was the appearance of that hero. With a tinkling he ran through the host, for on his spear there were rings that rang forth a sweet faint melody as he ran. He it was who had come to Rath Cruhane as a suitor of Fiona-var, leading in his train those weird harpers of whom men often spake, but never before saw. Vain then and since had been his suit, though he boasted that his mother was the goddess Be-bind. Musically now over the shoulder of Cuculain rushed the spear of the western champion, but in return Cuculain pierced him through the very boss of the shield, and through the middle of his breast where the breast bones join.

After that there came against him Lon, and Uala, and Dil, and along with them three warrioresses. All these practised druidic arts, but their arts availed not against Cuculain, and he slew them all with the Gae-Bolg and with Cruaideen. Then it was that the dear son of delicate Uala ran forward to avenge his father,

but his courage fell when he saw the giant spear of Cuculain dropping blood, and beside it the face of the hero, haggard, terrible, raging in his destructive wrath, and quickly he shrank back amongst the ranks of the Olnemacta.

There Cuculain routed the host of Meave on the right centre of the Ultonians, and kept moving southwards to assist Conall. Nevertheless, there came against him two warrior druids, Imraen and Imroe, trusting in their magic power, but they were slain by the son of Sualtam and by Lu.

Then returned the warrior to his chariot; around his lips there was a foam, and from his forehead down upon his neck the great veins had swollen out like ropes. Thereafter Laeg unfolded the left scythe and charged southwards, and where he went the battalions of Meave were confused, and chariots and fighting men were cast in heaps and rolled over one another.

Which seeing a brave southern hero, Liathan, said to his charioteer :—

“ O Mulcha, let us stay now this destroying hawk. The hero does not live who can meet him in single combat; but come now, charge against his chariot, and haply in the confusion I may find an opportunity to slay him.”

Then the charioteer gave reins to his steeds ; and, on the other side, Laeg, being very wary and vigilant, and looking all round under the borders of Fabane, saw him, and calling to Cuculain, gave rein to the steeds. Like thunder was the roar of the wheels on both sides and the trampling of the galloping steeds as they closed, and elsewhere the battle was still while the chariots drew nigh. But Laeg kept perpetually guiding the chariot-spear, so that it might pierce the breast of one of the steeds, and Mulcha on the other side, guided his so as to avoid the thrust of the great spear whose blade of bright bronze blazed in front of the horses.

But as they closed, the horses of Cuculain rose against the others and trampled them into the ground, and passed over them, and the great war-car crushed like brittle timber the chariot of Liathan, and that warrior was slain by his own chariot, and by the trampling of Cuculain's steeds. Then Cuculain made much of his horses, and said :—

“ O Grey of Macha and brave Shanglan, ye have not done a greater deed since the day that you slew the steeds of Ercoill, when we went to be judged by him, and when his terrible fire-breathing horses came against you.”

Then sounded in the ear of Cuculain a voice which he knew, and it said :—

“ Now, O Setanta, strengthen thyself, for against thee the powers of hell embattle themselves. Hid in dark clouds Cailitin and his mighty brood are upon thee.”

Cuculain looked westward, and he saw a darkness moving towards him from the camp of Meave, and a deadly chill transfixed his heart as he looked, and a wild horror overspread his face. And again the Ioldana spake :—

“ Not alone for the Red Branch shalt thou now fight, but for all the nations of Eire, who, thee beaten, will no longer yield men and heroes and fair peaceful fields, but her fens shall be enlarged, and dragons shall dwell there, and slimy unnameable monsters, and all manner of foul creeping things, and few and base shall her people be.”

Then by his magic art Lu spread a vision before the hero, and Cuculain saw his native land, sea-girt, like a picture, with all her tuaths and mor-tuaths, and, like silver threads, he saw her everlasting streams ; southwestward the mighty Shannon running from its source at Connla's Well, where glistened the sacred hazel, and there eternally on watch and ward the

fairy queens who guarded it, and he saw the Three Waters: the Suir, the Nore, and the Barrow, glittering through mid-Erin as they ran; the noble Slaney, too, he saw and the Liffey returning to its source; the lordly Boyne crowned with woods, and the palaces of the immortal gods; the Bann with its sacred estuary; the Drowis, and the Lee silver-flowing, untroubled, like a dream, and the sacred mountains of Eire, and her plains and many woods, her sea-piercing promontories and storm-repelling bays. And Cuculain saw her tribes and nations dwelling afar in happy labours employed singing as they wrought, and fleets of ships, great and small, entering or leaving all her harbours, creeks and inlets, and the land like an emerald set in sapphire seas, lit with a strange light and sounding with a strange music like a single mighty harp with chords innumerable played upon by some unseen divine harper, and the land blest and happy in itself and a cause of blessing and happiness to the Earth's ends.

Then the vision faded, and Cuculain saw before him a sword, the haft towards him. Like glittering diamond it shone, and the handle was inlaid with wondrous pearls, and on its starry sides were there graved verses in such an Ogham

as Cathvah never taught to Ultonian youths. True was that sword and pure, like him who now seized it and found the hand-grip fit rightly to his hand. Then went on that mighty hero against the weird brood, fearless, alone, and a silence and a terror fell on all the hosts of Erin. Alone went the hero, him nor god nor tutelar spirit, nor any of his class of power accompanied, repelled afar by the might of the Clan Cailitin. From their hills and grassy thrones remote, the gods of Erin watched him : Bove Derg from his cloudy turrets above the waters of the Aherlow ; the great Dagda from his fairy palace by the Boyne, over against Ros-na-ree. Alone went the hero, while around him nations trembled ; but into his heart the Ioldana breathed his own lavish soul, and that fierce wrath begotten of solitary thought, and outrage, and sacred pity, with which in the ancient days he led the arisen gods against the Fomoroh, laying waste at Moy Tura their accursed ranks. Far flashed around him a starry radiance ; he went swiftly, moaning as he went, and his voice was like the low brool of distant thunder heard behind hills when the storm-spirit murmurs in his wrath. From the depths of his soul, shaken with a mighty rage, arose the black-bird of his valour, and hovered

in a visible shape above his head. Gigantic waxed thy stature, O Riastarra ! Alone he went down against the Clan Cailitin, as one who goes down into hell ; the darkness gathered him in.

Within as from far distance there arose reverberations and horrid echoes as from deep caverns, and voice calling to voice, as of troop encouraging troop, and a noise of a crash, as of giants falling, a clangour of brass, and the thunder-pealing cry of the son of Sualtam amid the deafening uproar. Through rolling clouds there gleamed lurid lightnings, revealing things nameless, not to be described. From their tombs brake forth the ancient dead at the noise of that strife like the shock of worlds, for the earth stirred herself, and the dead arose out of their sleep of ages. Then Time gave up her secrets and births to be, and her veiled nations and generations arose rank behind rank. Like a torrent's fall their voices sounded from afar, summoning him to their deliverance, their thin voices unheard in the crash and roar of that awful strife.

Then were the hosts of Erin disordered, and the battalions clashed together ; then sprang champions forth out of their chariots, and the steeds were panic-stricken, and flew through the plain with the war-cars.

Then the magic darkness had peeled away till the last inky blot had vanished and men saw Cuculain, alone on the field of that battle which was torn and upturned as if ploughed by giant teams. Nor were there any slain men around him ; but the hero stood alone, motionless, and so transfigured that Laeg knew him only by the boar's head in the shield as he rushed the chariot and horses towards him and received him into the chariot. He was at first terrified and only reassured when he heard the familiar voice and felt his lord's hand upon his shoulder.

Then, indeed, few were the champions of the world who would have faced the son of Sualtam, at whom merely to behold, men trembled, for there was Panic in front of him, and Terror issued out of his countenance. And he ran out upon the chariot-pole of the chariot, and stood with one foot on the pole and one on the back of the Liath Macha, and laughed in the fierceness of his wrath, for not like a mortal fighter was the hero that day, but like the genius of war. Long had they laid him under spells, fairy-stricken and enfeebled by the force of druidic arts. But now, as out of the caves of death, he arose again in his invincible might, shaking off that magic sorrow and the oppression of the enchanters.

Then flapped his warlike tresses, even as a sail flaps, sharp-sounding in the blast, and he quaked in his anger like a bulrush in the river when swollen by spring rain the brown torrent rushes headlong to the sea. Out of his countenance there went as it were lightnings, and showers of deadly stars rained forth from dark clouds around his head, and there was a sound as of thunder around him, also there were cries not his own coming from unseen mouths, and dreadful faces came and went up on the wind, and visages not seen in Erin for a thousand years were present around the hero that day, and there was a clamour as of a multitude following behind when the son of Sualtam went forth into the great battle.

Loud then pealed the voice of the Hound, for with his the Ioldana mingled his voice of power, as then, when at Moy Tura, he brake the ranks of the Fomorian giants. Then sprang Queen Meave from her chariot and fled away upon her feet ; then were the Maineyes confused, and Cet, with the chivalry of Moyrisk, swerved aside ; then were the war-horses of the Tain terrified, and the familiar spirits of Queen Meave put to flight.

After him ran forward the hosts of the Clanna

Rury, and the men of Meave brake and fled, some to Tara, and others following the course of the Three Waters, and there fled southwards the Ernai and the Clan Dega, the Dergtheena and the Dairfeena, the Fir-morca and the people of Lok Mac Favash, Corca Lewy and the southern Fir-bolgs ; but Queen Meave and the Olnemacta fled to the Shannon, pursued by the Clanna Rury and Cuculain. Naytheless Cuculain himself checked the pursuit, and in the rear of their fleeing host he turned him right around raising up his shield against the Red Branch and guarded the retreat of Queen Meave until she had crossed the Shannon at Ath-Luain Mic Lewy. Then, on the eastern bank of the river, Cuculain set up a trophy and memorial, three great pillar stones, hard by the stream. Queen Meave on her part, sent back the Donn Coalney to the Ultonians, and the victorious Red Branch made an encampment there and celebrated their triumph with a great feast.

At this banquet men marvelled greatly as they looked upon Cuculain where he sat at the right hand of the King for his behaviour and bearing were not at all that of a mighty and victorious warrior. He seemed rather a rig-damna or young prince of one of the noble tribes

who, being well born, had been well instructed and educated by good tutors. Yet amongst them all he shone like a star, such his beauty and the light that seemed to flow from him and surround him. Above a white linen tunic secured with a silver brooch he wore a light bratta of scarlet silk over which his long hair rolled in golden torrents. Men could hardly restrain their eyes from gazing and wondering. When they praised him greatly, as they did, and cried his name aloud, he said that his deeds that day were due to the unseen people who sustained him and to Fergus, Conall, and Laegaire who had instructed him.

But he spoke brokenly and with a stammering tongue. Sometimes he looked at Laeg and smiled, for Laeg was boasting mightily that night as he sat with his brothers Id and Sheeling, and the other charioteers; and no one that night gainsaid anything he uttered concerning Cuculain and the two horses and himself.

After the return to Emain Macha, Cuculain was sick and weak for many days and Cathvah declared that this was a consequence of his battle with that weird brood.

CHAPTER VIII

IN ATHACLIA

"Wrapt in the scarlet mantle I see thee stalk through the city's narrow and populous streets."

LONGFELLOW.

It would need many books to tell rightly all the wars, adventures and sufferings of the son of Sualtam. Nevertheless—

"There is no human glory but its end is sorrow,"

and the time drew near when Cuculain should die, he being then in the twenty-eighth year of his age. Seven were his years when evading the vigilance of Dectira he escaped to his uncle's military school at Emain Macha, fourteen when he took arms, twenty-one when he followed the Tain.

In this year the territories subject to the Red Branch in Alba were invaded by the Northmen and Ostmen, a huge host and fierce.

To Concobar then and his council it seemed good to send the rest of the Red Branch for the defence of those territories, but that Cuculain and his battalion should remain for the safeguarding of the Province.

Cuculain was not pleased with that decision, but obeyed.

Along with Laeg and a retinue of chariots he rode south to Athaclia to witness the departure of a division of the host which was commanded by the two sons of his ancient friend Conall, namely Leix Cenmore and Euryall Glunmar, who were dear to him as the sons of Conall and also because of their youth and bravery, and to take an affectionate farewell of them in their first martial enterprise.

After that and when the sails of the galleys were no more seen Cuculain and Laeg went through the great city wondering, for there was much traffic and many people went to and fro, and there was an endless roar of many wheels and a sound of trampling feet. Along the streets were exposed many curious goods of the merchants both those native to the land and what was brought from overseas or taken by their pirates. So they wandered from booth to booth for in some were choice swords and spear heads and body armour, and in others chariots, some strong and low-wheeled for war, others also for pleasure or for the transfer of goods and the service of those who tilled the soil. Then they passed those in which were exposed mantles and lenas of wool, linen and silk decorated with gold thread or of silver and the

labours of embroidering women and others where were rolls and leaves of parchment in which men's thoughts were inscribed. They wondered at this for timber and stone were alone used in the North for this purpose. They came to another booth where were small images of horses cut in timber and of chariots and horses set on wheels and warriors were in the chariot whose heads nodded as the wheels went round. One of these Laeg purchased, remembering a small fair head at Dun Dalgan and weighed out for the same certain silver.

Yet as they went Cuculain was distressed when he looked on the people so small were they and so pale, ignoble, too, both in appearance and behaviour, and when he saw the extreme poverty of the poor and the hurrying eager crowds seeking he knew not what. They on the other hand were astonished at the heroes, the greatness of their stature, the majesty of their bearing and their tranquillity, at their bright slow-revolving eyes, and the purity of their complexions, white and red. For amongst this people they seemed like the remnants of some mighty and divine race long since passed away.

Said Laeg:—

“ The Princes of this city do not cherish their

own, but devour them. They affect to worship their great thunder god, him with the forked red beard whom they bring forth in their processions with a huge shouting, but secretly and with all their heart they worship other gods, the gods of gain-making and over-reaching."

As they went they saw a youth standing at the entrance of a great booth who with a loud voice called on all to enter and eat and drink.

"These people," said Cucùlain, "outdo us in hospitality. We indeed give to all who come but they send forth summoners and make a loud proclamation. It would be unseemly for us to scorn such an invitation."

They entered and the master of the house supplied them with meat of the freshest and drink of the oldest and though obese went actively to and fro and attended them with alacrity and assiduity, ministering to them with his own hands. When they had eaten and drunk they arose and thanked him courteously.

"Not so, O men," he said, "but you shall pay me in good silver for my good fare." Then he counted and declared aloud the scruples in silver which were due to him for that entertainment.

"By the oath of my territories," said Laeg,

“never in all Erin before this day have I seen meat and drink bought and sold.”

He took silver from his sporran which the man weighed in a pair of scales and declared himself well pleased.

Laeg thereupon in farewell took him by the right hand and pressing it broke the bones of the same so that they crackled and the man cried out.

Said Cuculain : “ A little hurt is soon mended. O keeper of the Bruideen. It was in my military education to be an expert bone-setter. Give me thy hand.”

He took the man's hand in both his and restored the bones to their places.

“ I pray mighty Thor, the Thunderer, to protect me against ever meeting again you or your like,” said the man.

When they set forth to return into the North a great multitude had assembled there, and when Cuculain entered the chariot, the people shouted. Though many of them were very meagre to look upon and meanly clad yet they cried out lustily in honour of the renowned Prince, for his fame had gone abroad over the whole land, and warmed many cold hearts and lit many that were dark. Amongst them an

old man leaning on a staff said to another who stood beside him : “ Would that we had these or such as they to rule over us whom we can see with our eyes to be so much greater and nobler than ourselves.”

Then the crowd divided and a young man with a bardic fillet round his temples came forward and said :—

“ I have a laudatory poem for thee, O Prince of Murthemney.”

“ I give thee thanks,” said Cuculain, “ and would hear it.”

The young man then repeated his poem with a clear sonorous voice. It was made in an antique tongue which Cuculain and Laeg understood, but the people did not.

When Cuculain bade Laeg reward the poet he would not receive it, saying it was reward enough to have looked him in the face. Also I have been rewarded ere this for it was through thee and the reports concerning thee that I became a poet when my kindred were very earnest with me to be a pirate. Now have I robbed no man and no man’s blood is on my hands.

“ I like thy poem well,” said Cuculain. “ The laudation is not excessive or such as to cause

a sense of shame in the recipient which is the greatest fault of those who deal in laudatory poems, and the numbers are not forced and intricate, but the thought and the word are naturally interfused. Should the desire ever possess thee come to me to Dun Dalgan, thou shalt be an honoured guest and preside over my poetic school there."

"Great Prince," said the lad, "let me go with thee now."

The lad was then provided with a place in one of the chariots of the retinue.

Returning, they drove along the shore road meaning to spend that night with Forgal Manach, King of Lusk and father of Emer. As they passed the ford afterwards named Beal-atha-Id, Laeg pointed out the white dun of his brother Id, amid trees and green pastures. The name of Id is upon that place to this day. He was in Alba at this time so they drove past, going unto Lusk.

Now the King of Lusk's chief strength was upon a promontory there looking forth to Lambay. On three sides it was defended by steep cliffs, the home and breeding place of countless gulls, but on the fourth, on the landward side, by a great rampart and a pass. On

the north side one looked down below upon a small safe harbour and a strand of pebbles and upon a town of mariners and fisherfolk who dwelt there and pursued their labours under the protection of the King. It is named Lough Shinna. Forgal's name, Manach, is upon the promontory to this day. There was a great enclosed lawn and park in the approach to that stronghold.

"It was on this lawn, and yonder," said Cuculain, "that I first met Emer."

"Right well do I remember," replied Laeg. "She sat beneath that great oak tree surrounded by young girls whom she was instructing in needlework. These indeed fled away for they were affrighted at the great war horses and at thee in thy full war array. But Emer stood up, erect, to meet thee, wearing a scarlet mantle with silver brooch over a kirtle of samite. Methinks I see her now again while I speak; and I recall how she tested and tried thee with perverse and hard questions."

"Which I could not answer, dear Laeg," said Cuculain, "but for thy prompting."

"When I met her a second time," he went on, "she was coming up from this strand of

Lough Shinna surrounded by the children of the fishermen."

So they were conversing, but neither of them recalled the slaughter which they had made upon Forgal's people on the night when they brought away Emer and were fiercely pursued by the awakened warriors of Forgal Manach. For that blood-shedding, Cuculain had made a full satisfaction, and eric very great, and he was now as dear to the King of Lusk as if he had been his son.

In his dun they were that night well and joyfully entertained.

At supper all Forgal's people stood with cups and goblets raised on high and cried his name aloud and shouted. Yea, though many of them had lost a brother or foster-brother or dear friend at his hands slain by him in the famous elopement, yet they raised their voices, now to do him honour, and with kindled faces and open mouths they sang a song which their chief bard had made in his praise, whereat the winged population of the cliffs and crags startled from slumber rose and wheeled round the great headland screaming, and mariners far out in the Muir Meann were astonished listening to the wild uproar and when they saw how every

window in Forgal Manach's cliff-defended city flashed with light and shed a radiance upon the dark waves.

Later that night Forgal Manach, though he was both old and very proud conversed familiarly and affectionately with Cuculain, even more than was his wont, calling him many times, "My son," counselling and advising him, and he warned him especially to be on his guard against the Clan Cailitin. For he was a seer as well as a king, and the supreme captain of a famous and warlike nation. He said the Clan Cailitin were immortal and that they would surely wage war upon him again.

CHAPTER IX

HOME

'Tis sweet to hear the watch-dog's honest bark
Bay deep-mouth'd welcome as we draw near home.
'Tis sweet to know there is an eye will mark
Our coming and grow brighter when we come.
'Tis sweet to be awakened by the lark,
And lulled by falling waters, sweet the hum
Of bees, the voice of girls, the song of birds,
The lisp of children and their earliest words.

BYRON.

IN the morning they took an affectionate farewell of Forgal Manach and all his people and drove northward again along the sea road.

When they came to the ford of the Nemnech, the sparkling and shining one which to-day is the Nanny Water, Laeg said :—

“ This stream is very dear to me ever since I was a child, for it has its source in a well on the side of the Hill of Gabra, near Tara, where is my father’s dun. Therefore Nemnech has been like a dear friend and comrade to me always. The prophet who is in Tara hath announced that it will in the latter days by the strength of descending water turn around an upper mill stone for the grinding of corn, the first stream in all Ireland to do this, and cause to cease the labours of grinding women.

Also he said that my mound of burial would be on the north bank of the stream hard by this ford and that my name would be on this place for ever.

Laeg said too that the finest bulrushes in Ireland grew in that stream and he showed to Cuculain a noble grove of the same blooming there for the time was later summer.

Then Laeg stood up in the chariot and spoke thus to the shining stream :—

“ Thou art lovely, O Nemnech, with thy sparklings, thy singing and thy laughter in the uplands and demure pacings on the lea, lovely

and dangerous like other sparklers. To thee I make this gift from Cuculain and from myself."

So saying, he took from his satchel an ingot of silver and dropped it in the stream repeating, as he did so, a form of words so ancient that he himself did not understand their meaning.

"Thou hast somewhat against thy Nemnech," said Cuculain.

"Truly I have," replied Laeg, "for she once attempted my life. Long since in the boyish days I sought to gather a sheaf of those very bulrushes. They were in flower at the time and very beautiful. Soon I found myself in what was neither water nor land but a mingling of both, so that I could not swim nor find a footing on which to stand, and thence hardly did I escape with my life."

"It is in my mind, Laeg," said Cuculain, smiling, "that it was for some woman thou didst go upon that quest."

"Thou are in the right," said Laeg. "It was for Acaill, sister of Conall Carna and daughter of Amargin, and who, excepting Emer is the most beautiful of the women of Eire. The dun of Amar, in is beside Gabra, hard by Tara, and we were children together there. She desired them as an ornament for her

greenan." And so they were conversing as they went, cheerfully and amicably after the manner of good friends and comrades.

It was evening and dark when they drew nigh to Dun Dalgan, yet the watch dogs there knew of their coming while they were yet far away, baying loudly, and in all the windows of the dun there was a ruddy light illuminating the lime-trees and elms upon the lawn, and the bright stream that traversed it, starting from a well-head beneath the dun. In that stream Cuculain, as a child, had been wont to play, building there dams and mimic bridges, and there Connla now did the same.

Then the draw-bridge was let down, braying a welcome on its iron hinges ; and in the gateway of the rampart stood Emer, having on her breast Fionscota, and Connla stood beside her holding her right hand. Happy that night was Emer, knowing that her lord was not needed for that foreign service of the Red Branch, remembering not at all prophecies and omens and the dim predictions of the Soothsayers of Ulla. So she stood radiant in the gateway, having the appearance of a beautiful and happy maiden. When he saw her, Cuculain sprang down to greet her ; but Laeg took the boy

into the chariot, setting him on his knee, and entrusted the reins to his tiny hands, and so they drove round to where were the stables and chariot-houses in the rear of the dun. Soon the wide court resounded with the noise of the washing of steeds and chariots, and the cries of horseboys, and the loud voice of Laeg controlling them and directing.

But within the dun, in the great central chamber, supper was prepared ; and when those who travelled had removed from themselves the stains of travel, they all came into the lofty and bright chamber set around with tall waxen candles whose light was reflected from polished shields and spear-heads all around. A long table extended from the north southwards, and at one end sat Cuculain, and Laeg, and Emer, and the Ard-Druid and Ard-Ollav of that realm, also the hostages and young princes in fosterage. There then they feasted joyfully, while the music of the harp and reed was heard, and Cuculain talked and laughed much that night, for he was by no means of a morose disposition, nor accustomed to wear a severe countenance at a feast ; and Connla, at the lower table with the ruder warriors and swineherds, whose society he most affected, dis-

played the toy-chariot, rolling it upon the table. Loud was the laughter of all the people there when they saw how the heads nodded in the chariot as the wheels went round. Thus they amused themselves and made merry.

CHAPTER X.

THE RETURN OF CLAN CAILITIN.

Eddying gust
 Whirl the leaves and the dust
 To the bay,
 Whirl away!
 Once I trembled to the sighing
 Of a maiden who is dying
 Far away.
 And the merry sunshine thrilled me,
 And the rapture of the May
 Stirred within me, and it filled me
 Full of life, and I was gay
 As I flickered on the spray,
 Till a hoar frost came and killed me,
 Whirl away! Whirl away!

EDMUND ARMSTRONG.

It was evening and the gloaming of the day, and Queen Meave returned from her pasture lands and the quarters of her herdsmen and milkers for her herds were ever dear to her. Then on the lawn of the dun, dim seen in the twilight,

the Clan Cailitin appeared to her and the great Queen screamed when she saw them.

Thereafter, understanding, she brought them into the recesses of her palace. There were six of them, the foulest things that were on the earth at the time, three male and three female, all lame, for Cailitin had broken the right foot of each that they might devote themselves wholly to wizardry and magic arts to the end that they might compass the destruction of Cuculain. It was not easy to distinguish any one of them from the rest for they changed from one haviour and appearance to another and all terrible, and Meave abhorred while she used them.

As a consequence of this dark consistory, she formed anew wide and far-reaching plans for the invasion of Ulla and especially for the overthrow and destruction of him who had ever been the sure defence of the North against her armies ; nor did she remember at all how he had once saved her from the just vengeance of the Red Branch.

As for Fergus Mac Roy she found an opportunity of sending him into west Munster to govern territories which she had lately made sword-land, him and his valiant sons Corc and

Conmac and Kiar, where they became the progenitors of famous nations, The Corcaree and the Conmacnemara and the Kiar-ree.

It was some time after this that Concobar awaking in the early morning at Emain Macha, heard the sobbing of a woman.

“Why weepest thou, Lavarcam?” he said.

“Verily I have cause for my weeping,” replied the woman. “Once again that great implacable Queen is about to wage sudden war upon thee. There is a great hosting of all the Four Provinces to Rath Cruhane. Erc, the son of Cairbre Nia-far, and Lewy Mac Conroi, and Concobar and Mac Nia, the two sons of Finn Mac Rossa, gather all their warriors together. There is mutiny and rebellion over the south of Eire and the midland, and the warlike colonies of the Red Branch are destroyed. All the soothsayers and interpreters of omens declare that the end of Cuculain is at hand, and that the Clan Cailitin have returned to Erin, and that they are abroad over Ireland, having great power.”

Concobar thereat started up from his royal couch and cried aloud:—“Go now thy swiftest to Dun Dalgan and bid the son of Sualtam come hither to Emain Macha that he may be under

the protection of Cathvah and of the wizards of the Ultonians."

Now this was the manner of Lavarcam. When upon her shining feet she had bound the magic sandals which were a gift from her foster-father, Mananan Mac Lir, she was the swiftest thing in the whole world; the winged lightning not swifter. Her footprints as she sped did not mark the still surface of the sea or burst a bubble on its rolling waves; neither did the bearded barley bend beneath her flying feet. She was young and lovely to look upon, though her years were past counting, and the wisest knew not the place and time of her birth. Her by his spells of power and druidic art Concobar had bound to his ministry and service and in all things she obeyed him.

In one straight line she sped now to Dun Dalgan not fetching a compass round Slieve Fuad or any of the intervening mountains or lakes.

Cuculain and Laeg, Emer and little Connla happened to be at the time sitting under an awning which was in front of the palace and Cuculain was telling some tale to Connla who listened with bright eyes. Nevertheless he was aware of the presence of Lavarcam, who now

coming out from a beech grove was crossing the dewy lawn, Cuculain rose and hastened to meet the ban-ecla pouring forth a torrent of friendly welcome and affection, as also did Emer and Laeg, and they led her into the dun. There Emer spread upon a table a cloth of fine linen and laid viands thereon, cakes of wheaten flour prepared with cream and honey, fresh butter and water cresses from the stream. Mead also and old light sparkling ale. But Lavarcam ate not nor drank and, though eloquent, stammered in her speech.

Said Cuculain :—

“Thou art pale, Lavarcam, and all thy limbs tremble. Thou comest, I think, bearing evil tidings. Is it concerning my uncle Concobar? Much have I feared concerning him since that battle at Derry-da-vaeh.”

For Concobar had been sore wounded in that battle and in such a manner that his physicians forbade him all the works of war and bade him reserve himself wholly for deliberation and counsel.

The ban-ecla answered :—

“O Cuculain, I have a message for thee from the High King who strictly enjoins thee to come straight to Emain Macha that thou mayest be

there under the protection of the druids and wizards of the Ultonians. For the children of Cailitin have returned to Ireland, having great power, who have travelled the round world seeking means to destroy thee, and dispel thy magic attributes and the favour of the Shee, and who have even gone down to Hell upon that quest. Therefore, not without reason, O dear Setanta, is my face pale and all my limbs tremble."

So spake the ban-ecla and her sorrow overflowed so that she cried aloud.

Thereat Emer stood up from the table pale as marble and as motionless. Well she knew the fulfilment of the old weird prophecy and how the end of all things was approaching and the light of life going down into darkness and the grave. Yet she wept not nor cried out though the whole palace was now filled with lamentation for the women there had heard the piercing cry of Lavarcam although knowing nought yet, they also lifting up their voices and raised a loud and bitter *caoine*.

Cuculain arose and led his wife into the women's quarter of the dun out of the great hall, into the greenan, and conferred with her.

Returning he said to Laeg :—

" These are bad tidings, O Laeg ; nevertheless

I have not received those monitions which have been foretold to me, and till they arise I fear not that wandering clan. But go now and make preparations for our departure, for I must go on straightway to Emain Macha, obeying the command of the High King."

All round the dun moved the servants and men of war, hastening the departure, and fierce and low were their words when any slackened or blundered in his task, eager that Cuculain should reach Emain Macha, and be under the protection of Cathvah and the druids of Ulla; nor did they or Cuculain know of the hosting, for this the ban-ecla concealed, knowing that thereafter it would not be in their power to bring away Cuculain out of Murthemney.

Then came the Tanist of the realm, and to him Cuculain gave the kingdom in charge, in words few and low, but of great authority, advising and dissuading; and ere noon they went forth from Dun Dalgan, along the road which led to Emain Macha, with attending warriors and chariots. In one chariot travelled Emer with Fionscota, pale and silent, with bright eyes, and in another Cuculain, and Laeg, and Connla. At nightfall they were met by Genann Gruad-Solus, the son of Cathvah,

Genann of the lightsome countenance, with a company of the druids of Emain. They passed that night with the bru-fir of the territory, and on the next evening came to Emain Macha, and Cuculain was glad when he saw the lights of the city and the princely homes of the Red Branch; but Laeg uttered bitter words, recalling their return thither in old times how triumphant, having conquered the enemies of the Ultonians.

Then came forth from the city the standing battalion of Emain Macha, heavy-armed troops marching in strict order, who enclosed the chariot and kept back the shouting concourse.

So they approached the royal dun, and Concobar Mac Nessa, and Mugain, the High Queen of the province, received Cuculain and Emer joyfully at the threshold of the dun, and the young knights took charge of Cuculain, and Mugain and her women took charge of Emer and the two children.

That night they feasted as at other times in the Tech Mid-cuarta, and Cuculain sat in his place in the Champion's Throne, and Emer in her place beyond all the queens and princesses of Ulla, for she ranked next to the High Queen herself amongst the women of the Ultonians.

Bright shone the vessels of glass and bronze, silver and gold, and bright glittered the bronze capitals of the great pillars, and the canopy above the High King's couch, and the joinings of the rafters of the lofty hall were apparent. But the feasting and merriment were alien to their thoughts that night.

There was Cathvah the Ard-druid of the Ultonian nation, surnamed Iarn-glunah, the mighty wizard, but his face was troubled, for all the omens pointed to sorrow, and his magic arts were confused, and some strange new power over-shadowed him. There too was Genann "of the lightsome countenance," very dear he to Cuculain, and he sat next to the champion, and there too Nieve the druidess, the daughter of Kelkar, the son of Uther, who, above all the women, loved and honoured the hero, and it was upon them that the Ultonians placed their chief reliance, for the power of Cathvah was broken by the enchantments of the children of Cailitin.

Cuculain conversed that night after his wont, and he played at chess with Sencha Mac Aileel, the orator, and won from him three games, and Cuculain said :—

"O son of Aileel, I have beaten thee three

times ; yet never before have I won against thee even one game in three."

But the thoughts of the orator were elsewhere, and his mind confused.

In the great banqueting-hall the High King dismissed the warriors, and held a close council of the druids. One by one the candles went out through the vast chamber ; but the druids gathering close together conversed long in low, grave voices, for very real and terrible to them was that prophecy and the power of the Clan Cailitin.

At this Council it was determined that Cuculain should, that night, be under the protection of Genann, and should sleep in his chamber where were his idol-gods, and his instruments of magic, and they thought that Genann, before all others, would be able to shield him against the might of the wandering clan.

Cuculain and Genann Gruad-Solus slept together in the same chamber, and Genann brought into his bed with him his idol-gods and instruments of magic, hoping to shield his dear friend and school-fellow from the weird powers which were now abroad.

Without, a tempest raged with wind and heavy rain ; but after a space Cuculain reached his

hand to the bed in which lay Genann to awake him, but the other was not at all asleep and Cuculain said :—

“ O Genann, there is a martial preparation forward in Emain Macha, for I hear the rumbling of wheels and the voices of captains giving commands, and more than once I heard the door of the great arms chamber opened. There is a hosting forward, and I have not been made aware of it or consulted as before. Wherefore is this?” Cuculain started up in his bed as he spake.

Then Gruad-Solus trembled, and his heart refused to beat ; but Cuculain went on :—

“ There is an invasion somewhere, and they have concealed it from me, fearing that wandering clan, but if the gods permit the Clan Cailitin to slay me, they will slay me here in Emain Macha as well as on the frontier. Once before there went a host southwards to protect the marches, and they were all boys, and Beta Mac-Boen of the Olnemacta, with his people, slew them, and along the Avon Dia between that stream and Dun Dalgan their pure young blood was shed over the land. And now, too, there are few mature warriors left in Ulla, and if there be war, and I not at hand, there will be a renewal of that piteous slaughter.”

As he spake Cuculain had bound on his sandals and thrown a bratta over his shoulders, and was going to the door when Genann sprang forward and cast his two arms around him, and said :—

“Thou shalt not go forth to-night, Cuculain, or thou shalt go forth having slain me. There are evil powers abroad against thee. This expedition is doubtless to ward off a border foray, or to pursue some vile band of cattle plunderers. Go not abroad, O dear Setanta.”

Then Cuculain laughed, and said :—

“Thou art right, O dear school-fellow, it is not fit that I should rush forward wherever there is a sound of battle like some hardened fighters, who then only seem to live.”

Cuculain lay down again and, deeming that he slept, he heard a voice singing, and it said :—

“O Prince of Murthemney, O flame of the Heroes of Eire !
What ails thee that thou art so slothful ?
Arise ? put on thy might as of yore.
Son of Lu, hound unconquerable, scatter thy enemies,
Scatter thy enemies, O Cu,
Cuculain Mac Sualtam.”

Cuculain told the dream to Genann, but Genann knew that it was no dream, for he, too, had heard the voice singing. It was, indeed, the Clan Cailitin tempting him.

In the morning, those who were permitted to approach Cuculain made light of the expedition, as had Genann Gruad-Solus, saying that it was to repel some border foray ; and they laid plans to appease his curiosity, and prevent him from going out and learning tidings of the great invasion by Meave and the son of Cairbre Nia-far, and the strain put upon the whole Province to collect some resisting force.

It seemed to them best that he should be entertained that day with tales of ancient heroes, to which at all times Cuculain listened gladly. Moreover, the council had laid injunctions upon him, that he should not go abroad into the city and the surrounding country ; and this, too, approved itself to his own judgment, for he, too, believed in wizardry and incantations, and believed that Cathvah, and Genann, and Nieve were able to draw over him some weird spiritual shield against the spiritual foe.

That day the great central chamber was set in order, and Cuculain and Emer, the queens, and the great warriors who had not yet gone away southwards, sat there, and were entertained by Heim, the royal bard, who for them related the history of Lu Lamfada and the mighty eric, which he had put upon the three

sons of Turann, and the sufferings of the brothers, and the implacable wrath of the Ioldana ; but not of Lu Lamfada were the thoughts of the assembly that day. To the bard Cuculain attended, carefully explaining all to Connla as the tale went on.

When the tale was ended, Cuculain, and Laeg, and the attending knights went down to the place, in which were the young princes of Ulla, who were in fosterage with the High King ; and Cuculain and Laeg looked around them with great affection upon that noble park, where they knew well every nook and tree, and much they conversed, recalling old adventures and pleasant incidents of that happy life, because for ever and for ever

“ Dear is the schoolboy spot
We ne’er forget though there we are forgot.”

When the boys saw Cuculain, they all ran together to him out of the remote parts of the lawn, and from amongst the trees. Well they knew the famous deeds which he had performed and forgotten in that small theatre of his fame, and which they had themselves received from their elders, and they from those who had been his comrades and co-evals.

Around him the boys crowded, and many of

them seized his hands and kissed them, and they kissed the bratta that hung from his shoulders ; but after that, like a stream that bursts through some restraining barrier, their young hearts were dissolved in tears, and there was a sound of sobbing voices around the son of Sualtam, and they said :—

“ O Cuculain, they say that it is the end of thy career, and that thy victorious attributes are over. In the great Breach of Murthemney when the Red Branch were under enchantment and thou, being alone, wert in the gap of danger, the boys of this school, our predecessors and forerunners, went to assist thee. We, too, would give our lives for thee.”

Cuculain smiled at the eagerness of the boys and said that that was an idle rumour which they had heard concerning himself and bade them attend well to their military exercises when these should be resumed, and he said that warriors were made for war and not for length of days.

Then he seized one of them who still wept and cast him high into the air and received him again as he fell and set him on his feet upon the ground and shook him till he laughed ; so he comforted all their young hearts.

They accompanied him and Laeg to the borders of their ground and there stood looking after him as he went to the King's palace.

That night Cuculain's quiet spirit was troubled, and he said to Genann :—

“ I do not feel this night as I was wont to feel, O dear school-fellow, for there is a blankness and desolation in my mind, such as one experiences when alone in a strange country, nor do I recognise in my spirit that strength and happiness which those unseen princes used to supply always before ; for I was ever aware of a spirit, not my own, within my own spirit, and this horror comes over me, that the gods themselves have forsaken me, and I think that, unwittingly, I have done some great wrong against them or against men.”

And Genann said :—

“ It is the enchantment of the Clan Cailitin that is around thee, and though our power is weak to protect thee, thou must not leave us.”

And Cuculain said :—

“ What is the form of Mac Manar, according to the traditions of the soothsayers of Erin ? ”

And Gruad-Solus said :—

“ To thee and those like thee, he is young and very beautiful, and like a tender girl in

feature and in limb, and of a most gentle aspect. But they say that to others he appears like a demon, more frightful and horrible than aught which the eye of man awake or in dream hath ever seen. He carries a harp of pure gold; and against the melody of that harp they say that not even the gods themselves are secure. And it is said, too, that he is the strongest of the gods, and in the end will slay them all, for that he alone is really immortal, nor was he made so by eating of the herd of Mananan, but that he is immortal in his own right, and while things endure he will endure. And there is no singing so sweet as his, and no music like the music of his harp, suggesting things never seen or heard, beauty beyond all beauty, and nobleness to which the knighthood of earth may not be compared, and visions of love and bliss, and of worlds fair and good. Such virtues, according to the soothsayers of Erin, reside in the strings of that harp."

And Cuculain said :—

"That is well, O Genann, he shall not find me unprepared."

Again that night Cuculain heard the tramp of armed men, and the hoarse voices of those who gave command and the rolling of wheels

and the distant noise of martial preparation ; for from the ends of the Province were arriving continually cohorts of warriors, the residue of the Clanna Rury, moving southwards to resist the great invasion, and they were ordered to enter Emain Macha by night, and thence, being armed and instructed, they went southwards to the frontier.

Then a fiery wrath possessed Cuculain, and a fierce tide of angry blood raced through his veins, and he started forth with a cry, and said :—

“ Ye are deceiving me, and I am surrounded by traitors and liars. There is a great invasion from the south, and ere this my realm is overrun, and my people are slain and made captive, and the territory which I have sworn to defend is made desolate.”

Genann cried out, too, but in terror, and he said :—

“ What is this, O Cu, that has come over thee, that thou standest thus aghast and pallid with thy eyes like burning fire ? ”

Cuculain answered him not.

And Genann said again :—

“ Rouse thyself, O Cu, it is the Clan Cailitin enchanting thee.”

And Cuculain said :—

“ Didst thou not see them, O Genann ? ”

And Genann said, “ Whom ? ”

“ Lu himself in that form in which he came to me before, but now more distinct, and that awful Queen who they say rules over the gods. They stood before me and said :—

“ ‘ O Cuculain, thy people are slain and made captive, and thy dun is dismantled and thy territory eaten up, for Erc, with all the nobles and warriors of Meath and Mac Nia, and Lewy Mac Conroy with the Ernai and the Clan Dega, and that bitter and relentless Queen with the might of the Fir-bolgs and the Clan Humor, have invaded Murthemney, and why dost thou delay to go out against them as of yore, for we are still with thee ? ’ ” This, too, was a druidic vision and apparition, the work of the Clan Cailitin.

But while he still spake, Cuculain moved his head round slowly and said :—

“ What music and singing is this that I hear in the dim mysterious night ? I have not heard such at any time.” He stood listening while he still held Genann, and the voice sang, heard indeed by Cuculain, but unheard by Genann :—

“Day ends in night, and the sun in the breast of Lir,
The might of the warrior will not save him when his end
comes.

Hearken, O Hound, to the strains of Mac Manar!
It is for thee I sing, O Cu,
Cuculain Mac Sualtam.”

Then Cuculain went to the window, and he saw Mac Manar in the moonlight—him who would slay even the gods—and that harp in his slender hands, all golden.

And Cuculain said :—

“It is enough, O school fellow, my end is come. I shall perish in this battle, but the high gods of Erin are around me, and I shall die, as I have lived, under their hands.”

So spake Cuculain in his ignorance, trusting in phantoms, for they, the Tuatha of Erin, were far from him that night, watching with sad eyes as the shadows closed around the hero. So speaking he set his strong shoulder against the door and burst it open despite all the bolts and bars ; but outside were innumerable faces, the faces of armed men, for they watched there nightly. He was amazed when he saw them ; but Genann took him by the hand and said :—

“O Cuculain, it is already morn. Wait now till the day is fully come, and then thou shalt go southwards against the enemy. But these warriors will be slain ere they suffer thee to pass.”

Cuculain lay down again till the day was fully come. Cathvah came into the chamber, and they told him what had happened during the night, and Cathvah and Genann both said that it was by the enchantment of the Clan Cailitin that he had seen the divine appearances ; but Cuculain was silent, for he believed them not, making preparations, and he went into Laeg's chamber, and cried out to Laeg to arise, but Laeg was still sleeping. He demanded from Fion-Cu the key of the Tayta Brac, where were his arms ; but Fion-Cu had put away the key, and Cuculain said :—

“ It boots not, O Fion-Cu. Thou shalt but gain employment in the afternoon for the King's kerd to repair the injury. For I shall break down the doors.”

Fion-Cu opened the door of the resounding chamber, and the shield of Cuculain had fallen from its rack in the night. Cuculain returned to Laeg, who was still asleep, and Cuculain looked upon him sleeping, and said :—

“ I alone have heard Mac Manar, and to me only has the warning come. Yet thou, O dear comrade and charioteer, wouldst answer with clamour and insult were I to announce that I will go alone upon this expedition, or take with

me another than thee. Very elate and insolent wert thou on that day when thou wast made my charioteer, and thou didst vex the souls of thy brothers, Sheeling, the charioteer of Laegaire, and Id, the charioteer of Conall, saying, that to thee was entrusted the care of the bravest of the Red Branch, exasperating the minds of thy elders, and thou hast done and said many vain-glorious things therefore ; but now thou shalt perish in Murthemney before them, guiding my steeds through the battle, yet I thought not our death should be so soon, but that thou wouldst grow old with me at Dun Dalgan, and I marvelled how years would change thy mood, but now we shall die together on the southern marches, holding the gates of Ulla against the South, which has been our task always and appointed duty. Sleep on awhile now, for bitter will be thy waking, O dear comrade."

So spake Cuculain above the sleeping warrior ; but Laeg turned his face to the wooden partition, and composed himself again to slumber.

Then Cuculain went forth again ; but in the court, there met him a company of women led by Nieve, the druidess, who took him by the hand, and said :—

" O Cuculain, we have heard of the vision,

and of thy determined resolve which we cannot gainsay, but we have this one request to make of thee, namely, that thou shalt defer thy going till the morrow, and that thou shalt go this day to Glan-na-mohar where Cathvah has his druidic abode, and I shall consult the auguries there and in the morning I shall announce to thee their purport. For here there is an enchantment around thee, and thy spirit is confused by the Clan Cailitin ; but there the power of Cathvah will be greater to defend thee, and I shall give thee a true answer from the auguries. And this request I urge on behalf of the women of Ulla, for, though to the rest of Eire thy name is a terror, and though the warlike tribes of Ulla worship thee like a god, yet none have been so faithful to thee as we. We have guarded thy renown, and rebuked every slander, for thou hast been like a brother to those of us who are young, and like a child to those of us who are old, and our love towards thee may not be told, O dear Setanta. Also of those who clave to Concobar in the great rebellion thou alone wert gentle to the unhappy daughter of Felim ; and as was the commencement of thy career so has it been up to this, and now, O Cuculain, be persuaded, and grant us this favour."

After that they passed northwards to Glanna-mohar, Cathvah and Ferceirtney, Genann Gruad-solus and Nieve, and Cuculain, and Laeg. Nieve was glad that day, for she said that the Clan Cailitin would be overpowered in the glen.

There Cathvah by his druidic art shed a veil of invisibility over the glen, so that nothing within it could be seen even by those accursed ones ; but the eyes of Genann were opened that night, and he saw the Clan Cailitin traversing all Ulla, and like hounds on the track searching every valley and hill-side, and every dark wood seeking Cuculain, and alone upon his bed he trembled like one sick of an ague, overcome with great fear, and he prayed earnestly to his tutelar spirits that night, and practised his wizard arts. Cathvah and Nieve were that night employed in the same manner. For in their fond minds they deemed that they could so shield the son of Sualtam.

Nevertheless that veil of invisibility which concealed Cathvah's druidic abode and the glen did not extend to the concealment of the paddock in which were the two war horses, and the Clan Cailitin shrieked upon the mountaintops when they saw beneath them in the

glen the great steeds of Cuculain, namely the Liath Macha and Black Shanglan.

They held a council then and determined that one of them should take the form of a familiar and friend of Nieve and in that guise and affecting to bring secret tidings withdraw her from the dun and lead her astray in the forest. This was done, and then the same witch, taking the form of Nieve, presented herself before Cuculain as reporting to him faithfully the issue of that consultation of the auguries and omens. And she said :—

“ Gird on thy armour, now, O son of Sualtam, for the high gods of Erin are around thee. Go forth as of yore, for thou shalt pursue the host of Meave southwards beyond the Boyne, and shalt slay Erc and Mac Nia, and Lewy Mac Conroi, and work deliverance for us as heretofore, and be not deceived by that apparition of Mac Manar, for it was a false appearance wrought by the enchantments of the Clan Cailitin.” Then was Cuculain glad, and hastened forward the departure, and Laeg ran to the paddock and cried aloud to the horses, as was his wont, flinging down the bar that was in the gap. But the steeds at the other end of the field stood stock

still like sulky mules, at the field's end by the fence.

Laeg was angry at that and ran towards them and Black Shanglan went behind the Liath Macha, and as Laeg sought to seize the Liath Macha he presented to him his side and his rear, and so moved round refusing to be taken. Thereat Laeg was astonished and said :—

“ What is this, O Liath Macha, that has come upon thee ? Never hast thou been thus with me before, for high-spirited and docile and light of foot wert thou ever yet when I summoned thee, but now thou art mulish and sulky, and like a farmer's ill-natured garran.”

Laeg again sprang at him to hold him, and the steed became fierce and intractable, and fled before him keeping along the fence ; also Black Shanglan fled with him, keeping by the fence inside the Liath Macha. And Laeg said :—

“ This is an evil foreboding.”

Then he returned to the Dun, and Cuculain himself came down to the field. He stood in the gateway and lifted up his clear-toned voice, but the steeds stirred not, and the Liath Macha held down his head, and all his foam-white mane drooped down to the ground. Cuculain approached and caressed him, and there fell

from the eyes of the steed, blood-stained tears, while he caressed him. Then Laeg led in the steeds, but they went slowly and reluctantly.

Now when Laeg entered the chariot house, he found the great chariot-pole broken in twain ; for the Mor Reega had passed that way in the night and snapped it with her mighty hands, a warning to the heroes. But Laeg fastened the parts roughly together until he should reach Emain Macha.

Laeg harnessed the steeds, and so they drove on to Emain Macha, and the sun was just rising as they left Glan-na-mohar. As they travelled Cuculain said to Laeg :—

“ I marvel much, O Laeg, remembering the appearance and face of Nieve, the prophetess, as she spake with me this day.”

And Laeg said :—

“ That is true, O Setanta ; for though I honour her above all the women of Ulla, save thy own wife, I felt towards her this day a strange repulsion.”

After that they drove rapidly onward, and it was noon when they reached the King's Dun, and there their hearts were again fretted by the mourning and the tearful faces. Cuculain took

Emer aside so that no one might witness their parting, and he said ;—

“ O Emer, not so soon did I deem that a darkness should overwhelm thy bright life, or that thou wouldst be left a widow in thy youth. Not such I deemed would be thy lot when I tempted thee to fly from thy father’s dun, and when thou gavest up all for my sake. Much already hast thou suffered, being the wife of a warrior, though thou wert not by nature formed to suffer but to be glad.”

But Emer, speechless, clung to him, still weeping, and he charged her that she should send Connla to Alba to be instructed by Eefa, who had also instructed himself, in the island of Skathach, which is Skye. He disengaged himself from her, and kissed her, and also Connla and Fionscota. The boy asked him, “ Whether he would not return again soon ? ” and Cuculain said that until he returned Connla should be a protector to his mother and little sister, and Connla said that he would. So went forth Cuculain ; and he sprang into his chariot and Laeg let the steeds go, and the loud wheels brayed through the city, which was lined with children, and women, and unwarlike people, and there was a vast and confused clamour

and mourning along the streets as they went, instead of the glad shouts which had so often greeted him there. As they came out on the plain eastward Cuculain looked back upon the city, and said :—

“O city of my heart, O nurse of heroes, Emain of the Red Branch, how often have I come unto thee bearing victory and spoils, and now I leave thee with a heavy heart, and depressed. It is our last journey, O Laeg. We shall not go back again to this dear city, O Laeg. We shall not return to Emain Macha any more.”

After that they went to the house of Dethcaen, Cuculain's nurse, for he was accustomed to visit her always ere he went to war. She it was who as a beautiful girl used to dance through the Palace at Dun Dalgan holding him in her arms or above her head in her delicate white hands as she laughed and sang and danced through the Palace.

As they crossed a tributary of the Oun Callan, they saw two maidens in the stream washing garments, one of whom held up a lena in both her hands which was pierced and torn, and stained with blood and the stains would not come out for all her washing, and Cuculain said :—

“No other omens are needed now. I have heard Mac Manar, and Rod too shall I see in his own time.”

As they passed Ardmacha it is said that they heard the angels of God singing.

After that they drove on again, and came to Slieve Fuad, which is Slieve Gullion. It was upon that mountain that Cuculain had first seized the Liath Macha, for he found him there grazing beside the lake on the hill top, and he sprang upon him and seized him by the long white mane, and that was said to have been the most desperate struggle in which he was ever engaged, for the divine steed, having been seized, fought with him and fled; but he could not release himself from his grasp; and Cuculain subdued him to his hand, and tamed his mighty soul. The country all around there was uncultivated and woody, and it was evening when they reached it, and the gloaming of the day.

And Laeg said :—

“This is a hill of which the poets sing many things.”

And Cuculain said :—

“We can well believe them looking upon it, for it is nobler and more lovely than the mountains of Eire. It was my road-post when first

I sought Emain Macha, escaping by night without the knowledge of my mother. Therefore has it been always dear and venerable to me from a boy, and it is the home of happy and benignant spirits. The summit is sacred to Lir, and is called the Shee Fionahah, and they say that Lir has there his fairy palace which no man may see; and it was from thence his children set forth with their step-mother to visit Bove Derg at his fairy palace upon the Galtees, on that journey in which, at Derryvara, they were so cruelly transformed. I myself have heard them singing in the northern seas, and I then thought I never heard music so sweet or so sad."

And he also said :—

"I never saw Slieve Fuad so beautiful as it is this night, for all its sacred dells and heathery promontories are lit up with the gold-red rays of the setting sun."

So conversed the warriors, for the sun was then setting, and shed a golden glow over that noble hill where dwelt Lir and his people unseen in its mysterious folds.

As they travelled they saw a smoke on the edge of the wood that ascended not into the still air, but lay low, hovering around the leafless trees, and soon they saw where a party of wan-

dering outcasts had made their encampment beside the wood, and they sat around the fire cooking, for a brazen pot was suspended from a branch between forked supporters, and they were cooking their evening meal.

And Laeg said :—

“Methinks I never saw such miserable wanderers as these. There are three men and three women all very old and wretched, and meanly clad.”

When the outcasts saw Cuculain, they lifted up their voices in a harsh and dissonant chorus, and said :—

“Right well have we chosen our encampment, O mighty Prince, for we said that this way thou wouldst go down to the battle, and we knew that no arts or persuasions would restrain thee that thou shouldst not come out, as of yore, to the assistance of thy people. Hail to thee, O Cuculain, O flame of the heroes of Eire, and to thee, O illustrious son of Riangowra.”

But as they spake they all stood up, and they were very hideous to look upon, marred, as it seemed, by some evil destiny. They were clad in the skins of black he-goats, and on the breast of each, instead of pin or brooch, was the shankbone of a stork. Their arms and legs were

lean and bony, but their hands and feet large, and they were all maimed in the right hand and the right foot.

But Cuculain answered them as was his wont, for many such a greeting had he received from unwarlike people and outcasts, for such especially cherished his glory. Then, as Laeg was urging on the steeds, one limped forward and stood before the steeds and said :—

“ O Cuculain, partake with us of our poor repast, not meet for princes, but such as we outcasts can procure trapping wild animals ; and we ourselves are like wild animals hunted to and fro. They say indeed that in many a poor man’s cot thou hast eaten food, and sat beside many a humble fire, not knowing thy own greatness.”

And Cuculain said :—

“ The night is already upon us, O Laeg, let us not insult these unhappy people, maimed and outcast, by refusing what they offer.”

Laeg reluctantly consented, and unharnessed the steeds from the great war car, having first brought it beside a stream that ran down from that sacred lake upon the mountain, and he washed the chariot-wheels carefully, and dried them, and spread a covering over the chariot

to protect it from the dew, and he returned to Cuculain, who sat beside the fire amongst the outlaws, for it was cold. Nevertheless he was not warmed by the fire.

Cuculain was glad when the charioteer drew nigh, for he was distressed at the conversation of those homeless people, and their countenances, and their forms, for their wretchedness sat lightly upon them, and they were very gay and mirthful as they sat holding the flesh on skewers of the rowan tree over the embers, and they made obscene jests, and often spoke in a language which he could not comprehend, and it seemed to him that the women were worse than the men. Moreover, the sun set, and the darkness came down, and mysterious sounds came from the sacred hill, the noise of the trees, and of the falling water, and he saw nought but these unlovely faces around.

When the flesh was cooked they gave a portion to Cuculain, who barely tasted of the same, but Laeg refused with an oath. Then these outcasts laughed and sprang to their feet, and they joined hands around them twain, and danced upon their misshapen feet. While they danced they sang exultingly a song in a strange tongue and all together cried aloud :—

“Hast thou heard, Cuculain, of Clan Cailitin?”

Cuculain drew his sword, crying:—

“O brood of hell, see now if your charms are proof against keen bronze.”

But they bounded away nimbly like goats, and still encircled him, singing. Then one plunged into the wood, and all followed; and there was cracked obscene laughter in the forest, and then silence; only the noise of the wind in the trees, and the gentle murmur of the stream, lit now with the beam of the rising moon. Cuculain stood panting, and very pallid, with wide eyes; but Laeg crouched upon the ground.

And Cuculain said:—

“They are gone, O Laeg. It was some horrible vision. Here was the fire where the grass is yet unburned, and there is no trace of the rowan tree spits, or of the flesh.”

But Laeg with difficulty recovered himself, and spake with a stammering tongue, and they found there no trace of the encampment of the outcasts save the skin of a wolf lately slain.

And Cuculain said:—

“I marvel, O Laeg, how the mighty and righteous Lir, to whom this mountain is sacred, can suffer within his precincts that horrid brood.

O mountain-dwelling, unseen king, shield us at least within thy own borders against these powers of darkness."

Cuculain and Laeg slept not that night ; and as they spake concerning those withered people, Laeg said that such a brood could never have been the children of Cailitin whom he had known ; but Cuculain said, " Nay, O Laeg, these devils are his true children."

Thereafter they were aware of a strange music within the mountain and listening they heard the clear shrill notes of blown reeds, a martial music, the measured tread of marching men and cries as of captains and commanders.

To which succeeded glad shoutings as of a multitude feasting with the clashing of drinking vessels smitten together and a tinkling as of lutes and stringed instruments and the voices of singing men and singing women.

Nevertheless, from the beginning Cuculain distinguished faint and low at first a wailing note as of women and children weeping with which, later, were intermingled fierce voices as of enraged men till the whole mountain from within seemed filled with the blended sounds of wrath and lamentation which became louder and ever louder. Then they heard a mighty

rending noise like the crashing of very near thunder or the falling, all together, of a thousand great forest trees ; after which, silence, and after that the very clear pure note of a boy's voice singing.

And Cuculain said :—

“ Many times have I heard strange sounds proceeding from the heart of this sacred and mysterious mountain, yet never any stranger than those which we have now heard. But dear Laeg, the lark is already on the wing and lo ! the morning star bright in his clear splendour. Yoke now the horses and let us on ; for our work is with the earth and with men which and whom we comprehend, not with this world of Fairy which we do not understand and whose ways are past finding out.”

“ I think,” said Laeg, “ that that last clear pure singing was the very voice of this morning star and that he bids men hope for ever and for ever, happen what may.”

“ Thou hast well said, dear Laeg,” replied Cuculain.

Laeg harnessed the steeds and yoked the chariot, and they went forward, and Laeg was continually restoring the weapons to their places. This he did secretly that he might not increase

the sadness of Cuculain, for it was an evil omen ; but Cuculain observing it, said :—

“ It matters not, O Laeg ; I have heard the singing of Mac Manar and Rod, too, ere long I shall see in his own time. We go down now to die on the plains of Murthemney but Lu Lamfada and Mananan and the Mor Reega go with us, and all is as it should be, for when were men like us made to enjoy length of days ? ”

Yet this his faith was without foundation for it was that wizard clan who still accompanied him assuming the form of his tutelar divinities, such was their power.

CHAPTER XI.

FINIS AND PEACE.

“ Silence sleeping on a waste of ocean
Sundown westward traileth a red streak,
One white seabird, poised with scarce a motion
Challenges the stillness with a shriek,
Challenges the stillness upward wheeling
Where some rocky peak containeth his rude nest,
And the shadows o’er the waters they come stealing
And they whisper to the silence—Here is Rest.

Down where the broad Zambesi river
 Glides away into some shadowy lagoon
 Lies the antelope and hears the leaflets quiver
 Shaken by the sultry breath of noon,
 Hears the sluggish water ripple in its flowing,
 Feels the atmosphere with fragrance all oppressed,
 Dreams his dreams and the sweetest is the knowing
 That above him and around him there is Rest.

Centuries have faded into shadow,
 Earth is fruitful with the dust of men's decay,
 Pilgrims all they were to some bright El Dorado
 But they wearied and they fainted by the way.
 Some were sick with surfeiture of pleasure,
 Some were bowed beneath a care-encumbered breast,
 But they all trod in turn life's stately measure
 And all paused betimes to wonder—Is there Rest?

Look, O man, to the infinite hereafter
 When thy sense shall be lifted from its dust,
 When thy anguish shall be melted into laughter
 When thy love shall be severed from its lust,
 When thy spirit shall be sanctified with seeing
 The ultimate dim Thule of the blest
 And the passion-haunted fever of thy being
 Shall be drifted in a Universe of Rest."

PERCY SOMERS PAYNE.

PASSING over Drum-na-Torc Cuculain was distressed when he saw all the land below them empty and deserted, for fear had dispeopled that territory. Then Laeg bade him look backwards, and lo! out of the forests and mountain fastnesses and remote hiding places the people were pouring forth and filling their villages, driving their flocks and herds and garrans laden with their instruments of husbandry and craftsmanship.

He heard too the lowing of cattle and singing and laughter and loud happy voices. Thereat Cuculain was well pleased and said :—

“ Truly, O Laeg, we are well praised in these sights and sounds. Many a time, as thou knowest, have I been the recipient of laudatory poems such as the bards make with ease, yet have I ever heard them with a mingling of pain and shame, but this praise which is in act and deed toucheth me nearly.”

As they descended the slope a company of children lined the way and sang with glad voices :—

“ Victory and blessings to thee, O Prince of Murthemney, and to thy great horses, and to the son of the King of Gabra whose hair is like a flame.”

They laughed at that and went forward more cheerfully.

It was noon when Cuculain and Laeg beheld the first signs of the invasion, and saw afar the lurid smoke of conflagrations, and heard the distant noise of battle. Then the old heroic rage burned in their hearts, and Laeg unfolded and closed the glittering scythes, to see if they would work freely, urging on the steeds, and Cuculain stood erect in the chariot, looking southwards, and he cried :—

“ O Dun Dalgan, Dun Dalgan, thou city of my sires, my own city, how red now are thy consuming flames, but on the other march there shall be a red eric for thy destruction, when the Boyne shall receive the hosts of that bitter and relentless queen, and their horses shall trample down their footmen, and mariners out in the Muir Meann will wonder at the ruddy tide which those sacred waters will roll down to the sea. O Erc the Fair-haired and thou Lewy Mac Conroi, returning now into Mid-Erin, ye will pray that your horses may be swifter than hawks. On, on, O royal-hearted Laeg, the Tuatha of Erin are around us this day, Lu Lamfada on the right, and on the left that mighty queen who rules over the gods, and above us that strong god who showed his mercy upon me when I fell in the wilderness of Mid-Luhara. O Liath Macha, my precious one, on the heaven-kissing mountain I took thee. The forests crashed around us contending, the spirits of Lough Liath arose at the noise of our strife, and the daughter of Cuilin roared, but I clung to thee and held thee, and subdued thee, O fairy steed.”

And Laeg answered :—

“ What is this that has come upon thee, O Cu ? I have not heard thee thus vaunting at any time.”

So Cuculain vaunted, for his mind was disturbed by the enchantments; but suddenly he ceased, and, stooping, seized Laeg by the shoulder with his left hand, so that he cried out for the pain, and Cuculain said :—

“ They have departed, O Laeg ; but now I said that beside our galloping steeds they went with us to the battle ; but they have deceived us and forsaken us. Dost thou hear that laughter ? We are forsaken.”

Then Cuculain turned round in the chariot all flaming, and roared against the high gods of Fail, and the peal of that cry resounded across Erin ; but there was no answer, only echoes in the hollow folds of the mountain, and once again, made mad with sorrow and rage, Cuculain roared a challenge against the immortal gods, but again his voice fell to a hoarse whisper, and leaning past Laeg in the war-car, he said :—

“ Who art thou ? I like not thy sleepy eyes and dusky tresses. Thou art not a pleasant or profitable companion for one who enters into the battle.”

But there answered him a voice, saying :—

“ I am Rod, son of the boundless Lir. It was foretold that thou shouldst see me, and I alone

of the Tuatha De Danaan will go with thee into this battle, and I shall be with thee to the end."

Then Cuculain bowed his head in the chariot and wept, and said :—

" O Laeg, the end of all is come, and this supreme horror, that even the gods themselves should have deserted us."

Then there approached the flying scattered battalions of the Red Branch, driven out of Murthemney by the great host of Meave, and Cuculain stayed them, and reformed their broken bands in the mountains of Coonalney, breathing into them his own unconquerable soul.

Ere dawn the next day he climbed into the Eagle's Nest ; and it was there that the men of Meave first saw him revealed in the light of the rising sun, and their host was confused at the sight, when they beheld him afar, and they retired into Conall Murthemney. It was with difficulty, after they saw Cuculain, that their captains prevailed upon them to risk a battle against him.

After this Cuculain defeated the host of Meave in seven great battles on the plains of Murthemney, and the tombs of those he slew are scattered over all that land. Many times he drove them southwards to the Boyne, but they were rein-

forced from mid-Erin, and the Ultonians who fell were not replaced. But on the eighth day, Cuculain looking round, saw the remnant of the Red Branch overwhelmed, and it was about five miles south and west of Dun Dalgan.

More terrible than at any other time was the son of Sualtam in those battles, which he entered in the naked majesty of his irresistible strength, shorn of his glory, and having lost his magic attributes, for this time he went to war like one who has devoted himself to death. Around him the shadows thickened, but like a light in darkness, his valour shone the brighter as before his fast-lessening warriors he charged the armies of the great Queen. Over the plains of Murthemney, between Dun Dalgan and the Boyne, pealed the voice of the son of Sualtam, shouting amid his warriors, and ever the southern host gave way before him, and their battalions were confused.

Then northward in the hills collected the people of Ulla, the unwarlike tribes, seeing afar that one hero, and the fast-lessening ranks of the Ultonians, where the great champion of the north fought on against the immense overflowing host of the Four Provinces.

But as the Ultonians grew less in the dread

conflict, the southern warriors precipitated themselves more and more upon Cuculain. Like a great rock over which rolls some mighty billow of the western sea, so was Cuculain often submerged in their overflowing tide ; and as, with the down-sinking billow, the same rock reappears in its invincible greatness, and the white brine runs down its stubborn ribs, so the son of Sualtam perpetually reappeared scattering and destroying his foes. Then crashed his battle mace through opposing shields ; then flew the foam-flakes from his lips over his reddened garments ; baleful shone his eyes beneath his brows, and his voice died away in his throat till it became a hoarse whisper. Often, too, Laeg charged with the war-car, and extricated him surrounded, and the mighty steeds trampled down opposing squadrons, and many a southern hero was transfixed with the chariot-spear, or divided by the brazen scythes.

It was on the eighth day, two hours after noon, that Cuculain raising his eyes beheld where the last of the Red Branch were overwhelmed, and he and Laeg were abandoned and alone, and he heard Laeg shouting, for he was surrounded by a battalion, and Cuculain hastened back to defend him, and sprang into the

chariot, bounding over the rim, and extended Fabane above him on the left. There he intercepted three javelins cast against the charioteer by a Lagenian band ; but Erc, son of Cairbre Nia-far pursued him, and at the same time cast his spear from the right. Through Cuculain it passed, breaking through the battle-shirt and the waistpiece, and it pierced his left side between the hip-bone and the lowest rib, and transfixed Laeg in the stomach above the navel. Then fell the reins from the hands of Laeg.

“ How is it with thee, O Laeg ? ” said Cuculain.

And Laeg answered :—

“ I have had enough this time, O my dear master. Truly thou hast fulfilled thy vow, for it was through thee that I have been slain.”

Then Cuculain cut through the spear-tree with his colg, and tore forth the tree out of himself ; but meantime, Lewy Mac Conroi stabbed Black Shanglan, driving the spear through his left side, behind the shoulder, and Shanglan fell, overturning the war-car, and Cuculain sprang forth, but as he sprang, Lewy Mac Conroi pierced him through the bowels. Then fell the great hero of the Gael.

Thereat the sun darkened, and the earth trembled, and a wail of agony from immortal mouths shrilled across the land, and a pale panic smote the vast host of Meave when, with a crash fell that pillar of heroism, and that flame of the warlike valour of Erin was extinguished. Then from his slain comrade brake forth the Liath Macha, for, like a housewife's thread, the divine steed brake the traces, and the brazen chains, and the yoke, and bounded forth neighing, and three times he encircled the heroes, trampling down the host of Meave. Afar then retreated the host, and the Liath Macha, wearing still the broken collar, went back into realms of unseen, and entered his house upon the Boyne, where, since the ancient days, was his mysterious dwelling place.

Cuculain kissed Laeg, and Laeg, dying, said :—

“Farewell, O dear master, and schoolfellow. Till the end of the world no servant will ever have a better master than thou hast been to me.”

And Cuculain said :—

“Farewell, O dear Laeg. The gods of Erin have deserted us, and the Clan Cailitin are now abroad, and what will happen to us henceforward I know not. But true and faithful thou hast ever been to me, and it is now seventeen

years since we plighted friendship, and no angry word has ever passed between us since then."

Then the spirit went out of Laeg, and he died, and Cuculain, raising his eyes, saw thence north-westward, about two hundred yards, a small lake called Loch-an-Tanaigte, and he tore forth from himself the bloody spear, and went staggering, and at times he fell, nevertheless he reached the lake, and stooping down drank a deep draught of the pure cold water, keen with frost, and the burning fever in his veins was allayed. After that he arose, and saw on the east side of the lake a tall pillarstone, the grave of a warrior slain there in some ancient war, and its name was Carrig-an-Compan. When Cuculain first saw it there was standing upon it a grey-necked crow, which flew thence as he approached. With difficulty he reached it, and he leaned awhile against the pillar, for his mind wandered, and he knew nothing for a space.

After that he took off his brooch, and removing the torn bratta, he passed it round the top of the pillar, where there was an indentation in the stone, and passed the ends under his arms and around his breast, tying with languid hands a loose knot, which soon was made fast by the

weight of the dying hero. This he did that he might die not in his sitting or lying but that he might die in his standing. Far away the host of Meave watched him for they said that he was immortal, and that Lu Lamfada would once more come down out of fairyland to his aid, and that they would wreak a terrible vengeance. So far they retreated, when they beheld him standing with the drawn sword in his hand, and the rays of the setting sun bright on his panic-striking helmet. So stood Cuculain, even in death-pangs a terror to his enemies and the bulwark of his nation.

While he so stood a stream of blood trickled from his wounds, and ran down to the lake ; and as Cuculain looked upon it, thinking many things in his deep mind, there came forth an otter out of the reeds of the lake and approached the pebbly strand, where the blood flowed into the water, and lapped up the life-blood of the hero. Which seeing Cuculain smiled for the last time, and said :

“ O thou greedy water-dog, often in my boyhood have I pursued thy race in the rivers and lakes of Murthemney ; but now thou hast a full eric, who drinkest the blood of me dying. Nor do I grudge thee this thy bloody meal. Drink

on, thou happy beast. To thee, too, doubtless, there will some time be an hour of woe."

Then to Cuculain appeared a vision, and he deemed that he saw Laeg approaching riding alone on black Shanglan, and he was glad therefore, and said :—

"Go now straightway to Emain Macha, O Laeg, and say to Concobar and all the Ultonians that here in Murthemney I will contend till I perish against the invaders of Ulla, and give my benediction to my uncle, the great King of the Ultonians, and to all the Red Branch ; and go to Emer and tell her not to weep for me, but to let her grief be of short duration, and that my last thought has been of her."

After that Cuculain deemed that Laeg went off to Emain Macha, and that he heard the sound of the hoofs afar going northwards, and again he saw the faces of that wandering clan, and they laughed around him, and taunted him, and said :—

"Thus shalt thou perish, O Hound, and thus shall all like thee be forsaken and deserted, and they shall perish in loneliness and sorrow. An early death and desolation shall be their lot, for we are powerful over men and over gods, and the world that is seen, and the world that is unseen

belong to us," and they ringed him round, and chaunted obscene songs, and triumphed.

Nevertheless they terrified him not, for a deep spring of stern valour was opened in his soul, and the might of his unfathomable spirit sustained him.

Then was Cuculain aware that the Clan Cailitin had retired, as though in fear, and there stood beside him a child, having a strange aspect, and he took Cuculain by the hand, and said :—

" Regard not these children of evil, O my brother, their dominion is but for a time."

And Cuculain said :—

" What strong god art thou who hast conquered the Clan Cailitin ? "

Thus perished Cuculain—" mild, handsome, invincible," " *caomh, álainn, do-éladairte.*"

Later, one wrote his epitaph thus :—

" Cuculain, filius Sualtam, fortissimus heros Scotorum."

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