

The Description of Cú Chulainn

Cú Chulainn came on the morrow to survey the host and to display his gentle and beautiful form to women and girls and maidens, to poets and men of art, for he held not as honourable or dignified the dark magical appearance in which he had appeared to them the previous night. So for that reason he now came on this day to display his beautiful fair appearance. Beautiful indeed was the youth who thus came to display his form to the hosts, namely, Cú Chulainn mac Súaltain. He seemed to have three kinds of hair: dark next to his skin, blood-red in the middle and hair like a crown of gold covering them outside. Fair was the arrangement of that hair with three coils in the hollow in the nape of his neck, and like gold thread was each fine hair, looseflowing, bright-golden, excellent, long-tressed, splendid and of beautiful colour, which fell back over his shoulders. A hundred bright crimson ringlets of flaming red-gold encircled his neck.

Around his head a hundred strings interspersed with carbunclegems. Four shades (?) in each of his cheeks, a yellow shade and a green, a blue shade and a purple. Seven brilliant gem-like pupils in each of his noble eyes. Seven toes on each of his feet; seven fingers on each of his hands with the grasp of a hawk's claws and the grip of a hedgehog's claws in each separate toe and finger.

So on that day he donned his festive apparel, namely, a fair mantle, well-fitting, bright purple, fringed, five-folded. A white brooch of silver inset with inlaid gold over his white breast as it were a bright lantern that men's eyes could not look at by reason of its brilliance and splendour. Next to his skin he wore a tunic of silky satin reaching to the top of his dark apron, dark-red, soldierly, of royal satin. He carried a dark-red purple shield with five concentric circles of gold and a rim of white bronze. At his girdle hung, ready for action, a golden-hilted, ornamented sword with great knobs of red gold at its end. In the chariot beside him was a long shining-edged spear together with a sharp attacking javelin with rivets of burning gold. In one hand he held nine heads, in the other ten, and these he brandished at the hosts. Those were the trophies of one night's fighting by Cú Chulainn.

Then the women of Connacht climbed up on the hosts and the women of Munster climbed on men's shoulders that they might behold the appearance of Cú Chulainn. But Medb hid her face and dared not show her countenance, but through fear of Cú Chulainn she sheltered under a cover of shields. That is why Dubthach Dóel Ulad said (these verses):

1. If this is the distorted one, men's corpses will lie here and cries will be heard around the courts. There will be tales in the lands(?).

2. Headstones will be erected over graves. More and more kings will be slain. Not well do ye fight on the battle-field against that champion.
3. I see how he drives around with eight severed heads on the cushions of his chariot. I see the shattered spoils he brings and ten heads as trophies.
4. I see how your woman-folk raise their heads above the battle (to see him), but I see that your great queen does not seek to come to the fight.
5. Were I your counsellor, then warriors would lie in ambush all around him so that they might cut short his life, if this is the distorted one.

Then Fergus chanted these verses:

1. Take Dubthach Déoltengaid away. Drag him to the rear of the army. He has done nought of good since he slew the maidens (in Ulster).
2. He performed a wicked and ill-omened deed when he killed Fíacha, the son of Conchobar. Nor was the slaying of Coirpre, son of Fedelm, any less wicked.
3. Dubthach, the son of Lugaid mac Casruba, does not contend for the lordship of Ulster, but this is how he treats them; those not killed he sets at loggerheads.
4. The Ulster exiles will grieve if their beardless lad is slain. If the Ulster army come upon you, they will turn back the herds.
5. The debility of the Ulstermen will be greatly prolonged before they finally recover.
6. Messengers will bring great tidings. Great queens will be there. Men's wounded bodies will be mangled and many slaughtered.
7. Corpses will be trampled underfoot. Vultures will feast. Shields will lie flat on the battle fields. Marauders will find shelter.
8. Warriors' blood will be spilt on the ground by this army of curs in human shape. If they get there, the exiles will penetrate far into Ulster. He cannot heed the prophecy of what lies before you. Take Dubthach Dóeltenga away.
9. Thereupon Fergus hurled Dubthach away from him and he landed flat on his face outside those who stood there.

Then Ailill was heard saying: 'O Fergus, do not fight against the women and cattle of Ulster. I can see by their mountain passes that many will be killed there. Strike even though they will be struck down only one by one. He slays them in the ford every day.' Then Medb was heard: 'O Ailill, arise with war-bands ... (Your) sons will kill in passes(?) and on fords, in great sandy places and in dark pools. And Fergus the brave and the exiled warriors will be victorious. After the battle there will be restitution ...' Then Fergus spoke: 'Do not listen to the foolish counsels of a woman. Hear them not...' Then Gabrán the poet spoke: 'Speak no words ... do not earn hatred.' 'Refuse not your opponent. Come to meet him at the ford,' said Fergus. 'Hear Ailill!' said Medb. Ailill was heard speaking: 'Fergus knows ...' Then Fergus was heard: 'O Medb, do not send the great heroes of your mighty exiles...'