

Part II

Conaire And His Troops To Dublin

'Tis then the man of the black, cropt hair, with his one hand and one eye and one foot, overtook them. Rough cropt hair upon him. Though a sackful of wild apples were flung on his crown, not an apple would fall on the ground, but each of them would stick on his hair. Though his snout were flung on a branch they would remain together. Long and thick as an outer yoke was each of his two shins. Each of his buttocks was the size of a cheese on a withe. A forked pole of iron black-pointed was in his hand. A swine, black-bristled, singed, was on his back, squealing continually, and a woman big-mouthed, huge, dark, sorry, hideous, was behind him. Though her snout were flung on a branch, the branch would support it. Her lower lip would reach her knee.

He starts forward to meet Conaire, and made him welcome. "Welcome to thee, O master Conaire! Long hath thy coming hither been known."

"Who gives the welcome?" asks Conaire.

"Fer Caille here, with his black swine for thee to consume that thou be not fasting tonight, for 'tis thou art the best king that has come into the world!"

"What is thy wife's name?" says Conaire.

"Cichuil," he answers.

"Any other night," says Conaire, "that pleases you, I will come to you, and leave us alone tonight."

"Nay," say the churl, "for we will go to thee to the place wherein thou wilt be tonight, O fair little master Conaire!"

So he goes towards the house, with his great, big-mouthed wife behind him, and his swine short-bristled, black, singed, squealing continually, on his back. That was one of Conaire's tabus, and that plunder should be taken in Ireland during his reign was another tabu of his.

Now plunder was taken by the sons of Donn Desa, and five hundred there were in the body of their marauders, besides what underlings were with them. This, too, was a tabu of Conaire's. There was a good warrior in the north country, "Wain over withered sticks," this was his name. Why he was so called was because he used to go over his opponent even as a wain would go over withered sticks. Now plunder was taken by him, and there were five hundred in the body of their marauders alone, besides underlings.

There was after that a troop of still haughtier heroes, namely, the seven sons of Ailill and Medb, each of whom was called "Mane." And each Mane had a nickname, to wit, Mane Fatherlike and

Mane Motherlike, and Mane Gentle-pious, Mane Very-pious, Mane Unslow, and Mane Honeyworded, Mane Grasp-them-all, and Mane the Loquacious. Rapine was wrought by them. As to Mane Motherlike and Mane Unslow there were fourteen score in the body of their marauders. Mane Fatherlike had three hundred and fifty. Mane Honeyworded had five hundred. Mane Grasp-them-all had seven hundred. Mane the Loquacious had seven hundred. Each of the others had five hundred in the body of his marauders.

There was a valiant trio of the men of Cualu of Leinster, namely, the three Red Hounds of Cualu, called Cethach and Clothach and Conall. Now rapine was wrought by them, and twelve score were in the body of their marauders, and they had a troop of madmen. In Conaire's reign a third of the men of Ireland were reavers. He was of sufficient strength and power to drive them out of the land of Erin so as to transfer their marauding to the other side (Great Britain), but after this transfer they returned to their country.

When they had reached the shoulder of the sea, they meet Ingcel the One eyed and Eiccel and Tulchinne, three great-grandsons of Conmac of Britain, on the raging of the sea. A man ungente, huge, fearful, uncouth was Ingcel. A single eye in his head, as broad as an oxhide, as black as a chafer, with three pupils therein. Thirteen hundred were in the body of his marauders. The marauders of the men of Erin were more numerous than they.

They go for a sea-encounter on the main. "Ye should not do this," says Ingcel: "do not break the truth of men (fair play) upon us, for ye are more in number than I."

"Nought but a combat on equal terms shall befall thee," say the reavers of Erin.

"There is somewhat better for you," quoth Ingcel. "Let us make peace since ye have been cast out of the land of Erin, and we have been cast out of the land of Alba and Britain. Let us make an agreement between us. Come ye and wreak your rapine in my country, and I will go with you and wreak my rapine in your country."

They follow this counsel, and they gave pledges therefor from this side and from that. There are the sureties that were given to Ingcel by the men of Erin, namely, Fer gair and Gabur (or Fer lee) and Fer rogain, for the destruction that Ingcel should choose to cause in Ireland and for the destruction that the sons of Donn Desa should choose in Alba and Britain.

A lot was cast upon them to see with which of them they should go first. It fell that they should go with Ingcel to his country. So they made for Britain, and there his father and mother and his seven brothers were slain, as we have said before. Thereafter they made for Alba, and there they wrought the destruction, and then they returned to Erin.

'Tis then, now, that Conaire son of Eterscel went towards the Hostel along the Road of Cualu.

'Tis then that the reavers came till they were in the sea off the coast of Bregia overagainst Howth.

Then said the reavers: "Strike the sails, and make one band of you on the sea that ye may not be sighted from land; and let some lightfoot be found from among you to go on shore to see if we could save our honors with Ingcel. A destruction for the destruction he has given us."

"Who will go on shore to listen? Let some one ago," says Ingcel, "who should have there the three gifts, namely, gift of hearing, gift of far sight, and gift of judgment."

"I," says Mane Honeyworded, "have the gift of hearing."

"And I," says Mane Unslow, "have the gift of far sight and of judgment."

"'Tis well for you to go thus," say the reavers: "good is that wise."

Then nine men go on till they were on the Hill of Howth, to know what they might hear and see.

"Be still a while!" says Mane Honeyworded.

"What is that?" asks Mane Unslow.

"The sound of a good king's cavalcade I hear."

"By the gift of far sight, I see," quoth his comrade.

"What seest thou here?"

"I see there," quoth he, "cavalcades splendid, lofty, beautiful, warlike, foreign, somewhat slender, weary, active, keen, whetted, vehement, a good course that shakes a great covering of land. They fare to many heights, with wondrous waters and invers."[\[5\]](#)

"What are the waters and heights and invers that they traverse?"

"Easy to say: Indeoin, Cult, Cuilten, Mafat, Ammat, Iarmafat, Finne, Goiste, Guistine. Gray spears over chariots: ivory-hilted swords on thighs: silvery shields above their elbows. Half red and half white. Garments of every color about them.

"Thereafter I see before them special cattle specially keen, to wit, thrice fifty dark-gray steeds. Small-headed are they, red-nosed, pointed, broad-hoofed, big-nosed, red-chested, fat, easily-stopt, easily-yoked, foray-nimble, keen, whetted, vehement, with their thrice fifty bridles of red enamel upon them."

"I swear by what my tribe swears," says the man of the long sight, "these are the cattle of some good lord. This is my judgment thereof: it is Conaire, son of Eterscel, with multitudes of the men of Erin around him, who has travelled the road."

Back then they go that they may tell it to the reavers. "This," they say, "is what we have heard and seen."

Of this host, then, there was a multitude, both on this side and on that, namely, thrice fifty boats, with five thousand in them, and ten hundred in every thousand. Then they hoisted the sails on the boats, and steer them thence to shore, till they landed on the Strand of Fuirbthe.

When the boats reached land, then was Mac cecht a-striking fire in Da Derga's Hostel. At the sound of the spark the thrice fifty boats were hurled out, so that they were on the shoulders of the sea.

"Be silent a while!" said Ingcel. "Liken thou that, O Fer rogain."

"I know not," answers Fer rogain, "unless it is Luchdonn the satirist in Emain Macha, who makes this handsmiting when his food is taken from him perforce: or the scream of Luchdonn in Temair Luachra: of Mac cecht's striking a spark, when he kindles a fire before a king of Erin where he sleeps. Every spark and every shower which his fire would let fall on the floor would broil a hundred calves and two half-pigs."

"May God not bring that man (even Conaire) there tonight!" say Donn Desa's sons. "Sad that he is under the hurt of foes!"

"Meseems," says Ingcel, "it should be no sadder for me than the destruction I gave you. This were my feast that Conaire should chance to come there."

Their fleet is steered to land. The noise that the thrice fifty vessels made in running ashore shook Da Derga's Hostel so that no spear nor shield remained on rack therein, but the weapons uttered a cry and fell all on the floor of the house.

"Liken thou that, O Conaire," says every one: "what is this noise?"

"I know nothing like it unless it be the earth that has broken, or the Leviathan that surrounds the globe and strikes with its tail to overturn the world, or the barque of the sons of Donn Desa that has reached the shore. Alas that it should not be they who are there! Beloved foster-brothers of our own were they! Dear were the champions. We should not have feared them tonight."

Then came Conaire, so that he was on the green of the Hostel.

When Mac cecht heard the tumultuous noise, it seemed to him that warriors had attacked his people. Thereat he leapt on to his armour to help them. Vast as the thunderfeat of three hundred did they deem his game in leaping to his weapons. Thereof there was no profit.

Now in the bow of the ship wherein were Donn Desa's sons was the champion, great-accoutred, wrathful, the lion hard and awful, Ingcel the One-eyed, great-grandson of Conmac. Wide as an oxhide was the single eye protruding from his forehead, with seven pupils therein, which were black as a chafer. Each of his knees as big as stripper's caldron; each of his two fists was the size of a reaping-basket: his buttocks as big as a cheese on a withe: each of his shins as long as an outer yoke.

So after that, the thrice fifty boats, and those five thousands - with ten hundred in every thousand, - landed on the Strand of Fuirbthe.

Then Conaire with his people entered the Hostel, and each took his seat within, both tabu and non-tabu. And the three Reds took their seats, and Fer caille with his swine took his seat.

Thereafter Da Derga came to them, with thrice fifty warriors, each of them having a long head of hair to the hollow of his polls, and a short cloak to their buttocks. Speckled-green drawers they wore, and in their hands were thrice fifty great clubs of thorn with bands of iron.

"Welcome, O master Conaire!" quoth he. "Though the bulk of the men of Erin were to come with thee, they themselves would have a welcome."

When they were there they saw a lone woman coming to the door of the Hostel, after sunset, and seeking to be let in. As long as a weaver's beam was each of her two shins, and they were as dark as the back of a stag-beetle. A greyish, wooly mantle she wore. Her lower hair used to reach as far as her knee. Her lips were on one side of her head.

She came and put one of her shoulders against the door-post of the house, casting the evil eye on the king and the youths who surrounded him in the Hostel. He himself addressed her from within.

"Well, O woman," says Conaire, "if thou art a wizard, what seest thou for us?"

"Truly I see for thee," she answers, "that neither fell nor flesh of thine shall escape from the place into which thou hast come, save what birds will bear away in their claws."

"It was not an evil omen we foreboded, O woman," saith he: "it is not thou that always augurs for us. What is thy name, O woman?"

"Calib," she answers.

"That is not much of a name," says Conaire.

"Lo, many are my names besides."

"Which be they?" asks Conaire.

"Easy to say," quoth she. "Samon, Sinand, Seisclend, Sodb, Caill, Coll, Dichoem, Dichiuil, Dithim, Dichuimne, Dichruidne, Dairne, Darine, Deruaine, Egem, Agam, Ethamne, Gnim, Cluiche, Cethardam, Nith, Nemain, Noennen, Badb, Blosc, B[l]oar, Huae, oe Aife la Sruth, Mache, Mede, Mod."

On one foot, and holding up one hand, and breathing one breath she sang all that to them from the door of the house.

"I swear by the gods whom I adore," says Conaire, "that I will call thee by none of these names whether I shall be here a long or a short time."

"What dost thou desire?" says Conaire.

"That which thou, too, desirest," she answered.

"'Tis a tabu of mine," says Conaire, "to receive the company of one woman after sunset."

"Though it be a tabu," she replied, "I will not go until my guesting come at once this very night."

"Tell her," says Conaire, "that an ox and a bacon-pig shall be taken out to her, and my leavings: provided that she stays tonight in some other place."

"If in sooth," she says, "it has befallen the king not to have room in his house for the meal and bed of a solitary woman, they will be gotten apart from him from some one possessing generosity - if the hospitality of the Prince in the Hostel has departed."

"Savage is the answer!" says Conaire. "Let her in, though it is a tabu of mine."

Great loathing they felt after that from the woman's converse, and ill foreboding; but they knew not the cause thereof.

The reavers afterwards landed, and fared forth till they were at Lecca cinn slebe. Ever open was the Hostel. Why it was called a Bruden was because it resembles the lips of a man blowing a fire.

Great was the fire which was kindled by Conaire every night, to wit, a "Boar of the Wood." Seven outlets it had. When a log was cut out of its side every flame that used to come forth at each outlet was as big as the blaze of a burning oratory. There were seventeen of Conaire's chariots at every door of the house, and by those that were looking from the vessels that great light was clearly seen through the wheels of the chariots.

"Canst thou say, O Fer rogain, what that great light yonder resembles?"

"I cannot liken it to aught," answers Fer rogain, "unless it be the fire of a king. May God not bring that man there tonight! 'Tis a pity to destroy him!"

"What then deemest thou," says Ingcel, "of that man's reign in the land of Erin?"

"Good is his reign," replied Fer rogain. "Since he assumed the kingship, no cloud has veiled the sun for the space of a day from the middle of spring to the middle of autumn. And not a dewdrop fell from grass till midday, and wind would not touch a beast's tail until nones. And in his reign, from year's end to year's end, no wolf has attacked aught save one bullcalf of each byre; and to maintain this rule there are seven wolves in hostageship at the sidewall in his house, and behind this a further security, even Maclocc, and 'tis he that pleads for them in Conaire's house. In Conaire's reign are the three crowns on Erin, namely crown of corn-ears, and crown of flowers, and crown of oak mast. In his reign, too, each man deems the other's voice as melodious as the strings of lutes, because of the excellence of the law and the peace and the goodwill prevailing throughout Erin. May God not bring that man there tonight! 'Tis sad to destroy him. 'Tis 'a branch through its blossom,' 'Tis a swine that falls before mast. 'Tis an infant in age. Sad is the shortness of his life!"

"This was my luck," says Ingcel, "that he should be there, and there should be one Destruction for another. It were not more grievous to me than my father and my mother and my seven brothers, and the king of my country, whom I gave up to you before coming on the transfer of the rapine."

"'Tis true, 'tis true!" say the evildoers who were along with the reavers.

The reavers make a start from the Strand of Fuirbthe, and bring a stone for each man to make a cairn; for this was the distinction which at first the Fians made between a "Destruction" and a "Rout." A pillar-stone they used to plant when there would be a Rout. A cairn, however, they used to make when there would be a Destruction. At this time, then, they made a cairn, for it was a Destruction. Far from the house was this, that they might not be heard or seen therefrom.

For two causes they built their cairn, namely, first, since this was a custom in marauding, and, secondly, that they might find out their losses at the Hostel. Every one that would come safe from it would take his stone from the cairn: thus the stones of those that were slain would be left, and thence they would know their losses. And this is what men skilled in story recount, that for every stone in Carn leca there was one of the reavers killed at the Hostel. From that cairn Leca in Hui Cellaig is so called.

A "boar of a fire" is kindled by the sons of Donn Desa to give warning to Conaire. So that is the first warning-beacon that has been made in Erin, and from it to this day every warning-beacon is kindled.

This is what others recount: that it was on the eve of samain (AllSaints-day) the destruction of the Hostel was wrought, and that from yonder beacon the beacon of samain is followed from that to this, and stones (are placed) is the samain-fire.

Then the reavers framed a counsel at the place where they had put the cairn.

"Well, then," says Ingcel to the guides, "what is nearest to us here?"

"Easy to say: the Hostel of Hua Derga, chief-hospitaller of Erin."

"Good men indeed," says Ingcel, "were likely to seek their fellows at that Hostel to-night."

This, then, was the counsel of the reavers, to send one of them to see how things were there.

"Who will go there to espy the house?" say everyone.

"Who should go," says Ingcel, "but I, for 'tis I that am entitled to dues."

Ingcel went to reconnoitre the Hostel with one of the seven pupils of the single eye which stood out of his forehead, to fit his eye into the house in order to destroy the king and the youths who were around him therein. And Ingcel saw them through the wheels of the chariots.

Then Ingcel was perceived from the house. He made a start from it after being perceived.

He went till he reached the reavers in the stead wherein they were. Each circle of them was set around another to hear the tidings - the chiefs of the reavers being in the very centre of the circles. There were Fer ger and Fer gel and Fer rogel and Fer rogain and Lomna the Buffoon, and Ingcel the Oneeyed - six in the centre of the circles. And Fer rogain went to question Ingcel.

"How is that, O Ingcel?" asks Fer rogain.

"However it be," answered Ingcel, "royal is the custom, hostful is the tumult: kingly is the noise thereof. Whether a king be there or not, I will take the house for what I have a right to. Thence my turn of rapine cometh."

We have left it in thy hand, O Ingcel!" say Conaire's fosterbrothers. "But we should not wreak the Destruction till we know who may be therein."

"Question, hast thou seen the house well, O Ingcel?" asks Fer rogain.

"Mine eye cast a rapid glance around it, and I will accept it for my dues as it stands."

"Thou mayest well accept it, O Ingcel," saith Fer rogain: "the foster father of us all is there, Erin's overking, Conaire, son of Eterscel."

"Question, what sawest thou in the champion's high seat of the house, facing the King, on the opposite side?"

The Room Of Cormac Condlongas

"I saw there," says Ingcel, "a man of noble countenance, large, with a clear and sparkling eye, an even set of teeth, a face narrow below, broad above,. Fair, flaxen, golden hair upon him, and a proper fillet around it. A brooch of silver in his mantle, and in his hand a gold-hilted sword. A shield with five golden circles upon it: a five-barbed javelin in his hand. A visage just, fair, ruddy he hath: he is also beardless. Modest-minded is that man!"

"And after that, whom sawest thou there?"

The Room Of Cormac's Nine Comrades

"There I saw three men to the west of Cormac, and three to the east of him, and three in front of the same man. Thou wouldst deem that the nine of them had one mother and one father. They are of the same age, equally goodly, equally beautiful, all alike. Thin rods of gold in their mantles. Bent shields of bronze they bear. Ribbed javelins above them. An ivory-hilted sword in the hand of each. An unique feat they have, to wit, each of them takes his sword's point between his two fingers, and they twirl the swords round their fingers, and the swords afterwards extend themselves by themselves. Liken thou that, O Fer rogain," says Ingcel.

"Easy," says Fer rogain, "for me to liken them. It is Conchobar's son, Cormac Condlongas, the best hero behind a shield in the land of Erin. Of modest mind is that boy! Evil is what he dreads tonight. He is a champion of valour for feats of arms; he is an hospitaller for householding. These are yon nine who surround him, the three Dungusses, and the three Doelgusses, and the three Dangusses, the nine comrades of Cormac Condlongas, son of Conchobar. They have never slain men on account of their misery, and they never spared them on account of their prosperity. Good is the hero who is among them, even Cormac Condlongas. I swear what my tribe swears, nine times ten will fall by Cormac in his first onset, and nine times ten will fall by his people, besides a man for each of their weapons, and a man for each of themselves. And Cormac will share prowess with any man before the Hostel, and he will boast of victory over a king or crown-prince or noble of the

reavers; and he himself will chance to escape, though all his people be wounded."

"Woe to him who shall wreak this Destruction!" says Lomna Druth, "even because of that one man, Cormac Condlongas, son of Conchobar." "I swear what my tribe swears," says Lomna son of Donn Desa, "if I could fulfil my counsel, the Destruction would not be attempted were it only because of that one man, and because of the hero's beauty and goodness!"

"It is not feasible to prevent it," says Ingcel: "clouds of weakness come to you. A keen ordeal which will endanger two cheeks of a goat will be opposed by the oath of Fer rogain, who will run. Thy voice, O Lomna," says Ingcel, "hath taken breaking upon thee: thou art a worthless warrior, and I know thee. Clouds of weakness come to you. . . .

Neither old men nor historians shall declare that I quitted the Destruction, until I shall wreak it."

"Reproach not our honour, O Ingcel," say Ger and Gabur and Fer rogain. "The Destruction shall be wrought unless the earth break under it, until all of us are slain thereby."

"Truly, then, thou hast reason, O Ingcel," says Lomna Druth son of Donn Desa. "Not to thee is the loss caused by the Destruction. Thou wilt carry off the head of the king of a foreign country, with thy slaughter of another; and thou and thy brothers will escape from the Destruction, even Ingcel and Ecell and the Yearling of the Rapine."

"Harder, however, it is for me," says Lomna Druth: "woe is me before every one! woe is me after every one! 'Tis my head that will be first tossed about there to-night after an hour among the chariot-shafts, where devilish foes will meet. It will be flung into the Hostel thrice, and thrice will it be flung forth. Woe to him that comes! woe to him with whom one goes! woe to him to whom one goes! Wretches are they that go! wretches are they to whom they go!"

"There is nothing that will come to me," says Ingcel, "in place of my mother and my father and my seven brothers, and the king of my district, whom ye destroyed with me. There is nothing that I shall not endure henceforward."

"Though a . . . should go through them," say Ger and Gabur and Fer rogain, "the Destruction will be wrought by thee to-night."

"Woe to him who shall put them under the hands of foes!" says Lomna. "And whom sawest thou afterwards?"

The Room Of The Picts, This

"I saw another room there, with a huge trio in it: three brown, big men: three round heads of hair on them, even, equally long at nape and forehead. Three short black cowls about them reaching to their elbows: long hoods were on the cowls. Three black, huge swords they had, and three black shields they bore, with three dark broadgreen javelins above them. Thick as the spit of a caldron was the shaft of each. Liken thou that, O Fer rogain!"

"Hard it is for me to find their like. I know not in Erin that trio, unless it be yon trio of Pictland, who

went into exile from their country, and are now in Conaire's household. These are their names: Dublonges son of Trebuat, and Trebuat son of Hua-Lonsce, and Curnach son of Hua Faich. The three who are best in Pictland at taking arms are that trio. Nine decads will fall at their hands in their first encounter, and a man will fall for each of their weapons, besides one for each of themselves. And they will share prowess with every trio in the Hostel. They will boast a victory over a king or a chief of the reavers; and they will afterwards escape though wounded. Woe to him who shall wreak the Destruction, though it be only on account of those three!"

Says Lomna Druth: "I swear to God what my tribe swears, if my counsel were taken, the Destruction would never be wrought."

"Ye cannot," says Ingcel: "clouds of weakness are coming to you. A keen ordeal which will endanger, etc. And whom slowest thou there afterwards?"

The Room Of The Pipers

"There I beheld a room with nine men in it. Hair fair and yellow was on them: they all are equally beautiful. Mantles speckled with colour they wore, and above them were nine bagpipes, four-turned, ornamented. Enough light in the palace were the ornament on these four-tuned pipes. Liken thou them, O Fer rogain."

"Easy for me to liken them," says Fer rogain. "Those are the nine pipers that came to Conaire out of the Elfmound of Bregia, because of noble tales about him. These are their names: Bind, Robind, Riारbind, Sibe, Dibe, Deichrind, Umall, Cumal, Ciallgind. They are the best pipers in the world. Nine eneads will fall before them, and a man for each of their weapons, and a man for each of themselves. And each of them will boast a victory over a king or a chief of the reavers. And they will escape from the Destruction; for a conflict with them will be a conflict with shadow. They will slay, but they will not be slain, for they are out of an elfmound. Woe to him who shall wreak the Destruction, though it be only because of those nine!"

"Ye cannot," says Ingcel. "Clouds of weakness come to you," etc. "And after that, whom sawest thou there?"

The Room Of Conaire's Majordomo

"There I saw a room with one man in it. Rough cropt hair upon him. Though a sack of crab-apples should be flung on his head, not one of them would fall on the floor, but every apple would stick on his hair. His fleecy mantle was over him in the house. Every quarrel therein about seat or bed comes to his decision. Should a needle drop in the house, its fall would be heard when he speaks. Above him is a huge black tree, like a millshaft, with its paddles and its cap and its spike. Liken thou him, O Fer rogain!"

"Easy for me is this. Tuidle of Ulaid is he, the steward of Conaire's household. 'Tis needful to hearken to the decision of that man, the man that rules seat and bed and food for each. 'Tis his household staff that is above him. That man will fight with you. I swear what my tribe swears, the dead at the Destruction slain by him will be more numerous than the living. Thrice his number will fall by him, and he himself will fall there. Woe to him who shall wreak the Destruction!" etc.

"Ye cannot," says Ingcel. "Clouds of weakness come upon you. What sawest thou there after that?"

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