The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel

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Part I

[1]

There was a famous and noble king over Erin, named Eochaid Feidlech. Once upon a time he came over the fairgreen of Bri Leith, and he saw at the edge of a well a woman with a bright comb of silver adorned with gold, washing in a silver basin wherein were four golden birds and little, bright gems of purple carbuncle in the rims of the basin. A mantle she had, curly and purple, a beautiful cloak, and in the mantle silvery fringes arranged, and a brooch of fairest gold. A kirtle she wore, long, hooded, hard-smooth, of green silk, with red embroidery of gold. Marvellous clasps of gold and silver in the kirtle on her breasts and her shoulders and spaulds on every side. The sun kept shining upon her, so that the glistening of the gold against the sun from the green silk was manifest to men. On her head were two golden-yellow tresses, in each of which was a plait of four locks, with a bead at the point of each lock. The hue of that hair seemed to them like the flower of the iris in summer, or like red gold after the burnishing thereof.

There she was, undoing her hair to wash it, with her arms out through the sleeve-holes of her smock. White as the snow of one night were the two hands, soft and even, and red as foxglove were the two clear-beautiful cheeks. Dark as the back of a stag-beetle the two eyebrows. Like a shower of pearls were the teeth in her head. Blue as a hyacinth were the eyes. Red as rowan-berries the lips. Very high, smooth and soft-white the shoulders. Clear-white and lengthy the fingers. Long were the hands. White as the foam of a wave was the flank, slender, long, tender, smooth, soft as wool. Polished and warm, sleek and white were the two thighs. Round and small, hard and white the two knees. Short and white and rulestraight the two shins. Justly straight and beautiful the two heels. If a measure were put on the feet it would hardly have found them unequal, unless the flesh of the coverings should grow upon them. The bright radiance of the moon was in her noble face: the loftiness of pride in her smooth eyebrows: the light of wooing in each of her regal eyes. A dimple of delight in each of her cheeks, with a dappling (?) in them, at one time, of purple spots with redness of a calf's blood, and at another with the bright lustre of snow. Soft womanly dignity in her voice; a step steady and slow she had: a queenly gait was hers. Verily, of the world's women 'twas she was the dearest and loveliest and justest that the eyes of men had ever beheld. It seemed to King Eochaid and his followers that she was from the elfmounds. Of her was said: "Shapely are all till compared with Etain," "Dear are all till compared with Etain."

A longing for her straightway seized the king; so he sent forward a man of his people to detain her. The king asked tidings of her and said, while announcing himself: "Shall I have an hour of dalliance with thee?"

"'Tis for that we have come hither under thy safeguard," quoth she.

"Query, whence art thou and whence hast thou come?" says Eochaid.

"Easy to say," quoth she. "Etain am I, daughter of Etar, king of the cavalcade from the elfmounds. I have been here for twenty years since I was born in an elfmound. The men of the elfmound, both kings and nobles, have been wooing me: but nought was gotten from me, because ever since I was able to speak, I have loved thee and given thee a child's love for the high tales about thee and thy splendour. And though I had never seen thee, I knew thee at once from thy description: it is thou, then, I have reached."

"No 'seeking of an ill friend afar' shall be thine," says Eochaid. "Thou shalt have welcome, and for thee every other woman shall be left by me, and with thee alone will I live so long as thou hast honour."

"My proper bride-price to me!" she says, "and afterwards my desire."

"Thou shalt have both," says Eochaid.

Seven cumals[2] are given to her.

Then the king, even Eochaid Feidlech, dies, leaving one daughter named, like her mother, Etain, and wedded to Cormac, king of Ulaid.

After the end of a time Cormac, king of Ulaid, "the man of the three gifts," forsakes Eochaid's daughter, because she was barren save for one daughter that she had borne to Cormac after the making of the pottage which her mother - the woman from the elfmounds - gave her. Then she said to her mother: "Bad is what thou hast given me: it will be a daughter that I shall bear."

"That will not be good," says her mother; "a king's pursuit will be on her."

Then Cormac weds again his wife, even Etain, and this was his desire, that the daughter of the woman who had before been abandoned [i. e. his own daughter] should be killed. So Cormac would not leave the girl to her mother to be nursed. Then his two thralls take her to a pit, and she smiles a laughing smile at them as they were putting her into it. Then their kindly nature came to them. They carry her into the calfshed of the cowherds of Etirscel, great-grandson of Iar, king of Tara, and they fostered her till she became a good embroideress; and there was not in Ireland a king's daughter dearer than she.

A fenced house of wickerwork was made by the thralls for her, without any door, but only a window and a skylight. King Etercel's folk espy that house and suppose that it was food the cowherds kept there. But one of them went and looked through the skylight, and he saw in the house the dearest, beautifullest maiden! This is told to the king, and straightway he sends his people to break the house and carry her off without asking the cowherds. For the king was childless, and it had been prophesied to him by his wizards that a woman of unknown race would bear him a son.

Then said the king: "This is the woman that has been prophesied to me!"

Now while she was there next morning she saw a Bird on the skylight coming to her, and he leaves his birdskin on the floor of the house, and went to her, and possessed her, and said: "They are

coming to thee from the king to wreck thy house and to bring thee to him perforce. And thou wilt be pregnant by me, and bear a son, and that son must not kill birds.."[3] And 'Conaire, son of Mess Buachalla' shall be his name," for hers was Mess Buachalla, 'the Cowherds' fosterchild

And then she was brought to the king, and with her went her fosterers, and she was betrothed to the king, and he gave her seven cumals and to her fosterers seven other cumals. And afterwards they were made chieftains, so that they all became legitimate, whence are the two Fedlimthi Rechtaidi. And then she bore a son to the king, even Conaire son of Mess Buachalla, and these were her three urgent prayers to the king, to wit, the nursing of her son among three households, that is, the fosterers who had nurtured her, and the two Honeyworded Maines, and she herself is the third; and she said that such of the men of Erin as should wish to do aught for this boy should give to those three households for the boy's protection.

So in that wise he was reared, and the men of Erin straightway knew this boy on the day he was born. And other boys were fostered with him, to wit, Fer Le and Fer Gar and Fer Rogein, three great-grandsons of Donn Desa the champion, an army-man of the army from Muc-lesi.

Now Conaire possessed three gifts, to wit, the gift of hearing and the gift of eyesight and the gift of judgment; and of those three gifts he taught one to each of his three fosterbrothers. And whatever meal was prepared for him, the four of them would go to it. Even though three meals were prepared for him each of them would go to his meal. The same raiment and armour and colour of horses had the four.

Then the king, even Eterscele, died. A bull-feast is gathered by the men of Erin, in order to determine their future king; that is, a bull used to be killed by them and thereof one man would eat his fill and drink its broth, and a spell of truth was chanted over him in his bed. Whosoever he would see in his sleep would be king, and the sleeper would perish if he uttered a falsehood.

Four men in chariots were on the Plain of Liffey at their game, Conaire himself and his three fosterbrothers. Then his fosterers went to him that he might repair to the bullfeast. The bull-feaster, then in his sleep, at the end of the night beheld a man stark-naked, passing along the road of Tara, with a stone in his sling.

"I will go in the morning after you," quoth he.

He left his fosterbrothers at their game, and turned his chariot and his charioteer until he was in Dublin. There he saw great, white-speckled birds, of unusual size and colour and beauty. He pursues them until his horses were tired. The birds would go a spearcast before him, and would not go any further. He alighted, and takes his sling for them out of the chariot. He goes after them until he was at the sea. The birds betake themselves to the wave. He went to them and overcame them. The birds quit their birdskins, and turn upon him with spears and swords. One of them protects him, and addressed him, saying: "I am Nemglan, king of thy father's birds; and thou hast been forbidden to cast at birds, for here there is no one that should not be dear to thee because of his father or mother."

"Till today," says Conaire, "I knew not this."

"Go to Tara tonight," says Nemglan; "'tis fittest for thee. A bull feast is there, and through it thou shalt be king. A man stark-naked, who shall go at the end of the night along one of the roads of Tara, having a stone and a sling - 'tis he that shall be king."

So in this wise Conaire fared forth; and on each of the four roads whereby men go to Tara there were three kings awaiting him, and they had raiment for him, since it had been foretold that he would come stark-naked. Then he was seen from the road on which his fosterers were, and they put royal raiment about him, and placed him in a chariot, and he bound his pledges.

The folk of Tara said to him: "It seems to us that our bullfeast and our spell of truth are a failure, if it be only a young, beardless lad that we have visioned therein."

"That is of no moment," quoth he. "For a young, generous king like me to be in the kingship is no disgrace, since the binding of Tara's pledges is mine by right of father and grandsire."

"Excellent! excellent!" says the host. They set the kingship of Erin upon him. And he said: "I will enquire of wise men that I myself may be wise."

Then he uttered all this as he had been taught by the man at the wave, who said this to him: "Thy reign will be subject to a restriction, but the bird-reign will be noble, and this shall be thy restriction, i.e. thy tabu.

"Thou shalt not go righthandwise round Tara and lefthandwise round Bregia.

"The evil-beasts of Cerna must not be hunted by thee.

"And thou shalt not go out every ninth night beyond Tara.

"Thou shalt not sleep in a house from which firelight is manifest outside, after sunset, and in which light is manifest from without.

"And three Reds shall not go before thee to Red's house.

"And no rapine shall be wrought in thy reign.

"And after sunset a company of one woman or one man shall not enter the house in which thou art.

"And thou shalt not settle the quarrel of thy two thralls.

Now there were in his reign great bounties, to wit, seven ships in every June in every year arriving at Inver Colptha,[4] and oakmast up to the knees in every autumn, and plenty of fish in the rivers Bush and Boyne in the June of each year, and such abundance of good will that no one slew another in Erin during his reign. And to every one in Erin his fellow's voice seemed as sweet as the strings of lutes. From mid-spring to mid-autumn no wind disturbed a cow's tail. His reign was neither thunderous nor stormy.

Now his fosterbrothers murmured at the taking from them of their father's and their grandsire's gifts, namely Theft and Robbery and Slaughter of men and Rapine. They thieved the three thefts from the same man, to wit, a swine and an ox and a cow, every year, that they might see what punishment therefor the king would inflict upon them, and what damage the theft in his reign would cause to the king.

Now every year the farmer would come to the king to complain, and the king would say to him. "Go thou and address Donn Desa's three great grandsons, for 'tis they that have taken the beasts." Whenever he went to speak to Donn Desa's descendants they would almost kill him, and he would not return to the king lest Conaire should attend his hurt.

Since, then, pride and wilfulness possessed them, they took to marauding, surrounded by the sons of the lords of the men of Erin. Thrice fifty men had they as pupils when they (the pupils) were were-wolfing in the province of Connaught, until Maine Milscothach's swineherd saw them, and he had never seen that before. He went in flight. When they heard him they pursued him. The swineherd shouted, and the people of the two Maines came to him, and the thrice fifty men were arrested, along with their auxiliaries, and taken to Tara. They consulted the king concerning the matter, and he said: "Let each (father) slay his son, but let my fosterlings be spared."

"Leave, leave!" says every one: "it shall be done for thee."

"Nay indeed," quoth he; "no 'cast of life' by me is the doom I have delivered. The men shall not be hung; but let veterans go with them that they may wreak their rapine on the men of Alba."

This they do. Thence they put to sea and met the son of the king of Britain, even Ingcel the One-eyed, grandson of Conmac: thrice fifty men and their veterans they met upon the sea.

They make an alliance, and go with Ingcel and wrought rapine with him.

This is the destruction which his own impulse gave him. That was the night that his mother and his father and his seven brothers had been bidden to the house of the king of his district. All of them were destroyed by Ingcel in a single night. Then the Irish pirates put out to sea to the land of Erin to seek a destruction as payment for that to which Ingcel had been entitled from them.

In Conaire's reign there was perfect peace in Erin, save that in Thomond there was a joining of battle between the two Carbres. Two fosterbrothers of his were they. And until Conaire came it was impossible to make peace between them. 'Twas a tabu of his to go to separate them before they had repaired to him. He went, however, although to do so was one of his tabus, and he made peace between them. He remained five nights with each of the two. That also was a tabu of his.

After settling the two quarrels, he was travelling to Tara. This is the way they took to Tara, past Usnech of Meath; and they saw the raiding from east and west, and from south and north, and they saw the warbands and the hosts, and the men stark-naked; and the land of the southern O'Neills was a cloud of fire around him.

"What is this?" asked Conaire. "Easy to say," his people answer. "Easy to know that the king's law

has broken down therein, since the country has begun to burn."

"Whither shall we betake ourselves?" says Conaire.

"To the Northeast," says his people.

So then they went righthandwise round Tara, and lefthandwise round Bregia, and the evil beasts of Cerna were hunted by him. But he saw it not till the chase had ended.

They that made of the world that smoky mist of magic were elves, and they did so because Conaire's tabus had been violated.

Great fear then fell on Conaire because they had no way to wend save upon the Road of Midluachair and the Road of Cualu.

So they took their way by the coast of Ireland southward.

Then said Conaire on the Road of Cualu: "whither shall we go tonight?"

"May I succeed in telling thee! my fosterling Conaire," says Mac cecht, son of Snade Teiched, the champion of Conaire, son of Eterscel. "Oftener have the men of Erin been contending for thee every night than thou hast been wandering about for a guesthouse."

"Judgment goes with good times," says Conaire. "I had a friend in this country, if only we knew the way to his house!"

"What is his name?" asked Mac cecht.

"Da Derga of Leinster," answered Conaire. "He came unto me to seek a gift from me, and he did not come with a refusal. I gave him a hundred kine of the drove. I gave him a hundred fatted swine. I gave him a hundred mantles made of close cloth. I gave him a hundred blue-coloured weapons of battle. I gave him ten red, gilded brooches. I gave him ten vats good and brown. I gave him ten thralls. I gave him ten querns. I gave him thrice nine hounds all-white in their silvern chains. I gave him a hundred race-horses in the herds of deer. There would be no abatement in his case though he should come again. He would make return. It is strange if he is surly to me tonight when reaching his abode."

"When I was acquainted with his house," says Mac cecht, "the road whereon thou art going towards him was the boundary of his abode. It continues till it enters his house, for through the house passes the road. There are seven doorways into the house, and seven bedrooms between every two doorways; but there is only one doorvalve on it, and that valve is turned to every doorway to which the wind blows."

"With all that thou hast here," says Conaire, "thou shalt go in thy great multitude until thou alight in the midst of the house."

"If so be," answers Mac cecht, "that thou goest thither, I go on that I may strike fire there ahead of thee."

When Conaire after this was journeying along the Road of Cualu, he marked before him three horsemen riding towards the house. Three red frocks had they, and three red mantles: three red bucklers they bore, and three red spears were in their hands: three red steeds they bestrode, and three red heads of hair were on them. Red were they all, both body and hair and raiment, both steeds and men.

"Who is it that fares before us?" asked Conaire. "It was a tabu of mine for those Three to go before me - the three Reds to the house of Red. Who will follow them and tell them to come towards me in my track?"

"I will follow them," says Le fri flaith, Conaire's son.

He goes after them, lashing his horse, and overtook them not. There was the length of a spearcast between them: but they did not gain upon him and he did not gain upon them.

He told them not to go before the king. He overtook them not; but one of the three men sang a lay to him over his shoulder:

"Lo, my son, great the news, news from a hostel . . . Lo, my son!"

They go away from him then: he could not detain them.

The boy waited for the host. He told his father what was said to him. Conaire liked it not. "After them, thou!" says Conaire, "and offer them three oxen and three bacon-pigs, and so long as they shall be in my household, no one shall be among them from fire to wall."

So the lad goes after them, and offers them that, and overtook them not. But one of the three men sang a lay to him over his shoulder:

"Lo, my son, great the news! A generous king's great ardour whets thee, burns thee. Through ancient men's enchantments a company of nine yields. Lo, my son!"

The boy turns back and repeated the lay to Conaire.

"Go after them," says Conaire, "and offer them six oxen and six bacon pigs, and my leavings, and gifts tomorrow, and so long as they shall be in my household no one to be among them from fire to wall."

The lad then went after them, and overtook them not; but one of the three men answered and said:

"Lo, my son, great the news. Weary are the steeds we ride. We ride the steeds of Donn Tetscorach from the elfmounds. Though we are alive we are dead. Great are the signs: destruction of life: sating of ravens: feeding of crows, strife of slaughter: wetting of sword-edge, shields with broken

bosses in hours after sundown. Lo, my son!"

Then they go from him.

"I see that thou hast not detained the men," says Conaire.

"Indeed it is not I that betrayed it," says Le fri flaith.

He recited the last answer that they gave him. Conaire and his retainers were not blithe thereat: and afterwards evil forebodings of terror were on them.

"All my tabus have seized me tonight," says Conaire, "since those Three Reds are the banished folks."<ref<They had been banished from the elfmounds, and for them to precede Conaire was to violate one of his taboos. - W.S.</ref>

They went forward to the house and took their seats therein, and fastened their red steeds to the door of the house.

That is the Forefaring of the Three Reds in the Bruden Da Derga.

This is the way that Conaire took with his troops, to Dublin.

Part II

Conaire And His Troops To Dublin

'Tis then the man of the black, cropt hair, with his one hand and one eye and one foot, overtook them. Rough cropt hair upon him. Though a sackful of wild apples were flung on his crown, not an apple would fall on the ground, but each of them would stick on his hair. Though his snout were flung on a branch they would remain together. Long and thick as an outer yoke was each of his two shins. Each of his buttocks was the size of a cheese on a withe. A forked pole of iron black-pointed was in his hand. A swine, black-bristled, singed, was on his back, squealing continually, and a woman big-mouthed, huge, dark, sorry, hideous, was behind him. Though her snout were flung on a branch, the branch would support it. Her lower lip would reach her knee.

He starts forward to meet Conaire, and made him welcome. "Welcome to thee, O master Conaire! Long hath thy coming hither been known."

"Who gives the welcome?" asks Conaire.

"Fer Caille here, with his black swine for thee to consume that thou be not fasting tonight, for 'tis thou art the best king that has come into the world!"

"What is thy wife's name?" says Conaire.

"Cichuil," he answers.

"Any other night," says Conaire, "that pleases you, I will come to you, and leave us alone tonight."

"Nay," say the churl, "for we will go to thee to the place wherein thou wilt be tonight, O fair little master Conaire!"

So he goes towards the house, with his great, big-mouthed wife behind him, and his swine short-bristled, black, singed, squealing continually, on his back. That was one of Conaire's tabus, and that plunder should be taken in Ireland during his reign was another tabu of his.

Now plunder was taken by the sons of Donn Desa, and five hundred there were in the body of their marauders, besides what underlings were with them. This, too, was a tabu of Conaire's. There was a good warrior in the north country, "Wain over withered sticks," this was his name. Why he was so called was because he used to go over his opponent even as a wain would go over withered sticks. Now plunder was taken by him, and there were five hundred in the body of their marauders alone, besides underlings.

There was after that a troop of still haughtier heroes, namely, the seven sons of Ailill and Medb,

each of whom was called "Mane." And each Mane had a nickname, to wit, Mane Fatherlike and Mane Motherlike, and Mane Gentle-pious, Mane Very-pious, Mane Unslow, and Mane Honeyworded, Mane Grasp-them-all, and Mane the Loquacious. Rapine was wrought by them. As to Mane Motherlike and Mane Unslow there were fourteen score in the body of their marauders. Mane Fatherlike had three hundred and fifty. Mane Honeyworded had five hundred. Mane Grasp-them-all had seven hundred. Mane the Loquacious had seven hundred. Each of the others had five hundred in the body of his marauders.

There was a valiant trio of the men of Cualu of Leinster, namely, the three Red Hounds of Cualu, called Cethach and Clothach and Conall. Now rapine was wrought by them, and twelve score were in the body of their marauders, and they had a troop of madmen. In Conaire's reign a third of the men of Ireland were reavers. He was of sufficient strength and power to drive them out of the land of Erin so as to transfer their marauding to the other side (Great Britain), but after this transfer they returned to their country.

When they had reached the shoulder of the sea, they meet Ingcel the One eyed and Eiccel and Tulchinne, three great-grandsons of Conmac of Britain, on the raging of the sea. A man ungentle, huge, fearful, uncouth was Ingcel. A single eye in his head, as broad as an oxhide, as black as a chafer, with three pupils therein. Thirteen hundred were in the body of his marauders. The marauders of the men of Erin were more numerous than they.

They go for a sea-encounter on the main. "Ye should not do this," says Ingcel: "do not break the truth of men (fair play) upon us, for ye are more in number than I."

"Nought but a combat on equal terms shall befall thee," say the reavers of Erin.

"There is somewhat better for you," quoth Ingcel. "Let us make peace since ye have been cast out of the land of Erin, and we have been cast out of the land of Alba and Britain. Let us make an agreement between us. Come ye and wreak your rapine in my country, and I will go with you and wreak my rapine in your country."

They follow this counsel, and they gave pledges therefor from this side and from that. There are the sureties that were given to Ingcel by the men of Erin, namely, Fer gair and Gabur (or Fer lee) and Fer rogain, for the destruction that Ingcel should choose to cause in Ireland and for the destruction that the sons of Donn Desa should choose in Alba and Britain.

A lot was cast upon them to see with which of them they should go first. It fell that they should go with Ingcel to his country. So they made for Britain, and there his father and mother and his seven brothers were slain, as we have said before. Thereafter they made for Alba, and there they wrought the destruction, and then they returned to Erin.

'Tis then, now, that Conaire son of Eterscel went towards the Hostel along the Road of Cualu.

'Tis then that the reavers came till they were in the sea off the coast of Bregia overagainst Howth.

Then said the reavers: "Strike the sails, and make one band of you on the sea that ye may not be

sighted from land; and let some lightfoot be found from among you to go on shore to see if we could save our honors with Ingcel. A destruction for the destruction he has given us."

"Who will go on shore to listen? Let some one ago," says Ingcel, "who should have there the three gifts, namely, gift of hearing, gift of far sight, and gift of judgment."

"I," says Mane Honeyworded, "have the gift of hearing."

"And I," says Mane Unslow, "have the gift of far sight and of judgment."

"'Tis well for you to go thus," say the reavers: "good is that wise."

Then nine men go on till they were on the Hill of Howth, to know what they might hear and see.

"Be still a while!" says Mane Honeyworded.

"What is that?" asks Mane Unslow.

"The sound of a good king's cavalcade I hear."

"By the gift of far sight, I see," quoth his comrade.

"What seest thou here?"

"I see there," quoth he, "cavalcades splendid, lofty, beautiful, warlike, foreign, somewhat slender, weary, active, keen, whetted, vehement, a good course that shakes a great covering of land. They fare to many heights, with wondrous waters and invers."[5]

"What are the waters and heights and invers that they traverse?"

"Easy to say: Indeoin, Cult, Cuilten, Mafat, Ammat, Iarmafat, Finne, Goiste, Guistine. Gray spears over chariots: ivory-hilted swords on thighs: silvery shields above their elbows. Half red and half white. Garments of every color about them.

"Thereafter I see before them special cattle specially keen, to wit, thrice fifty dark-gray steeds. Small-headed are they, red-nosed, pointed, broad-hoofed, big-nosed, red-chested, fat, easily-stopt, easily-yoked, foray-nimble, keen, whetted, vehement, with their thrice fifty bridles of red enamel upon them."

"I swear by what my tribe swears," says the man of the long sight, "these are the cattle of some good lord. This is my judgment thereof: it is Conaire, son of Eterscel, with multitudes of the men of Erin around him, who has travelled the road."

Back then they go that they may tell it to the reavers. "This," they say, "is what we have heard and seen."

Of this host, then, there was a multitude, both on this side and on that, namely, thrice fifty boats, with five thousand in them, and ten hundred in every thousand. Then they hoisted the sails on the boats, and steer them thence to shore, till they landed on the Strand of Fuirbthe.

When the boats reached land, then was Mac cecht a-striking fire in Da Derga's Hostel. At the sound of the spark the thrice fifty boats were hurled out, so that they were on the shoulders of the sea.

"Be silent a while!" said Ingcel. "Liken thou that, O Fer rogain."

"I know not," answers Fer rogain, "unless it is Luchdonn the satirist in Emain Macha, who makes this handsmiting when his food is taken from him perforce: or the scream of Luchdonn in Temair Luachra: of Mac cecht's striking a spark, when he kindles a fire before a king of Erin where he sleeps. Every spark and every shower which his fire would let fall on the floor would broil a hundred calves and two half-pigs."

"May God not bring that man (even Conaire) there tonight!" say Donn Desa's sons. "Sad that he is under the hurt of foes!"

"Meseems," says Ingcel, "it should be no sadder for me than the destruction I gave you. This were my feast that Conaire should chance to come there."

Their fleet is steered to land. The noise that the thrice fifty vessels made in running ashore shook Da Derga's Hostel so that no spear nor shield remained on rack therein, but the weapons uttered a cry and fell all on the floor of the house.

"Liken thou that, O Conaire," says every one: "what is this noise?"

"I know nothing like it unless it be the earth that has broken, or the Leviathan that surrounds the globe and strikes with its tail to overturn the world, or the barque of the sons of Donn Desa that has reached the shore. Alas that it should not be they who are there! Beloved foster-brothers of our own were they! Dear were the champions. We should not have feared them tonight."

Then came Conaire, so that he was on the green of the Hostel.

When Mac cecht heard the tumultuous noise, it seemed to him that warriors had attacked his people. Thereat he leapt on to his armour to help them. Vast as the thunderfeat of three hundred did they deem his game in leaping to his weapons. Thereof there was no profit.

Now in the bow of the ship wherein were Donn Desa's sons was the champion, great-accoutred, wrathful, the lion hard and awful, Ingcel the One -eyed, great-grandson of Conmac. Wide as an oxhide was the single eye protruding from his forehead, with seven pupils therein, which were black as a chafer. Each of his knees as big as stripper's caldron; each of his two fists was the size of a reaping-basket: his buttocks as big as a cheese on a withe: each of his shins as long as an outer yoke.

So after that, the thrice fifty boats, and those five thousands - with ten hundred in every thousand,

- landed on the Strand of Fuirbthe.

Then Conaire with his people entered the Hostel, and each took his seat within, both tabu and non-tabu. And the three Reds took their seats, and Fer caille with his swine took his seat.

Thereafter Da Derga came to them, with thrice fifty warriors, each of them having a long head of hair to the hollow of his polls, and a short cloak to their buttocks. Speckled-green drawers they wore, and in their hands were thrice fifty great clubs of thorn with bands of iron.

"Welcome, O master Conaire!" quoth he. "Though the bulk of the men of Erin were to come with thee, they themselves would have a welcome."

When they were there they saw a lone woman coming to the door of the Hostel, after sunset, and seeking to be let in. As long as a weaver's beam was each of her two shins, and they were as dark as the back of a stag-beetle. A greyish, wooly mantle she wore. Her lower hair used to reach as far as her knee. Her lips were on one side of her head.

She came and put one of her shoulders against the door-post of the house, casting the evil eye on the king and the youths who surrounded him in the Hostel. He himself addressed her from within.

"Well, O woman," says Conaire, "if thou art a wizard, what seest thou for us?"

"Truly I see for thee," she answers, "that neither fell nor flesh of thine shall escape from the place into which thou hast come, save what birds will bear away in their claws."

"It was not an evil omen we foreboded, O woman," saith he: "it is not thou that always augurs for us. What is thy name, O woman?"

"Calib," she answers.

"That is not much of a name," says Conaire.

"Lo, many are my names besides."

"Which be they?" asks Conaire.

"Easy to say," quoth she. "Samon, Sinand, Seisclend, Sodb, Caill, Coll, Dichoem, Dichiuil, Dithim, Dichuimne, Dichruidne, Dairne, Darine, Deruaine, Egem, Agam, Ethamne, Gnim, Cluiche, Cethardam, Nith, Nemain, Noennen, Badb, Blosc, B[l]oar, Huae, oe Aife la Sruth, Mache, Mede, Mod."

On one foot, and holding up one hand, and breathing one breath she sang all that to them from the door of the house.

"I swear by the gods whom I adore," says Conaire, "that I will call thee by none of these names whether I shall be here a long or a short time."

"What dost thou desire?" says Conaire.

"That which thou, too, desirest," she answered.

"'Tis a tabu of mine," says Conaire, "to receive the company of one woman after sunset."

"Though it be a tabu," she replied, "I will not go until my guesting come at once this very night."

"Tell her," says Conaire, "that an ox and a bacon-pig shall be taken out to her, and my leavings: provided that she stays tonight in some other place."

"If in sooth," she says, "it has befallen the king not to have room in his house for the meal and bed of a solitary woman, they will be gotten apart from him from some one possessing generosity - if the hospitality of the Prince in the Hostel has departed."

"Savage is the answer!" says Conaire. "Let her in, though it is a tabu of mine."

Great loathing they felt after that from the woman's converse, and ill foreboding; but they knew not the cause thereof.

The reavers afterwards landed, and fared forth till they were at Lecca cinn slebe. Ever open was the Hostel. Why it was called a Bruden was because it resembles the lips of a man blowing a fire.

Great was the fire which was kindled by Conaire every night, to wit, a "Boar of the Wood." Seven outlets it had. When a log was cut out of its side every flame that used to come forth at each outlet was as big as the blaze of a burning oratory. There were seventeen of Conaire's chariots at every door of the house, and by those that were looking from the vessels that great light was clearly seen through the wheels of the chariots.

"Canst thou say, O Fer rogain, what that great light yonder resembles?"

"I cannot liken it to aught," answers Fer rogain, "unless it be the fire of a king. May God not bring that man there tonight! 'Tis a pity to destroy him!"

"What then deemest thou," says Ingcel, "of that man's reign in the land of Erin?"

"Good is his reign," replied Fer rogain. "Since he assumed the kingship, no cloud has veiled the sun for the space of a day from the middle of spring to the middle of autumn. And not a dewdrop fell from grass till midday, and wind would not touch a beast's tail until nones. And in his reign, from year's end to year's end, no wolf has attacked aught save one bullcalf of each byre; and to maintain this rule there are seven wolves in hostageship at the sidewall in his house, and behind this a further security, even Maclocc, and 'tis he that pleads for them in Conaire's house. In Conaire's reign are the three crowns on Erin, namely crown of corn-ears, and crown of flowers, and crown of oak mast. In his reign, too, each man deems the other's voice as melodious as the strings of lutes, because of the excellence of the law and the peace and the goodwill prevailing throughout Erin. May God not bring that man there tonight! 'Tis sad to destroy him. 'Tis 'a branch through its

blossom,' 'Tis a swine that falls before mast. 'Tis an infant in age. Sad is the shortness of his life!"

"This was my luck," says Ingcel, "that he should be there, and there should be one Destruction for another. It were not more grievous to me than my father and my mother and my seven brothers, and the king of my country, whom I gave up to you before coming on the transfer of the rapine."

"'Tis true, 'tis true!" say the evildoers who were along with the reavers.

The reavers make a start from the Strand of Fuirbthe, and bring a stone for each man to make a cairn; for this was the distinction which at first the Fians made between a "Destruction" and a "Rout." A pillar-stone they used to plant when there would be a Rout. A cairn, however, they used to make when there would be a Destruction. At this time, then, they made a cairn, for it was a Destruction. Far from the house was this, that they might not be heard or seen therefrom.

For two causes they built their cairn, namely, first, since this was a custom in marauding, and, secondly, that they might find out their losses at the Hostel. Every one that would come safe from it would take his stone from the cairn: thus the stones of those that were slain would be left, and thence they would know their losses. And this is what men skilled in story recount, that for every stone in Carn leca there was one of the reavers killed at the Hostel. From that cairn Leca in Hui Cellaig is so called.

A "boar of a fire" is kindled by the sons of Donn Desa to give warning to Conaire. So that is the first warning-beacon that has been made in Erin, and from it to this day every warning-beacon is kindled.

This is what others recount: that it was on the eve of samain (AllSaints-day) the destruction of the Hostel was wrought, and that from yonder beacon the beacon of samain is followed from that to this, and stones (are placed) is the samain-fire.

Then the reavers framed a counsel at the place where they had put the cairn.

"Well, then," says Ingcel to the guides, "what is nearest to us here?

"Easy to say: the Hostel of Hua Derga, chief-hospitaller of Erin."

"Good men indeed," says Ingcel, "were likely to seek their fellows at that Hostel to-night."

This, then, was the counsel of the reavers, to send one of them to see how things were there.

"Who will go there to espy the house?" say everyone.

"Who should go," says Ingcel, "but I, for 'tis I that am entitled to dues."

Ingcel went to reconnoitre the Hostel with one of the seven pupils of the single eye which stood out of his forehead, to fit his eye into the house in order to destroy the king and the youths who were around him therein. And Ingcel saw them through the wheels of the chariots.

Then Ingcel was perceived from the house. He made a start from it after being perceived.

He went till he reached the reavers in the stead wherein they were. Each circle of them was set around another to hear the tidings - the chiefs of the reavers being in the very centre of the circles. There were Fer ger and Fer gel and Fer rogel and Fer rogain and Lomna the Buffoon, and Ingcel the Oneeyed - six in the centre of the circles. And Fer rogain went to question Ingcel.

"How is that, O Ingcel?" asks Fer rogain.

"However it be," answered Ingcel, "royal is the custom, hostful is the tumult: kingly is the noise thereof. Whether a king be there or not, I will take the house for what I have a right to. Thence my turn of rapine cometh."

We have left it in thy hand, O Ingcel!" say Conaire's fosterbrothers. "But we should not wreak the Destruction till we know who may be therein."

"Question, hast thou seen the house well, O Ingcel?" asks Fer rogain.

"Mine eye cast a rapid glance around it, and I will accept it for my dues as it stands."

"Thou mayest well accept it, O Ingcel," saith Fer rogain: "the foster father of us all is there, Erin's overking, Conaire, son of Eterscel."

"Question, what sawest thou in the champion's high seat of the house, facing the King, on the opposite side?"

The Room Of Cormac Condlongas

"I saw there," says Ingcel, "a man of noble countenance, large, with a clear and sparkling eye, an even set of teeth, a face narrow below, broad above,. Fair, flaxen, golden hair upon him, and a proper fillet around it. A brooch of silver in his mantle, and in his hand a gold-hilted sword. A shield with five golden circles upon it: a five-barbed javelin in his hand. A visage just, fair, ruddy he hath: he is also beardless. Modest-minded is that man!"

"And after that, whom sawest thou there?"

The Room Of Cormac's Nine Comrades

"There I saw three men to the west of Cormac, and three to the east of him, and three in front of the same man. Thou wouldst deem that the nine of them had one mother and one father. They are of the same age, equally goodly, equally beautiful, all alike. Thin rods of gold in their mantles. Bent shields of bronze they bear. Ribbed javelins above them. An ivory-hilted sword in the hand of each. An unique feat they have, to wit, each of them takes his sword's point between his two fingers, and they twirl the swords round their fingers, and the swords afterwards extend themselves by themselves. Liken thou that, O Fer rogain," says Ingcel.

"Easy," says Fer rogain, "for me to liken them. It is Conchobar's son, Cormac Condlongas, the best hero behind a shield in the land of Erin. Of modest mind is that boy! Evil is what he dreads tonight. He is a champion of valour for feats of arms; he is an hospitaller for householding. These are yon nine who surround him, the three Dungusses, and the three Doelgusses, and the three Dangusses, the nine comrades of Cormac Condlongas, son of Conchobar. They have never slain men on account of their misery, and they never spared them on account of their prosperity. Good is the hero who is among them, even Cormac Condlongas. I swear what my tribe swears, nine times ten will fall by Cormac in his first onset, and nine times ten will fall by his people, besides a man for each of their weapons, and a man for each of themselves. And Cormac will share prowess with any man before the Hostel, and he will boast of victory over a king or crown-prince or noble of the reavers; and he himself will chance to escape, though all his people be wounded."

"Woe to him who shall wreak this Destruction!" says Lomna Druth, "even because of that one man, Cormac Condlongas, son of Conchobar." "I swear what my tribe swears," says Lomna son of Donn Desa, "if I could fulfil my counsel, the Destruction would not be attempted were it only because of that one man, and because of the hero's beauty and goodness!"

"It is not feasible to prevent it," says Ingcel: "clouds of weakness come to you. A keen ordeal which will endanger two cheeks of a goat will be opposed by the oath of Fer rogain, who will run. Thy voice, O Lomna," says Ingcel, "hath taken breaking upon thee: thou art a worthless warrior, and I know thee. Clouds of weakness come to you. . . .

Neither old men nor historians shall declare that I quitted the Destruction, until I shall wreak it."

"Reproach not our honour, O Ingcel," say Ger and Gabur and Fer rogain. "The Destruction shall be wrought unless the earth break under it, until all of us are slain thereby."

"Truly, then, thou hast reason, O Ingcel," says Lomna Druth son of Donn Desa. "Not to thee is the loss caused by the Destruction. Thou wilt carry off the head of the king of a foreign country, with thy slaughter of another; and thou and thy brothers will escape from the Destruction, even Ingcel and Ecell and the Yearling of the Rapine."

"Harder, however, it is for me," says Lomna Druth: "woe is me before every one! woe is me after every one! 'Tis my head that will be first tossed about there to-night after an hour among the chariot-shafts, where devilish foes will meet. It will be flung into the Hostel thrice, and thrice will it be flung forth. Woe to him that comes! woe to him with whom one goes! woe to him to whom one goes! Wretches are they that go! wretches are they to whom they go!"

"There is nothing that will come to me," says Ingcel, "in place of my mother and my father and my seven brothers, and the king of my district, whom ye destroyed with me. There is nothing that I shall not endure henceforward."

"Though a . . . should go through them," say Ger and Gabur and Fer rogain, "the Destruction will be wrought by thee to-night."

"Woe to him who shall put them under the hands of foes!" says Lomna. "And whom sawest thou

afterwards?"

The Room Of The Picts, This

"I saw another room there, with a huge trio in it: three brown, big men: three round heads of hair on them, even, equally long at nape and forehead. Three short black cowls about them reaching to their elbows: long hoods were on the cowls. Three black, huge swords they had, and three black shields they bore, with three dark broadgreen javelins above them. Thick as the spit of a caldron was the shaft of each. Liken thou that, O Fer rogain!"

"Hard it is for me to find their like. I know not in Erin that trio, unless it be yon trio of Pictland, who went into exile from their country, and are now in Conaire's household. These are their names: Dublonges son of Trebuat, and Trebuat son of Hua-Lonsce, and Curnach son of Hua Faich. The three who are best in Pictland at taking arms are that trio. Nine decads will fall at their hands in their first encounter, and a man will fall for each of their weapons, besides one for each of themselves. And they will share prowess with every trio in the Hostel. They will boast a victory over a king or a chief of the reavers; and they will afterwards escape though wounded. Woe to him who shall wreak the Destruction, though it be only on account of those three!"

Says Lomna Druth: "I swear to God what my tribe swears, if my counsel were taken, the Destruction would never be wrought."

"Ye cannot," says Ingcel: "clouds of weakness are coming to you. A keen ordeal which will endanger, etc. And whom slowest thou there afterwards?"

The Room Of The Pipers

"There I beheld a room with nine men in it. Hair fair and yellow was on them: they all are equally beautiful. Mantles speckled with colour they wore, and above them were nine bagpipes, four-turned, ornamented. Enough light in the palace were the ornament on these four-tuned pipes. Liken thou them, O Fer rogain."

"Easy for me to liken them," says Fer rogain. "Those are the nine pipers that came to Conaire out of the Elfmound of Bregia, because of noble tales about him. These are their names: Bind, Robind, Riarbind, Sibe, Dibe, Deichrind, Umall, Cumal, Ciallglind. They are the best pipers in the world. Nine enneads will fall before them, and a man for each of their weapons, and a man for each of themselves. And each of them will boast a victory over a king or a chief of the reavers. And they will escape from the Destruction; for a conflict with them will be a conflict with shadow. They will slay, but they will not be slain, for they are out of an elfmound. Woe to him who shall wreak the Destruction, though it be only because of those nine!"

"Ye cannot," says Ingcel. "Clouds of weakness come to you," etc. "And after that, whom sawest thou there?"

The Room Of Conaire's Majordomo

"There I saw a room with one man in it. Rough cropt hair upon him. Though a sack of crab-apples should be flung on his head, not one of them would fall on the floor, but every apple would stick on his hair. His fleecy mantle was over him in the house. Every quarrel therein about seat or bed comes to his decision. Should a needle drop in the house, its fall would be heard when he speaks. Above him is a huge black tree, like a millshaft, with its paddles and its cap and its spike. Liken thou him, O Fer rogain!"

"Easy for me is this. Tuidle of Ulaid is he, the steward of Conaire's household. 'Tis needful to hearken to the decision of that man, the man that rules seat and bed and food for each. 'Tis his household staff that is above him. That man will fight with you. I swear what my tribe swears, the dead at the Destruction slain by him will be more numerous that the living. Thrice his number will fall by him, and he himself will fall there. Woe to him who shall wreak the Destruction!" etc.

"Ye cannot," says Ingcel. "Clouds of weakness come upon you. What sawest thou there after that?"

Part III

The Room Of Mac Cecht, Conaire's Battle-Soldier

There I beheld another room with a trio in it, three half-furious nobles: the biggest of them in the middle, very noisy . . . rock-bodied, angry, smiting, dealing strong blows, who beats nine hundred in battleconflict. A wooden shield, dark, covered with iron, he bears, with a hard . . . rim, a shield whereon would fit the proper litter of four troops of ten weaklings on its . . . of . . . leather. A . . . boss thereon, the depth of a caldron, fit to cook four oxen, a hollow maw, a great boiling, with four swine in its mid-maw great . . . At his two smooth sides are two five-thwarted boats fit for three parties of ten in each of his two strong fleets.

A spear he hath, blue-red, hand-fitting, on its puissant shaft. It stretches along the wall on the roof and rests on the ground. An iron point upon it, dark-red, dripping. Four amply-measured feet between the two points of its edge.

Thirty amply-measured feet in his deadly-striking sword from dark point to iron hilt. It shews forth fiery sparks which illumine the Mid-court House from roof to ground.

'Tis a strong countenance that I see. A swoon from horror almost befell me while staring at those three. There is nothing stranger.

Two bare hills were there by the man with hair. Two loughs by a mountain of the . . . of a blue-fronted wave: two hides by a tree. Two boats near them full of thorns of a white thorn tree on a circular board. And there seems to me somewhat like a slender stream of water on which the sun is shining, and its trickle down from it, and a hide arranged behind it, and a palace housepost shaped like a great lance above it. A good weight of a plough-yoke is the shaft that is therein. Liken thou that, O Fer rogain!

"Easy, meseems, to liken him! That is Mac cecht son of Snaide Teichid; the battle-soldier of Conaire son of Eterscel. Good is the hero Mac cecht! Supine he was in his room, in his sleep, when thou beheldest him. The two bare hills which thou sawest by the man with hair, these are his two knees by his head. The two loughs by the mountain which thou sawest, these are his two eyes by his nose. The two hides by a tree which thou sawest, these are his two ears by his head. The two five-thwarted boats on a circular board, which thou sawest, these are his two sandals on his shield. The slender stream of water which thou sawest, whereon the sun shines, and its trickle down from it, this is the flickering of his sword. The hide which thou sawest arranged behind him, that is his sword's scabbard. The palace house-post which thou sawest, that is his lance: and he brandishes this spear till its two ends meet, and he hurls a wilful cast of it when he pleases. Good is the hero, Mac cecht!"

"Six hundred will fall by him in his first encounter, and a man for each of his weapons, besides a

man for himself. And he will share prowess with every one in the Hostel, and he will boast of triumph over a king or chief of the reavers in front of the Hostel. He will chance to escape though wounded. And when he shall chance to come upon you out of the house, as numerous as hailstones, and grass on a green, and stars of heaven will be your cloven heads and skulls, and the clots of your brains, your bones and the heaps of your bowels, crushed by him and scattered throughout the ridges."

Then with trembling and terror of Mac cecht they flee over three ridges.

They took the pledges among them again, even Ger and Gabur and Fer rogain.

"Woe to him that shall wreak the Destruction," says Lomna Druth; "your heads will depart from you."

"Ye cannot," says Ingcel: "clouds of weakness are coming to you" etc.

"True indeed, O Ingcel," says Lomna Druth son of Donn Desa. "Not unto thee is the loss caused by the Destruction. Woe is me for the Destruction, for the first head that will reach the Hostel will be mine!"

"'Tis harder for me," says Ingcel: "'tis my destruction that has been . . . there.

"Truly then," says Ingcel, "maybe I shall be the corpse that is frailest there," etc.

"And afterwards whom sawest thou there?"

The Room Of Conaire's Three Sons, Oball And Oblin And Corpre

"There I beheld a room with a trio in it, to wit, three tender striplings, wearing three silken mantles. In their mantles were three golden brooches. Three golden-yellow manes were on them. When they undergo headcleansing their golden-yellow mane reaches the edge of their haunches. When they raise their eye it raises the hair so that it is not lower than the tips of their ears, and it is as curly as a ram's head. A . . . of gold and a palace-flambeau above each of them. Every one who is in the house spares them, voice and deed and word. Liken thou that, O Fer rogain," says Ingcel.

Fer rogain wept, so that his mantle in front of him became moist. And no voice was gotten out of his head till a third of the night had passed.

"O little ones," says Fer rogain, "I have good reason for what I do! Those are three sons of the king of Erin: Oball and Obline and Corpre Findmor."

"It grieves us if the tale be true," say the sons of Donn Desa. "Good is the trio in that room. Manners of ripe maidens have they, and hearts of brothers, and valours of bears, and furies of lions. Whosoever is in their company and in their couch, and parts from them, he sleeps not and eats not at ease till the end of nine days, from lack of their companionship. Good are the youths for their age! Thrice ten will fall by each of them in their first encounter, and a man for each weapon,

and three men for themselves. And one of the three will fall there. Because of that trio, woe to him that shall wreak the Destruction!"

"Ye cannot," says Ingcel: "clouds of weakness are coming to you, etc. And whom sawest thou afterwards?"

The Room Of The Fomorians

I beheld there a room with a trio in it, to wit, a trio horrible, unheard - of, a triad of champions, etc.

Liken thou that, O Fer rogain?

"'Tis hard for me to liken that trio. Neither of the men of Erin nor of the men of the world do I know it, unless it be the trio that Mac cecht brought out of the land of the Fomorians by dint of duels. Not one of the Fomorians was found to fight him, so he brought away those three, and they are in Conaire's house as sureties that, while Conaire is reigning, the Fomorians destroy neither corn nor milk in Erin beyond their fair tribute. Well may their aspect be loathy! Three rows of teeth in their heads from one ear to another. An ox with a bacon-pig, this is the ration of each of them, and that ration which they put into their mouths is visible till it comes down past their navels. Bodies of bone (i.e. without a joint in them) all those three have. I swear what my tribe swears, more will be killed by them at the Destruction than those they leave alive. Six hundred warriors will fall by them in their first conflict, and a man for each of their weapons, and one for each of the three themselves. And they will boast a triumph over a king or chief of the reavers. It will not be more than with a bite or a blow or a kick that each of those men will kill, for no arms are allowed them in the house, since they are in 'hostageship at the wall' lest they do a misdeed therein. I swear what my tribe swears, if they had armour on them, they would slay us all but a third. Woe to him that shall wreak the Destruction, because it is not a combat against sluggards."

"Ye cannot," says Ingcel, etc. "And whom sawest thou there after that?"

The Room Of Munremar Son Of Gerrchenn, Birderg Son Of Ruan, Mal son of Telband

"I beheld a room there, with a trio in it. Three brown, big men, with three brown heads of short hair. Thick calf-bottoms (ankles?) they had. As thick as a man's waist was each of their limbs. Three brown and curled masses of hair upon them, with a thick head: three cloaks, red and speckled, they wore: three black shields with clasps of gold, and three five-barbed javelins; and each had in hand an ivory-hilted sword. This is the feat they perform with their swords: they throw them high up, and they throw the scabbards after them, and the swords, before reaching the ground, place themselves in the scabbards. Then they throw the scabbards first, and the swords after them, and the scabbards meet the swords and place themselves round them before they reach the ground. Liken thou that, O Fer rogain!"

"Easy for me to liken them! Mal son of Telband, and Munremar son of Gerrchenn, and Birderg son of Ruan. Three crown-princes, three champions of valour, three heroes the best behind weapons in Erin! A hundred heroes will fall by them in their first conflict, and they will share prowess with every man in the Hostel, and they will boast of the victory over a king or chief of the reavers, and

afterwards they will chance to escape. The Destruction should not be wrought even because of those three."

"Woe to him that shall wreak the Destruction!" says Lomna. "Better were the victory of saving them than the victory of slaying them! Happy he who should save them! Woe to him that shall slay them!"

"It is not feasible," says Ingcel, etc. "And afterwards whom sawest thou?"

The Room Of Conall Cernach

"There I beheld in a decorated room the fairest man of Erin's heroes. He wore a tufted purple cloak. White as snow was one of his cheeks, the other was red and speckled like foxglove. Blue as hyacinth was one of his eyes, dark as a stag-beetle's back was the other. The bushy head of fair golden hair upon him was as large as a reaping-basket, and it touches the edge of his haunches. It is as curly as a ram's head. If a sackful of red-shelled nuts were spilt on the crown of his head, not one of them would fall on the floor, but remain on the hooks and plaits and swordlets of their hair. A gold hilted sword in his hand; a blood-red shield which has been speckled with rivets of white bronze between plates of gold. A long, heavy, three-ridged spear: as thick as an outer yoke is the shaft that is in it. Liken thou that, O Fer rogain!"

"Easy for me to liken him, for the men of Erin know that scion. That is Conall Cernach, son of Amorgen. He has chanced to be along with Conaire at this time. 'Tis he whom Conaire loves beyond every one, because of his resemblance to him in goodness of form and shape. Goodly is the hero that is there, Conall Cernach! To that blood-red shield on his fist, which has been speckled with rivets of white bronze, the Ulaid have given a famous name, to wit, the Bricriu of Conall Cernach.

"I swear what my tribe swears, plenteous will be the rain of red blood over it to-night before the Hostel! That ridged spear above him, many will there be unto whom to-night, before the Hostel, it will deal drinks of death. Seven doorways there are out of the house, and Conall Cernach will contrive to be each of them, and from no doorway will he be absent. Three hundred will fall by Conall in his first conflict, besides a man for each (of his) weapons and one for himself. He will share prowess with every one in the Hostel, and when he shall happen to sally upon you from the house, as numerous as hailstones and grass on green and stars of heaven will be your half-heads and cloven skulls, and your bones under the point of his sword. He will succeed in escaping though wounded. Woe to him that shall wreak the Destruction, were it but for this man only!"

"Ye cannot," says Ingcel. "Clouds," etc.

"And after that whom sawest thou?"

The Room Of Conaire Himself

"There I beheld a room, more beautifully decorated than the other rooms of the house. A silvery curtain around it, and there were ornaments in the room. I beheld a trio in it. The outer two of them

were, both of them, fair, with their hair and eyelashes; and they are as bright as snow. A very lovely blush on the cheek of each of the twain. A tender lad in the midst between them. The ardour and energy of a king has he and the counsel of a sage. The mantle I saw around him is even as the mist of Mayday. Diverse are the hue and semblance each moment shewn upon it. Lovelier is each hue than the other. In front of him in the mantle I beheld a wheel of gold which reached from his chin to his navel. The colour of his hair was like the sheen of smelted gold. Of all the world's forms that I beheld, this is the most beautiful. I saw his golden-hilted glaive down beside him. A forearm's length of the sword was outside the scabbard. That forearm, a man down in the front of the house could see a fleshworm by the shadow of the sword! Sweeter is the melodious sounding of the sword than the melodious sound of the golden pipes that accompany music in the palace."

"Then," quoth Ingcel, "I said, gazing at him:

I see a high, stately prince, etc.

I see a famous king, etc.

I see his white prince's diadem, etc.

I see his two blue-bright cheeks, etc.

I see his high wheel . . . round his head . . . which is over his yellow - curly hair.

I see his mantle red, many-coloured, etc.

I see therein a huge brooch of gold, etc.

I see his beautiful linen frock . . . from ankle to kneecaps.

I see his sword golden-hilted, inlaid, in its scabbard of white silver, etc.

I see his shield bright, chalky, etc.

A tower of inlaid gold," etc.

Now the tender warrior was asleep, with his feet in the lap of one of the two men and his head in the lap of the other. Then he awoke out of his sleep, and arose, and chanted this lay:

"The howl of Ossar (Conaire's dog) . . . cry of warriors on the summit of Tol Geisse; a cold wind over edges perilous: a night to destroy a king is this night."

He slept again, and awoke thereout, and sang this rhetoric:

"The howl of Ossar . . . a battle he announced: enslavement of a people: sack of the Hostel: mournful are the champions: men wounded: wind of terror: hurling of javelins: trouble of unfair fight: wreck of houses: Tara waste: a foreign heritage: like is lamenting Conaire: destruction of

corn: feast of arms: cry of screams: destruction of Erin's king: chariots a-tottering: oppression of the king of Tara: lamentations will overcome laughter: Ossar's howl."

He said the third time:

"Trouble hath been shewn to me: a multitude of elves: a host supine; foes' prostration: a conflict of men on the Dodder6: oppression of Tara's king: in youth he was destroyed: lamentations will overcome laughter: Ossar's howl."[6]

"Liken thou, O Fer rogain, him who has sung that lay."

"Easy for me to liken him," says Fer rogain. No "conflict without a king" this. He is the most splendid and noble and beautiful and mighty king that has come into the whole world. He is the mildest and gentlest and most perfect king that has come to it, even Conaire son of Eterscel. 'Tis he that is overking of all Erin. There is no defect in that man, whether in form or shape or vesture: whether in size or fitness or proportion, whether in eye or hair of brightness, whether in wisdom or skill or eloquence, whether in weapon or dress or appearance, whether in splendour or abundance or dignity, whether in knowledge or valour or kindred.

"Great is the tenderness of the sleepy simple man till he has chanced on a deed of valour. But if his fury and his courage be awakened when the champions of Erin and Alba are at him in the house, the Destruction will not be wrought so long as he is therein. Six hundred will fall by Conaire before he shall attain his arms, and seven hundred will fall by him in his first conflict after attaining his arms. I swear to God what my tribe swears, unless drink be taken from him, though there be no one else in the house, but he alone, he would hold the Hostel until help would reach it which the man would prepare for him from the Wave of Clidna7 and the Wave of Assaroe8 while ye are at the Hostel.[7][8]

"Nine doors there are to the house, and at each door a hundred warriors will fall by his hand. And when every one in the house has ceased to ply his weapon, 'tis then he will resort to a deed of arms. And if he chance to come upon you out of the house, as numerous as hailstones and grass on a green will be your halves of heads and your cloven skulls and your bones under the edge of his sword.

"'Tis my opinion that he will not chance to get out of the house. Dear to him are the two that are with him in the room, his two fosterers, Dris and Snithe. Thrice fifty warriors will fall before each of them in front of the Hostel, and not farther than a foot from him, on this side and that, will they too fall."

"Woe to him who shall wreak the Destruction, were it only because of that pair and the prince that is between them, the over-king of Erin, Conaire son of Eterscel! Sad were the quenching of that reign!" says Lomna Druth, son of Donn Desa.

"Ye cannot," says Ingcel. "Clouds of weakness are coming to you," etc.

"Good cause hast thou, O Ingcel," says Lomna son of Donn Desa. "Not unto thee is the loss caused

by the Destruction: for thou wilt carry off the head of the king of another country, and thyself will escape. Howbeit 'tis hard for me, for I shall be the first to be slain at the Hostel."

"Alas for me!" says Ingcel, "peradventure I shall be the frailest corpse," etc.

"And whom sawest thou afterwards?"

The Room Of The Rearguards

"There I saw twelve men on silvery hurdles all around that room of the king. Light yellow hair was on them. Blue kilts they wore. Equally beautiful were they, equally hardy, equally shapely. An ivory-hilted sword in each man's hand, and they cast them not down; but it is the horse-rods in their hands that are all round the room. Liken thou that, O Fer rogain."

"Easy for me to say. The king of Tara's guardsmen are there. These are their names: three Londs of Liffey -plain: three Arts of Ath cliath (Dublin): three Buders of Buagnech: and three Trenfers of Cuilne. I swear what my tribe swears, that many will be the dead by them around the Hostel.

And they will escape from it although they are wounded. Woe to him who shall wreak the Destruction were it only because of that band! And afterwards whom sawest thou there?"

Le Fri Flaith Son Of Conaire, Whose Likeness This Is

"There I beheld a red-freckled boy in a purple cloak. He is always a wailing in the house. A stead wherein is the king of a cantred, whom each man takes from bosom to bosom.

"So he is with a blue silvery chair under his seat in the midst of the house, and he always a-wailing. Truly then, sad are his household listening to him! Three heads of hair on that boy, and these are the three; green hair and purple hair and all-golden hair. I know not whether they are many appearances which the hair receives, or whether they are three kinds of hair which are naturally upon him. But I know that evil is the thing he dreads to night. I beheld thrice fifty boys on silvern chairs around him, and there were fifteen bulrushes in the hand of that red-freckled boy, with a thorn at the end of each of the rushes. And we were fifteen men, and our fifteen right eyes were blinded by him, and he blinded one of the seven pupils which was in my head," saith Ingcel. "Hast thou his like, O Fer rogain?"

"Easy for me to liken him!" Fer rogain wept till he shed his tears of blood over his cheeks. "Alas for him!" quoth he. "This child is a 'scion of contention' for the men of Erin with the men of Alba for hospitality, and shape, and form and horsemanship. Sad is his slaughter! 'Tis a 'swine that goes before mast,' 'tis a babe in age! the best crown-prince that has ever come into Erin! The child of Conaire son of Eterscel, Le fri flaith is his name. Seven years there are in his age. It seems to me very likely that he is miserable because of the many appearances on his hair and the various hues that the hair assumes upon him. This is his special household, the thrice fifty lads that are around him."

"Woe," says Lomna, "to him that shall wreak the Destruction, were it only because of that boy!"

"Ye cannot," says Ingcel. "Clouds of weakness are coming on you, etc." "And after that whom sawest thou there?"

The Room Of The Cupbearers

"There I saw six men in front of the same room. Fair yellow manes upon them: green mantles about them: tin brooches at the opening of their mantles. Half-horses (centaurs) are they, like Conall Cernach. Each of them throws his mantle round another and is as swift as a millwheel. Thine eye can hardly follow them. Liken thou those, O Fer rogain!"

"This is easy for me. Those are the King of Tara's six cupbearers, namely Uan and Broen and Banna, Delt and Drucht and Dathen. That feat does not hinder them from their skinking, and it blunts not their intelligence thereat. Good are the warriors that are there! Thrice their number will fall by them. They will share prowess with any six in the Hostel, and they will escape from their foes, for they are out of the elfmounds. They are the best cupbearers in Erin. Woe to him that shall wreak the Destruction were it only because of them!"

"Ye cannot," says Ingcel. "Clouds, etc." "And after that, whom sawest thou there?"

The Room Of Tulchinne The Juggler

"There I beheld a great champion, in front of the same room, on the floor of the house. The shame of baldness is on him. White as mountain cotton grass is each hair that grows through his head. Earrings of gold around his ears. A mantle speckled, coloured, he wore. Nine swords in his hand, and nine silvern shields, and nine apples of gold. He throws each of them upwards, and none of them falls on the ground, and there is only one of them on his palm; each of them rising and falling past another is just like the movement to and fro of bees on a day of beauty. When he was swiftest, I beheld him at the feat, and as I looked, they uttered a cry about him and they were all on the house-floor. Then the Prince who is in the house said to the juggler: 'We have come together since thou wast a little boy, and till to-night thy juggling never failed thee.'

"'Alas, alas, fair master Conaire, good cause have I. A keen, angry eye looked at me: a man with the third of a pupil which sees the going of the nine bands. Not much to him is that keen, wrathful sight! Battles are fought with it,' saith he. 'It should be known till doomsday that there is evil in front of the Hostel.'

"Then he took the swords in his hand, and the silvern shields and the apples of gold; and again they uttered a cry and were all on the floor of the house. That amazed him, and he gave over his play and said:

'O Fer caille, arise! Do not . . . its slaughter. Sacrifice thy pig! Find out who is in front of the house to injure the men of the Hostel.'

'There,' said he, 'are Fer Cualngi, Fer le, Fer gar, Fer rogel, Fer rogain. They have announced a deed which is not feeble, the annihilation of Conaire by Donn Desa's five sons, by Conaire's five loving foster-brothers.'

"Liken thou that, O Fer rogain! Who has chanted that lay?"

"Easy for me to liken him," says Fer rogain. "Taulchinne the chief juggler of the King of Tara; he is Conaire's conjurer. A man of great might is that man. Thrice nine will fall by him in his first encounter, and he will share prowess with every one in the Hostel, and he will chance to escape therefrom though wounded. What then? Even on account of this man only the Destruction should not be wrought."

"Long live he who should spare him!" says Lomna Druth.

"Ye cannot," says Ingcel, etc.

The Room Of The Swineherds

"I beheld a trio in the front of the house: three dark crowntufts on them: three green frocks around them: three dark mantles over them: three forked . . . (?) above them on the side of the wall. Six black greaves they had on the mast. Who are yon, O Fer rogain?"

"Easy to say," answers Fer rogain: "the three swineherds of the king, Dub and Donn and Dorcha: three brothers are they, three sons of Mapher of Tara. Long live he who should protect them! woe to him who shall slay them! for greater would be the triumph of protecting them than the triumph of slaying them!"

"Ye cannot," says Ingcel, etc.

The Room Of The Principal Charioteers

"I beheld another trio in front of them: three plates of gold on their foreheads: three short aprons they wore, of grey linen embroidered with gold: three crimson capes about them: three goads of bronze in their hands. Liken thou that, O Fer rogain!"

"I know them," he answered. "Cul and Frecul and Forcul, the three charioteers of the King: three of the same age: three sons of Pole and Yoke. A man will perish by each of their weapons, and they will share the triumph of slaughter."

Part IV

The Room Of Cuscrad Son Of Conchobar

"I beheld another room. Therein were eight swordsmen, and among them a stripling. Black hair is on him, and very stammering speech has he. All the folk of the Hostel listen to his counsel. Handsomest of men he is: he wears a shirt and a bright-red mantle, with a brooch of silver therein."

"I know him," says Fer rogain: "'tis Cuscraid Menn of Armagh, Conchobar's son, who is in hostageship with the king. And his guards are those eight swordsmen around him, namely, two Flanns, two Cummains, two Aeds, two Crimthans. They will share prowess with every one in the Hostel, and they will chance to escape from it with their fosterling."

The Room Of The Under-Charioteers

"I beheld nine men: on the mast were they. Nine capes they wore, with a purple loop. A plate of gold on the head of each of them. Nine goads in their hands. Liken thou."

"I know those," quoth Fer rogain: "Riado, Riamcobur, Riade, Buadon, Buadchar, Buadgnad, Eirr, Ineirr, Argatlam - nine charioteers in apprenticeship with the three chief charioteers of the king. A man will perish at the hands of each of them," etc.

The Room Of The Englishmen

"On the northern side of the house I beheld nine men. Nine very yellow manes were on them. Nine linen frocks somewhat short were round them: nine purple plaids over them without brooches therein. Nine broad spears, nine red curved shields above them."

"We know them," quoth he. "Oswald and his two foster-brothers, Osbrit Longhand and his two foster-brothers, Lindas and his two foster-brothers. Three crown-princes of England who are with the king. That set will share victorious prowess," etc.

The Room Of The Equerries

"I beheld another trio. Three cropt heads of hair on them, three frocks they wore, and three mantles wrapt around them. A whip in the hand of each."

"I know those," quoth Fer rogain. "Echdruim, Echriud, Echruathar, the three horsemen of the king, that is, his three equerries. Three brothers are they, three sons of Argatron. Woe to him who shall wreak the Destruction, were it only because of that trio."

The Room Of The Judges

"I beheld another trio in the room by them. A handsome man who had got his baldness newly. By him were two young men with manes upon them. Three mixed plaids they wore. A pin of silver in the mantle of each of them. Three suits of armour above them on the wall. Liken thou that, O Fer rogain!"

"I know those," quoth he. "Fergus Ferde, Fergus Fordae and Domaine Mossud, those are the king's three judges. Woe to him who shall wreak the Destruction were it only because of that trio! A man will perish by each of them."

The Room Of The Harpers

"To the east of them I beheld another ennead. Nine branchy, curly manes upon them. Nine grey, floating mantles about them: nine pins of gold in their mantles. Nine rings of crystal round their arms. A thumb-ring of gold round each man's thumb: an ear-tie of gold round each man's ear: a torque of silver round each man's throat. Nine bags with golden faces above them on the wall. Nine rods of white silver in their hands. Liken thou them."

"I know those," quoth Fer rogain. "They are the king's nine harpers, with their nine harps above them: Side and Dide, Dulothe and Deichrinne, Caumul and Cellgen, Ol and Olene and Olchoi. A man will perish by each of them."

The Room Of The Conjurers

"I saw another trio on the dais. Three bedgowns girt around them. Four cornered shields in their hands, with bosses of gold upon them. Apples of silver they had, and small inlaid spears."

"I know them," says Fer rogain. "Cless and Clissine and Clessamun, the king's three conjurers. Three of the same age are they: three brothers, three sons of Naffer Rochless. A man will perish by each of them."

The Room Of The Three Lampooners

"I beheld another trio hard by the room of the King himself. Three blue mantles around them, and three bedgowns with red insertion over them. Their arms had been hung above them on the wall."

"I know those," quoth he. "Dris and Draigen and Aittit ('Thorn and Bramble and Furze'), the king's three lampooners, three sons of Sciath foilt. A man will perish by each of their weapons."

The Room Of The Badbs

"I beheld a trio, naked, on the roof-tree of the house: their jets of blood coming through them, and the ropes of their slaughter on their necks."

"Those I know," saith he, three . . . of awful boding. Those are the three that are slaughtered at every time."

The Room Of The Kitcheners

"I beheld a trio cooking, in short inlaid aprons: a fair grey man, and two youths in his company."

"I know those," quoth Fer rogain: "they are the King's three chief kitcheners, namely, the Dagdae and his two fosterlings, Seig and Segdae, the two sons of Rofer Singlespit. A man will perish by each of them," etc.

"I beheld another trio there. Three plates of gold over their heads. Three speckled mantles about them: three linen shirts with red insertion: three golden brooches in their mantles: three wooden darts above them on the wall."

"Those I know," says Fer rogain: "the three poets of that king: Sui and Rodui and Fordui: three of the same age, three brothers: three sons of Maphar of the Mighty Song. A man will perish for each of them, and every pair will keep between them one man's victory. Woe to him who shall wreak the Destruction! etc.

The Room Of The Servant-Guards

"There I beheld two warriors standing over the king. Two curved shields they had, and two great pointed swords. Red kilts they wore, and in the mantles pins of white silver."

"Bole and Root are those," quoth he, "the king's two guards, two sons of Maffer Toll."

The Room Of The King's Guardsmen

"I beheld nine men in a room there in front of the same room, Fair yellow manes upon them: short aprons they wore and spotted capes: they carried smiting shields. An ivory-hilted sword in the hand of each of them, and whoever enters the house they essay to smite him with the swords. No one dares to go to the room of the King without their consent. Liken thou that, O Fer rogain!"

"Easy for me is that. Three Mochmatnechs of Meath, three Buageltachs of Bregia, three Sostachs of Sliab Fuait, the nine guardsmen of that King. Nine decades will fall by them in their first conflict, etc. Woe to him that shall wreak the Destruction because of them only!"

"Ye cannot," says Ingcel. "Clouds of weakness," etc. "And whom sawest thou then?"

The Room Of Nia And Bruthne, Conaire's Two Waiters

"There I beheld another room, and a pair was in it, and they are 'oxtubs,' stout and thick. Aprons they wore, and the men were dark and brown. They had short back-hair on them, but high upon their foreheads. They are as swift as a waterwheel, each of them past another, one of them to the King's room, the other to the fire. Liken thou those, O Fer rogain!"

"Easy to me. They are Nia and Bruthne, Conaire's two table-servants. They are the pair that is best in Erin for their lord's advantage. What causes brownness to them and height to their hair is their

frequent haunting of the fire. In the world is no pair better in their art than they. Thrice nine men will fall by them in their first encounter, and they will share prowess with every one, and they will chance to escape. And after that whom sawest thou?"

The Room Of Sencha, Dubthach And Gobniu Son Of Lurgnech

"I beheld the room that is next to Conaire. Three chief champions, in their first greyness, are therein. As thick as a man's waist is each of their limbs. They have three black swords, each as long as a weaver's beam. These swords would split a hair on water. A great lance in the hand of the midmost man, with fifty rivets through it. The shaft therein is a good load for the yoke of a plough-team. The midmost man brandishes that lance so that its edge-studs hardly stay therein, and he strikes the half thrice against his palm. There is a great boiler in front of them, as big as a calf's caldron, wherein is a black and horrible liquid. Moreover he plunges the lance into that black fluid. If its quenching be delayed it flames on its shaft and then thou wouldst suppose that there is a fiery dragon in the top of the house. Liken thou, that, O Fer rogain!"

"Easy to say. Three heroes who are best at grasping weapons in Erin, namely, Sencha the beautiful son of Ailill, and Dubthach Chafer of Ulaid, and Goibnenn son of Lurgnech. And the Luin of Celtchar son of Uthider which was found in the battle of Mag Tured, this is in the hand of Dubthach Chafer of Ulaid. That feat is usual for it when it is ripe to pour forth of foeman's blood. A caldron full of poison is needed to quench it when a deed of man slaying is expected. Unless this come to the lance, it flames on its haft and will go through its bearer or the master of the palace wherein it is. If it be a blow that is to be given thereby it will kill a man at every blow, when it is at that feat, from one hour to another, though it may not reach him. And if it be a cast, it will kill nine men at every cast, and one of the nine will be a king or crown-prince or chieftain of the reavers.

"I swear what my tribe swears, there will be a multitude unto whom tonight the Luin of Celtchar will deal drinks of death in front of the Hostel. I swear to God what my tribe swears that, in their first encounter, three hundred will fall by that trio, and they will share prowess with every three in the Hostel tonight. And they will boast of victory over a king or chief of the reavers, and the three will chance to escape."

"Woe," says Lomna Druth, "to him who shall wreak the Destruction, were it only because of that trio!"

"Ye cannot," says Ingcel, etc. "And after that, whom sawest thou there?"

The Room Of The Three Manx Giants

"There I beheld a room with a trio in it. Three men mighty, manly, overbearing, which see no one abiding at their three hideous crooked aspects. A fearful view because of the terror of them. A . . . dress of rough hair covers them . . . of cow's hair, without garments enwrapping down to the right heels. With three manes, equine, awful, majestic, down to their sides. Fierce heroes who wield against foeman hard-smiting swords. A blow, they give with three iron flails having seven chains triple-twisted, three-edged, with seven iron knobs at the end of every chain: each of them as heavy as an ingot of ten smeltings. Three big brown men. Dark equine backmanes on them, which reach

their two heels. Two good thirds of an oxhide in the girdle round each one's waist, and each quadrangular clasp that closes it as thick as a man's thigh. The raiment that is round them is the dress that grows through them. Tresses of their back-manes were spread, and a long staff of iron, as long and thick as an outer yoke was in each man's hand, and an iron chain out of the end of every club, and at the end of every chain an iron pestle as long and thick as a middle yoke. They stand in their sadness in the house, and enough is the horror of their aspect. There is no one in the house that would not be avoiding them. Liken thou that, O Fer rogain!"

Fer rogain was silent. "Hard for me to liken them. I know none such of the world's men unless they be yon trio of giants to whom Cuchulainn gave quarter at the beleaguerment of the Men of Falga, and when they were getting quarter they killed fifty warriors. But Cuchulainn would not let them be slain, because of their wondrousness. These are the names of the three: Srubdaire son of Dordbruige, and Conchenn of Cenn maige, and Fiad sceme son of Scipe. Conaire bought them from Cuchulainn for . . . so they are along with him. Three hundred will fall by them in their first encounter, and they will surpass in prowess every three in the Hostel; and if they come forth upon you, the fragments of you will be fit to go through the sieve of a corn-kiln, from the way in which they will destroy you with the flails of iron. Woe to him that shall wreak the Destruction, though it were only on account of those three! For to combat against them is not a 'paean round a sluggard.'"

"Ye cannot," says Ingcel. "Clouds of weakness are coming to you," etc. "And after that, whom sawest thou there?"

The Room Of Da Derga

"There I beheld another room, with one man therein and in front of him two servants with two manes upon them, one of the two dark, the other fair. Red hair on the warrior, and red eyebrows. Two ruddy cheeks he had, and an eye very blue and beautiful. He wore a green cloak and a shirt with a white hood and a red insertion. In his hand was a sword with a hilt of ivory, and he supplies attendance of every room in the house with ale and food, and he is quick-footed in serving the whole host. Liken thou that, O Fer rogain!"

"I know those men. That one is Da Derga. 'Tis by him that the Hostel was built, and since it was built its doors have never been shut save on the side to which the wind comes - the valve is closed against it - and since he began housekeeping his caldron was never taken from the fire, but it has been boiling food for the men of Erin. The pair before him, those two youths, are his fosterlings, two sons of the king of Leinster, namely Muredach and Corpre. Three decads will fall by that trio in front of their house and they will boast of victory over a king or a chief of the reavers. After this they will chance to escape from it."

"Long live he who should protect them!" says Lomna. "Better were triumph of saving them than triumph of slaying them! They should be spared were it only on account of that man. 'Twere meet to give that man quarter," says Lomna Druth.

"Ye cannot," says Ingcel. "Clouds," etc. "And after that whom sawest thou there?"

The Room Of The Three Champions From The Elfmounds

"There I beheld a room with a trio in it. Three red mantles they wore, and three red shirts, and three red heads of hair were on them. Red were they all together with their teeth. Three red shields above them. Three red spears in their hands. Three red horses in their bridles in front of the Hostel. Liken thou that, O Fer rogain!"

"Easily done. Three champions who wrought falsehood in the elfmounds. This is the punishment inflicted upon them by the king of the elfmounds, to be destroyed thrice by the King of Tara. Conaire son of Eterscel is the last king by whom they are destroyed. Those men will escape from you. To fulfil their own destruction, they have come. But they will not be slain, nor will they slay anyone. And after that whom sawest thou?"

The Room Of The Doorwards

"There I beheld a trio in the midst of the house at the door. Three holed maces in their hands. Swift as a hare was each of them round the other towards the door. Aprons were on them, and they had gray and speckled mantles. Liken thou that, O Fer rogain!"

"Easily done: Three doorwardens of Tara's King are those, namely Echur ('Key') and Tochur and Tecmang, three sons of Ersa ('Doorpost') and Comla ('Valve'). Thrice their number will fall by them, and they will share a man's triumph among them. They will chance to escape though wounded."

"Woe to him that shall wreak!" etc., says Lomna Druth.

"Ye cannot," says Ingcel, etc. "And after that whom sawest thou?"

The Room Of Fer Caille

"There I beheld at the fire in front a man with black cropt hair, having only one eye and one foot and one hand, having on the fire a pig bald, black singed, squealing continually, and in his company a great big-mouthed woman. Liken thou that, O Fer rogain!"

"Easily done: Fer caille with his pig and his wife Cichuil. They (the wife and the pig) are his proper instruments on the night that ye destroy Conaire King of Erin. Alas for the guest who will run between them! Fer caille with his pig is one of Conaire's tabus."

"Woe to him who shall wreak the Destruction!" says Lomna.

"Ye cannot," quoth Ingcel. "And after that, whom sawest thou there?"

The Room Of The Three Sons Of Baithis Of Britain

"There I beheld a room with three enneads in it. Fair yellow manes upon them, and they are equally beautiful. Each of them wore a black cape, and there was a white hood on each mantle, a red tuft on each hood, and an iron brooch at the opening of every mantle, and under each man's

cloak a huge black sword, and the swords would split a hair on water. They bore shields with scalloped edges. Liken thou them, O Fer rogain!"

"Easily done. That is the robber-band of the three sons of Baithis of Britain. Three enneads will fall by them in their first conflict, and among them they will share a man's triumph. And after that whom sawest thou?"

The Room Of The Mimes

"There I beheld a trio of jesters hard by the fire. Three dun mantles they wore. If the men of Erin were in one place, even though the corpse of his mother or his father were in front of each, not one could refrain from laughing at them. Wheresoever the king of a cantred is in the house, not one of them attains his seat on his bed because of that trio of jesters. Whenever the king's eye visits them it smiles at every glance. Liken thou that, O Fer rogain!"

"Easily done. Mael and Mlithe and Admlithe - those are the king of Erin's three jesters. By each of them a man will perish, and among them they will share a man's triumph."

"Woe to him that will wreak the Destruction!" says Lomna, etc. "And after that whom sawest thou there?"

The Room Of The Cupbearers

"There I beheld a room with a trio in it. Three grey-floating mantles they wore. There was a cup of water in front of each man, and on each cup a bunch of watercress. Liken thou that, O Fer rogain!"

"Easily done. Black and Dun and Dark: they are the King of Tara's three cupbearers, to wit, the sons of Day and Night. And after that, whom sawest thou there?"

The Room Of Nar The Squinter-With-The-Left-Eye

"There I beheld a one-eyed man asquint with a ruinous eye. A swine's head he had on the fire, continually squealing. Liken thou that, O Fer rogain!"

"Easy for me to name the like. He is Nar the Squinter with the left eye, the swineherd of Bodb of the Elfmound on Femen, 'tis he that is over the cooking. Blood hath been split at every feast at which he has ever been present."

"Rise up, then ye champions!" says Ingcel," and get you on to the house!"

With that the reavers march to the Hostel, and made a murmur about it.

"Silence a while!" says Conaire, "what is this?"

"Champions at the house," says Conall Cernach.

There are warriors for them here," answers Conaire.

"They will be needed tonight," Conall Cernach rejoins.

Then went Lomna Druth before the host of reavers into the Hostel. The doorkeepers struck off his head. Then the head was thrice flung into the Hostel, and thrice cast out of it, as he himself had foretold.

Then Conaire himself sallies out of the Hostel together with some of his people, and they fight a combat with the host of reavers, and six hundred fell by Conaire before he could get to his arms. Then the Hostel is thrice set on fire, and thrice put out from thence: and it was granted that the Destruction would never have been wrought had not work of weapons been taken from Conaire.

Thereafter Conaire went to seek his arms, and he dons his battledress, and falls to plying his weapons on the reavers, together with the band that he had. Then, after getting his arms, six hundred fell by him in his first encounter.

After this the reavers were routed. "I have told you," says Fer rogain son of Donn Desa, "that if the champions of the men of Erin and Alba attack Conaire at the house, the Destruction will not be wrought unless Conaire's fury and valour be quelled."

"Short will his time be," say the wizards along with the reavers. This was the quelling they brought, a scantness of drink that seized him.

Thereafter Conaire entered the house, and asked for a drink.

"A drink to me, O master Mac cecht!" says Conaire.

Says Mac cecht: "This is not the order that I have hitherto had from thee, to give thee a drink. There are spencers and cupbearers who bring drink to thee. The order I have hitherto had from thee is to protect thee when the champions of the men of Erin and Alba may be attacking thee around the Hostel. Thou wilt go safe from them, and no spear shall enter thy body. Ask a drink of thy spencers and thy cupbearers."

Then Conaire asked a drink of his spencers and his cupbearers who were in the house.

In the first place there is none," they say; "all the liquids that had been in the house have been spilt on the fires."

The cupbears found no drink for him in the Dodder (a river), and the Dodder had flowed through the house.

Then Conaire again asked for a drink. "A drink to me, O fosterer, O Mac cecht! 'Tis equal to me what death I shall go to, for anyhow I shall perish."

Then Mac cecht gave a choice to the champions of valour of the men of Erin who were in the

house, whether they cared to protect the King or to seek a drink for him.

Conall Cernach answered this in the house - and cruel he deemed the contention, and afterwards he had always a feud with Mac cecht. - "Leave the defense of the King to us," says Conall, "and go thou to seek the drink, for of thee it is demanded."

So then Mac cecht fared forth to seek the drink, and he took, Conaire's son, Le fri flaith, under his armpit, and Conaire's golden cup, in which an ox with a bacon-pig would be boiled; and he bore his shield and his two spears and his sword, and he carried the caldron-spit, a spit of iron.

He burst forth upon them, and in front of the Hostel he dealt nine blows of the iron spit, and at every blow nine reavers fell. Then he makes a sloping feat of the shield and an edge-feat of the sword about his head, and he delivered a hostile attack upon them. Six hundred fell in his first encounter, and after cutting down hundreds he goes through the band outside.

The doings of the folk of the Hostel, this is what is here examined presently.

Conall Cernach arises, and takes his weapons, and wends over the door of the Hostel, and goes round the house. Three hundred fell by him, and he hurls back the reavers over three ridges out from the Hostel, and boasts of triumph over a king, and returns, wounded, into the Hostel.

Cormac Condlongas sallies out, and his nine comrades with him, and they deliver their onsets on the reavers. Nine enneads fall by Cormac and nine enneads by his people, and a man for each weapon and a man for each man. And Cormac boasts of the death of a chief of the reavers. They succeed in escaping though they be wounded.

The trio of Picts sally forth from the Hostel, and take to plying their weapons on the reavers. And nine enneads fall by them, and they chance to escape though they be wounded.

The nine pipers sally forth and dash their warlike work on the reavers; and then they succeed in escaping.

Howbeit then, but it is long to relate, 'tis weariness of mind, 'tis confusion of the senses, 'tis tediousness to hearers, 'tis superfluity of narration to go over the same things twice. But the folk of the Hostel came forth in order, and fought their combats with the reavers, and fell by them, as Fer rogain and Lomna Druth had said to Ingce'l, to wit, that the folk of every room would sally forth still and deliver their combat, and after that escape. So that none were left in the Hostel in Conaire's company save Conall and Sencha and Dubthach.

Now from the vehement ardour and the greatness of the contest which Conaire had fought, his great drouth of thirst attacked him, and he perished of a consuming fever, for he got not his drink, So when the king died those three sally out of the Hostel, and deliver a wily stroke of reaving on the reavers, and fare forth from the Hostel, wounded, to broken and maimed.

Touching Mac cecht, however, he went his way till he reached the Well of Casair, which was near him in Crich Cualann; but of water he found not therein the full of his cup, that is, Conaire's golden

cup which he had brought in his hand. Before morning he had gone round the chief rivers of Erin, to wit Bush, Boyne, Bann, Barrow, Neim, Luae, Laigdae, Shannon, Suir, Sligo, Samair, Find, Ruirthech, Slaney, and in them he found not the full of his cup of water.

Then before morning he had travelled to the chief lakes of Erin, to wit, Lough Derg, Loch Luimnig, Lough Foyle, Lough Mask, Lough Corrib, Loch Laig, Loch Cuan, Lough Neagh, Morloch, and of water he found not therein the full of his cup.

He went his way till he reached Uaran Garad on Magh Ai. It could not hide itself from him: so he brought thereout the full of his cup, and the boy fell under his covering.

After this he went on and reached Da Derga's Hostel before morning.

When Mac cecht went across the third ridge towards the house, 'tis there were twain striking off Conaire's head. The Mac cecht strikes off the head of one of the two men who were beheading Conaire. The other man then was fleeing forth with the king's head. A pillar-stone chanced to be under Mac cecht's feet on the floor of the Hostel. He hurls it at the man who had Conaire's head and drove it through his spine, so that his back broke. After this Mac cecht beheads him. Mac cecht then split the cup of water into Conaire's gullet and neck. Then said Conaire's head, after the water had been put into its neck and gullet:

"A good man Mac cecht! an excellent man Mac cecht! A good warrior without, good within, He gives a drink, he saves a king, he doth a deed. Well he ended the champions I found. He sent a flagstone on the warriors. Well he hewed by the door of the Hostel. . .Fer le, So that a spear is against one hip. Good should I be to far-renowned Mac cecht If I were alive. A good man!"

After this Mac cecht followed the routed foe.

'Tis this that some books relate, that but a very few fell around Conaire, namely, nine only. And hardly a fugitive escaped to tell the tidings to the champions who had been at the house.

Where there had been five thousand - and in every thousand ten hundred only one set of five escaped, namely Ingcel, and his two brothers Echell and Tulchinne, the "Yearling of the Reavers" - three great grandsons of Conmac, and the two Reds of Roiriu who had been the first to wound Conaire.

Thereafter Ingcel went into Alba, and received the kingship after his father, since he had taken home triumph over a king of another country.

This, however, is the recension in other books, and it is more probably truer. Of the folk of the Hostel forty or fifty fell, and of the reavers three fourths and one fourth of them only escaped from the Destruction.

Now when Mac cecht was lying wounded on the battlefield, at the end of the third day, he saw a woman passing by.

"Come hither, O woman!" says Mac cecht.

"I dare not go thus," says the woman, "for horror and fear of thee."

"There was a time when I had this, O woman, even horror and fear of me on some one. But now thou shouldst fear nothing. I accept thee on the truth of my honour and my safeguard."

Then the woman goes to him.

"I know not," says he, "whether it is a fly or a gnat, or an ant that nips me in the wound."

It happened that it was a hairy wolf that was there, as far as its two shoulders in the wound!

The woman seized it by the tail, and dragged it out of the wound, and it takes the full of its jaws out of him.

"Truly," says the woman, "this is 'an ant of ancient land.'"

Says Mac cecht "I swear to God what my people swears, I deemed it no bigger than a fly, or a gnat, or an ant."

And Mac cecht took the wolf by the throat, and struck it a blow on the forehead, and killed it with a single blow.

Then Le' fri flaith, son of Conaire, died under Mac cecht's armpit, for the warrior's heat and sweat had dissolved him.

Thereafter Mac cecht, having cleansed the slaughter, at the end of the third day, set forth, and he dragged Conaire with him on his back, and buried him at Tara, as some say. Then Mac cecht departed into Connaught, to his own country, that he might work his cure in Mag Brengair. Wherefore the name clave to the plain from Mac cecht's misery, that is, Mag Bren-guir.

Now Conall Cernach escaped from the Hostel, and thrice fifty spears had gone through the arm which upheld his shield. He fared forth till he reached his father's house, with half his shield in his hand, and his sword, and the fragments of his two spears. Then he found his father before his garth in Taltiu.

"Swift are the wolves that have hunted thee, my son," saith his father.

"'Tis this that has wounded us, thou old hero, an evil conflict with warriors," Conall Cernach replied.

"Hast thou then news of Da Derga's Hostel?" asked Amorgin. "Is thy lord alive?"

"He is not alive," says Conall.

"I swear to God what the great tribes of Ulaid swear, it is cowardly for the man who went thereout

alive, having left his lord with his foes in death."

"My wounds are not white, thou old hero," says Conall.

He shews him his shield-arm, whereon were thrice fifty wounds: this is what was inflicted upon it. The shield that guarded it is what saved it. But the right arm had been played upon, as far as two thirds thereof, since the shield had not been guarding it. That arm was mangled and maimed and wounded and pierced, save that the sinews kept it to the body without separation.

"That arm fought tonight, may son," says Amorgein.

"True is that, thou old hero," says Conall Cernach. "Many there are unto whom it gave drinks of death tonight in front of the Hostel."

Now as to the reavers, every one of them that escaped from the Hostel went to the cairn which they had built on the night before last, and they brought thereout a stone for each man not mortally wounded. So this is what they lost by death at the Hostel, a man for every stone that is (now) in Carn Lecca.

It endeth: Amen: it endeth.[9]

footnotes

- Quelle:Epic and Saga. New York, P. F. Collier & son [c1910], Harvard Classics no. 49
- i.e., twenty-one cows.
- This passage indicates the existence in Ireland of totems, and of the rule that the person to whom a totem belongs must not kill the totem-animal. - W.S.
- The mouth of the river Boyne. - W.S.
- Mouths of rivers.
- A small river near Dublin, which is said to have passed through the Bruden. - W. S.
- In the bay of Glandore, co. Cork. - W. S.
- At Ballyshannon, co. Donegal. - W. S.
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