

Tales of Mongan

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THE BIRTH OF MONGAN

Fiachna Lurga, the father of Mongan, was sole king of the province. He had a friend in Scotland, to wit, Aedan, the son of Gabran. A message went from him to Aedan. A message went from Aedan asking him to come to his aid. He was in warfare against the Saxons. A terrible warrior was brought by them to accomplish the death of Aedan in the battle. Then Fiachna went across, leaving his queen at home.

While the hosts were fighting in Scotland, a noble-looking man came to his wife in his stronghold in Rathmore of Moylinny. At the time he went, there were not many in the stronghold. The stranger asked the woman to arrange a place of meeting. The woman said there were not in the world possessions or treasures, for which she would do anything to disgrace her husband's honor. He asked her whether she would do it to save her husband's life. She said that if she were to see him in danger and difficulty, she would help him with all that lay in her might. He said she should do it then, "for thy husband is in great danger. A terrible man has been brought against him, and he will die by his hand. If we, thou and I, make love, thou wilt bear a son thereof. That son will be famous; he will be Mongan. I shall go to the battle which will be fought to-morrow at the third hour, so that I shall save Fiachna, and I shall vanquish the warrior before the eyes of the men of Scotland. And I shall tell thy husband our adventures, and that it is thou that hast sent me to his help."

It was done thus. When army was drawn up against army, the boats saw a noble-looking man before the army of Aedan and Fiachna. He went towards Fiachna in particular, and told him the conversation with his wife the day before, and that he had promised to come to his help at that hour. Thereupon he went before the army towards the other, and vanquished the warriors, so that Aedan and Fiachna won the battle.

And Fiachna returned to his country, and the woman was pregnant and bore a son, even Mongan son of Fiachna. And he thanked his wife for what she had done for him, and she confessed all her adventures. So that this Mongan is a son of Manannan mac Lir, though he is called Mongan son of Fiachna. For when the stranger went from her in the morning he left a quatrain with Mongan's mother, saying:

I go home,
The pale pure morning draws near:
Manannan son of Lir
Is the name of him who came to thee.

A STORY OF MONGAN

Now once upon a time when Forgall the poet was with Mongan, the latter at a certain hour of the day went before his stronghold, where he found a bardic scholar learning his lesson. Said Mongan:

All is lasting
In a cloak of sackcloth;
In due course thou shalt attain
The end of thy studies.

Mongan then took pity on the scholar, who was in the cloak of sackcloth. He had little of any substance. In order to know whether he would be a truthful and good messenger, he said to him: "Go now, until thou reach the fairy-mound of Lethet Oidni, and bring a precious stone which I have there, and for thyself take a pound of white silver, in which are twelve ounces. Thou shalt have help from them. This is thy journey from here, to Cnoc Bane. Thou wilt find welcome in the fairy-mound of Cnoc Bane for my sake. Thence to Duma Granerit. Thence to the fairy-mound of Lethet Oidni. Take the stone for me, and go to the stream of Lethet Oidni, where thou wilt find a pound of gold, in which are nine ounces. Take that with thee for me."

The scholar went on his journey. In the fairy-mound of Cnoc Bane he found a noble-looking couple to meet him. They gave great welcome to a messenger of Mongan's. It was his due. He went further. He found another couple in Duma Granerit, where he had the same welcome. He went to the fairy-mound of Lethet Oidni, where again he found another couple. They gave great welcome to a man of Mongan's. He was most hospitably entertained, as on the other nights. There was a marvellous chamber at the side of the couple's house. Mongan had told him that he should ask for its key. He did so. The key was brought to him. He opened it. He had been told to take nothing out of the house except what he had been sent for. He did so. The key he gave back to the couple; his stone, however, and his pound of silver he took with him. Thereupon he went to the stream of Lethet Oidni, out of which he took his pound of gold. He went back to Mongan, to whom he gave his stone and his gold. He himself took his silver. These were his wanderings.

A STORY FROM WHICH IT IS INFERRED THAT MONGAN WAS FINN MAC CUMAILL

Mongan was in Rathmore of Moylinny in his kingship. To him went Forgall the poet. Through him many a married couple complained to Mongan. Every night the poet would recite a story to Mongan. So great was his lore that they were thus from Hallowe'en to May-day. He received gifts and food from Mongan.

One day Mongan asked his poet what was the death of Fothad Airgdech. Forgall said he was slain at Duffry in Leinster. Mongan said it was false. The poet said he would satirize him with his lampoons, and he would satirize his father and his mother and his grandfather, and he would sing spells upon their waters, so that fish should not be caught in their river-mouths. He would sing upon their woods, so that they should not give fruit, upon their plains, so that they should be barren for ever of any produce. Mongan promised him his will of precious things as far as the value of seven bondmaids, or twice seven bondmaids, or three times seven. At last he offered him one-third, or one-half of his land, or his whole land; at last anything save only his own liberty with that of his wife Breothigernn, unless he were redeemed before the end of three days. The poet refused all except as regards the woman. For the sake of his honor Mongan consented. Thereat the woman was sorrowful. The tear was not taken from her cheek. Mongan told her not to be sorrowful, help would certainly come to them.

So it came to the third day. The poet began to enforce his bond. Mongan told him to wait till evening. He and his wife were in their bower. The woman wept as her surrender drew near and she saw no help. Mongan said: "Be not sorrowful, woman. He who is even now coming to our help, I hear his feet in the Labrinne."

They waited a while. Again the woman wept. "Weep not, woman! He who is now coming to our help, I hear his feet in the Main."

Thus they were waiting between every two watches of the day. She would weep, and he would still say: "Weep not, woman. He who is now coming to our help, I hear his feet in the Laune, in Loch Leane, in the Morning-star River between the Ui Fidgente and the Arada, in the Suir on Mag Femin in Munster, in the Echuir, in the Barrow, in the Liffey, in the Boyne, in the Dee, in the Tuarthesc, in Carlingford Loch, in the Nid, in the Newry river, in the Lame Water in front of Rathmore."

When night came to them, Mongan was on his couch in his palace, and his wife at his right hand, and she sorrowful. The poet was summoning them by their sureties and their bonds. While they

were there, a man was announced approaching the enclosure from the south. His cloak was in a fold around him, and in his hand a headless spear-shaft that was not small. By that shaft he leapt across the three ramparts, so that he landed in the middle of the enclosure, thence into the middle of the palace, thence between Mongan and the wall at his pillow. The poet was in the back of the house behind the king. The question was argued in the house before the warrior that had come.

“What is the matter here?” said he.

“I and the poet yonder,” said Mongan, “have made a wager about the death of Fothad Airgdech. He said it was at Duffry in Leinster; I said that was false.” The warrior said the poet was wrong.

“It shall be proved. We were with thee, with Finn,” said the warrior.

“Hush!” said Mongan, “that is not fair.”

“We were with Finn, then,” said he. “We came from Scotland. We met with Fothad Airgdech yonder on the Lame river. There we fought a battle. I made a cast at him, so that the spear passed through him and went into the earth beyond him and left its iron head in the earth. Here is the shaft that was in that spear. The bare stone from which I made that cast will be found, and the iron head will be found in the earth, and the tomb of Fothad Airgdech will be found a little to the east of it. A stone chest is about him there in the earth. There, upon the chest, are his two bracelets of silver, and his two arm-rings, and his neck-torque of silver. And by his tomb there is a stone pillar. And on the end of the pillar that is in the earth there is an inscription in ogam. This is what it says: ‘This is Eochaid Airgdech. Cailte’ slew me in an encounter against Finn.’”

They went with the warrior. Everything was found thus. It was Cailte, Finn’s foster-son, that had come to them. Mongan, however, was Finn, though he would not let it be told