

## XXIV THE REPEATED WARNING OF SUALTAIM

Now while the deeds we have told here were being done, Sualtaim ('Goodly Fosterer') son of Becaltach ('of Small Belongings') son of Moraltach ('of Great Belongings'), the same the father of Cuchulain macSualtaim, of Sualtaim's Rath in the plain of Murthemne, was told of the distress and sore wounding of his son contending in unequal combat on the Cualnge Cattle Spoil, even against Calatin Dana ('the Bold') with his seven and twenty sons, and against Glass son of Delga, his grandson, and at the last against Ferdiad son of Daman.

It is then that Sualtaim said: "Whate'er it be, this that I hear from afar" quoth Sualtaim "it is the sky that bursts or the sea that ebbs or the earth that quakes, or is it the distress of my son overmatched in the strife on the Driving of the Kine of Cualnge?"

In that, indeed, Sualtaim spoke true. And he went to learn all after a while, without hastening on his way. And when Sualtaim was come to where his son Cuchulain was and found him covered with wounds and bloody gashes and many stabs, Sualtaim began to moan and lament for Cuchulain.

Forsooth Cuchulain deemed it neither an honour nor glory that Sualtaim should bemoan and lament him, for Cuchulain knew that, wounded and injured though he was, Sualtaim would not be the man to avenge his wrong. For such was Sualtaim: He was no mean warrior and he was no mighty warrior, but only a good, worthy man was he. "Come, my father Sualtaim" said Cuchulain; "cease thy sighing and mourning for me, and do thou go to Emain Macha to the men of Ulster and tell them to come now to have a care for their droves, for no longer am I able to protect them in the gaps and passes of the land of Conalle Murthemni. All alone am I against four of the five grand provinces of Erin from Monday at Summer's end till the beginning of Spring, every day slaying a man on a ford and a hundred warriors every night. Fair fight is not granted me nor single combat, and no one comes to aid me nor to succour. And such is the measure of my wounds and my sores that I cannot bear my garments or my clothing to touch my skin, so that spancel hoops hold my cloak over me. Dry tufts of grass are stuffed in my wounds. There is not the space of a needle's point from my crown to my sole without wound or sore, and there is not a single hair on my body from my crown to my sole whereon the point of a needle could stand, without a drop of deep red blood on the top of each hair, save the left hand alone which is holding my shield, and even there thrice fifty bloody wounds are upon it. And let them straightway give battle to the warriors, and unless they avenge this anon, they will never avenge it till the very day of doom and of life!"

Sualtaim set out on Liath ('the Roan') of Macha as his only horse, with warning to the men of Ulster. And when he was come alongside of Emain, he shouted these words there: "Men are slain, women stolen, cattle lifted, ye men of Ulster!" cried Sualtaim.

He had not the answer that served him from the Ulstermen, and forasmuch as he had it not he went on further to the rampart of Emain. And he cried out the same words there: "Men are slain, women stolen, cattle lifted, ye men of Ulster!" cried Sualtaim.

And a second time he had not the response that served him from the men of Ulster. Thus stood it among the Ulstermen: It was geis for the Ulstermen to speak before their king, geis for the king to speak before his three druids. Thereafter Sualtaim drove on to the 'Flagstone of the hostages' in Emain Macha. He shouted the same words there: "Men are slain, women stolen, cows carried off!"

"But who has slain them, and who has stolen them, and who has carried them off?" asked Cathba the druid.

"Ailill and Medb have, with the cunning of Fergus mac Roig, overwhelmed you. Your people have been harassed as far as Dūn Sobairche" said Sualtaim. "Your wives and your sons and your children, your steeds and your stock of horses, your herds and your flocks and your droves of cattle have been carried away. Cuchulain all alone is checking and staying the hosts of the four great provinces of Erin at the gaps and passes of the land of Conalle Murthemni. Fair fight is refused him, nor is he granted single combat, nor comes any one to succour or aid him. Cuchulain has not suffered them to enter the plain of Murthemne or into the land of Ross. Three winter months is he there. The youth is wounded, his limbs are out of joint. Spancel hoops hold his cloak over him. There is not a hair from his crown to his sole whereon the point of a needle could stand, without a drop of deep red blood on the top of each hair, except his left hand alone which is holding his shield, and even there thrice fifty bloody wounds are upon it. And unless ye avenge this betimes, ye will never avenge it till the end of time and of life."

"Fitter is death and doom and destruction for the man that so incites the king!" quoth Cathba the druid.

"In good sooth, it is true!" said the Ulstermen all together.

Thereupon Sualtaim went his way from them, indignant and angry because from the men of Ulster he had not had the answer that served him. Then reared Liath ('the Roan') of Macha under Sualtaim and dashed on to the ramparts of Emain. Thereat Sualtaim fell under his own shield, so that his own shield turned on Sualtaim and the scalloped edge of the shield severed Sualtaim's head, though others say he was asleep on the stone, and that he fell thence onto his shield on awaking. Hence this is the 'Tragical Death of Sualtaim.'

The horse himself turned back again to Emain, and the shield on the horse and the head on the shield. And Sualtaim's head uttered the same words: "Men are slain, women stolen, cattle lifted, ye men of Ulster!" spake the head of Sualtaim.

“Some deal too great is that cry” quoth Conchobar; “for yet is the sky above us, the earth underneath and the sea round about us. And unless the heavens shall fall with their showers of stars on the man like face of the world, or unless the ground burst open in quakes beneath our feet, or unless the furrowed, blue bordered ocean break o’er the tufted brow of the earth, will I restore to her byre and her stall, to her abode and her dwelling place, each and every cow and woman of them with victory of battle and contest and combat!”

Thereupon a runner of his body-guard was summoned to Conchobar, Findchad Ferbenduma (‘he of the Copper Horn’) to wit, son of Fraech Lethan (‘the Broad’), and Conchobar bade him go assemble and muster the men of Ulster. And in like manner, in the drunkenness of sleep and of his ‘Pains,’ Conchobar enumerated to him their quick and their dead, and he uttered these words: —

“Arise, O Findchad!  
Thee I send forth:  
A negligence not to be wished;  
Proclaim it to the chiefs of Ulster!”

“Go thou forward to Derg, to Deda at his bay, to Lemain, to Follach, to Illann son of Fergus at Gabar, to Dornail Feic at Imchlar, to Derg Imdirg, to Fedilmid son of Ilar Cetach of Cualnge at Ellonn, to Reochad son of Fathemon at Rigdonn, to Lug, to Lugaid, to Cathba at his bay, to Carfre at Ellne, to Laeg at his causeway, to Gemen in his valley, to Senoll Uathach at Diabul Ard, to Cethern son of Fintan at Carrloig, to Cethern at Eillne, to Tarothor, to Mulach at his fort, to the royal poet Amargin, to Uathach Bodba, to the Morrigan at Dùn Sobairche, to Eit, to Roth, to Fiachna at his mound, to Dam drend, to Andiaraid, to Manè Macbriathrach (‘the Eloquent’), to Dam Derg (‘the Red’), to Mod, to Mothus, to Iarmothus at Corp Cliath, to Gabarlaig in Linè, to Eocho Semnech in Semne, to Eochaid Laithrech at Latharne, to Celtchar son of Uthecar in Lethglas, to Errgè Echbel (‘Horsemouth’) at Bri Errgi (‘Errgè’s Hill’), to Uma son of Remarfessach (‘Thickbeard’) at Fedain in Cualnge, to Munremur (‘Thickneck’) son of Gerrcend (‘Shorthead’) at Moduirn, to Senlabair at Canann Gall (‘of the Foreigners’), to Fallomain, to Lugaid, king of the Fir Bolg, to Lugaid of Linè, to Buadgalach (‘the Victorious Hero’), to Abach, to Fergna at Barrene, to Anè, to Aniach, to Abra, to Loegaire Milbel (‘Honey-mouth’), at his fire, to the three sons of Trosgal at Bacc Draigin (‘Thornhollow’), to Drend, to Drenda, to Drendus, to Cimb, to Cimbil, to Cimbin at Fan na Coba, to Fachtna son of Sencha at his rath, to Sencha, to Senchainte, to Bricriu, to Briccirne son of Bricriu, to Brecc, to Buan, to Barach, to Oengus of the Fir Bolg, to Oengus son of Letè, to Fergus son of Letè, to Bruachar, to Slangè, to Conall Cernach (‘the Victorious’) son of Amargin at Midluachar, to Cuchulain son of Sualtaim at Murthemne, to Menn son of Salcholga at Rena (‘the Waterways’), to the three sons of Fiachna, Ross, Darè and Imchad at Cualnge, to Connud macMorna at the Callann, to Condra son of Amargin at his rath, to Amargin at Ess Ruaid, to Laeg at Leirè, to Oengus Ferbenduma (‘him of the copper Horn’), to Ogma Grianainech (‘Sun-faced’) at Brecc, to Eo macFornè, to Tollcend, to Sudè at Mag Eol in Mag Dea, to Conla Saeb at Uarba, to Loegaire Buadach (‘the Triumphant’) at Immail, to Amargin

Iarngiunnach ('the Dark Haired') at Taltiu, to Furbaide Ferbenn ('the Man with Horns on his Helmet') son of Conchobar at Sil in Mag Inis ('the Island plain'), to Cuscraid Menn ('the Stammerer') of Macha son of Conchobar at Macha, to Fingin at Fingabair, to Blae 'the Hospitaller of a score,' to Blae 'the Hospitaller of six men,' to Eogan son of Durthacht at Fernmag, to Ord at Mag Sered, to Oblan, to Obail at Culenn, to Curethar, to Liana at Ethbenna, to Fernel, to Finnchad of Sliab Betha, to Talgoba at Bernas ('the Gap'), to Menn son of the Fir Cualann at Mag Dula, to Iroll at Blarinè, to Tobraidè son of Ailcoth, to Ialla Ilgremma ('of many Captures'), to Ross son of Ulchrothach ('the Many-shaped') at Mag Dobra, to Ailill Finn ('the Fair'), to Fethen Bec ('the Little'), to Fethan Mor ('the Big'), to Fergus son of Finnchoem ('the Fair-comely') at Burach, to Olchar, to Ebadchar, to Uathchar, to Etatchar, to Oengus son of Oenlam Gabè ('the one handed Smith'), to Ruadri at Mag Tail, to Manè son of Crom ('the Bent'), to Nindech son of Cronn, to Mal macRochraidi, to Beothach ('the Lively'), to Briathrach ('the Wordy') at his rath, to Narithla at Lothor, to the two sons of Feic, Muridach and Cotreb, to Fintan son of Niamglonnach ('of brilliant Exploits') at Dun da Benn ('the two gabled Dùn'), to Feradach Finn Fechnach ('the Fair and Upright') at Nemed ('the Shrine') of Sliab Fuait, to Amargin son of Ecetsalach ('the grimy Smith') at the Buas, to Bunnè son of Munremar, to Fidach son of Dorarè, to Muirnè Menn ('the Stammerer')."

It was nowise a heavy task for Finnchad to gather this assembly and muster which Conchobar had enjoined upon him. For all there were of Ulstermen to the east of Emain and to the west of Emain and to the north of Emain set out at once for the field of Emain in the service of their king, and at the word of their lord, and to await the recovery of Conchobar. Such as were from the south of Emain waited not for Conchobar, but set out directly on the trail of the host and on the hoofprints of the Táin.

The first stage the men of Ulster marched under Conchobar was from Emain to the green in Iraird Cuillinn that night. "Why now delay we, ye men?" Conchobar asked.

"We await thy sons" they answered; "Fiacha and Fiachna who have gone with a division from us to Tara to fetch Erc son of thy daughter Fedlimid Nocruthach ('Nine-shaped'), son also of Carbre Niafer king of Tara, to the end that he should come with the number of his muster and his troops, his levy and his forces to our host at this time. Until these two divisions come to us, no further advance will we make from this place."

"By my word," exclaimed Conchobar; "I will delay here no longer for them, lest the men of Erin hear of my rising from the weakness and 'Pains' wherein I was. For the men of Erin know not even if I am still alive!"

Thereupon Conchobar and Celtchar proceeded with thirty hundred spear bristling chariot fighters to Ath Irmidi ('the Ford of Spearpoints'). And there met them there eight score huge men of the bodyguard of Ailill and Medb, with eight score women of the Ulstermen's women as their spoils. Thus was their portion of the plunder of Ulster: A woman captive in the hand of each man of them.

Conchobar and Celtchar struck off their eight score heads and released their eight score captive women. Ath Irmidi ('the Ford of Spearpoints') was the name of the place till that time; Ath Fenè is its name ever since. It is for this it is called Ath Fenè, because the warriors of the Fenè from the east and the warriors of the Fenè from the west encountered one another in battle and contest man for man on the brink of the ford.

Touching the four grand provinces of Erin, they encamped at Slemain Midè ('Slane of Meath') that night, and Conchobar and Celtchar returned that night to the green in Iraid Cuillinn hard by the men of Ulster. Thereupon Celtchar aroused the men of Ulster.

XXIVA THE AGITATION OF CELTCHAR

It was then that Celtchar in his sleep uttered these words to Conchobar in the midst of the men of Ulster in Iraid Cuillinn that night: —

“Thirty hundred chariot men;  
An hundred horse companions stout;  
An hundred with an hundred druids!  
To lead us will not fail  
The hero of the land,  
Conchobar with hosts around him!  
Let the battle line be formed!  
Gather now, ye warriors!  
Battle shall be fought  
At Garech and Ilgarech  
On aftermorrow’s morn!”

Or it was Cuscraid Menn (‘the Stammerer’) of Macha, Conchobar’s son, who sang this lay on the night before the battle, after the lay ‘Arise ye Kings of Macha’ which Loegaire Buadach (‘the Victorious’) sang.

On that same night Cormac Conlongas, Conchobar’s son, spake these words to the men of Erin at Slemain Midè that night: —

“A wonder of a morning,  
A wondrous time!  
When hosts will be confused,  
Kings turned back in flight!  
Necks will be broken,  
The sand made red,  
When forth breaks the battle,  
The seven chieftains before,  
Of Ulster’s host round Conchobar!  
Their women will they defend,  
For their herds will they fight  
At Garech and Ilgarech,  
On the morning after the morrow!  
Heroes will be slaughtered then,  
Hounds cut to pieces,  
Steeds overwhelmed!”

On that same night, Dubthach Doel (‘the Scorpion’) of Ulster saw the dream wherein were the hosts at Garech and Ilgarech. Then it was he uttered these words in his sleep among the men of Erin at Slemain Midè that night: —

“Great be the morn,  
The morn of Meath!  
Great be the truce

The truce of Culenn!

“Great be the fight,  
The fight of Clartha!  
Great, too, the steeds,  
The steeds of Assal!

“Great be the plague,  
The plague of Tuath-Bressi!  
Great be the storm,  
Ulster’s battle storm round Conchobar!

“Their women will they defend,  
For their herds will they fight  
At Garech and Ilgarech,  
On the morning after the morrow!”

Then when the hosts were assembled at Garech and Ilgarech, Dubthach was awakened from his sleep, so that Nemain brought confusion on the host and they fell trembling in their arms under the points of their spears and weapons, so that an hundred warriors of them fell dead in the midst of their camp and quarters at the fearfulness of the shout they raised on high. Be that as it would, that night was not the calmest for the men of Erin that they passed before or since, because of the forebodings and predictions and because of the spectres and visions that were revealed to them.

XXV HERE FOLLOWETH THE ARRAY OF THE HOST

While these things were being done, the Connachtmen by the counsel of Ailill, Medb, and Fergus, resolved to send messengers from thence to spy out the men of Ulster, to make certain if they had taken possession of the plain. Said Ailill: "Truly have I succeeded" said he "in laying waste Ulster and the land of the Picts and Cualnge from Monday at Summer's end till Spring's beginning. We have taken their women and their sons and their children, their steeds and their troops of horses, their herds and their flocks and their droves. We have laid level their hills after them, so that they have become lowlands and are all one height. For this cause, will I await them no longer here, but let them offer me battle on Mag Ai, if so it please them. But, say here what we will, some one shall go forth from us to watch the great, wide plain of Meath, to know if the men of Ulster come hither. And, should the men of Ulster come hither, I will in no wise be the first to retreat till battle be given them, for it was never the wont of a good king to retreat."

"Who should fitly go thither?" asked all.

"Who but macRoth our chief runner yonder" answered another group of them.

MacRoth went his way to survey the great wide spreading plain of Meath. Not long was macRoth there when he heard something: A rush and a crash and a clatter and a clash. Not slight the thing he judged it to be, but as though it was the firmament itself that fell on the man like face of the world, or as though it was the furrowed, blue bordered ocean that broke o'er the tufted brow of the earth, or as though the ground had gone asunder in quakes, or as though the forest fell, each of the trees in the crotches and forks and branches of the other. But why give further accounts! The wood's wild beasts were hunted out on the plain, so that beneath them the grassy forelocks of the plain of Meath were not to be seen.

MacRoth hastened to tell this tale at the place where were Ailill and Medb and Fergus and the nobles of the men of Erin. MacRoth related the whole matter to them.

"What was that there, O Fergus?" asked Ailill; "to what likenest thou it?"

"Not hard for me to say what it resembled. It was the rush and tramp and clatter that he heard" said Fergus "the din and thunder, the tumult and turmoil of the Ulstermen. It was the men of Ulster arising from their 'Pains,' who have come into the woods, the throng of champions and battle heroes cutting down with their swords the woods in the way of their chariots. This it was that hath put the wild animals to flight on the plain, so that the grassy forelocks of the field of Meath are hidden beneath them!"

Another time macRoth surveyed the plain and he saw something: a heavy, grey mist that filled the glens and the slopes, the upper void and veil, the space between the heavens and earth. It seemed to him that the hills were islands in lakes that he saw rising up out of the sloping valleys of mist. It seemed to him they were wide yawning caverns that he saw there leading into that mist. It seemed to him it was all-white, flaxy sheets of linen, or sifted snow a-falling that he saw there through a rift in the mist. It seemed to him it was a flight of many, varied, wonderful, numerous birds that he saw in the same mist, or the constant sparkling of shining stars on a bright, clear night of hoar-frost, or sparks of red flaming fire. He heard something: A rush and a din and a hurtling sound, a noise and a thunder, a tumult and a turmoil, and a great wind that all but took the hair from his head and threw him on his back, and yet the wind of the day was not great. He hastened on to impart these tidings at the place where were Ailill and Medb and Fergus and the nobles of the men of Erin. He reported the matter to them.

“But what was that, O Fergus?” asked Ailill.

“Not hard to say” Fergus made answer. “This was the great, grey mist that he saw which filled the space between the heavens and earth, namely, the streaming breath both of horses and men, the smoke of the earth and the dust of the roads as it rose over them with the driving of the wind, so that it made a heavy, deep grey misty vapour thereof in the clouds and the air.

“These were the islands over lakes that he saw there, and the tops of hills and of heights over the sloping valleys of mist, even the heads of the champions and battle heroes over the chariots and the chariots withal. These were the wide yawning caverns that he saw there leading into that mist, even the mouths and the nostrils of the horses and champions exhaling and inhaling the sun and the wind with the speed of the host. These were the all white, flax-like cloths that he saw there or the streaming snow a-falling, to wit the foam and the froth that the bridles of the reins flung from the bits of strong, stout steeds with the stress, with the swiftness and strength and speed of the host.

“These were the flights of many, various, wonderful, numerous birds that he saw there, even the dust of the ground and the top of the earth and the sods which the horses flung from their feet and their hoofs and arose over the heads of the host with the driving of the wind.

“This was the rush and the crash and the hurtling sound, the din and the thunder, the clatter and clash that he heard there, to wit the shield shock of shields and the jangle of javelins and the hard smiting of swords and the ring of helmets, the clangour of breast-plates and the rattle of arms and the fury of feats, the straining of ropes and the whirr of wheels and the trampling of horses’ hoofs and the creaking of chariots, and the deep voices of heroes and battle warriors coming hither towards us.

“This was the constant sparkling of shining stars on a bright, clear night that he saw there and the sparks of red flaming fire, even the bloodthirsty, terrible

eyes of the champions and battle warriors from under beautiful, well-shaped, finely adorned battle helmets; eyes full of the fury and rage they brought with them, against the which neither before nor since has equal combat nor overwhelming force of battle prevailed, and against which it will never prevail till the very day of doom and of life!”

“We make not much of that” quoth Medb; “we will await them. For there are goodly warriors and goodly fighting men with us to cope with them.”

“Thou shall have need of them” answered Fergus. “Truly, I count not on that, O Medb. For I give my word, thou shalt find no host in all Erin, nor in Alba, nor in the western part of the world from Greece and Scythia westwards to the Orkney Islands, the Pillars of Hercules, Bregon’s Tower and the islands of Cadiz to cope with the men of Ulster when once their anger comes on them!”

Then did the four grand provinces of Erin pitch camp and make lodgment at Claritha for that night. They sent forth folk to keep watch and guard against Ulster, to the end that the Ulstermen might not come upon them without warning, without notice.

Then it was that Conchobar and Celtchar with thirty hundred bristling chariot fighters set forth, till they halted at Slemain Midè (‘Slane of Meath’) in the rear of the host of Erin. But, though ‘halted’ we have said, a very brief halt made they there. Not straightway pitched they camp, but proceeded for a favourable sign to the quarters of Ailill and Medb, so they might be the first of all to redden their hands on the men of Erin.

Then did macRoth go again to view the hosting of the men of Ulster, so that he reached their encampment at Slane of Meath. It was not long macRoth had been there when he saw something: An incomparable, immense troop of horsemen in Slane of Meath coming straight from the northeast. He hastened forward to where were Ailill and Medb and Fergus and the chiefs of the men of Erin. Ailill asked tidings of him on his arrival: “Say, macRoth,” queried Ailill; “sawest thou aught of the men of Ulster on the trail of the host this day?”

“Truly I know not” answered macRoth; “but I saw an incomparable, immense troop of horsemen in Slane of Meath coming straight from the northeast.”

“But how many numbered the horse troop?” asked Ailill.

“Not fewer, meseemed, than thirty hundred fully armed chariot fighters were they, even ten hundred and twenty hundred fully armed chariot fighters,” macRoth made answer.

“So, O Fergus” quoth Ailill “those are the warriors of Ulster with Conchobar! How thinkest thou to terrify us till now with the smoke and dust and the breath of a mighty host, while all the battle force thou hast is that we see yonder!”

“A little too soon belittlest thou them” Fergus retorted; “for mayhap the bands are more numerous than is said they are.”

“Let us take good, swift counsel on the matter” said Medb; “for yon huge, most fierce, most furious man will attack us we ween, Conchobar, to wit, son of Fachtna Fathach (‘the Giant’) son of Ross Ruad (‘the Red’) son of Rudraige, himself High King of Ulster and son of the High King of Erin. Let there be a hollow array of the men of Erin before Conchobar and a force of thirty hundred ready to close in from behind, and the men shall be taken and in no wise wounded; for, no more than is a caitiff’s lot is this whereto they are come!” Wherefore this is the third most derisive word that was spoken on the Cattle Lifting of Cualnge, even to take Conchobar and his people prisoners without wounding, and to inflict a caitiff’s lot on the ten hundred and twenty hundred who accompanied the kings of Ulster.

And Cormac Conlongas son of Conchobar heard that, and he knew that unless he took vengeance at once upon Medb for her great boast, he would not avenge it till the very day of doom and of life.

It was then that Cormac Conlongas son of Conchobar arose with his troop of thirty hundred to inflict the revenge of battle and prowess upon Ailill and Medb. Ailill arose with his thirty hundred to meet him. Medb arose with her thirty hundred. The Manè arose with their thirty hundred. The sons of Maga arose with their thirty hundred. The Leinstermen and the Munstermen and the people of Temair arose and made interposition between them, so that on both sides each warrior sat down near to the other and near by his arms.

Meanwhile a hollow array of men was made by Medb to face Conchobar and a warlike band of thirty hundred ready to close in from behind. Conchobar proceeded to attack the circle of men, to force an opening. And he was far from seeking any particular breach, but he worked a small gap, broad enough for a man-at-arms, right in front over against him in the circle of combatants, and effected a breach of an hundred on his right side, and a breach of an hundred on his left, and he turned in on them, and mingled among them on their ground, and there fell of them eight hundred fully brave warriors at his hands. And thereafter he left them without blood or bleeding from himself and took his station in Slane of Meath at the head of the men of Ulster.

“Come, ye men of Erin!” cried Ailill. “Let some one go hence to scan the wide stretching plain of Meath, to know in what guise the men of Ulster come to the height in Slane of Meath, to bring us an account of their arms and their gear and their trappings, their kings and their royal leaders, their champions and battle warriors and gap breakers of hundreds and their yeomen, to which to listen will shorten the time for us.”

“Who should go thither?” asked all.

“Who but macRoth the chief runner” Aililla made answer.

MacRoth went his way till he took his station in Slane of Meath, awaiting the men of Ulster. The Ulstermen were busied in marching to that hill from gloaming of early morn till sunset hour in the evening. In such manner the earth was never left naked under them during all that time, every division of them under its king, and every band under its leader, and every king and every leader and every lord with the number of his force and his muster, his gathering and his levy apart. Howbeit, by sunset hour in the evening all the men of Ulster had taken position on that height in Slane of Meath.

MacRoth came forward with the account of their first company to the place where Ailill and Medb and Fergus were and the nobles of the men of Erin. Ailill and Medb asked tidings of him when he arrived. "Come, macRoth" quoth Ailill "tell us in what manner of array do the Ulstermen advance to the hill of Slane in Meath?"

"Truly, I know not" answered macRoth "except this alone: there came a fiery, powerful, most well-favoured company upon the hill of Slane in Meath" said macRoth. "It seemed, on scanning and spying, that thrice thirty hundred warriors were in it. Anon they all doffed their garments and threw up a turfy mound for their leader to sit on. A youth, slender, long, exceeding great of stature, fair to behold, proud of mien, in the van of the troop. Fairest of the princes of the world was he in the midst of his warriors, as well in fearsomeness and in awe, in courage and command; fair yellow hair, curled, delicately arranged in ridges and bushy had he reaching to the nape of his neck; a comely, clear rosy countenance he had, narrow below and broad above; a deep blue-grey, angry eye, devouring and fear inspiring, in his head; a two forked beard, yellow, fairly curled, on his chin; a purple mantle with fringes and five-folded wrapped around him; a conspicuous, salmon shaped brooch of red gold in the mantle over his breast; a shining white, hooded shirt under red interweaving of red gold he wore next his white skin; a bright white shield with figures of beasts of red gold thereon; a gold hilted, hammered sword in one of his hands; a broad and grey-green lancehead on an ashen shaft in the other; the pillar of a king's house on his back. That warrior took his station on the top of the mound, so that each one came up to him and his company took their places around him.

"There came also another company to the same height in Slane of Meath" continued macRoth. "Second of the two divisions of thirty hundred it was, and next to the other in numbers and attendance, in accoutrements and fearfulness and horror. A great, hero-like, well-favoured warrior was there likewise at the head of that company; fair yellow hair he wore; a bright, curly beard about his chin; a green mantle wrapped around him; a bright silvern pin in the mantle at his breast; a brown-red, soldier's tunic under red interweaving of red gold trussed up against his fair skin down to his knees; a candle of a king's house in his hand, with windings of silver and bands of gold; wonderful the feats and games performed with the spear in the hand of the youth; the windings of silver ran round it by the side of the bands of gold, now from the butt to the socket, while at other times it was the bands of gold that circled by the side of the windings of silver from socket to spear end; a smiting shield with plaited edge he bore; a sword with hilt pieces of ivory, and ornamented with thread of gold

on his left side. This warrior took his station on the left of the leader of the first company who had come to the mound, and his followers got them seated around him. But, though we have said they sat, they did not verily seat themselves at once, but they sat thus, with their knees on the ground and the rims of their shields against their chins, so long it seemed to them till they should be let at us. But, one thing yet: meseemed that the great, fierce youth who led the troop stammered grievously in his speech.

“Still another battalion there came to the same mound in Slane of Meath” continued macRoth. “Second to its fellow in number and followers and apparel. A handsome, broad headed warrior at the head of that troop; dark yellow hair in tresses he wore; an eager, dark blue eye rolling restlessly in his head; a bright, curled beard, forked and tapering, at his chin; a dark grey cloak with fringes, folded around him; a leaf shaped brooch of silvered bronze in the mantle over his breast; a white hooded shirt reaching to his knees was girded next to his skin; a bright shield with raised devices of beasts thereon he bore; a sword with white silver hilt in battle scabbard at his waist; the pillar of a king’s palace he bore on his back. This warrior took his station on the hill of turf facing the warrior who first came to the hill, and his company took their places around him. But sweet as the tone of lutes in masters’ hands when long sustained, so seemed to me the melodious sound of the voice and the speech of the youth conversing with the warrior who first came to the hill and offering him every counsel.”

“But who might that be?” asked Ailill of Fergus.

“Truly, we know him well” Fergus made answer. “This, to wit, is the first hero for whom they threw up the mound of turf on the height of the hill and whom all approached, namely, Conchobar son of Fachtna Fathach son of Ross Ruad son of Rudraige, High King of Ulster, and son of the High King of Erin. It is he that sat on the mound of sods. This, to wit, is the stammering, great warrior” Fergus continued “who took station on his father Conchobar’s left, namely, Cuscraid Menn (‘the Stammerer’) of Macha, Conchobar’s son, with the sons of the king of Ulster and the sons of the princes of the men of Erin close by him. This is the spear he saw in his hand, even the ‘Torch of Cuscraid,’ with its windings of silver and bands of gold. It is the wont of that spear that neither before nor after do the silver windings run round it by the side of the bands of gold but only on the eve of a triumph. Belike, it is almost before a triumph they course round it now.

“The well-favoured, broad-headed warrior who seated himself on the hill in the presence of the youth who first came on the mound, namely is Sencha son of Ailill son of Maelcho ‘the Eloquent’ of Ulster, he that is wont to appease the hosts of the men of Erin. But, yet a word more I say: It is not the counsel of cowardice nor of fear that he gives his lord this day on the day of strife, but counsel to act with valour and courage and wisdom and cunning. But, again one word further I say” added Fergus: “It is a goodly people for performing great deeds that has risen there early this day around Conchobar!”

“We make not much of them” quoth Medb; “we have goodly warriors and stout youths to deal with them.”

“I count not that for much” answered Fergus again; “but I say this word: thou wilt not find in Erin nor in Alba a host to be a match for the men of Ulster when once their anger comes upon them.”

“Yet another company there came to the same mound in Slane of Meath” said macRoth. “Not fewer than a battalion of thirty hundred was in it. A fair, tall, great warrior in the van of that battalion, and he of fiery spirit, with noble countenance. Brown, dark coloured hair he wore, smooth and thin on his forehead; a dull grey cloak girt around him; a silver pin in the cloak over his breast; a bright, sleeved tunic next to his skin; a curved shield with sharp, plaited rim he bore; a five pronged spear in his hand; a straight sword with ornaments of walrus tooth in its place.”

“But, who might that be?” asked Ailill of Fergus.

“In very sooth, we know him” Fergus made answer. “The putting of hands on strife is he; a battle warrior for combat and destruction on foes is the one who is come there, even Eogan son of Durthacht, king of the stout handed Fernmag in the north, is the one yonder.”

“Another battalion there came thither to the same mound in Slane of Meath” continued macRoth. “It is surely no false word that boldly they took the hill. Deep the terror, great the fear they brought with them. Terrible the clangour of arms they made as they advanced. Their raiment all thrown back behind them. A great headed, warlike warrior in the forefront of the company, and he eager for blood, dreadful to look upon; spare, grizzly hair had he; huge, yellow eyes in his head; a yellow, close-napped cloak around him; a pin of yellow gold in the cloak over his breast; a yellow tunic with lace next his skin; a great, smiting sword under his waist; in his hand a nailed, broad plated, long shafted spear with a drop of blood on its edge.”

“But, who might that be?” asked Ailill of Fergus.

“In truth then, we know him, that warrior” Fergus gave answer. “Neither battle nor battlefield nor combat nor contest shuns he, the one who is come thither. Loegaire Buadach (‘the Victorious’) son of Connad Buidè (‘the Yellow’) son of Iliach, from Immail in the north, is the one yonder.”

“Another company there came there too to the same mound in Slane of Meath” continued macRoth. “A thick-necked, burly warrior at the head of that troop; black, bushy hair he had; a scarred, crimsoned face he had; a deep blue-grey, blazing eye in his head; a spear set with eyes of glass, casting shadows over him; a black shield with a hard rim of silvered bronze upon him; a dun coloured cloak of curly wool about him; a brooch of pale gold in the cloak over his breast; a three-striped tunic of silk with red embroidery next to his skin; a

sword with ivory hilt and with ornamentation of thread of gold over his dress on the outside.”

“But, who might that man be?” asked Ailill of Fergus.

“We know him full well” Fergus made answer. “He is the putting of hand on strife; a wave of the high sea that drowneth the small streams; he is the man of three shouts; the sea over walls; the venomous destruction of enemies, the man who comes thither. Muremur (‘Thick Neck’) son of Gerrcend (‘Short Head’) from Moduirn in the north is the one yonder.”

“Still another company there came to the same mound in Slane of Meath” continued macRoth. “Not fewer than thirty hundred, the battle line of the troops. A broad headed, stout warrior, pleasantly found of limb, in the front of that troop; he is dried and sallow; he is wild and bull-like; a dun, round eye, proud in his head; yellow, very curly is his hair; a red, round shield with hard silver rim about it he bore; a trebly riveted, broad plated, long shafted spear in his hand; a streaked grey cloak around him; a salmon shaped brooch of copper in the cloak over his breast; a hooded kirtle girded around him reaching down to his calves; a straight sword with ornaments of walrus tooth on his left thigh.”

“But who might he be?” asked Ailill of Fergus.

“I know him indeed” Fergus made answer. “He is the prop of battle; he is the wild heat of anger; he is the daring of every battle; he is the triumph of every combat; he is the tool that pierces, is the man who comes thither. Connud macMorna, from the Callann in the north, is the man yonder.”

“There came still another company to the same mound in Slane of Meath” continued macRoth. “A company most fair to look upon, most notable both in numbers and in attendance and apparel. It is indeed no lying word, it is with might and storm they gained the hill, so that with the clash of arms they made at the approach of that company they startled the hosts that had arrived there before them. A man, comely and noble, in advance of that band; most well favoured to see of the men of the world, whether in shape or form or frame; whether in hair or eyes or fearfulness; whether in voice or brightness or knowledge or adornment; whether in rank or wisdom or kindred; whether in arms or apparel; whether in size or worth or beauty; whether in figure or valour or conduct.”

“Who might that man be, O Fergus?” asked Ailill.

“Then it is surely no lying word” Fergus made answer: “A fitting saying is this, ‘No fool ’mongst the naked’ is he who comes thither. He is the foe of all others; he is a power irresistible; the storm wave that drowneth, the glitter of ice is that well favoured man. Fedilmid son of Ilar Cetach of Cualnge, from Ellonn in the north, is he yonder, with trophies from other lands after dealing destruction to his enemies.”

“Still another battalion came thither to the same hill in Slane of Meath” macRoth proceeded. “It is the array of an army for greatness. Not often is a warrior seen more handsome than the warrior that is in the front rank of that company. Bushy, red-yellow hair he wore; his countenance comely, ruddy, well formed; his face slender below, broad above; a deep blue-grey, beaming eye, and it flashing and laughing in his head; a well set, shapely man, tall, slender below and broad above; red, thin lips he had; teeth shining and pearl like; a clear, ringing voice; a white skinned body; most beautiful of the forms of men; a purple cloak wrapped around him; a brooch of gold in the mantle over his breast; a hooded tunic of royal silk with a red hem of red gold he wore next to his white skin; a bright, curved shield with wonderful, many coloured devious figures of beasts in red gold thereon and with hollows of silver he bore at his left side; a gold hilted, inlaid sword hanging from his neck at his left side; a long, grey edged spear along with a cutting bye-spear of attack, with thongs for throwing, with fastenings of silvered bronze, in his hand.”

“But who might that man be?” asked Ailill of Fergus.

“We know him full well” Fergus made answer. “He is half of a battle; he is the dividing of combat; he is the wild rage of a watchhound, the man who is come thither; Rochad son of Fatheman, from Rigdonn in the north, is he yonder. Your son-in-law is he; he wedded your daughter, namely Finnabair, without dower, and he brought neither marriage gift nor bride price to her.”

“Another battalion there came to the same hill in Slane of Meath” continued macRoth. “A stalwart, thick-thighed, gross-calved warrior at the head of that company; little but every limb of him as stout as a man. Verily it is no lying word, he is a man down to the ground,” said he. “Brown, bushy hair upon his head; a round faced, ruddy countenance covered with scars he had; a flashing, proud eye in his head; a splendid, dexterous man was there, in this wise: Accompanied by black haired, black eyed youths; with a red, flaming banner; with terror and fearsomeness; with wonderful appearance, both of arms and apparel and raiment and countenance and splendour; with converse of heroes; with champions’ deeds; with wilful rashness, so that they seek to rout overwhelming numbers outside of equal combat, with their wrath upon foes, with raids into hostile lands, with the violence of assault upon them, without having aught assistance from Conchobar. It is no lying word, stiffly they made their march, that company to Slane of Meath.”

“But, who might he be?” asked Ailill of Fergus.

“Aye then we know him” Fergus made answer. “A thirst for valour and prowess; a thirst for madness and fury; a man of strength and of courage, of pride and of greatness of heart is he that came thither. The welding of hosts and of arms; the point of battle and of slaughter of the men of the north of Erin, mine own real foster brother himself, Fergus son of Letè, the king from Linè in the north, is the man yonder!”

“Still another great, fierce company came to the same hill in Slane of Meath,” macRoth continued. “A battle line with strange garments upon them, steadfast, without equal. A comely, handsome, matchless, untiring warrior in the van of this company; the flower of every form, whether as regards hair, or eye, or whiteness; whether of size, or followers or fitness. Next to his skin a blue, narrow bordered cloth, with strong, woven and twisted hoops of silvered bronze, with becoming, sharp fashioned buttons of red gold on its slashes and breast borders; a green mantle, pieced together with the choicest of all colours, folded about him; a brooch of pale gold in the cloak over his breast; five circles of gold, that is, his shield, he bore on him; a tough, obdurate, straight bladed sword for a hero’s handling hung high on his left side. A straight, fluted spear, flaming red and venomous in his hand.”

“But, who might that be?” asked Ailill of Fergus.

“Truly, we know him well” Fergus made answer. “Fiery is the manner of the warlike champion who has so come thither. The choice flower of royal poets is he. He is the rush on the rath; he is the way to the goal; fierce is his valour, the man that came thither; Amargin son of the smith Ecetsalach (‘the Grimy’), the noble poet from the Buas in the north, is he.”

“There came yet another company there to the same hill in Slane of Meath” continued macRoth. “A fair, yellow haired hero in the front rank of that band. Fair was the man, both in hair and eye and beard and eyebrows and apparel; a rimmed shield he bore; a gold hilted, overlaid sword on his left side; in his hand, a five pointed spear that reflected its glare over the entire host, and a hollow lance in his hand. Hero-like was his coming!”

“But who was that man?” asked Ailill of Fergus.

“In sooth, we know him well” Fergus made answer. “Cherished, in truth, is that warrior by the people, he that to us is come thither; cherished, the stout blow dealing beast; cherished, the bear of great deeds against foes, with the violence of his attack. Feradach Finn Fectnach (‘the Fair and Righteous’) from Nemed (‘the Grove’) in Sliab Fuait in the north, is the one that is come there.”

“Another company there came to the mound in Slane of Meath” continued macRoth. “Three bold, high spirited youths of noble countenance, fiery and noble, in the front rank of that company. Three cloaks of the one colour they wore folded upon them; three close shorn, blae-yellow heads; three gold brooches over their arms; three sleeved tunics with embroidery of red gold, girded around them; three shields wholly alike they bore; three gold hilted swords on their shoulders; three five pointed, broad and grey-green spears in their right hands.”

“Who were those men there?” Ailill asked.

“I know” Fergus answered; “the three princes of Roth, the three champions of Colph, the three of Midluachair, great in achievements, three seasoned

warriors of the east of Erin, to wit, the three sons of Fiachna in quest of their bull are there, even Ros and Darè and Imchad, for theirs was the possession of the Brown Bull of Cualnge. Even had they come alone, they would have offered you battle in defence of their bull and their drove, even though before them the enemy should not be routed.”

“Yet another company there came thither to the same hill in Slane of Meath” said macRoth. “Two fair, tender, young warriors at the head of that company, and both wholly alike. Brown, curly hair on the head of one of them; fair, yellow hair on that of the other; two green cloaks wrapped about them; two bright silver brooches in the cloaks over their breasts; two tunics of smooth yellow silk next to their skin; bright hilted swords on their belts; two bright shields with devious figures of beasts in silver; two five pronged spears with windings of pure bright silver in their hands. Moreover, their years were nigh the same. Together they lifted their feet and set them down again, for it was not their way for either of them to lift up his feet past the other.”

“But, who might they be?” asked Ailill of Fergus.

“Well do we know them” Fergus made answer. “Two single, strong necked champions are they; two united flames; two united torches; two champions; two heroes; two ridge poles of hosts; two dragons; two thunderbolts; two destroyers; two boars; two bold ones; two mad ones; the two loved ones of Ulster around their king; two breachmakers of hundreds; two spencers; the two darlings of the north of Erin, namely Fiacha and Fiachna have come thither, two sons of Conchobar son of Fachtna son of Ross Ruad son of Rudraige.”

“There came also another company to that same mound” said macRoth. “Tis the engulfing of the sea for size; red flaming fire for splendour; a legion for number; a rock for strength; annihilation for battle; thunder for might. A rough-visaged, wrathful, terrible, ill favoured one at the head of that band, and he was big nosed, large eared, apple eyed, red limbed, great bellied, thicklipped. Coarse, grizzly hair he wore; a streaked grey cloak about him; a skewer of iron in the cloak over his breast, so that it reached from one of his shoulders to the other; a rough, three striped tunic next to his skin; a sword of seven charges of remelted iron he bore on his rump; a brown hillock he bore, namely his shield; a great, grey spear with thirty nails driven through its socket he had in his hand. But, what need to tell further? All the host arose to meet him, and the lines and battalions were thrown into disorder at the sight of that warrior, as he came surrounded by his company to the hill, in Slane of Meath and the stream of battle hosts with him.”

“But who might that man be?” asked Ailill of Fergus.

“Ah, but we know him well” Fergus made answer. “He is the half of the battle; he is the head of strife of Ulster; he is the head of combat in valour; he is the storm wave that drowneth; he is the sea overbounds, the man that is come thither; the mighty Celtchar son of Uthechar, from Lethglass in the north, is the man there!”

“There came yet another company thither to the same hill in Slane of Meath” said macRoth; “one that is firm and furious; one that is ugly and fearful. A great bellied, big-mouthed champion, the size of whose mouth is the mouth of a horse, in the van of that troop; with but one clear eye, and half-brained, long handed. Brown, very curly hair he wore; a black, flowing mantle around him; a wheel shaped brooch of tin in the mantle over his breast; a cunningly wrought tunic next to his skin; a great long sword under his waist; a well-tempered lance in his right hand; a grey buckler he bore on him, that is, his shield.”

“Pray, who might that man be?” asked Ailill of Fergus.

“Indeed, but we know him” Fergus made answer; “the wild, red handed, rending lion; the fierce, fearful bear that overcometh valour. He is the high doer of deeds, warlike, and fierce, Errgè Echbel (‘Horsemouth’), from Bri Errgi (‘Errgè’s Mound’) in the north, is the one there.”

“Yet another company there came to the same hill in Slane of Meath” said macRoth. “A large, noble, fiery man at the head of that company; foxy red hair he had; huge, crimson-red eyes in his head; bulging as far as the bend of a warrior’s finger is either of the very large crimson, kingly eyes he had; a many coloured cloak about him; a wheel shaped brooch of silver therein; a grey shield he bore on his left arm; a slender, blue lance above him; a bright, hooded shirt tucked around him that reached down to his knees; a sword with silver hilt at his hip; a spear remarkable for keenness in his revengeful right hand; a blood-smear, becrimsoned company around him; himself covered with wounds and blood in their midst.”

“Now who might he be?” asked Ailill of Fergus.

“Well do we know him” Fergus made answer. “He is the bold, the ruthless, the swift moving eagle; the eager lance; the goring beast; the torrent of the Colbtha; the border gate of the north of Erin; the triumphant hero from Bailè; he is the shaft; he is the bellowing hero from Bernas (‘the Gap’); the furious bull; Menn son of Salcholga, from Rena (‘the Waterways’) of the Boyne in the north; he hath come to take vengeance on ye for his bloody wounds and his sores which ye inflicted on him afore.”

“Yet another company came thither to the same mound in Slane of Meath” continued macRoth. “High spirited and worthy of one another. A long jawed, sallow faced warrior, huge, broad, and tall, at the head of that company; black hair on his head; long limbs are his legs; a cloak of red curly wool about him; a brooch of white silver in the cloak over his breast; an all white, linen shirt next to his skin; a gory red shield with a boss of gold he bore; a sword with hilt of white silver on his left side; a sharp-cornered, gold socketed spear he held over him; a broad, grey, interwoven spearhead, fairly set on an ashen shaft, in his hand.”

“But, who might he be?” Ailill asked of Fergus.

“Truly, we know him,” Fergus made answer. “The man of three stout blows has come; the man of three highways is he; the man of three roads, the man of three paths, the man of three ways; the man of three victories, the man of three triumphs; the man of three shouts; the man that breaks battles on foes in another province; Fergna son of Findchoem, king of Burach, from Coronn, royal hospitaller of Ulster in the north, has come thither.”

“Even another company came there to the same mound in Slane of Meath” continued macRoth. “Vaster than a division of three thousand was its appearance. A large, white breasted, well favoured man in the van of that company. Like to Ailill yonder, with his pointed weapons, the restrainer, both in features and noble bearing and fairness, both in arms and apparel, in valour and bravery and fame and deeds. A blue shield adapted for striking, with boss of gold was upon him. A gold hilted sword, the pillar of a palace, along his shoulder he bore on his left side; a five pronged spear with gold, in his hand; an exceeding fine cloak folded about him; a brooch of gold in the cloak over his breast; a tunic with red ornaments about him; a golden crown on his head.”

“But, who might that be?” asked Ailill of Fergus.

“Ah, but we know him well,” Fergus made answer. “Truly, the sea over rivers is the one that is come thither; the wild rage of fire; not to be borne is his wrath against foes; the root of all manhood; the assault of overwhelming power; the annihilation of men is he that is come thither. Furbaide Ferbenn son of Conchobar, from Sil in Mag Inis in the north, is there.”

“Yet another company came to the mound in Slane of Meath” continued macRoth. “A sharp, proud folk; a stately, royal company, with their apparel of many colours, as well white and blue and black and purple, so that to a king could be likened each spirited, chosen man in the noble, most wonderful troop. A feast for the eyes of a host, to gaze on their comeliness and their garb, as if it was going forth to some great surpassing assembly was each single man of that company. A trine of noble, distinguished men were in the front rank of that company. The first man of them with a dark grey mantle fringed with gold thread about him; a brooch of gold in the mantle over his breast; a tunic of rare silk next to his skin; sandals of lamb’s skin he wore. Not many men in the world are better favoured than is he. A light yellow head of hair he has; a bright faced sword with ivory hilt and with coils of gold thread, in his right hand. He flings on high the tooth hilted sword, so that it falls on the head of the middle man but it simply grazes it. He catches it up in the air again, so that it falls on the head of the other man, and the first man catches it in his hand, and it divided not a ringlet nor the skin of the head of either of them, and these two men did not perceive it. Two brown, rich hued, bright faced youths; reddish-grey mantles around them; white-silver brooches in their mantles over their breasts; a bright hilted sword under their waists; purple sandals they wore; as sweet as strings of lutes when long sustained in players’ hands was the voice and song of one of the men, so that enough of delight it was to the host to listen to the sound of his voice. Worthy of a king or of a prince was each man in that company as regards apparel and appearance; thou wouldst think, at the sight of them, they

were all kings. Neither spears nor swords do they bear, but their servants bear them.”

“An overproud body is that” quoth Ailill; “and who may they be, O Fergus?” he asked.

“I know full well” replied Fergus; “the poets of Ulster are they, with that Fercerdne the fair, much-gifted, whom thou sawest, even the learned master of Ulster, Fercerdne. ’Tis before him that the lakes and rivers sink when he upbraids, and they swell up high when he applauds. The two others thou sawest are Athirne the chief poet, whom none can deny, and Ailill Miltenga (‘Honey Tongue’) son of Carba; and he is called Ailill ‘Honey Tongue’ for that as sweet as honey are the words of wisdom that fall from him.”

“There came yet another company to the mound in Slane of Meath” said macRoth. “A most terrible, dreadful sight to behold them. Blue and pied and green, purple, grey and white and black mantles; a kingly, white-grey, broad eyed hero in the van of that company; wavy, grizzled hair upon him; a blue-purple cloak about him; a leaf shaped brooch with ornamentation of gold in the cloak over his breast; a shield, stoutly braced with buckles of red copper; yellow sandals he wore; a large, strange fashioned sword along his shoulder. Two curly haired, white faced youths close by him, wearing green cloaks and purple sandals and blue tunics, and with brown shields fitted with hooks, in their hands; white hilted swords with silvered bronze ornaments they bore; a broad, somewhat light countenance had one of them. One of these cunning men raises his glance to heaven and scans the clouds of the sky and bears their answer to the marvellous troop that is with him. They all lift their eyes on high and watch the clouds and work their spells against the elements, so that the elements fall to warring with each other, till they discharge rainclouds of fire downwards on the camp and entrenchments of the men of Erin.”

“Who might that be, O Fergus?” asked Ailill.

“I know him” replied Fergus; “the foundation of knowledge; the master of the elements; the heaven soaring one; he that blindeth the eyes; that depriveth his foe of his strength through incantations of druids, namely Cathba the friendly druid, with the druids of Ulster about him. And to this end he makes augury when judging the elements, in order to ascertain therefrom how the great battle on Garech and Ilgarech will end. The two youths that are about him, they are his own two sons, to wit Imrinn son of Cathba and Genonn Gruadsolus (‘Bright Cheek’) son of Cathba, he that has the somewhat light countenance. Howbeit it will be hard for the men of Erin to withstand the spells of the druids.”

“Yet another company there came to the mound in Slane of Meath” continued macRoth. “A numberless, bright faced band; unwonted garments they wore; a little bag at the waist of each man of them. A white haired, bull-faced man in the front of that company; an eager, dragon-like eye in his head; a black, flowing robe with edges of purple around him; a many coloured, leaf shaped brooch with gems, in the robe over his breast; a ribbed tunic of thread of gold around

him; a short sword, keen and hard, with plates of gold, in his hand; they all came to show him their stabs and their sores, their wounds and their ills, and he told each one his sickness, and he gave each a cure, and what at last happened to each was even the ill he foretold him.”

“He is the power of leechcraft; he is the healing of wounds; he is the thwarting of death; he is the absence of every weakness, is that man” said Fergus, “namely Fingin the prophet mediciner, the physician of Conchobar, with the leeches of Ulster around him. It is he that knoweth the sickness of a man by the smoke of the house wherein he lies, or by hearing his groans. Their medicine bags are the sacks which thou sawest with them.”

“Another company came to the mound in Slane of Meath” continued macRoth. “A powerful, heavy, turbulent company; they caused uproar in their deeds of arms for the accomplishment of brilliant feats; they tore up the sad sodded earth with the strength of their bitter rage, for the mighty princes of the proud province of Conchobar would not allow them to proceed to the great camp till all should be arrived. Two youths, swarthy and huge, in the front of that company; soft, playful eyes in their heads; about them, dark grey tunics with silver pins set with stones; great, horn topped swords with sheaths they bore; strong, stout shields they bore; hollow lances with rows of rivets, in their hands; glossy tunics next to their skin.”

“We know well that company” quoth Fergus; “the household of Conchobar and his vassals are those; their two leaders, Glasnè and Menn, two sons of Uthechar.”

“There came yet another band to the mound in Slane of Meath” continued macRoth; “to wit, a band of a numerous body of henchmen. A black, hasty, swarthy man in the front rank of that band; seven chains around his neck; seven men at the end of each chain; these seven groups of men he drags along, so that their faces strike against the ground, and they revile him until he desists. Another terrible man is there, and the ponderous stone which powerful men could not raise, he sets on his palm and flings on high to the height a lark flies on a day of fine weather; a club of iron at his belt.”

“I know those men” quoth Fergus: “Triscoth the strong man of Conchobar’s house; it is he that flings the stone on high. Ercenn son of the three stewards, he it is in the chains.”

“There came another large, stately company to the mound in Slane of Meath” macRoth went on. “Three, very curly headed, white faced youths in the van of that troop; three curly red kirtles with brooches of silvered bronze was the apparel they wore about them; three sparkling tunics of silk with golden seams tucked up about them; three studded shields with images of beasts for emblems in silvered bronze upon them and with bosses of red gold; three very keen swords with guards adorned with gold thread along their shoulders; broad bladed javelin heads on ashen shafts in their hands.”

“Who might that be there, O Fergus?” asked Ailill.

“That I know” answered Fergus: “the three venoms of serpents; three cutting ones; three edges; three watchful ones; three points of combat; three pillars of the borders; three powerful companies of Ulster; three wardens of Erin; three triumph singers of a mighty host are there,” said Fergus, “the three sons of Conchobar, namely Glas and Manè and Conaing.”

“Yet another company there came to the mound in Slane of Meath” said macRoth. “Stately, in beautiful colours, gleaming bright they came to the mound. Not fewer than an army division, as a glance might judge them. A bold, fair cheeked youth in the van of that troop; light yellow hair has he; though a bag of red shelled nuts were spilled on his crown, not a nut of them would fall to the ground because of the twisted, curly locks of his head. Bluish-grey as harebell is one of his eyes; as black as beetle’s back is the other; the one brow black, the other white; a forked, light yellow beard has he; a magnificent red-brown mantle about him; a round brooch adorned with gems of precious stones fastening it in his mantle over his right shoulder; a striped tunic of silk with a golden hem next to his skin; an everbright shield he bore; a hard smiting, threatening spear he held over him; a very keen sword with hilt piece of red gold on his thigh.”

“Who might that be, O Fergus?” asked Ailill.

“I know, then” replied Fergus: “it is battle against foes; it is the inciting of strife; it is the rage of a monster; it is the madness of a lion; it is the cunning of a snake; it is the rock of the Badb; it is the sea over dikes; it is the shaking of rocks; it is the stirring of a wild host, namely Conall Cernach (‘the Victorious’), the high glorious son of Amargin, that is come hither.”

“Yet another company came to the same mound in Slane of Meath” said macRoth. “Very heroic and without number it is; steady and dissimilar to the other companies. Strange garments, unlike the other companies they wore. Famously have they come, both in arms and raiment and dress. A great host and fierce is that company. Some wore red cloaks, others light blue cloaks, others dark blue cloaks, others green cloaks; white and yellow jerkins, beautiful and shiny, were over them. Behold the little, freckled, red faced lad with purple, fringed mantle folded about him amongst them in their midst. Fairest of the forms of men was his form. A salmon shaped brooch of gold in the mantle over his breast; a bright, hooded tunic of royal silk with red trimming of red gold next to his white skin; a bright shield with intricate figures of beasts in red gold upon it; a boss of gold on the shield; an edge of gold around it; a small, gold hilted sword at his waist; a sharp, light lance cast its shadow over him.”

“But, who might he be?” asked Ailill of Fergus.

“Truly, I know not” Fergus made answer “that I left behind me in Ulster the like of that company nor of the little lad that is in it. But, one thing I think likely, that they are the men of Temair with the well-favoured, wonderful, noble

youth Erc son of Fedilmid Nocruthach, Conchobar's daughter, and of Carbre Niafer. And if it be they, they are not more friends than their leaders here. Mayhap despite his father has this lad come to succour his grandfather at this time. And if these they be, a sea that drowneth shall this company be to ye, because it is through this company and the little lad that is in it that the battle shall this time be won against ye."

"How through him?" asked Ailill.

"Not hard to tell" Fergus responded: "for this little lad will know neither fear nor dread when slaying and slaughtering, until at length he comes into the midst of your battalion. Then shall be heard the whirr of Conchobar's sword like the yelp of a howling war-hound, or like a lion rushing among bears, while the boy will be saved. Then outside around the battle lines will Conchobar pile up huge walls of men's bodies while he seeks the little lad. In turn the princes of the men of Ulster, filled with love and devotion, will hew the enemy to pieces. Boldly will those powerful bulls, the brave warriors of Ulster, bellow as their grandson, the calf of their cow, is rescued in the battle on the morn of the morrow."

"Then came there three huge, strong, well-braced, cunningly built castles; three mighty, wheeled-towers like unto mountains, in this wise placed in position: Three royal castles with their thirty fully armed battalions, swarming with evil tongued warriors and with thirty round shielded heroes. A bright, beautiful, glistening shield guard was on each of the three strong, stout battle castles, with black, deadly armament of huge, high, blue, sharp pine lances, such that one's bent knee would fit in the socket of each smooth, polished, even and hard spearhead that is on each huge, terrible, strange shaft of the terrible, awful, heavy, monstrous, indescribable armament that I saw. A third part of each shaft was contained in the socket of the riveted, very long, securely placed spears; as high as two cubits was each citadel from the ground; as long as a warrior's spear was the height of each battle hurdle; as sharp as charmed sword was the blade of each sickle on the sides and the flanks of each of Badb's hurdles; on each of the three stout and hard battle hurdles they are to be found. Four dark, yet gleaming, well adorned doors were on each battle wheeled tower of the three royal wheeled towers which were displayed and spread over the plain, with ivory doorposts, with lintels of cypress, with stately thresholds set of speckled, beautiful, strong pine, with their blue, glass door leaves, with the glitter of crystal gems around each door-frame, so that its appearance from afar was like that of bright shining stars. As loud as the crash of a mighty wave at the great spring tide, or of a huge heavy fleet upon the sea when toiling with the oars along the shore, was the similitude of the din and the clamour and the shouts and the tumult of the multitude and the to-and-fro of the thirty champions with their thirty heavy, iron clubs that they bear in their hands. And when the wheeled towers advance massively and boldly against the line of heroes, these almost leave behind their arms at the fierce charge of the outland battalions. Then spring the three hundred champions with a shout of vengeful anger over the sides and over the front of the huge iron towers on wheels, so that this it was that checked the swift course and the great, hasty onslaught of

the well-grounded, swiftly moving, mighty chariots. The three stout, strong, battleproof towers on wheels careered over rough places and over obstacles, over rocks and over heights. There coursed the thirty entire chargers, powerful, strong backed, four abreast, the equal of ninety entire chargers, with manes more than big, bold and leaping, with sack-like, distended nostrils, high-headed, towering, overpowering, wonderful, so that they shook with their ramping the thick shell of the sad sodded earth. They flecked the plain behind them with the foam dripping from the swift Danish steeds, from the bits and bridles, from the traces and tracks of the huge, maned, mighty steeds, greater than can be told! They excited strife with their din of arms. They plunged headlong in their swift impatience. They aroused great terror at their accoutrement, at their armour, at their cunning, at their power, at their hugeness, at their destructive, terrible, hostile vengeance on the four grand, proud provinces of Erin. Amazing to me was their appearance because of the unwontedness of their trappings both in form and in garb. Three wonderful flights of birds with variety of appearance hovered over them. The first flock was all red, the second flock was white as swans, the third flock as black as ravens. Three red mouthed, crow shaped demons of battle sped around them as swift as hares, circling the three wheeled towers, and this is what they prophesied: —

“Sheaves of battle,  
 Might of quelling,  
 Ill of war deeds,  
 Sating of foul ravens!  
 Sodden ground, blood-red;  
 Men low in dust;  
 Sheaves on sword blades!”

“They wheeled about and brought them twelve battle pillars of thick, huge, iron pillars. As thick as the middle of a warrior’s thigh, as tall as a champion’s spear was each battle fork of them, and they placed four forks under each wheeled tower. And their horses all ran from them and grazed upon the plain. And those forty that had gone in advance descend clad in armour on the plain, and the garrison of the three battle wheeled towers falls to attacking and harassing them, and is attacked and harassed in turn by those forty champions, so that there was heard the breaking of shields and the loud blows of hard iron poles on bucklers and battle helmets, on coats of mail and on the iron plates of smooth, hard, blue-black, sharp beaked, forkèd spears. And in the whole camp there is none but is on the watch for their fierceness and their wrath and their cunning and their strangeness, for their fury, their achievements and the excellence of their guard. And in the place where the forty champions are and the thousand armed men contending with them, not one of the thousand had a wounding stroke nor a blow on his opponent because of the might of their skill in arms and the excellence of their defence withal!”

“They are hard to contend with for all such as are unfamiliar with them, is the opinion held of them” spake Fergus “but they are readily to be dealt with for such as do know them. These are three battle wheeled towers” Fergus continued “as I perceive from their account. Once I saw their like, namely when as prentice

I accompanied Darè to Spain, so that we entered the service, of the king of Spain, Esorb to wit, and we afterwards made an expedition to Soda, that is, to the king of Africa, and we gave battle to the Carthaginians. There came their like upon us against the battle line wherein we were, an hundred battalions and three score hundred in each battalion. One of the wheeled towers won victory over us all, for we were not on our guard against them. And this is the way to defeat them: To mine a hole broader than the tower in the ground in the front thereof and cover over the pitfall; and for the battle line to be drawn up over against it and not to advance to attack, so that it is the towers that advance and fall into the pit. Lebarcham told me, as I passed over Taltiu, that the Ulstermen brought these towers from Germany, and the towers held a third of the exiles of Ulster among them as their only dwelling; and Cualgae ('a Heap of Spears') is their name, namely battle penfolds. And herein have ye the sorest of all hardships, for although all the men of Erin are drawn up against them, it is the men of Erin that will be defeated. When they take it upon them to engage in battle they cannot hold out without a combat. Thus will they remain now till morning, every forty men of them contending with the others. And this is my advice to you" said Fergus: "permit me with my division to withstand them, and do ye betake yourselves to the woods and wilds of Erin, and the Ulstermen shall not find ye in any place, and I will proceed as an example, depending on my own men-of-war."

"There are men here for ye!" cried Medb.

"That will be a force for yourselves" Fergus made answer.

"Yet another company came there to the same height in Slane of Meath" said macRoth. "Not fewer than a division was in it; wild, dark red, warrior bands; bright, clear, blue-purple men; long, fair yellow heads of hair they wore; handsome, shining countenances they had; clear, kingly eyes; magnificent vesture with beautiful mantles; conspicuous, golden brooches along their bright coloured sleeves; silken, glossy tunics; blue, glassy spears; yellow shields for striking withal; gold hilted, inlaid swords set on their thighs; loud tongued care has beset them; sorrowful are they all, and mournful; sad are the royal leaders; orphaned the brilliant company without their protecting lord who was wont to guard their lands."

"But, who may they be?" asked Ailill of Fergus.

"Indeed, we know them well" Fergus made answer. "Furious lions are they; deeds of battle; the division from the field of Murthemne are they. It is this that makes them cast down, sorrowful, joyless as they are, because that their own divisional king himself is not amongst them, even Cuchulain, the restraining, victorious, red sworded one that triumpheth in battle!"

"Good reason, in truth, there is for them to be so" quoth Medb "if they are dejected, mournful and joyless. There is no evil we have not worked on them. We have harassed and we have assailed them, their territory and their land, from Monday at the beginning of Samhaintide till the beginning of Spring. We

have taken their women and their sons and their youths, their steeds and their troops of horses, their herds and their flocks and their droves. We have razed their hills after them till they are become lowlands, so that they are level with the plain. We have brought their lords to bloody stabs and sores, to cuts and many wounds.”

“Not so, O Medb!” cried Fergus. “There is naught thou canst boast over them. For thou didst them no hurt nor harm that yon fine company’s leader avenged not on thee. For, every mound and every grave, every stone and every tomb that is from hence to the east of Erin is the mound and the grave, the stone and the tomb of some goodly warrior and goodly youth of thy people, fallen at the hands of the noble chieftain of yonder company. Happy he to whom they hold! Woe to him whom they oppose! It will be enough, e’en as much as half a battle, for the men of Erin, when these defend their lord in the battle on the morning of the morrow.”

“I heard a great uproar there, west of the battle or to its east” said macRoth.

“Say, what noise was it?” asked Ailill of Fergus.

“Ah, but we know it well” Fergus made answer: “Cuchulain it was, straining to go, sick as he is, to battle, wearied at the length of his lying sick on Fert Sciach (‘Thorn Mound’) under hoops and clasps and ropes, and the men of Ulster do not permit him to go because of his sores and his wounds, inasmuch as he is not fit for battle and is powerless for combat after his encounter with Ferdiad.”

True indeed spake Fergus. Cuchulain it was, wearied at the length of his lying supine on Fert Sciach under hoops and clasps and ropes. “But, there is one thing more to tell,” said Fergus: “unless he be held back now, he will surely come to the battle!”

Thus far the Companies of the Táin Bó Cúalnge mustered by Conchobar and the men of Ulster.

Then came two women lampoonists from the camp and quarters of the men of Erin; their names, Fethan and Collach, to wit; and they stood with a feint of weeping and wailing over Cuchulain, telling him of the defeat of Ulster and the death of Conchobar and the fall of Fergus in combat.

Now Conchobar proceeded with his troops till he pitched camp nearby his companions. Conchobar asked a truce of Ailill till sunrise on the morrow, and Ailill granted it for the men of Erin and the exiles, and Conchobar granted it for the men of Ulster, and thereupon Conchobar’s tents were pitched. In this way the ground was bare between them, and the Ulstermen came thither at sunset.