

Chapter I

Here beginneth the Feast of Bricriu, and the Champion's Portion of Emain, and the Ulster Women's War-of-Words, and the Hosting of the Men of Ulster to Cruachan, and the Champion's Wager in Emain.

Chapter I

§ 1. Bricriu of the Evil Tongue held a great feast for Conchobar mac Nessa and for all the Ultonians. The preparation of the feast took a whole year. For the entertainment of the guests a spacious house was built by him. He erected it in Dun Rudraige after the likeness [of the palace] of the Red Branch in Emain. Yet it surpassed the buildings of that period entirely for material and for artistic design, for beauty of architecture—its pillars and frontings splendid and costly, its carving and lintel-work famed for magnificence.

§ 2. The House was made on this wise: on the plan of Tara's Mead-Hall, having nine compartments from fire to wall, each fronting of bronze thirty feet high, overlaid with gold. In the fore part of the palace a royal couch was erected for Conchobar high above those of the whole house. It was set with carbuncles and other precious stones which shone with a lustre of gold and of silver, radiant with every hue, making night like unto day. Around it were placed the twelve couches of the twelve heroes of Ulster. The nature of the workmanship was on a par with the material of the edifice. It took a waggon team to carry each beam, and the strength of seven Ulster men to fix each pole, while thirty of the chief artificers of Erin were employed on its erection and arrangement.

§ 3. Then a balcony^[1] was made by Bricriu on a level with the couch of Conchobar [and as high as those] of the heroes of valour. The decorations of its fittings were magnificent. Windows of glass were placed on each side of it, and one of these was above Bricriu's couch, so that he could view the hall from his seat, as he knew the Ulster men would not suffer him within.

§ 4. When Bricriu had finished building the hall and balcony, supplying it both with quilts and blankets, beds and pillows, providing meat and drink, so that nothing was lacking, neither furnishings nor food, he straightway went to Emain to meet Conchobar and the nobles of Ulster.

§ 5. It fell upon a day there was in Emain a gathering of the Ulster men. He was anon made welcome, and was seated by the shoulder of Conchobar. Bricriu addressed himself to him as well as to the body of the Ulster men. "Come with me," quoth Bricriu, "to partake of a banquet with me." "Gladly," rejoined Conchobar, "if that please the men of

Ulster." Fergus mac Rôig and the nobles of Ulster also made answer: "No; for if we go our dead will outnumber our living, when Bricriu has incensed us against each other."

§ 6. "If ye come not, worse shall ye fare," quoth Bricriu. "What then," asked Conchobar, "if the Ulster men go not with thee?" "I will stir up strife," quoth Bricriu, "between the kings, the leaders, the heroes of valour, and the yeomen, till they slay one another, man for man, if they do not come with me to share my feast." "That we shall not do to please thee," quoth Conchobar. "I will stir up enmity between father and son so that it will come to mutual slaughter. If I do not succeed in doing so, I will make a quarrel between mother and daughter. If that does not succeed, I will set each of the Ulster women at variance, so that they come to deadly blows till their breasts become loathsome and putrid." "Sure 'tis better to come," quoth Fergus. "Do ye straightway take counsel with the chief Ultonians," said Sencha, son of Ailill. "Unless we take counsel against this Bricriu, mischief will be the consequence," quoth Conchobar.

§ 7. Thereupon all the Ulster nobles assembled in council. In discussing the matter Sencha counselled them thus: "Take hostages from Bricriu, since ye have to go with him, and set eight swordsmen about him so as to compel him to retire from the house as soon as he has laid out the feast." Furbaide Ferbenn, son of Conchobar, brought Bricriu reply, and showed him the whole matter. "It is happily arranged," quoth Bricriu. The men of Ulster straightway set out from Emain, host, battalion and company, under king, chieftain and leader. Excellent and admirable the march of the brave and valiant heroes to the palace.

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