

The Death of Nad Crantail

‘What man have you got to encounter Cú Chulainn tomorrow?’ asked Lugaid. ‘They will give you him tomorrow,’ said Maine son of Ailill. ‘We can get no one to encounter him,’ said Medb. ‘Let us make a truce with him till a man be sought for him.’ A truce was granted them. ‘Whither will you send,’ asked Ailill, ‘to seek a man to encounter Cú Chulainn?’ ‘There is no one in Ireland to be got for him,’ said Medb, ‘unless Cú Roí mac Dáire or Nad Crantail the warrior be brought.’

One of Cú Roí's followers was in the tent. ‘Cú Roí will not come,’ said he. ‘He thinks that enough of his people have already come.’ ‘Let a message be sent to Nad Crantail then.’ Maine Andoí went to Nad Crantail. They related their tidings to him. ‘Come with us for the sake of the honour of Connacht.’ ‘I will not,’ said he, ‘unless Findabair is given to me.’ He came with them then. They brought his weapons in a cart from the east of Connacht to the encampment. ‘You shall get Findabair,’ said Medb, ‘as a reward for encountering yonder man.’ ‘I shall do so,’ said he. That night Lugaid came to Cú Chulainn. ‘Nad Crantail is coming to meet you tomorrow. Alas for you! You will not stand out against him.’ ‘That is no matter,’ said Cú Chulainn.

—According to another version it was then that Cú Chulainn chanted the verse: ‘If Nad Crantail should fall.’—

On the morrow Nad Crantail went forth from the camp, taking with him nine stakes of holly, sharpened and charred. Cú Chulainn was there engaged in fowling, with his chariot beside him. Nad Crantail cast a stake at Cú Chulainn. Cú Chulainn sprang on to the top of that stake but it did not hinder him in his fowling. Similarly with the other eight stakes. When Nad Crantail cast the ninth stake, the flock of birds flew away from Cú Chulainn who went in pursuit of them. Then, like a bird himself, he stepped on to the points of the stakes, going from one stake to another, pursuing the birds that they might not escape him. They were all certain, however, that Cú Chulainn was fleeing from Nad Crantail.

‘That Cú Chulainn of yours,’ said Nad Crantail, ‘has taken to flight before me.’ ‘It was to be expected,’ said Medb, ‘if goodly warriors opposed him, that the sprite would not hold out against bold men.’ Fergus and the Ulstermen were grieved to hear this. Fíacha mac Fir Fhebe was sent by them to upbraid Cú Chulainn. ‘Tell him,’ said Fergus, ‘that it was fine for him to attack the warriors as long as he acted bravely. It is better for him, however, to hide himself when he flees from a single opponent, for it is no greater dishonour for him than for the rest of the Ulstermen.’ ‘Who boasted that I fled?’ asked Cú Chulainn. ‘Nad Crantail,’ said Fíacha.

‘If he had boasted of the feat I had performed in his presence; it would have become him better,’ said Cú Chulainn. ‘But he would not boast if only he had a weapon in his hand. You know that I kill no man unarmed. So let him come tomorrow and stand between Ochaíne and the sea, and however early he come, he shall find me waiting there and I shall not flee from him.’

Cú Chulainn ended the meeting, and he cast his mantle around him after his night watch, but he

did not notice the great pillar-stone as big as himself which was beside him and he covered it over between himself and his mantle and sat down beside it.

Then Nad Crantail arrived. His weapons were brought by him in a wagon. 'Where is Cú Chulainn?' he asked. 'There he is over there,' said Fergus. 'That is not how he appeared to me yesterday,' said Nad Crantail. 'Are you the famous Cú Chulainn?' 'And what if I am?' said Cú Chulainn. 'If you are,' said Nad Crantail, 'then until I carry the head of a little lamb to the camp, I shall not take back your head which is the head of a beardless boy.' 'I am not Cú Chulainn at all,' said Cú Chulainn. 'Go round the hill to him.'

Cú Chulainn came to Láeg. 'Smear a false beard on me. The champion refuses to fight with me since I am beardless.' So it was done for him. He went to meet Nad Crantail on the hill. 'I think that better,' said Nad Crantail. 'Grant me fair play now.' 'You shall have it provided that we know it.' said Cú Chulainn. 'I will throw a cast at you,' said Nad Crantail, 'and do not avoid it.' 'I shall avoid it only by leaping upwards,' said Cú Chulainn. Nad Crantail threw a cast at him and Cú Chulainn leapt upwards as it came. 'You do ill to avoid the cast,' said Nad Crantail. 'Avoid my cast upwards also,' said Cú Chulainn.

Cú Chulainn threw the spear at him but it was upwards he threw so that the spear came down on the crown of Nad Crantail's head and went through him to the ground. 'Indeed,' he cried, 'you are the best warrior in Ireland! I have twenty- four sons in the encampment. Let me go and tell them what hidden treasures I have. And I shall come back so that you may behead me for I shall die if the spear is taken out of my head.' 'Good,' said Cú Chulainn, 'provided that you come back again.'

Then Nad Crantail went to the encampment. They all came forth to meet him. 'Where is the head of the distorted one that you have brought?' they all asked. 'Stay, O warriors, until I tell my tale to my sons and go back again to fight with Cú Chulainn.'

He went off to meet Cú Chulainn and cast his sword at him. Cú Chulainn leapt up so that the sword struck the pillar-stone and broke in two. Cú Chulainn was distorted as he had been when with the boys in Emain. Thereupon Cú Chulainn leapt on to Nad Crantail's shield and cut off his head. He struck him again on his headless neck (and split him) down to the navel and Nad Crantail fell in four sections to the ground. Then Cú Chulainn spoke these words

1. If Nad Crantail has fallen, there will be increase of strife. Alas that I do not now give battle to Medb with a third of the host!

Revision #1

Created 27 April 2022 17:39:07 by Admin

Updated 27 April 2022 18:34:07 by Admin