

Chapter XII.

§ 66. “Go to the abode of my foster-father and to that of my stepmother,” quoth Mève—viz., Ercol and Garmna—“and there put up as guests to-night.” They kept on their way, and after running a race at the Cruachan Gathering, thrice did Cuchulainn win the victory of the games. They then went to the abode of Garmna and of Ercol, who bade them welcome. “For what are ye come?” asked Ercol. “To be adjudged by thee,” they quoth. “Go to the abode of Samera; he will adjudge ye.” They went accordingly and guides were sent with them. They were welcomed by Samera, whose daughter Buan fell in love with Cuchulainn. They told Samera it was in order to be judged they had come to him. Samera despatched them as they were (lit. in their order) to the Amazons of the Glen.

§ 67. Loigaire went first, but left his accoutrements (arms) and clothing with them.^[17]

Conall also went, and left his spears with them, but took his chief weapon, to wit, his sword, away with him. On the third night Cuchulainn went. The Amazons shrieked at him. He and they fought each other till his spear was splintered, his shield broken, his raiment torn off. The Amazons were beating and overpowering him. “O Cuchulainn,” said Loig, “you sorry coward, you squinting savage! gone are your valour and your bravery when it is sprites that beat you.” Then Cuchulainn was enraged at the sprites. He turned back upon the Horrors, and cut and gashed them till the glen was filled with their blood. He brought off his company’s brave banner with him and turned back in triumph to the seat of Samera, the place where his companions were.

§ 68. Samera bade him welcome; ’twas then he made speech:—

“Not right to share the champion’s fare of the cooking pit,

Fatted kine, well-fed swine, honey and bread;

Through ladies’ cunning take not his share

From Culann’s Hound, of name and fame.

Cleaver of shields, raven of prey,

That bravery wields, eager for fray—boar of battle.

As wood takes fire, strikes his ire Emain’s foes;

Of victory-loving women belov’d—plague of death.

A judge in deeming, not in seeming, eye flashing far—

Hostile ports where ships resort his tributes know;

His chariot rides the mountain-side,

Pride of his clan, he leads the van, an eagle of war.

Why to Loigaire, lion of fences, liken him?

Why unto Conall, rider of fame?

Why should not Emer, of mantle shining—it is our pleasure through
grace divining—

Of Ultonian ladies high-born and all, enter first the merry Mead-Hall.
Cuchulainn's share, well I wot,
It is not just [elsewhere] to allot.

"My verdict to ye then: the Champion's Portion to Cuchulainn, and to
his wife the precedence of the ladies of Ultonia—Cuchulainn's valour to
rank above that of every one else, Conchobar's excepted."

§ 69. After that they went to the abode of Ercol, who bade them
welcome. They slept there that night. Ercol challenged them to combat
with himself and with his horse. Whereupon Loigaire and his horse went
against them. The gelding of Ercol killed the horse of Loigaire, who was
himself overcome by Ercol, before whom he fled. He took his way to
Emain across Assaroe, and brought tidings with him of his comrades
having been killed by Ercol. Conall likewise fled, his horse having been
killed by Ercol's; the way he went was across Snâm Râthaind (Rathand's
Pool) on the route to Emain. Moreover, Conall's gillie, Râthand, was
drowned in the river there, and after him Snâm Râthaind takes its name
since.

§ 70. The grey of Macha, however, killed the horse of Ercol, and
Cuchulainn took Ercol himself bound behind his chariot along with him
to Emain. Buan, daughter of Samera, went on the track of the three
chariots. She recognised the track of Cuchulainn's framed chariot,
inasmuch as it was no narrow track it used to take, but undermining
walls, either enlarging or else leaping over breaches. The girl at last leapt
a fearful leap, following him behind in his chariot's track till she struck
her forehead on a rock, whereof she died. From this is named Buan's
Grave. When Conall and Cuchulainn reached Emain, they found the
Ultonians holding a keen for them, inasmuch as they felt certain they were
killed. Such the report Loigaire brought. They then related their
adventures and told their news to Conchobar and to the Ultonian nobles
generally. But the chiefs of chariots and the men of valour as a body
were reproaching Loigaire for the lying story he told concerning his
fellows.

§ 71. Then Cathbath made speech to this effect:—

"A tale inglorious! Base
Outlaw, black and false,
For shame! thy face from sight!
Ultonia's Champion's Portion
Unhappily didst thou dispute,
Nor won it by right,
—Thy lying upset—
Cuchulainn with Ercol has coped,
Victor in battle-fight;
Tied at the tail of his car,
Hercules strong he held;
Nor do men conceal his feats,

His great havoc they tell.
A champion glorious, battle-victorious,
When rageth the fray,
Slaughter-head of the hosts,
A lord that careers in might,
Zealous of valour and stout;
With him to dispute
The Champion's Portion,
Unworthy a hero's repute.

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