

The Muster of the Men of Ireland

That night before the battle Ailill mac Máta chanted these words: 'Arise, O Traigthrénn! I send you to the three Conaires from Slíab Mis, the three Lesfinds from Lúachair; the three Meid Corpthe Loste, the three called Bodar from the river Búas, the three called Bodb from the river Búaidnech, the three called Búageltach from the river Barrow, the three Muiredachs from Mairge, the three Láegaires from Lee Derg, the three Suibnes from the river Suir, the three Échtachs from Áine, the three Doíl Eirrig, the three called Damach from Loch Derg, the three Bratrúaid from Lough Ree, the three Mielles from Lough Erne, the three called Bresal Bodgna, the three Amalgáids from Mag nAí, the three Fiachras from Fid Némain, the three Nechtans from Mag Muirisce, the three Mac Amras from Es Rúaid, the three Ruirechs from Crúacha Aigle, the three called Bruchar from Glais Febrat, the three Conalls from Collamair, the three called Fiac from Finnabair, the three Cairbres of Clíu, the three called Mane Milsoth, the three Descertachs of Dromm Fornocta, the three Fintans from Femen, the three Rathachs from Mag Raigne, the three Eterscéls of Etarbán, the three Guaire of Fid Gaible, the three Aeds from Mag nAidne, the three Mongachs of Mitain, the three Dúadaid Áine, the three Gairb Glunnaid, the three Deiscirt Uaga, the three Lethluind Linti, the three Coinchind Shile, the three Daich of Lámáin, the three Celtchair of Umall, the three Coscrachs of Clothra, the three Barrchais from Eille, the three Dáires from Tipra Find, the three Arts from Ard Ladrann, the three Muiredachs from Mag Femin, the three Congbaidi of Cliu, the three Morda Mosad, the three Roir of Ros Buíte, the three Ánrad of Tráig Thuirbe, the three Eterscéls of Tara, the three Galgaidi Goain, the three Feradaig Fholtchais, the three Feidmáig Rotail, the three Scáil Sobail, the three Ailill Uaiti, the three Gortaig Granaisc, the three Mesaig Maethla, the three Uilleith of Ard Airthir, the three called Corb from Clár, the three called Art from Ard, the three called Foimdech from Irrus, the three Illands of Ireland, the three Sochaide from Shannon, the three Brónachs from Bethra, the three Mongachs from Mag Mucruma, the three Mochmaidne from Mag nAí, the three called Tigemmas from Túath Ambráis, the three Échtachs from Finnabair, the three Cormacs of Uisce, the three called Odar from Buaille, the three Ruis Ruscae, the three Ferad Find, the three Athchuirp Tulcha, the three Tuathail Tanni, the three Maccáech Femrag, the three Láegaires from Berramain, the three Fidaig Saigthi, the three called Cormac Cúanach, the three called Cairbre Luingi, the three called Odar Conchobair, the three Glais meic Cathbad, the three Duib Drúad, the three Airrig Cluichur, the three Laitne Luiged, the three called Conchobar Collsen, the three Elair Deiuais, the three Fiadail Duinergin (?), the three Airig Inse Uan, the three Níths from Áth Craibe, the three called Óengus Uisce, the three Fiach Fema nImbais, the three called Dom, the three Bailcbroindí from Móenmag, the three Cais Cuile, the three called Trén from Mag Éile, the three called Sruthmar from Mag nOchtair, the three called Glonnmar from Mag Lethan, the three called Dornmar from Mag nUisci, the three Glaisderg from Tethba, the three Tigirn Taince from Tiprait Talindi.'

These triads made up what was called the Ferchuitred of the men of Ireland, not counting those of

them whom Cú Chulainn had previously killed. Tidings of Cú Chulainn are now told: 'Look for us, my friend Láeg, and see how are the men of Ulster fighting now.'

'Bravely (they fight),' answered the charioteer, 'If I were to go today in my chariot and Óen, the charioteer of Conall Cernach, in his chariot and if we were to travel from one wing (of the army) to the other, no hoof of horse or wheel of chariot would go through (to the ground).' 'The makings of a great fight are there,' said Cú Chulainn. 'Let nothing be done in the battle,' said he to his charioteer, 'that I shall not hear an account of from you.' 'That will be so insofar as I can do it,' said the charioteer. 'Now as for the warriors from the west, they make a breach eastwards through the battle-line. The same number of warriors from the east breach the battle-line westwards.' 'Alas that I am not healed,' said Cú Chulainn, 'or my breach too would be clearly seen there like that of all the others.'

Then came the ferchuitred, the triads of that second mustering. When the warriors came afterwards to the battle at Gáirech and Irgáirech, there also arrived the nine chariots of the warriors from Irúath. In front of them were three men on foot who travelled no more slowly than the chariots. Medb allowed them into battle only to drag Ailill out of the conflict if the enemy defeated him, or to kill Conchobar if it were he who was overcome. Then his charioteer told Cú Chulainn that Ailill and Medb were begging Fergus to go into battle. They said that it was not wrong of him to do so for they had shown him great generosity in his exile.

'If I had my own sword,' said Fergus, 'men's heads cut off by me would be as numerous on their shields as hailstones in a swamp to which the king's horses come when they have travelled swiftly into the land.' Then Fergus swore this oath: 'I swear my people's oath that I would strike men's jawbones from their necks, men's necks from shoulders, men's shoulders from elbows, men's elbows from forearms, men's forearms and their fists, men's fists and their fingers, men's fingers and their nails, men's nails and the crowns of their heads, men's crowns and their trunks, men's trunks and their thighs, men's thighs and their knees, men's knees and their calves, men's calves and their feet, men's feet and their toes, men's toes and their nails. Their headless necks would sound in the air(?) like a bee flying to and fro on a day of fine weather.'

Then said Ailill to his charioteer: 'Bring me the sword that cuts (men's) flesh. I swear the oath of my people that, if its condition be worse with you today than on the day I gave it to you on the hillside in the territory of Ulster, even though the men of Ireland were protecting you against me, they would not save you.'. Then his sword was given to Fergus and Ailill said: 'Take your sword. Though you may smite Ireland, a great warrior of her sons will fight at Gáirech ... For honour's sake do not wreak your fierce anger on us in the presence of the chariot-fighters of Ulster...' 'Welcome, O hard blade, the sword of Leite! ... My sword shall not inflict slaughter on you. I am a proud leader as I stand before the men of Ireland.' 'A pity that you should fall on a crowded(?) field of battle!' said Fergus to Ailill. That night Badb and Bé Néit and Mémain shrieked above them at Gáirech and Irgáirech so that a hundred of their warriors fell dead of fright. That was not the most peaceful night for them.

Then Fergus seized his weapons and turned towards the fighting, and holding his sword in both hands he cleared a passage for a hundred through the line of battle. Medb too, took up her weapons and rushed into battle. Thrice she was victorious until a phalanx of spears turned her back. 'I wonder,' said Conchobar to his people, 'who is it who is victorious in the fight against us in the north. Do ye stay here in the battle until I go against him.' 'We shall hold the spot where we

now stand,' said the warriors, 'but unless the ground quakes beneath us or the heavens fall down on us, we shall not flee from here.'

Then Conchobar went to meet Fergus. He raised against him his shield, the Óchaín, which had four golden points and four coverings of gold. Fergus struck three blows on it but not even the rim of the shield above his head touched Conchobar. 'Who of the men of Ulster raises the shield (against me)?' asked Fergus. 'One who is better (than you),' said Conchobar. 'One who drove you into exile to dwell with wolves and foxes, one who today will hold you at bay in the presence of the men of Ireland by dint of his own prowess.' Thereupon Fergus, holding the sword in both hands, aimed a vengeful blow at Conchobar, and the point of the sword touched the ground behind him (as he swung it back). Cormac Con Loinges laid hands on him and grasped him by the arm.

'That is harsh yet not harsh, friend Fergus,' said Cormac. 'That is cautious yet not over-cautious, friend Fergus. Friendship proves hostile. Behold your enemies, your friends have been destroyed. Wicked are these blows that you strike, friend Fergus.' 'Tell me,' said Fergus, 'whom shall I strike?' 'Strike the three hills above them. Turn your hand and strike on all sides of you. Heed them not (?). Remember the honour of the Ulstermen which has not been lost. It will not be lost unless it be through your fault today.' 'Go in some other direction, Conchobar,' said Cormac to his father. 'This man will no longer wreak his fierce anger here on the men of Ulster.'

Fergus turned away. With his sword he slew a hundred warriors among the Ulstermen in his first onslaught, until he came face to face with Conall Cernach. 'Too great is that force which you exert against (your own) people and race, following a wanton woman as you do,' said Conall Cernach. 'What shall I do, O warrior?' asked Fergus. 'Strike the hills beyond them and the trees about them,' said Conall Cernach. Then Fergus smote the hills and with three blows struck off the (tops of the) three hills in Meath (now called) Máela Midi, the flattopped hills of Meath. Cú Chulainn heard the blows which Fergus had struck on the hills, or (those he had struck) on the shield of Conchobar.

'Who strikes those great strong blows in the distance?' asked Cú Chulainn. 'Blood seals up the heart. Anger destroys the world. Quickly it loosens the dressings of my wounds.' Láeg answered saying: 'The finest of men strikes them, Fergus mac Róig, the dauntless. The (coming of the) hero Fergus mac Róig means wounds and increase of slaughter. The sword was hidden in the chariot-pole so that the cavalcade of my master Conchobar did not arrive at the great battle.' Then said Cú Chulainn: 'Quickly unfasten the hoops over my wounds. Men are covered in blood. Swords will be wielded. Men's lives will be ended.' Thereupon the dry wisps which plugged his wounds sprang out of him (and rose up) as high as a lark soars in the air, and the wooden hoops (túaga) sprang from him as far as Mag Túag in Connacht. They flew out of him in all directions. His wounds took violent effect on him and he struck the heads of the two handmaidens one against the other so that each of them was grey with the brains of the other. —These handmaidens had been sent by Medb to pretend to lament over him so that his wounds might break out afresh and to tell him that the Ulstermen had been defeated and that Fergus had fallen opposing them because Cú Chulainn had been unable to join the battle. —Then Cú Chulainn was distorted (with rage). The twenty-seven shirts which he used to wear going into battle, tied to him with ropes and cords, were now brought to him, and he took on his back his chariot with its framework and two wheels and went round the battle towards Fergus. 'Turn hither, master Fergus!' cried Cú Chulainn, but (though he said this) three times Fergus did not answer. 'I swear by the god by whom Ulstermen swear,' said Cú Chulainn, 'that I shall drub you as flax-heads(?) are beaten in a pool. I shall go over you as a tail goes over a cat. I shall smite you as a fond woman smites her son.' 'Who among the men of Ireland

speaks to me thus?’ said Fergus. ‘Cú Chulainn mac Suáiltain, the son of Conchobar's sister,’ said Cú Chulainn, ‘and hold back from me now.’ ‘I have promised to do that,’ said Fergus. ‘Begone then,’ said Cú Chulainn. ‘I agree,’ said Fergus, ‘for you refused to encounter me when you were pierced with wounds.’ So at that juncture Fergus and his division of three thousand went away. The men of Leinster and the men of Munster went away too, and nine divisions, those of Medb and of Ailill and of their seven sons, were left in the battle. It was midday when Cú Chulainn came to the battle. When the sun was sinking behind the trees in the wood, he overcame the last of the bands, and of the chariot there remained only a handful of the ribs of the framework and a handful of the shafts round the wheel.

Then Cú Chulainn overtook Medb going from the battle-field. ‘Spare me!’ cried Medb. ‘If I were to kill you, it would be only right for me,’ said Cú Chulainn. But he spared her life then because he used not to kill women. He convoyed them west to Áth Lúain and across the ford too. He struck three blows of his sword upon the flagstone in Áth Luain. They (i.e. the hills) are called Máelana Áth Lúain. Now when they were finally routed Medb said to Fergus: ‘Men and lesser men(?) meet here today, Fergus.’

‘That is what usually happens,’ said Fergus, ‘to a herd of horses led by a mare. Their substance is taken and carried off and guarded as they follow a women who has misled them.’ In the morning after the battle the bull was taken away, and he met the bull Finnbennach in combat in the place now called Tarbga in Mag nAí.—Tarbga means Bull-sorrow or Bull-battle.—Roí Dedond was the former name of that hill. Everyone who had survived the battle now did nothing except to watch the two bulls fighting. Bricriu Nemthenga had been in the west convalescing after Fergus had fractured his skull with the chessmen. He came now with all the rest to watch the bulls' fight. In their violent struggle the two bulls trampled on Bricriu and so he died. That is the tragical death of Bricriu.

The Donn Cúailnge's foot was impaled on the horn of the other bull. For a day and a night he did not draw his foot away, until Fergus urged him on and struck his hide with a rod. ‘It was bad luck,’ said Fergus, ‘that the belligerent old calf that was brought here and because of whom many now lie dead should dishonour his clan and lineage.’ Thereupon Donn Cúailnge drew back his foot. His leg broke and his opponent's horn sprang out on to the mountain beside him. So Slíab nAdarca was afterwards the name of that place.

He carried off the Finnbennach then for a day and a night's journey and plunged into the lake beside Cruachu, and he came out of it with the loin and shoulder blade and liver of his opponent on his horns. The hosts advanced then with intent to kill him, but Fergus did not allow it and insisted that he should go wherever he pleased. So then the bull made for his own land. As he came he drank a draught in Finnleithe and left there the shoulder-blade of his opponent. That land was afterwards called Finnleithe. He drank another draught at Áth Lúain and left the other bull's loin there. Hence the name Áth Lúain. At Iraid Cuillinn he bellowed so loudly that he was heard throughout the province. He drank again in Troma. There the liver of his opponent fell from his horns. Hence the name Troma. He went then to the place called Étan Tairb and rested his forehead against the hill at Áth Dá Fherta. Hence the name Étan Tairb in Mag Muirthemne. Thereafter he travelled along Slige Midlúachra to Cuib—it was in Cuib he used to abide with the dry cows of Dáire—and there he pawed up the earth. Hence the place-name Gort mBúraig. Then he went on and died in Druim Tairb between Ulster and Uí Echach. That place is called Druim Tairb. Ailill and Medb made peace with the Ulstermen and Cú Chulainn. For seven years after that no one

was killed between them in Ireland. Finnabair remained with Cú Chulainn and the men of Connacht returned to their own land, while the Ulstermen went in triumph to Emain Macha.

Finit. Amen.

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