

The Death of Fer Báeth

‘Go for me, friend Láeg, to the encampment and consult Lugaid mac Nóis uí Lomairc, and find out who is coming to fight me tomorrow. Question him closely and greet him.’

Láeg went off then. ‘Welcome!’ said Lugaid. ‘Cú Chulainn is indeed in unlucky plight, fighting single handed against the men of Ireland.’ ‘Who is coming to fight him tomorrow?’ ‘It is Fer Báeth—bad luck to him in his fighting!—who goes to meet him tomorrow, Fer Báeth, the comrade of us both. He has been given Finnabair for doing so and sway over his own people.’ Láeg returned to where Cú Chulainn was.

‘My friend Láeg is not glad of the answer he got,’ said Cú Chulainn. Láeg recounted it all to him, telling him how Fer Báeth had been summoned to Ailill and Medb in their tent and told to sit beside Finnabair and that she would be given to him as a reward for fighting with Cú Chulainn, for he was her chosen lover. They considered that he was a match for Cú Chulainn for they had both learnt the same art of war with Scáthach. Fer Báeth was plied with wine until he was intoxicated. He was told that they prized that liquor for only fifty wagon-loads of it had been brought by them. And the maiden used to serve him his share of the wine. ‘I do not wish to go,’ said Fer Báeth. ‘Cú Chulainn is my foster brother and bound to me by solemn covenant. Nevertheless I shall go and oppose him tomorrow and cut off his head.’ ‘You will be the man to do it,’ said Medb.

Cú Chulainn told Láeg to go and ask Lugaid to come and speak with him. Lugaid came to him. ‘So it is Fer Báeth who comes to oppose me tomorrow,’ said Cú Chulainn. ‘It is he indeed,’ said Lugaid. ‘It is an evil day,’ said Cú Chulainn. ‘I shall not survive this encounter. We two are of equal age, of equal swiftness and of equal weight. Leave me now so that we may meet, and tell him that it is unworthy of his valour that he should come against me. Ask him to come and meet me and speak to me tonight.’

Lugaid told this to Fer Báeth. Since Fer Báeth did not avoid the conflict, he went that night accompanied by Fíacha mac Fir Fhbe, to renounce his friendship with Cú Chulainn. Cú Chulainn adjured him by his foster-brotherhood and by their common foster-mother Scáthach. ‘I must fight,’ said Fer Báeth. ‘I have promised to do so.’ ‘Renounce your bond of friendship then,’ said Cú Chulainn. Cú Chulainn went away from him in anger. He trampled a sharp shoot of holly into his foot and it came up to his knee and appeared there. Cú Chulainn pulled it out.

‘Do not go away, Fer Báeth, until you see what I have found.’ ‘Throw it here,’ said Fer Báeth.

Then Cú Chulainn threw the holly shoot after Fer Báeth and it struck the depression at the back of his neck and went out through his mouth, and he fell on his back in the glen. ‘That is indeed a throw,’ said Fer Báeth. From this comes the place-name Focherd Muirthemne.

—Or (according to another version), Fíacha said: ‘Your throw is lucky today, Cú Chulainn.’ Whence

the place-name Focherd Muirthemne.— Fer Báeth fell dead at once in the glen. Whence the place-name Glend Fir Baíth.

Fergus was heard saying:

1. O Fer Báeth, foolish is your expedition on this spot wherein is your grave. Ruin has reached you there ... in Cróen Corand. The hill is named Fríthe; forever it will be Cróenech in Muirthemne. Henceforth its name will be Focherd, the place in which you fell,

a Fer Báeth

‘Your opponent has fallen,’ said Fergus. ‘Tell me, will that man give compensation tomorrow?’ ‘He will indeed,’ said Cú Chulainn. Cú Chulainn sent Láeg again to find out how matters stood in the camp and whether Fer Báeth was alive. Lugaid said: ‘Fer Báeth has died, and tell Cú Chulainn to come presently to talk with me.’

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