

The Story of Tuan mac Carill

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had come with the Gospel to Ireland, into the territory of the men of Ulster, he went to a wealthy warrior there, who would not let them come to him into the stronghold, but left them fasting there over Sunday. The warrior's faith was not good. Said Finnen to his followers: 'There will come to you a good man, who will comfort you, and who will tell you the history of Ireland from the time that it was first colonised until to-day.'

2. Then on the morrow early in the morning there came to them a venerable cleric, who bade them welcome. 'Come with me to my hermitage,' said he, 'that is meet for you.' They went with him, and they perform the duties of the Lord's day, both with psalms and preaching and offering. Thereupon Finnen asked him to tell his name. Said he to them: 'Of the men of Ulster am I. Tuan, son of Cairell, son of Muredach Red-neck, am I. I have taken this hermitage, in which thou art, upon the hereditary land of my father. Tuan, son of Starn, son of Sera, son of Partholon's brother, that was my name of yore at first.'

3. Then Finnen asked him about the events of Ireland, to wit, what had happened in it from the time of Partholon, son of Sera. And Finnen said they would not eat with him until he had told them the stories of Ireland. Said Tuan to Finnen: 'It is hard for us not to meditate upon the Word of God which thou hast just told to us.' But Finnen said: 'Permission is granted thee to tell thy own adventures and the story of Ireland to us now.'

4. 'Five times, verily,' said he, 'Ireland was taken after the Flood, and it was not taken after the Flood until 312 years had gone. Then Partholon, son of Sera, took it. He had gone upon a voyage with twenty-four couples. The cunning of each of them against the other was not great. They settled in Ireland until there were 5000 of their race. Between two Sundays a mortality came upon them, so that all died, save one man only. For a slaughter is not usual without some one to come out of it to tell the tale. That man am I,' said he.

5. 'Then I was from hill to hill, and from cliff to cliff, guarding myself from wolves, for twenty-two years, during which Ireland was empty. At last old age came upon me, and I was on cliffs and in wastes, and was unable to move about, and I had special eaves for myself. Then Nemed, son of Agnoman, my father's brother, invaded Ireland, and I saw them from the cliffs and kept avoiding them, and I hairy, clawed, withered, grey, naked, wretched, miserable. Then, as I was asleep one night, I saw myself passing into the shape of a stag. In that shape I was, and I young and glad of heart. It was then I spoke these words:

Strengthless to-day' is Senba's son,
From vigour he has been parted,
Not under fair fame with new strength,
Senba's son is an old .

These men that come from the east

With their spears that achieve valour,
I have no strength in foot or hand
To go to avoid them.

Starin, fierce is the man,
I dread Scemel of the white shield,
Andind will not save me, though good and fair,
If it were Beoin, ...

Though Beothach would leave me alive,
Cacher's rough fight is rough,
Britan achieves valour with his spears,
There is a fit of fury on Fergus.

They are coming towards me, O gentle Lord,
The offspring of Nemed, Agnoman's son,
Stoutly they are lying in wait for my blood,
To compass my first wounding.

Then there grew upon my head
Two antlers with three score points,
So that I am rough and grey in shape
After my age has changed from feebleness.

7. 'After this, from the time that I was in the shape of a stag, I was the leader of the herds of Ireland, and wherever I went there was a large herd of stags about me. In that way I spent my life during the time of Nemed and his offspring. When Nemed came with his fleet to Ireland, their number was thirty-four barques, thirty in each barque, and the sea cast them astray for the time of a year and a half on the Caspian Sea, and they were drowned and died of hunger and thirst, except four couples only together with Nemed. Thereafter his race increased and had issue until there were 4030 couples. However, these all died.

8. 'Then at last old age came upon me, and I fled from men and wolves. Once as I was in front of my cave -- I still remember it - I knew that I was passing from one shape into another. Then I passed into the shape of a wild boar. 'Tis then I said:

A boar am I to-day among herds,
A mighty lord I am with great triumphs,
He has put me in wonderful grief,
The King of all, in many shapes.

In the morning when I was at Dun Bré,
Fighting against old seniors
Fair was my troop across the pool,
A beautiful host was following us.

My troop, they were swift

Among hosts in revenge,
They would throw my spears alternately
On the warriors of Fál on every side.

When we were in our gathering
Deciding the judgments of Partholon,
Sweet to all was what I said,
Those were the words of true approach.

Sweet was my brilliant judgment
Among the women with beauty,
Stately was my fair chariot,
Sweet was my song across a dark road.

Swift was my step without straying
In battles at the onset,
Fair was my face, there was a day,
Though to-day I am a boar.

9. 'In that shape, he said, I was then truly, and I young and glad of mind. And I was king of the boar-herds of Ireland, and I still went the round of my abode when I used to come into this land of Ulster at the time of my old age and wretchedness; for in the same place I changed into all these shapes. Therefore I always visited that place to await the renewal.

10. 'Thereupon Semion, the son of Stariath, seized this island. From them are the Fir Dornnann, and the Fir Bolg, and the Galiuin; and these inhabited this island for the time that they dwelt in Ireland. Then old age came upon me, and my mind was sad, and I was unable to do all that I used to do before, but was alone in dark caves and in hidden cliffs.

11. 'Then I went to my own dwelling always. I remembered every shape in which I had been before. I fasted my three days as I had always done. I had no strength left. Thereupon I went into the shape of a large hawk. Then my mind was again happy. I was able to do anything. I was eager and lusty. I would fly across Ireland; I would find out everything. 'Tis then I said:

A hawk to-day, a boar yesterday,
Wonderful . . . inconstancy!
Dearer to me every day
God, the friend who has shapen me.

Many are the offspring of Nemed
Without obedience . . . to the certain King,
Few to-day are the race of Sera;
I know not what caused it.

Among herds of boars I was,
Though to-day I am among bird-flocks;
I know what will come of it:

I shall still be in another shape.

Wonderfully has dear God disposed
Me and the children of Nemed;
They at the will of the demon of God,
While, for me, God is my help.

12. 'Beothach, the son of Iarbone the prophet, seized this island from the races that dwelt in it. From them are the Tuatha Dé and Andé, whose origin the learned do not know, but that it seems likely to them that they came from heaven, on account of their intelligence and for the excellence of their knowledge.

13. 'Then I was for a long time in the shape of that hawk, so that I outlived all those races who had invaded Ireland. However, the sons of Mu took this island by force from the Tuatha Dé Danann. Then I was in the shape of that hawk in which I had been, and was in the hollow of a tree on a river.

14. 'There I fasted for three days and three nights, when sleep fell upon me, and I passed into the shape of a river-salmon there and then. Then God put me into the river so that I was in it. Once more I felt happy and was vigorous and well-fed, and my swimming was good, and I used to escape from every danger and from every snare -- to wit, from the hands of fishermen, and from the claws of hawks, and from fishing spears -- so that the scars which each one of them left are still on me.

15. 'Once, however, when God, my help, deemed it time, and when the beasts were pursuing me, and every fisherman in every pool knew me, the fisherman of Cairell, the king of that land, caught me and took me with him to Cairell's wife, who had a desire for fish. Indeed I remember it; the man put me on a gridiron and roasted me. And the queen desired me and ate me by herself, so that I was in her womb. Again, I remember the time that I was in her womb, and what each one said to her in the house, and what was done in Ireland during that time. I also remember when speech came to me, as it comes to any man, and I knew all that was being done in Ireland, and I was a seer; and a name was given to me -- to wit, Tuan, son of Cairell. Thereupon Patrick came with the faith to Ireland. Then I was of great age; and I was baptized, and alone believed in the King of all things with his elements.'

16. Thereupon they celebrate mass and go into their refectory, Finnen with his followers and Tuan, after he had told them these stories. And there they stay a week conversing together. Every history and every pedigree that is in Ireland, 'tis from Tuan, son of Cairell, the origin of that history is. He had conversed with Patrick before them, and had told him; and he had conversed with Colum Cille, and had prophesied to him in the presence of the people of the land. And Finnen offered him that he should stay with him, but he could not obtain it from him. 'Thy house will be famous till doom,' said Tuan.