

LADY GREGORY

the cave and he heard them crying after him, "You left us worse than you found us." And the cave was not found again since that time.

But some say the day will come when the Dord Fiann will be sounded three times, and that at the sound of it the Fianna will rise up as strong and as well as ever they were. And there are some say Finn, son of Cumhal, has been on the earth now and again since the old times, in the shape of one of the heroes of Ireland.

And as to the great things he and his men did when they were together, it is well they have been kept in mind through the poets of Ireland and of Alban. And one night there were two men minding sheep in a valley, and they were saying the poems of the Fianna while they were there. And they saw two very tall shapes on the two hills on each side of the valley, and one of the tall shapes said to the other: "Do you hear that man down below? I was the second doorpost of battle at Gabhra, and that man knows all about it better than myself."

BOOK XI

Oisín and Patrick



CHAPTER I

Oisín's Story

As to Oisín, it was a long time after he was brought away by Niamh that he came back again to Ireland. Some say it was hundreds of years he was in the Country of the Young, and some say it was thousands of years he was in it; but whatever time it was, it seemed short to him.

And whatever happened him through the time he was away, it is a withered old man he was found after coming back to Ireland, and his white horse going away from him, and he lying on the ground.

And it was S. Patrick had power at that time, and it was to him Oisín was brought; and he kept him in his house, and used to be teaching him and questioning him. And Oisín was no way pleased with the way Ireland was then, but he used to be talking of the old times, and fretting after the Fianna.

And Patrick bade him to tell what happened him the time he left Finn and the Fianna and went away with Niamh. And it is the story Oisín told:—"The time I went away with golden-haired Niamh, we turned our backs to the land, and our faces westward, and the sea was going away before us, and filling up in waves after us. And we saw wonderful things on our journey," he said, "cities and courts and duns and lime-white houses, and shining sunny-houses and palaces. And one time we saw beside us a hornless deer running hard, and an eager white red-eared hound following after it. And another time we saw a young girl on a horse and having a golden apple in her right hand, and she going over the tops of the waves; and there was following after her a young man riding a white horse, and having a crimson cloak and a gold-hilted sword in his right hand."

"Follow on with your story, pleasant Oisín," said Patrick, "for you did not tell us yet what was the country you went to."

"The Country of the Young, the Country of Victory, it was," said Oisín. "And O Patrick," he said, "there is no lie in that name; and if there are grandeurs in your Heaven the same as there are there, I would give my friendship to God.

"We turned our backs then to the dun," he said, "and the horse under us was

the spring wind on the backs of the mountains. And it was not long darkened, and the wind rose in every part, and the sea was as if on fire, and there was nothing to be seen of the sun.

But after we were looking at the clouds and the stars for a while the wind went down, and the storm, and the sun brightened. And we saw before us a very delightful country under full blossom, and smooth plains in it, and a king's dun that was very grand, and that had every colour in it, and sunny-houses beside it, and palaces of shining stones, made by skilled men. And we saw coming out to meet us three fifties of armed men, very lively and handsome. And I asked Niamh was this the Country of the Young, and she said it was. 'And indeed, Oisin,' she said, 'I told you no lie about it, and you will see all I promised you before you for ever.'

And there came out after that a hundred beautiful young girls, having cloaks of silk worked with gold, and they gave me a welcome to their own country. And after that there came a great shining army, and with it a strong beautiful king, having a shirt of yellow silk and a golden cloak over it, and a very bright crown on his head. And there was following after him a young queen, and fifty young girls along with her.

And when all were come to the one spot, the king took me by the hand, and he said out before them all: 'A hundred thousand welcomes before you, Oisin, son of Finn. And as to this country you are come to,' he said, 'I will tell you news of it without a lie. It is long and lasting your life will be in it, and you yourself will be young for ever. And there is no delight the heart ever thought of,' he said, 'but it is here against your coming. And you can believe my words, Oisin,' he said, 'for I myself am the King of the Country of the Young, and this is its comely queen, and it was golden-headed Niamh our daughter that went over the sea looking for you to be her husband for ever.' I gave thanks to him then, and I stooped myself down before the queen, and we went forward to the royal house, and all the high nobles came out to meet us, both men and women, and there was a great feast made there through the length of ten days and ten nights.

And that is the way I married Niamh of the Golden Hair, and that is the way I went to the Country of the Young, although it is sorrowful to me to be telling it now, O Patrick from Rome," said Oisin.

"Follow on with your story, Oisin of the destroying arms," said Patrick, "and tell me what way did you leave the Country of the Young, for it is long to me till I hear that; and tell us now had you any children by Niamh, and was it long you were in that place."

"Two beautiful children I had by Niamh," said Oisin, "two young sons and a comely daughter. And Niamh gave the two sons the name of Finn and of Osgar, and the name I gave to the daughter was The Flower.

"And I did not feel the time passing, and it was a long time I stopped there," he said, "till the desire came on me to see Finn and my comrades again. And I asked

leave of the king and of Niamh to go back to Ireland. 'You will get leave from me,' said Niamh; 'but for all that,' she said, 'it is bad news you are giving me, for I am in dread you will never come back here again through the length of your days.' But I bade her have no fear, since the white horse would bring me safe back again from Ireland. 'Bear this in mind, Oisin,' she said then, 'if you once get off the horse while you are away, or if you once put your foot to ground, you will never come back here again. And O Oisin,' she said, 'I tell it to you now for the third time, if you once get down from the horse, you will be an old man, blind and withered, without liveliness, without mirth, without running, without leaping. And it is a grief to me, Oisin,' she said, 'you ever to go back to green Ireland; and it is not now as it used to be, and you will not see Finn and his people, for there is not now in the whole of Ireland but a Father of Orders and armies of saints; and here is my kiss for you, pleasant Oisin,' she said, 'for you will never come back any more to the Country of the Young.'

"And that is my story, Patrick, and I have told you no lie in it," said Oisin. "And O Patrick," he said, "if I was the same the day I came here as I was that day, I would have made an end of all your clerks, and there would not be a head left on a neck after me."

"Go on with your story," said Patrick, "and you will get the same good treatment from me you got from Finn, for the sound of your voice is pleasing to me."

So Oisin went on with his story, and it is what he said: "I have nothing to tell of my journey till I came back into green Ireland, and I looked about me then on all sides, but there were no tidings to be got of Finn. And it was not long till I saw a great troop of riders, men and women, coming towards me from the west. And when they came near they wished me good health; and there was wonder on them all when they looked at me, seeing me so unlike themselves, and so big and so tall.

"I asked them then did they hear if Finn was still living, or any other one of the Fianna, or what had happened them. 'We often heard of Finn that lived long ago,' said they, 'and that there never was his equal for strength or bravery or a great name; and there is many a book written down,' they said, 'by the sweet poets of the Gael, about his doings and the doings of the Fianna, and it would be hard for us to tell you all of them. And we heard Finn had a son,' they said, 'that was beautiful and shining, and that there came a young girl looking for him, and he went away with her to the Country of the Young.'

"And when I knew by their talk that Finn was not living or any of the Fianna, it is downhearted I was, and tired, and very sorrowful after them. And I made no delay, but I turned my face and went on to Almuin of Leinster. And there was great wonder on me when I came there to see no sign at all of Finn's great dun, and his great hall, and nothing in the place where it was but weeds and nettles."

And there was grief on Oisin then, and he said: "Och, Patrick! Och, ochone, my grief! It is a bad journey that was to me; and to be without tidings of Finn or the Fianna has left me under pain through my lifetime."

"Leave off fretting, Oisin," said Patrick, "and shed your tears to the God of heaven and the Fianna are slack enough now, and they will get no help for ever." "It is a great pity that would be," said Oisin, "Finn to be in pain for ever; and who was it gained the victory over him, when his own hand had made an end of so many a hard fighter?"

"It is God gained the victory over Finn," said Patrick, "and not the strong hand of an enemy; and as to the Fianna, they are condemned to hell along with him, and tormented for ever."

"O Patrick," said Oisin, "show me the place where Finn and his people are, and there is not a hell or a heaven there but I will put it down. And if Osgar, my own son, is there," he said, "the hero that was bravest in heavy battles, there is not in hell or in the Heaven of God a troop so great that he could not destroy it."

"Let us leave off quarrelling on each side now," said Patrick; "and go on, Oisin, with your story. What happened you after you knew the Fianna to be at an end?"

"I will tell you that, Patrick," said Oisin. "I was turning to go away, and I saw the stone trough that the Fianna used to be putting their hands in, and it full of water. And when I saw it I had such a wish and such a feeling for it that I forgot what I was told, and I got off the horse. And in the minute all the years came on me, and I was lying on the ground, and the horse took fright and went away and left me there, an old man, weak and spent, without sight, without shape, without comeliness, without strength or understanding, without respect."

"There, Patrick, is my story for you now," said Oisin, "and no lie in it, of all that happened me going away and coming back again from the Country of the Young."

CHAPTER II

Oisin in Patrick's House

And Oisin stopped on with S. Patrick, but he was not very well content with the way he was treated. And one time he said: "They say I am getting food, but God knows I am not, or drink; and I Oisin, son of Finn, under a yoke, drawing stones." "It is my opinion you are getting enough," said S. Patrick then, "and you getting a quarter of beef and a churn of butter and a griddle of bread every day." "I often saw a quarter of a blackbird bigger than your quarter of beef," said Oisin, "and a rowan berry as big as your churn of butter, and an ivy leaf as big as your griddle of bread." S. Patrick was vexed when he heard that, and he said to Oisin that he had told a lie.

There was great anger on Oisin then, and he went where there was a litter of pups, and he bade a serving-boy to nail up the hide of a freshly killed bullock to

the wall, and to throw the pups against it one by one. And every one that he threw fell down from the hide till it came to the last, and he held on to it with his teeth and his nails. "Rear that one," said Oisin, "and drown all the rest."

Then he bade the boy to keep the pup in a dark place, and to care it well, and never to let it taste blood or see the daylight. And at the end of a year, Oisin was so well pleased with the pup, that he gave it the name of Bran Og, young Bran.

And one day he called to the serving-boy to come on a journey with him, and to bring the pup in a chain. And they set out and passed by Slieve-nam-ban, where the witches of the Sidhe do be spinning with their spinning-wheels; and then they turned eastward into Gleann-na-Smol. And Oisin raised a rock that was there, and he bade the lad take from under it three things, a great sounding horn of the Fianna, and a ball of iron they had for throwing, and a very sharp sword. And when Oisin saw those things, he took them in his hands, and he said: "My thousand farewells to the day when you were put here!" He bade the lad to clean them well then; and when he had done that, he bade him to sound a blast on the horn. So the boy did that, and Oisin asked him did he see anything strange. "I did not," said the boy. "Sound it again as loud as you can," said Oisin. "That is as hard as I can sound it, and I can see nothing yet," said the boy when he had done that. Then Oisin took the horn himself, and he put it to his mouth, and blew three great blasts on it. "What do you see now?" he said. "I see three great clouds coming," he said, "and they are settling down in the valley; and the first cloud is a flight of very big birds, and the second cloud is a flight of birds that are bigger again, and the third flight is of the biggest and the blackest birds the world ever saw." "What is the dog doing?" said Oisin. "The eyes are starting from his head, and there is not a rib of hair on him but is standing up." "Let him loose now," said Oisin.

The dog rushed down to the valley then, and he made an attack on one of the birds, that was the biggest of all, and that had a shadow like a cloud. And they fought a very fierce fight, but at last Bran Og made an end of the big bird, and lapped its blood. But if he did, madness came on him, and he came rushing back towards Oisin, his jaws open and his eyes like fire. "There is dread on me, Oisin," said the boy, "for the dog is making for us, mad and raging." "Take this iron ball and make a cast at him when he comes near," said Oisin. "I am in dread to do that," said the boy. "Put it in my hand, and turn it towards him," said Oisin. The boy did that, and Oisin made a cast of the ball that went into the mouth and the throat of the dog, and choked him, and he fell down the slope, twisting and foaming.

Then they went where the great bird was left dead, and Oisin bade the lad to cut a quarter off it with the sword, and he did so. And then he bade him cut open the body, and in it he found a rowan berry, the biggest he had ever seen, and an ivy leaf that was bigger than the biggest griddle.

So Oisin turned back then, and went to where S. Patrick was, and he showed

"I will listen to me at last, now you are quiet," said Amergin, "I am able to bring a child like a king. The people praise my honour, my bravery, my wisdom; they praise my good luck, my age, my speaking, my name, my courage, and my race. Though I am a fighter, I am a poet; I am worthy of the king's favour; I overcome all the men who fight from their chariots; I owe thanks to no one except Conchubar; I obey no one but the king."

Then Sencha said: "Let Finchoem keep the child until we come to Emain, and Morann, the judge, will settle the question when we are there."

So the men of Ulster set out for Emain, Finchoem having the child with her. And when they came there Morann gave his judgment. "It is for Conchubar," he said, "to help the child to a good name, for he is next of kin to him; let Sencha teach him words and speaking; let Fergus hold him on his knees; let Amergin be his tutor." And he said: "This child will be praised by all, by chariot drivers and fighters, by kings and by wise men; he shall be loved by many men; he will avenge all your wrongs; he will defend your fords; he will fight all your battles."

And so it was settled. And the child was left until he should come to sensible years, with his mother Dechtire and with her husband Sualtim. And they brought him up upon the plain of Muirthemne, and the name he was known by was Setanta, son of Sualtim.

CHAPTER II

Boy Deeds of Cuchulain

It chanced one day, when Setanta was about seven years old, that he heard some of the people of his mother's house talking about King Conchubar's court at Emain Macha, and of the sons of kings and nobles that lived there, and that spent a great part of their time at games and at hurling. "Let me go and play with them there," he said to his mother. "It is too soon for you to do that," she said, "but wait till such time as you are able to travel so far, and till I can put you in charge of some one going to the court, that will put you under Conchubar's protection." "It would be too long for me to wait for that," he said, "but I will go there by myself if you will tell me the road." "It is too far for you," said Dechtire, "for it is beyond Slieve Fuad, Emain Macha is." "Is it east or west of Slieve Fuad?" he asked. And when she had answered him that, he set out there and then, and nothing with him but his hurling stick, and his silver ball, and his little dart and spear; and to shorten the road for himself he would give a blow to the ball and drive it from him, and then he would throw his hurling stick after it, and the dart after that again, and then he would make a run and catch them all in his hand before one of them would have reached the ground.

So he went on until he came to the lawn at Emain Macha, and there he saw the cities of kings' sons hurling and learning feats of war. He went in among them, and when the ball came near him he got it between his feet, and drove it along in spite of them till he had sent it beyond the goal. There was great surprise and anger on them when they saw what he had done, and Follaman, King Conchubar's son, that was chief among them, cried out to them to come together and drive out this stranger and make an end of him. "For he has no right," he said, "to come into our game without asking leave, and without putting his life under our protection. And you may be sure," he said, "that he is the son of some common fighting man, and it is not for him to come into our game at all." With that they all made an attack on him, and began to throw their hurling sticks at him, and their balls and darts, but he escaped them all, and then he rushed at them, and began to throw some of them to the ground. Fergus came out just then from the palace, and when he saw what a good defence the little lad was making, he brought him in to where Conchubar was playing chess, and told him all that had happened. "This is no gentle game you have been playing," he said. "It is on themselves the fault is," said the boy; "I came as a stranger, and I did not get a stranger's welcome." "You did not know then," said Conchubar, "that no one can play among the boy troop of Emain unless he gets their leave and their protection." "I did not know that, or I would have asked it of them," he said. "What is your name and your family?" said Conchubar. "My name is Setanta, son of Sualtim and of Dechtire," he said. When Conchubar knew that he was his sister's son, he gave him a great welcome, and he bade the the boy troop to let him go safe among them. "We will do that," they said. But when they went out to play, Setanta began to break through them, and to overthrow them, so that they could not stand against him. "What are you wanting of them now?" said Conchubar. "I swear by the gods my people swear by," said the boy, "I will not lighten my hand of them till they have come under my protection the same way I have come under theirs." Then they all agreed to give in to this; and Setanta stayed in the king's house at Emain Macha, and all the chief men of Ulster had a hand in bringing him up.

There was a great smith in Ulster of the name of Culain, who made a feast at that time for Conchubar and for his people. When Conchubar was setting out to the feast, he passed by the lawn where the boy troop were at their games, and he watched them awhile, and he saw how the son of Dechtire was winning the goal from them all. "That little lad will serve Ulster yet," said Conchubar; "and call him to me now," he said, "and let him come with me to the smith's feast." "I cannot go with you now," said Setanta, when they had called to him, "for these boys have not had enough of play yet." "It would be too long for me to wait for you," said the king. "There is no need for you to wait; I will follow the track of the chariots," said Setanta.

So Conchubar went on to the smith's house, and there was a welcome before him, and fresh rushes were laid down, and there were poems and songs and

and the feast was brought in, and they began to be merry. And the smith said to the king: "Will there be any one else of your people coming after you to-night?" "There will not," said Conchubar, for he forgot that he had told the little lad to follow him. "But why do you ask me that?" he said. "I have a great fierce hound," said the smith, "and when I take the chain off him, he lets no one come into the one district with himself, and he will obey no one but myself, and he has in him the strength of a hundred." "Loose him out," said Conchubar, "until he keeps a watch on the place." So Culain loosed him out, and the dog made a course round the whole district, and then he came back to the place where he was used to lie and to watch the house, and every one was in dread of him, he was so fierce and so cruel and so savage.

Now, as to the boys at Emain, when they were done playing, every one went to his father's house, or to whoever was in charge of him. But Setanta set out on the track of the chariots, shortening the way for himself as he was used to do with his hunting stick and his ball. When he came to the lawn before the smith's house, the hound heard him coming, and began such a fierce yelling that he might have been heard through all Ulster, and he sprang at him as if he had a mind not to stop and tear him up at all, but to swallow him at the one mouthful. The little fellow had no weapon but his stick and his ball, but when he saw the hound coming at him, he struck the ball with such force that it went down his throat, and through his body. Then he seized him by the hind legs and dashed him against a rock until there was no life left in him.

When the men feasting within heard the outcry of the hound, Conchubar started up and said: "It is no good luck brought us on this journey, for that is surely my sister's son that was coming after me, and that has got his death by the hound." On that all the men rushed out, not waiting to go through the door, but over walls and barriers as they could. But Fergus was the first to get to where the boy was, and he took him up and lifted him on his shoulder, and brought him in safe and sound to Conchubar, and there was great joy on them all.

But Culain the smith went out with them, and when he saw his great hound lying dead and broken there was great grief in his heart, and he came in and said to Setanta: "There is no good welcome for you here." "What have you against the little lad?" said Conchubar.

"It was no good luck that brought him here, or that made me prepare this feast for yourself, King," he said; "for from this out, my hound being gone, my substance will be wasted, and my way of living will be gone astray. And little boy," he said, "that was a good member of my family you took from me, for he was the protector of my goods and my flocks and my herds and of all that I had." "Do not be vexed on account of that," said the boy, "and I myself will make up to you for what I have done." "How will you do that?" said Conchubar. "This is how I will do it: if there is a whelp of the same breed to be had in Ireland, I will rear him and train him until he is as good a hound as the one killed; and until that time,

Culain," he said, "I myself will be your watch-dog, to guard your goods and your cattle and your house." "You have made a fair offer," said Conchubar. "I could have given no better award myself," said Cathbad the Druid. "And from this out," he said, "your name will be Cuchulain, the Hound of Culain." "I am better pleased with my own name of Setanta, son of Sualtim," said the boy. "Do not say that," said Cathbad, "for all the men in the whole world will some day have the name of Cuchulain in their mouths." "If that is so, I am content to keep it," said the boy. And this is how he came by the name Cuchulain.

It was a good while after that, Cathbad the Druid was one day teaching the pupils in his house to the north-east of Emain. There were eight boys along with him that day, and one of them asked him: "Do your signs tell of any special thing this day is favourable to?" "If any young man should take arms to-day," said Cathbad, "his name will be greater than any other name in Ireland. But his span of life will be short," he said.

Cuchulain was outside at play, but he heard what Cathbad said, and there and then he put off his playing suit, and he went straight to Conchubar's sleeping-room, and said: "All good be with you, King!" "What is it you are wanting?" said Conchubar. "What I want is to take arms to-day." "Who put that into your head?" "Cathbad the Druid," said Cuchulain. "If that is so, I will not deny you," said Conchubar. Then he gave him his choice of arms, and the boy tried his strength on them, and there were none that pleased him, or that were strong enough for him but Conchubar's own. So he gave him his own two spears, and his sword and his shield.

Just then Cathbad the Druid came in, and there was wonder on him, and he said: "Is it taking arms this young boy is?" "He is indeed," said the king. "It is sorry I would be to see his mother's son take arms on this day," said Cathbad. "Was it not yourself bade him do it?" said the king. "I did not surely," he said. "Then you have lied to me, boy," said Conchubar. "I told no lie King," said Cuchulain, "for it was he indeed put it in my mind when he was teaching the others, for when one of them asked him if there was any special virtue in this day, he said that whoever would for the first time take arms to-day, his name would be greater than any other in Ireland, and he did not say any harm would come on him, but that his life would be short." "And what I said is true," said Cathbad, "there will be fame on you and a great name, but your lifetime will not be long." "It is little I would care," said Cuchulain, "if my life were to last one day and one night only, so long as my name and the story of what I had done would live after me." Then Cathbad said: "Well, get into a chariot now, and let us see if it was the truth I spoke."

Then Cuchulain got into a chariot and tried its strength, and broke it to pieces, and he broke in the same way the seventeen chariots that Conchubar kept for the boy troop at Emain, and he said: "These chariots are no use, Conchubar, they are not worthy of me." "Where is Jubair, son of Rianganbra?" said Conchubar. "Here I

answered. "Make ready my own chariot, and yoke my own horses to it for me to try," said Conchubar. So he tried the king's chariot and shook it and strained it, and it bore him. "This is the chariot that suits me," he said. "Now, little one," said Jubair, "let us take out the horses and turn them out to graze." "It is too early for that, Jubair; let us drive on to where the boy troop are, that they may wish me good luck on the day of my taking arms?" So they drove on, and all the lads shouted when they saw him—"Have you taken arms?" "I have indeed," said Cuchulain. "That you may do well in wounding and in first killing and in spoil-winning," they said; "but it is a pity for us, you to have left playing."

"Let the horses go graze now," said Jubair. "It is too soon yet," said Cuchulain, "and tell me where does that great road that goes by Emain lead to?" "It leads to Ath-an-Foraire, the watchers' ford in Slieve Fuad," said Jubair. "Why is it called the watchers' ford?" "It is easy to tell that; it is because some choice champion of the men of Ulster keeps watch there every day to do battle for the province with any stranger that might come to the boundary with a challenge." "Do you know who is in it to-day?" said Cuchulain. "I know well it is Conall Cearnach, the Victorious, the chief champion of the young men of Ulster and of all Ireland." "We will go on then to the ford," said Cuchulain. So they went on across the plain, and at the water's edge they found Conall, and he said: "And are those arms you have taken to-day, little boy?" "They are indeed," Jubair said for him. "May they bring him triumph and victory and shedding of first blood," said Conall. "But I think, little Hound," he said, "that you are too ready to take them; for you are not fit as yet to do a champion's work." "What is it you are doing here, Conall?" said the boy. "I am keeping watch and guard for the province." "Rise out of it, Conall," he said, "and for this one day let me keep the watch." "Do not ask that, little one," said Conall; "for you are not able yet to stand against trained fighting men." "Then I will go down to the shallows of Loch Echtra and see if I can redden my arms on either friend or enemy." "Then I will go with you myself," said Conall, "to take care of you and to protect you, that no harm may happen you." "Do not," said Cuchulain. "I will indeed," said Conall, "for if I let you go into a strange country alone, all Ulster would avenge it on me."

So Conall's horses were yoked to his chariot, and he set out to follow Cuchulain, for he had waited for no leave, but had set out by himself. When Cuchulain saw Conall coming up with him he thought to himself, "If I get a chance of doing some great thing, Conall will never let me do it." So he picked up a stone, the size of his fist, from the ground, and made a good cast at the yoke of Conall's chariot, so that he broke it, and the chariot came down, and Conall himself was thrown to the ground sideways. "What did you do that for?" he said. "It was to see could I throw straight, and if there was the making of a good champion in me." "Bad luck on your throwing and on yourself," said Conall. "And any one that likes may strike your head off now, for I will go with you no farther." "That is just what I

wanted," said Cuchulain. And with that, Conall went back to his place at the ford.

As for the lad, he went on towards Lough Echtra in the south. Then Jubair said: "If you will listen to me, little one, I would like that we would go back now to Emain; for at this time the carving of the food is beginning there, and it is all very well for you that have your place kept for you, between Conchubar's knees. But as to myself," he said, "it is among the chariot-drivers and the jesters and the messengers I am, and I must take a place and fight for myself where I can." "What is that mountain before us?" said Cuchulain. "That is Slieve Mourne, and that is Finncairn, the white cairn, on its top." "Let us go to it," said Cuchulain. "We would be too long going there," said Jubair. "You are a lazy fellow," said Cuchulain; "and this is my first adventure, and the first journey you have made with me." "And that it may be my last," said Jubair, "if ever I get back to Emain again." They went on then to the cairn. "Good Jubair," said the boy, "show me now all that we can see of Ulster, for I do not know my way about the country yet." So Jubair showed him from the cairn all there was to see of Ulster, the hills and the plains and the duns on every side. "What is that sloping square plain before us to the south?" "That is Magh Breagh, the fine meadow." "Show me the duns and strong places of that plain." So Jubair showed him Teamhair and Tailte, Cleathra and Cnobhach and the Brugh of Angus on the Boyne, and the dun of Nechtan Sceine's sons. "Are those the sons of Nechtan that say in their boasting they have killed as many Ulstermen as there are living in Ulster to-day?" "They are the same," said Jubair. "On with us then to that dun," said Cuchulain. "No good will come to you through saying that," said Jubair; "and whoever may go there I will not go," he said. "Alive or dead, you must go there for all that," said Cuchulain. "Then if so, it is alive I will go there," said Jubair, "and it is dead I will be before I leave it."

They went on then to the dun of Nechtan's sons, and when they came to the green lawn, Cuchulain got out of the chariot, and there was a pillar stone on the lawn, and an iron collar about it, and there was Ogham writing on it that said no man that came there, and he carrying arms, should leave the place without giving a challenge to some one of the people of the dun. When Cuchulain had read the Ogham, he put his arms round the stone and threw it into the water that was there at hand. "I don't see it is any better there than where it was before," said Jubair; "and it is likely this time you will get what you are looking for, and that is a quick death." "Good Jubair," said the boy, "spread out the coverings of the chariot now for me, until I sleep for a while." "It is no good thing you are going to do," said Jubair, "to be going to sleep in an enemy's country." He put out the coverings then, and Cuchulain lay down and fell asleep.

It was just at that time, Foill, son of Nechtan Sceine, came out, and when he saw the chariot, he called out to Jubair, "Let you not unyoke these horses." "I was not going to unyoke them," said Jubair; "the reins are yet in my hands." "What

“They are Conchubar’s two speckled horses.” “So I thought when I saw them,” said Foill. “And who is it has brought them across our boundaries?” “A young little lad,” said Jubair, “that has taken arms to-day for luck, and it is to show himself off he has come across Magh Breagh.” “May he never have good luck,” said Foill, “And if he were a fighting man, it is not alive but dead he would go back to Emain to-day.” “Indeed he is not able to fight, or it could not be expected of him,” said Jubair, “and he but a child that should be in his father’s house.” At that the boy lifted his head from the ground, and it is red his face was, and his whole body, at hearing so great an insult put on him, and he said: “I am indeed well able to fight.” But Foill said: “I am more inclined to think you are not,” “You will soon know what to think,” said the boy, “and let us go down now to the ford. But go first and get your armour,” he said, “for I would not like to kill an unarmed man.” There was anger on Foill then, and he went running to get his arms. “You must have a care now,” said Jubair, “for that is Foill, son of Nechtan, and neither point of spear or edge of sword can harm him.” “That suits me very well,” said the boy. With that out came Foill again, and Cuchulain stood up to him, and took his iron ball in his hand, and hurled it at his head, and it went through the forehead and out at the back of his head, and his brains along with it, so that the air could pass through the hole it made. And then Cuchulain struck off his head.

Then Tuachel, the second son of Nechtan, came out on the lawn. “It is likely you are making a great boast of what you are after doing,” he said. “I see nothing to boast of in that,” said Cuchulain, “a single man to have fallen by me.” “You will not have long to boast of it,” said Tuachel, “for I myself am going to make an end of you on the moment.” “Then go back and bring your arms,” said Cuchulain, “for it is only a coward would come out without arms.” He went back into the house then, and Jubair said: “You must have a care now, for that is Tuachel, son of Nechtan, and if he is not killed by the first stroke, or the first cast, or the first thrust, he cannot be killed at all, for there is no way of getting at him after that.” “You need not be telling me that, Jubair,” said Cuchulain, “for it is Conchubar’s great spear, the Venomous, I will take in my hand, and that is the last thrust that will be made at him, for after that, there is no physician will heal his wounds for ever.”

Then Tuachel came out on the lawn, and Cuchulain took hold of the great spear, and made a cast at him, that went through his shield and broke three of his ribs, and made a hole through his heart. And then he struck his head off, before the body reached the ground.

Then Fainnle, the youngest of the three sons of Nechtan, came out. “Those were foolish fellows,” he said, “to come at you the way they did. But come out now, after me,” he said, “into the water where your feet will not touch bottom,” and with that he made a plunge into the water. “Mind yourself well now,” said Jubair, “for that is Fainnle, the Swallow, and it is why that name was put on him,

he travels across water with the swiftness of a swallow, and there is not one of the swimmers of the whole world can come near him.” “It is not to me you should be saying that,” said Cuchulain, “for you know the river Callan that runs through Emain, and it is what I used to do,” he said, “when the boy troop would break off from their games and plunge into the river to swim, I used to take a boy of them on each shoulder and a boy on each hand, and I would bring them through the river without so much as to wet my back.” With that he made a leap into the water, where it was very deep, and himself and Fainnle wrestled together, and then he got a grip of him, and gave him a blow of Conchubar’s sword, and struck his head off, and he let his body go away down the stream.

Then he and Jubair went into the house and destroyed what was in it, and they set fire to it, and left it burning, and turned back towards Slieve Fuad, and they brought the heads of the three sons of Nechtan along with them.

Presently they saw a herd of wild deer before them. “What sort of cattle are those?” said the boy. “They are not cattle, but the wild deer of the dark places of Slieve Fuad.” “Make the horses go faster,” said Cuchulain, “until we can see them better.” But with all their galloping the horses could not come up with the wild deer. Then Cuchulain got down from the chariot and raced and ran after them until two stags lay moaning and panting from the hardness of their run through the wet bog, and he bound them to the back of the chariot with the throngs of it. Then they went on till they came to the plain of Emain, and there they saw a flock of white swans that were whiter than the swans of Conchubar’s lake, and Cuchulain asked where they came from. “They are wild swans,” said Jubair, “that are come from the rocks and the islands of the great sea to feed on the low levels of the country.” “Would it be best to take them alive or to kill them?” “It would be best to take them alive,” said Jubair, “for many a one kills them, and many a one makes casts at them, but you would hardly find any one at all would bring them in alive.” With that Cuchulain put a little stone in his sling and made a cast, and brought down eight birds of them, and then he put a bigger stone in, and with it he brought down sixteen more. “Get out now, Jubair,” he said, “and bring me the birds here.” “I will not,” said Jubair, “for it would not be easy to stop the horses the way they are going now, and if I leap out, the iron wheels of the chariot will cut through me, or the horns of the stags will make a hole in me.” “You are no good of a warrior, Jubair; but give me the reins and I will quiet the horses and the stags.” So then Jubair went and brought in the swans, and tied them, and they alive, to the chariot and to the harness. And it is like that they went on till they came to Emain.

It was Levarcham daughter of Aedh, the conversation woman and messenger to the king, that was there at that time, and was sometimes away in the hills, was the first to see them coming. “There is a chariot-fighter coming, Conchubar,” she said, “and he is coming in anger. He has the bleeding heads of his enemies with him in the chariot, and wild stags are bound to it, and white birds are bearing him

the oath of my people!" she said, "if he comes on us with his anger, the best of the men of Ulster will fall by his hand." "I know that," said Conchubar. "It is the young lad, the son of Dechtire, that went over the boundaries this very day. He has surely reddened his hand, and if his anger cannot be cooled, the young men of Emain will be in danger from him," he said.

Then they all consulted together, and it is what they agreed, to send out three fifties of the women of Emain to meet him, and they having their breasts uncovered. When the boy saw the women coming, there was shame on him, and he leaned down his head into the cushions of the chariot, and hid his face from them. And the wildness went out of him, and his feasting clothes were brought, and water for washing; and there was a great welcome before him.

This is the story of the boy deeds of Cuchulain, as it was told by Fergus to Ailell and to Maeve at the time of the war for the Brown Bull of Cuailgne.

CHAPTER III

The Courting of Emer

When Cuchulain was growing out of his boyhood at Emain Macha, all the women of Ulster loved him for his skill in feats, for the lightness of his leap, for the weight of his wisdom, for the sweetness of his speech, for all the beauty of his face, for the loveliness of his looks, for all his gifts. He had the gift of caution in fighting, until such time as his anger would come on him, and the hero light would shine about his head; the gift of feats, the gift of chess-playing, the gift of draught-playing, the gift of counting, the gift of divining, the gift of right judgment, the gift of beauty. And all the faults they could find in him were three, that he was too young and smooth-faced, so that young men who did not know him would be laughing at him, that he was too daring, and that he was too beautiful.

The men of Ulster took counsel together then about Cuchulain, for their women and their maidens loved him greatly, and it is what they settled among themselves, that they would seek out a young girl that would be a fitting wife for him, the way that their own wives and their daughters would not be making so much of him. And besides that they were afraid he might die young, and leave no heir after him.

So Conchubar sent out nine men into each of the provinces of Ireland to look for a wife for Cuchulain, to see if in any dun or in any chief place, they could find the daughter of a king or of an owner of land or a householder, who would be pleasing to him, that he might ask her in marriage.

All the messengers came back at the end of a year, but not one of them had

found a young girl that would please Cuchulain. And then he himself went out to court a young girl he knew in Luglochta Loga, the Garden of Lugh, Emer, the daughter of Forgall Manach, the Wily.

He set out in his chariot, that all the chariots of Ulster could not follow by reason of its swiftness, and of the chariot chief who sat in it. And he found the young girl on her playing field, with her companions about her, daughters of the landowners that lived near Forgall's dun, and they learning needlework and fine embroidery from Emer. And of all the young girls of Ireland, she was the one Cuchulain thought worth courting; for she had the six gifts—the gift of beauty, the gift of voice, the gift of sweet speech, the gift of needlework, the gift of wisdom, the gift of chastity. And Cuchulain had said that no woman should marry him but one that was his equal in age, in appearance, and in race, in skill and handiness; and one who was the best worker with her needle of the young girls of Ireland, for that would be the only one would be a fitting wife for him. And that is why it was Emer he went to ask above all others.

And it was in his rich clothes he went out that day, his crimson five-folded tunic, and his brooch of inlaid gold, and his white hooded shirt, that was embroidered with red gold. And as the younger girls were sitting together on their bench on the lawn, they heard coming towards them the clatter of hoofs, the breaking of a chariot, the cracking of straps, the grating of wheels, the rushing of horses, the clanking of arms. "Let one of you see," said Emer, "what is it that is coming towards us." And Fiall, daughter of Forgall, went out and met him, and he came with her to the place where Emer and her companions were, and he wished a blessing to them. Then Emer lifted up her lovely face and saw Cuchulain, and she said, "May the gods make smooth the path before you." "And you," he said, "may you be safe from every harm." "Where are you come from?" she asked him. And he answered her in riddles, that her companions might not understand him, and he said, "From Intide Emna." "Where did you sleep?" "We slept," he said, "in the house of the man that tends the cattle of the plain of Tethra." "What was your food there?" "The ruin of a chariot was cooked for us," he said. "Which way did you come?" "Between the two mountains of the wood." "Which way did you take after that?" "That is not hard to tell," he said. "From the Cover of the Sea, over the Great Secret of the Tuatha De Danaan, and the Foam of the horses of Emain, over the Morigu's Garden, and the Great Sow's back; over the Valley of the Great Dam, between the God and his Druid; over the Marrow of the Woman, between the Boar and his Dam; over the Washing-place of the horses of Dea; between the King of Ana and his servant, to Mandchuile of the Four Courners of the World; over Great Crime and the Remnants of the Great Feast; between the Vat and the Little Vat, to the Gardens of Lugh, to the daughters of Tethra, the nephew of the King of the Fomor." "And what account have you to give of yourself?" said Emer. "I am the nephew of the man that disappears in another in the wood of Badb," said Cuchulain.