

Birth of Aedh Sláine

[1]Tara of the Kings: she it was that to all kings successively ruling Ireland was a peculiar appanage; and it was a universal thing for them that thither all Ireland's charges, and dues prescribed, and rents, must be brought in to them. With the men of Ireland too it was general that out of all airts they should resort to Tara in order to the holding of Tara's Feast at samhaintide. For these were the two principal gatherings that they had: Tara's Feast at every samhain (that being the heathens' Easter); and at each lughnasa, or 'Lammas-tide,' the Convention of Tailhte. All precepts and all enactments which in either of these festivals were ordained by the men of Ireland, during the whole space of that year none might infringe. In Tailhte then once upon a time the Gael had an extraordinary great convention, he that at such epoch was king of Ireland being Dermot son of Fergus Cerrbeol. The men of Ireland were disposed along the benches of the assembly-ground: all of them according to precedence of ranks, of calling, of legitimate claim and, in fact, after the fashion of hitherto use and wont.

Now the women, with the king's two wives, had a sitting-place apart; the queens that on this occasion kept Dermot company being Mairenn (surnamed mael i.e. 'bald') and Mughain, daughter of Conchraid son of Duach (of the men of Munster). Mughain bore Mairenn a great jealousy, and to a certain female jester she said that she would give her her own award [i.e. told her to name her own price] if from the other queen's head she would remove her headgear of gold; for the manner of Mairenn was that she lacked all hair, so that a queen's head-dress it was which habitually concealed her defect. The jestress came to Mairenn therefore, and began to importune her for some boon or other. The queen averred that she had it not to give. "Thou shalt have this at any rate," said the other as from the queen's head she tore her casque of gold. Mairenn cried: "God and S. Kieran help me at this need!" nor had an individual in the crowd so much as well turned his eyes on her there, when down to her very shoulders fell the flossy, convoluted, golden-sheeny hair which through Kieran's power grew on her. The whole host are astounded at the miracle, and well pleased that the queen is not put to shame. "God I invoke," cried Mairenn, "that for this thing thou be disgraced in presence of the men of Ireland!" which came true.

After this Dermot frequented Mugain still, but she was barren; whereby she was unhappy, for the king meditated to abandon her utterly. The other wives also that the king had were a grief to her, that they bore children: Eithne in especial, daughter of Brenann Dall of the conmaicne cúile talad and mother of Colman Mór; and Breo, daughter of Colman mac Neman from dún Suane, mother of Colman Beg. So Mugain was sad for this: for her being without either son or daughter, and the king purposing to dismiss her.

Finnian of magh bile [angl. 'Moville'], and bishop Aedh son of Bri, arrived in Bregia. The queen came to visit them, and began to implore the clerics that they would succour her. Finnian and bishop Aedh blessed water, gave it to her to drink, and she became pregnant; but what she eventually produced from this promise was a lamb. She cried: "woe is me that I should have borne a four-footed thing, after which I shall never be acceptable to any!" "Not that it is which shall come

to pass," said Finnian: "but such a thing, a similitude namely of the sinless Lamb that was offered up for the human race, shall to thy womb be for a consecration."

Again the cleric blessed water for her, and she conceived of it; then bore a silvern salmon. "Woe is me for this!" she said: "for all thou doest in my behalf I am but the worse off, cleric, seeing that with the men of Ireland these two births will become matter of common notoriety; from all which no good awaits me." "Not that it is which shall take place," said the cleric: "but the silvern salmon I will take, and by me a use will be made of him ;[2] in virtue of him too [lit. 'on the head of him'] thou shalt bring forth a son, and in addition bear brothers to him; but from him shall kings of Ireland spring in number more than from the others." Mughain answered: "I am well pleased, if that thou sayest be but fulfilled to me!" "Fulfilled it shall be," quoth the cleric.

Then Finnian and bishop Aedh pronounced a benediction upon the queen and on the seed to emanate from her; he [i.e. one of them] put water into his cup and gave it to the queen, who both drank of it and washed in it. By this process she found herself with child and, this time, had a son: who was Aedh: Sláine. A good offspring in sooth was that which was born then: Aedh Sláine. Good are his clan too in Bregia: good in respect of profuseness, of renown, of honour; of hardihood, of lifting tribute, of holding the upper hand; of rectitude, of heroic practice, of brilliancy; of dealing with church orders, of exercising hospitallers' functions, of compassionateness; of ethics, of sagacity, of pride; of fame, of affection, of cordiality; of form, of good sense, of intelligent apprehension; of nobility, of excellence, of splendour. For 'a golden wand laid across a plate of white bronze, that is what the seed of Aedh Sláine are athwart Bregia's plain; and all opulence whatsoever, every grandly ordered household, 'tis with that of Aedh Sláine that men compare it.

To commemorate which transactions, and to store them in all - men's memory, it was that the sennachie, Flann of the Monastery namely, sang this:

"Mughain, daughter of Duach's son gentle Conchraid out of Desmond: she-wife of Dermot son of Cerbhall-without intermission plied large-handed generosity. . .

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- Quelle: Silva Gadelica. ed. and trans. Standish Hayes O'Grady. 1892. reprint: NY: C. Lemma Publishing Corporation, 1970.

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The only additional detail furnished by the concluding lay of fourteen quatrains is that of this silver salmon Finnian had a reliquary and other sacred objects made.

Revision #1

Created 11 June 2026 14:47:37 by Admin

Updated 11 June 2026 14:47:37 by Admin