

The Death of the Youths

Then the youths of Ulster took counsel together in Emain Macha. 'Alas for us,' said they, 'that our friend Cú Chulainn should be left unaided!' 'Tell me,' said Fiachna Fuilech mac Fir Fhebi, a brother of Fíachach Fialdána mac Fir Fhebi, 'shall I have a band of fighters from among you so that I may go and help him thus?' Thrice fifty boys, a third of the youths of Ulster, went with him, carrying their hurleys. The army saw them approaching across the plain. 'There is a great host coming towards us across the plain,' said Ailill. Fergus went to see them.

'Those are some of the boys of Ulster,' he said, 'and they are coming to help Cú Chulainn.' 'Let a band of armed men go to meet them,' said Ailill, 'but without Cú Chulainn's knowledge, for if they meet with him, you will not withstand them.'

Thrice fifty warriors went to encounter them. Both sides fell and not one of those splendid boys escaped alive at Lia Toll. Hence the place-name Lia Fiachrach meic Fir Fhebi for it is here he fell. 'Take counsel,' said Ailill. 'Ask Cú Chulainn to let you leave this place for you will hardly escape from him now that his hero's flame has sprung forth.'

For it was usual with him that when his hero's flame sprang forth his feet would turn to the back and his hams turn to the front and the round muscles of his calves would come on to his shins, while one eye sank into his head and the other protruded. A man's head would go into his mouth. Every hair on him would be as sharp as a spike of hawthorn and there would be a drop of blood on every hair. He would recognise neither comrades nor friends. He would attack alike before him and behind him. Hence the men of Connacht named Cú Chulainn the Distorted One.

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