

Chapter X

§ 58. Ailill having gone to his chamber, set his back against the wall. He was disquieted in mind, for he took the difficulty that faced him to be fraught with danger. He neither ate nor slept till the end of three days and three nights. "Coward!" Mève then called him, "if you don't decide, I will." "Difficult for me to adjudge them," Ailill said; "it is a misfortune for one to have to do it." "There is no difficulty," quoth Mève, "for Loigaire and Conall Cernach are as different as bronze and findruini;^[14] Conall Cernach and Cuchulainn as different as findruini and red gold."

§ 59. It was then, after she had pondered her advice, that Loigaire the Triumphant was summoned to Mève. "Welcome, O Loigaire the Triumphant," she quoth; "it is meet to give thee a Champion's Portion. We assign to thee the sovranty of the heroes of Erin from this time forth, and the Champion's Portion, and a cup of bronze with a bird chased in white metal on its bottom. In preference to every one else, take it with thee as a token of award. No one else is to see it till, at the day's end, thou hast come to the Red Branch of Conchobar. On the Champion's Portion being exhibited among you, then shalt thou bring forth thy cup in the presence of all the Ultonian nobles. Moreover, the Champion's Portion is therein. None of the valiant Ultonian heroes will dispute it further with thee. For the thing thou art to take away with thee shall be a token of genuineness in the estimation of all the Ultonians." Thereupon the cup with its full of luscious wine was given to Loigaire the Triumphant. There and then^[15] he quaffs the contents at a draught. "Now you have the feast of a champion," quoth Mève. "I wish you may enjoy it a hundred hundred years at the head of all Ulster."

§ 60. Loigaire thereupon bade farewell. Then Conall Cernach in like wise was summoned into the royal presence. "Welcome," quoth Mève, "O Conall Cernach; meet it is to give thee a Champion's Portion, with a cup of white-metal besides, having a bird on the bottom of it chased in gold." Thereafter the cup was given to Conall with its full of luscious wine.

§ 61. Conall bade farewell. A herald was then sent to fetch Cuchulainn. "Come to speak with the king and queen," quoth the messenger. Cuchulainn at the time was busy playing chess with Loig, son of Riagabair, his own charioteer. "No mocking," he quoth; "you might try your lies on some other fool." Having hurled one of the chessmen, it pierced the centre of the herald's brain. He got his death-blow therefrom, and fell between Ailill and Mève. "Woe is me," quoth Mève; "sorely doth Cuchulainn work on us his fury when his fit of rage is upon him." Thereupon Mève got up and came to Cuchulainn, and put her two

arms round his neck. "Try a lie upon another," quoth Cuchulainn. "Glorious son of the Ultonians and flame of the heroes of Erin, 'tis no lie that is to our liking where thou art concerned. Were all Erin's heroes to come, to thee by preference would we grant the quest, for, in regard to fame, bravery and valour, to distinction, youth and glory, the men of Erin acknowledge thy superiority."

§ 62. Cuchulainn got up. He accompanied Mève into the palace, and Ailill bade him warm welcome. A cup of gold was given him full of luscious wine, and having on the bottom of it birds chased in precious stone. With it, and in preference to every one else, there was given him a lump, as big as his eyes twain, of dragon-stone. "Now you have the feast of a champion," quoth Mève. "I wish you may enjoy it a hundred hundred years at the head of all the Ultonian heroes." "Moreover, it is our verdict," quoth Ailill and Mève, "inasmuch as thou thyself art not to be compared with the Ultonian warriors, neither is thy wife to be compared with their women. Nor is it too much, we think, that she should always precede all the Ultonian ladies when entering the Mead Hall." At that Cuchulainn quaffed at one draught the full of the cup, and then bade farewell to the king, queen, and household all.

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