

"Who shall go there?" asked Cu Roi.

"These same two," said Medb, "that welcome may be given to them from me with the nobles of the province of Connacht, and from thee with the nobles of the two provinces of Munster."

"I shall know," said Cu Roi, "by the person that answers whether they come with peace or with battle; for if it is Dubtach Chafertongue of Ulster that answers, it is with discord they come; if it is Sencha mac Mill that answers, it is with peace they come."

The messengers went on to the place where the Ulstermen were on the green.

"Welcome, ever-welcome, thy coming, O high-puissant, high-noble High-King of Ulster, from Medb and from Ailill, and from the chieftains of the province of Connacht along with them," said Crom Deroil.

"Welcome, ever-welcome, thy coming, O high-puissant, high-noble High-King of Ulster, from Cu Roi mac Dairi, with the nobles of the two provinces of Munster, who are yonder in the stronghold," said Faenglinni mac Dedad.

"It is pleasing to us and pleasing to the king," said Sencha mac Ailill; "and it was not to commit injury or conflict the Ulstermen came but in a drunken escapade, from Dun-da-Benn to Cliu Mail maic Ugaine; and they deemed it not honorable to get out of the district until they should be a night encamped in it."

The messengers proceeded to the place in which were Medb and Ailill and Cu Roi and Eochaid, with the nobles of the three provinces, and they related the news to them.

The poets, the minstrels, and the entertainers were sent to the Ulstermen, while a house was being arranged for them, to furnish amusement for them.

Messengers were then sent to them, to inform them that the best hero of the Ulstermen might select the choicest house for them. A quarrel arose about that among the Ulstermen. A hundred powerful warriors rose up together upon their arms; but Sencha mac Ailill pacified them.

"Let Cu Chulainn go there," said Sencha; "about the measure of his house you have come; and you shall be under his guarantee until you return again."

Cu Chulainn went. The Ulstermen advanced as one man after Cu Chulainn. Cu Chulainn looked upon the largest house that was in the place; it happened to be the iron house, about which the two wooden houses were.

Their attendants came to them, and an enormous bonfire was lighted for them; and provisions of food and ale were dealt to them. As night approached, their attendants and servants stole away from them one by one, until the last man, who closed the door after him. And the seven chains of iron were fixed upon the house, and fastened to the seven pillars that were upon the green outside. Thrice fifty smiths were brought, with their smith's-bellows, to blow the fire. Three circles were made around the house; and the fire was ignited from above and from below, in the house, until the heat from the fire came through the house from below. Then the hosts shouted loudly about the house, so that the Ulstermen were silent, speechless, until Bricriu said, "What, O Ulstermen, is the great heat that seizes our feet? But it is fitter that I should know than any other person. It seems to me they are burning us from below, and from above; and the house is closed fast."

"There will be a means by which we shall know," said Triscatal Strongman, getting up and delivering a blow with his foot on the iron door. But the door neither creaked nor resounded nor was injured.

"Not well hast thou made thy banquet for the Ulstermen, O Cu Chulainn," said Bricriu; "thou hast brought them into an enemy's pen."

"Say not so, O Bricriu," answered Cu Chulainn. "I will do my hero feat, a deed through which the Ulstermen will all get out."

Cu Chulainn plunged his sword up to the hilt through the iron house, and through the two houses of boards.

"An iron house here," said Cu Chulainn, " between two houses of boards."

"Worse than all, alas!" said Bricriu.

(The conclusion of this form of the story is lost. There is, however, another version, the beginning of which is lost, in one of our oldest manuscripts, which dates from the eleventh century. This fragment begins with the dispute of the Ulstermen over which of them should lead the way into the enclosure. There is apparently no iron house in this version. The visitors are lodged in a wooden house and besieged by the hosts of the Erna. Ailill and his sons try to protect the Ulstermen.)

"'Tis I," said Triscoth.^[1] Any man of them whom I shall look fiercely at—his lips shall die."

"'Tis I" said the fool Reorda.^[2]

"'Tis I" said Nia na Trebuin-cro.

"'Tis I," said Daeltega (Chafertongue.)

"Either of us shall go," said Dub and Rodub.

Each man rose against the other, regarding it.

"Can you not decide that thing?" asked Sencha. "The man whom the Ulstermen honor, though he were not the best warrior here, 'tis he should go."

"Which of us is that?" asked the Ulstermen.

"Cu Chulainn there; even though he were not the best warrior here, 'tis he should go."

They then advanced into the enclosure of the fort, and Cu Chulainn in front of them.

"Is this the youth that is the best warrior among the Ulstermen?" asked Fintan.

Thereupon Cu Chulainn jumped up until he was on the summit of the enclosure, and leaped valorously on the bridge, so that the weapons that were in the stronghold fell from their racks. The Ulstermen were afterwards taken into a secure oaken house, with a yew door, three feet thick, having two iron hooks, and an iron spit through them. The house was furnished with flock-beds and bed-clothes. Crom Deroil sent their weapons after them; and they sat down; and Cu Chulainn's weapons were elevated over them.

"Let water for washing be heated for them," said Ailill. And ale and food were given them until they were intoxicated. Crom Deroil visited them again, to know if there was anything they would wish.

When they were merry drunk Sencha clapped his hands. They all listened to him. "Give now your blessing on the prince who has protected you, who has been generous to you. It is not 'a hand in a poor, garnered field.' Plentiful are food and ale for you with the prince who has protected you. It was not necessary to wait for cooking."

"It is true," said Chafertongue. "I swear by my people's gods that there shall never reach your country anything but what birds may carry away of you in their claws; but the men of Erin and Alba will possess your land, and take your women and treasures and break your children's heads against stones."

It was of him Fergus said thus in the "Cattle-Raid":

Let off Dubtach Chafertongue,
Behind the host drag him;
No good has he done.
He slew the maiden-band.

He did a hateful, hideous act—
The killing of Fiacha, Conchobar's son.
Not more famous for him, it was heard,

The killing of Maine son of Fedlimid.

The kingship of Ulster he contest not,—
The son of Lugaid son of Casruba;
What he does against men is,
To attack them when they sit.

"That is not false, however," said Dubtach. "Observe the strength of the house and the fastening that is on the house. See you not that though you be anxious to leave it, you cannot? I am now deceived, unless there is a contest about our being brought out. However, that hero who is the best warrior among the Ulstermen—let him bring some news from the opponents."

Cu Chulainn advanced, and made a somersault upwards, carried away the upper roof of the house, and was on the roof of another house, when he saw the multitude down below. They formed into a battle-throng to attack the Ulstermen inside. Ailill placed his back to the door to protect them. His seven sons joined hands with him before the door. The multitude burst into the middle of the enclosure; Cu Chulainn returned to his people, and gave the door a kick, so that his leg went through it up to the knee. "If it were to a woman that was given," said Chafertongue, "she would be in her bed." Cu Chulainn delivered another kick, and the door fell down before him. "May I be saved," said Sencha; "it is Cu Chulainn that is here this time. Every virtue that is a virtue to heroes fighting, you shall have. Your companions are coming to you here."

"What is your counsel?" asked Sencha.

"Put your back, all, against the wall, and let everyone have his weapons in front of him; and send one man to speak with them."

Heavy as it was, they threw the house from off them.

"Who shall speak to them?" asked Sencha.

"I will speak to them," said Triscoth. "Any one of them that I look upon—his lips shall die."

The others were holding their council outside.

"Query: who shall speak to them, and, go the first to them into the house?" said the warriors outside.

"I shall go," said Lopan.

Lopan then went into the house to them, accompanied by nine persons. "Is that pleasant, O heroes?" asked he.

"Yes," said the heroes.

"Man against man?" said Triscoth.

"True, true."

"Triscoth here, speaking for the Ulstermen! They have not good speakers besides." Triscoth looked fiercely at him so that he fainted.

Fer Caille came into the house; nine men with him. "Is that pleasant, O warriors?" said he.

"The full pleasure," said Triscoth, "is one man against another."

Triscoth looked fiercely at him, and he fainted.

Mianach "the unknown" came into the house; nine men with him.

"Pale to us," said he, "appear the sick that are on the floor."

Triscoth looked at him.

"Look at me," said Mianach, "and see if I would die of it."

The other took him by the leg and dashed him against the three nines that were in the house, so that not one of them escaped alive. The multitude outside gathered around the house, to take it against the Ulstermen. But the Ulstermen upset the house, so that three hundred of the host outside it fell under the house. The battle closed between them. They were engaged in battle until mid-day on the morrow. The Ulstermen were wounded, however, and they were fewer in number.

Ailill was on the rampart of the stronghold, looking at them. "The stories of the Ulstermen were stories worth telling me until today," said he. "It was told me that not in Erin were there heroes equal to them. But I perceive that they do nought but treachery today. It has long been a proverb 'no battle should be fought without a king.' If it were about me that battle were going on, it would not continue long. You see," said Ailill to the Ulstermen, "I am not able for them; and I have been profaned regarding you."

Thereupon Cu Chulainn dashed suddenly through the multitude and assailed them thrice. Furbaide Ferbenn son of Conchobar attacked them also all around. The others would not wound him because of his beauty.

"Why do you not wound this warrior?" said one of them. "Not agreeable the deeds he performs. I swear by my people's gods, though it were a head of gold he had, I would slay him when he slew my brother." Furbaide pierced him with a spear and he died thereof. The battle was subsequently gained over the Erna; only three of them escaped from it.

The Ulstermen then plundered the entire stronghold, but protected Ailill and his seven sons, because they were not in the battle against them. From that time forth Tara Luachra was not inhabited.

Crimthann Nia Nair of the Erna escaped from the battle. He met with Richis, a female satirist, westwards of the Laune. "Was my son lost?" asked she.

"Yes," said Crimthann.

"Come with me," said she, "until you avenge him."

"What revenge?" asked Crimthann.

"That you slay Cu Chulainn for his sake," replied she.

"How can that be done?" asked Crimthann.

"Not difficult. If you only use your two hands upon him, you will need nothing more; for you will find him unprepared."

They then went in pursuit of the host of the Ulstermen, and found Cu Chulainn on a ford before them in the country of Owney. Richis took off her clothes in presence of Cu Chulainn, who hid his face downwards, that he might not see her nakedness. "Attack him now, O Crimthann," said Richis.

"The man approaches thee," said Loeg.

"Not so, indeed," said Cu Chulainn. "Whilst the woman is in that condition I shall not rise up."

Loeg took a stone out of the chariot and cast it at her, which hit her across the /luthan/, so that her back was broken in two; and she died thereof afterwards.

Cu Chulainn then advanced against Crimthann and fought with him and carried away his head and spoils.

Then Cu Chulainn and his charioteer went after the host until all arrived at Cu Chulainn's stronghold, where they rested that night. They were all entertained to the end of forty nights on the same feast by Cu Chulainn. And they afterwards departed from him and left a blessing with him.

Ailill came from the south towards the Ulstermen and remained as a friend with them. The width of his face was given to him of gold and silver and the worth of seven bondmaids was given to each of his sons. He subsequently went to his own country in peace and unity with the Ulstermen.

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1. Triscatal in the other version.
 2. Roimid in the other version.

Conchobar was afterward without destruction of his kingship whilst he lived.
