

Cause of the Battle of Cnucha

When Cathar Mor son of Fedlimid Fir Urglais son of Cormac Gelta-gaith was in the kingship of Tara, and Conn the Hundred-Fighter in Kells, in the rigdonna's land, Cathar had a celebrated druid, Nuada son of Achi son of Dathi son of Brocan son of Fintan, of Tuath Dathi in Breg. The druid was soliciting land in Leinster from Cathar; for he knew that it was in Leinster his inheritance would be. Cathar gave him his choice of land. The land the druid chose was Almu in Leinster. She that was wife to Nuada was Almu, daughter of Becan.

A stronghold was built by the druid then in Almu, and alamu (lime) was rubbed to its wall, until it was all white; and perhaps it was from that the name "Almu" was applied to it; of which was said:

All-white is the stronghold of battle renown
As if it had received the lime of Ireland;
From the alamu which he gave to his house,
Hence it is that "Almu" is applied to Almu.

Nuada's wife, Almu, begged that her name might be given to the hill; and her request was granted, and it was in it she was to be buried, hence it was said:

Almu—beautiful was the woman!—

Wife of Nuada the great, son of Achi;
She entreated—the division was just—
That her name should be on the perfect hill.

Nuada had a distinguished son, named Tadg. Rairiu, daughter of Donn-Duma, was his wife. A celebrated druid also was Tadg. Death came to Nuada; and he left his stronghold, as it was, to his son; and it is Tadg that was druid to Cathar in the place of his father. Rairiu bore a daughter to Tadg; her name was Muirne of the fair neck. This maiden grew up in great beauty, so that the Sons of the kings and mighty lords of Ireland were wont to be courting her.

Cumall, son of Trenmor, king-warrior of Ireland, was then in the service of Conn, and he, like every other youth, was demanding the maiden. Nuada gave him a refusal, for he knew that it was on account of Cumall he would have to leave Almu. The same woman

was mother to Cumall and to Conn's father, to wit, Fedlimid Rechtaide.

Cumall, however, came and took Muirne by force, since she had not been given to him. Tadg went to Conn, told him what Cumall had done, and he began to incite Conn and to reproach him.

Conn dispatched messengers to Cumall, and ordered him to leave Ireland, or to restore Muirne to Tadg. Cumall said he would not give her up; everything else he would give but not the woman. Conn sent his soldiers, and Urgriu son of Lugaid Corr king of the Luagni, and Daire the Red son of Eochaid, and his son Aed (who was afterwards called Goll) to attack Cumall. Cumall assembled his army against them; and the battle of Cnucha was fought between them, and Cumall was slain along with many of his people.

Cumall fell by Goll son of Morna. Luchet wounded Goll in his eye, so that he destroyed it. And hence it is that the name Goll (the One-eyed) attached to him; whereof was said:

Aed was the name of Daire's son,

Until Luchet of fame wounded him;

Since the heavy lance wounded him,

Therefore, he has been called Goll.

Goll killed Luchet. it is because of this battle, moreover, that a hereditary feud existed between the sons of Morna and **Finn mac Cumail**. Daire had two names, to wit, Morna and Daire.

Muirne went, after that, to Conn; for her father, Tadg the druid, rejected her and would not let her come to him, because she was pregnant; he ordered his people to burn her. Nevertheless, he dared not compass her destruction against the will of Conn, who, when the girl asked him how she should act, said, "Go to Fiacal son of Conchenn, to Tara Mairci, and let thy delivery be effected there." This was because a sister to Cumall was Fiacal's wife, Dodbail the druidess. Connla, Conn's servant, went with her, to escort her, until she came to Fiacal's house, to Tara Mairci. Muirne was welcomed by Fiacal and his wife and bore a son, to whom the name Demne was given.

Demne stayed at Tara Mairci until he was able to raid all who were his enemies. He then declared war or offered single combat against Tadg, unless the full eric (fine) for his father be given to him. Tadg said that he would give him judgment therein, which was that Almu, as it was, should be ceded to him for ever, and Tadg was to leave it. So it was done. Tadg abandoned Almu to Demne, afterwards called Finn, and came to Tuath Dathi, to his own hereditary land; and he abode in Cnoc Rein, which is called Tadhg's Tulach to this day. So that hence was said this:

Finn demands from Tadhg of the towers,

For killing Cumall the great,
Battle, without respite, without delay,
Or that he should obtain single combat.
Because Tadg was not able to sustain battle
Against the high prince,
He abandoned to him-it was for him enough-
Almu altogether, as it stood.

Finn went afterwards to Almu, and abode in it. And it is it that was his principal residence whilst he lived. Finn and Goll concluded peace after that; and the eric of his father was given by the Clan Morna to Finn. And they lived peacefully, until a quarrel occurred between them in Tara Luachra, regarding the Slanga-pig, when Banb Simm son of Maelenaig was slain; of which was said:

Afterwards they made peace-
Finn and Goll of mighty deeds-
Until Banb Sinna was slain
Regarding the pig, in Tara Luaehra.

Boyhood Deeds of Finn mac Cumhail

Laud 610

There befell a meeting of valor and a contest of battle about the chieftaincy of the Fian (national militia) and about the high-stewardship of Ireland between Cumall son of Trenmor, and Tirgriu son of Lugaid Corr of the Luagni. Cumall was of the Corco Oche of Cuil Contuinn, for to these the Ui Tairrsig, Cumall's tribe, belonged. Torba, daughter of Eochaman of the Erne, was the wife of Cumall, until he married Muirne of the fair neck.

Then the battle of Cnucha was fought between them, between Cumall and Urganu. Daire the Red, son of Eochaid the Fair son of Cairbre the Valorous son of Muiredach, and his son Aed fought the battle along with Urganu. Another name for that Daire was Morna Wry-neck. Luchet and Aed, son of Morna, met in the battle. Luchet wounded Aed, and destroyed one of his eyes, whence the name of Goll, the One-eyed, stuck to him from that time forth. Luchet fell by Goll. The man who kept Cumall's treasure-bag wounded Gumall in the battle. Cumall fell in the battle by Goll mac Morna, who carried off his spoils and his bead, whence there was a hereditary feud between Finn mac Cumhail and the sons of Morna.

Hence sang the shanachie:

Goll, son of Daire the Red, with fame,

Son of Eochaid the Fair, of valor excellent,
Son of Cairbre the Valorous with valor,
Son of Muiredach from Finnmag.

Goll slew Luchet of the hundreds
In the battle of Cnucha, it is no falsehood:
Luchet the Fair of prowess bright
Fell by the son of Morna.

By him fell great Cumall
In the battle of Cnucha of the hosts.
It is for the chieftaincy of Erin's fian
That they waged the stout battle.

The children of Morna were in the battle
And the Luagni of Tara,
Since to them belonged the leadership of the men of Ireland
By the side of every valorous king.

Victorious Cumall had a son,
Finn, bloody, of weapons hard:
Finn and Goll, great their fame,
Mightily they waged war.

Afterwards they made peace,
Finn and Goll of the hundred deeds,
Until Banb Sinna fell
About the pig at Tara Luachra.

Aed was the name of the son of Daire
Until Luchet with glory wounded him:
Since the fierce lance had wounded him,
Therefore was he called Goll.

Cumall left his wife Muirne pregnant. And she brought forth a son, to whom the name of Demne was given. Fiacal mac Con-chinn, and Bodball the druidess, and the Gray one of Luachar came to Muirne, and carried away the boy, for his mother durst not let him be with her. Muirne afterwards slept with Gleor Red-hand, king of the Lamraige, whence the saying, "Finn, son of Gleor." Bodball, however, and the Gray one, and the boy with them, went into the forest of Sliab Bladma. There the boy was secretly reared. That was indeed necessary, for many a sturdy stalwart youth, and many a venomous hostile warrior and angry fierce champion of the warriors of the Luagni and of the sons of Morna were lying in

wait for that boy, and for Tulcha the son of Cumall. In that manner then those two women-warriors reared him for a long time.

Then, at the end of six years, his mother came to visit her son, for she had been told that he was in that place, and besides, she was afraid of the eons of Morna for him. However, she passed from one wilderness to another, until she reached the forest of Sliab Bladma. She found the hunting-booth and the boy asleep in it. And then she lifted the boy to her bosom, and pressed him to her, and she pregnant at the time. It was then she made the quatrains, fondling her son:

Sleep in peaceful slumber, etc.

Thereupon the woman bade farewell to the women-warriors, and told them to take charge of the boy till he should be fit to be a fighter. And so the boy grew up till he was able to hunt.

On a certain day the boy went out alone, and saw ducks upon a lake. He sent a shot among them, which cut off the feathers and wings of one, so that a trance fell upon her; and then he seized her and took her with him to the hunting-booth. And that was Finn's first chase.

Later he went with certain cairds (men of art) to flee from the Sons of Morna, and was with them about Crotta. These were their names: Futh and Ruth and Regna of Mag Fea, and Temle and Olpe and Rogein. There scurvy came upon him, and therefrom he became scald-headed, whence he used to be called Demne the Bald. At that time there was a robber in Leinster, Fiacal, the son of Codna. Then in Feeguile Fiacal came upon the cairds, and killed them all save Demne alone. Mter that he was with Fiacal, the son of Codna, in his house in Sescenn Uairbeoil. The two women-warriors came southwards to the house of Fiacal, the son of Codna, in search of Demne, and he was given to them. And then they took him with them from the south to Sliab Bladma.

One day he went out alone until he reached Mag Life, and a certain stronghold there; and he saw the youths playing hurly upon the green of the stronghold. He went to contend in running or in hurling with them. He came again the next day, and they put one-fourth of their number against him. Again they came with one-third of their number against him. However, at last they all went against him, and he won his game from them all.

"What is thy name?" they said.

"Demne," said he.

The youths told that to the chief of the stronghold. "Then kill him, if you know how to do it-if you are able to do it," said he.

"We should not be able to do anything to him," said they.

“Did he tell you his name?” asked he.

“He said,” said they, “that his name was Demne.”

“What does he look like?” said he.

“A shapely fair (finn) youth,” said they.

“Then Demne shall be named Finn, ‘the Fair’,” said he. Whence the youths used to call him Finn.

He came to them on the next day, and went to them at their game. All together they threw their hurlies at him. He turned among them, and threw seven of them to the ground. He went from them into the forest of Sliab Bladma.

Then, at the end of a week, he came back to the stronghold. The youths were swimming in a lake that was close by. The youths challenged him to come and try to drown them. Thereupon he jumped into the lake to them, and drowned nine of them. After that he went to Sliab Bladma.

“Who drowned the youths?” everybody asked.

“Finn,” said they.

So that henceforth the name Finn stuck to him.

Once he went forth across Shah Bladma, and the two women-warriors together with him, when a fleet herd of wild deer was seen by them on the ridge of the mountain. “Alas!” said the two old women, “that we cannot get hold of one of those!”

“I can,” said Finn, and he dashed upon them, laying hold of two bucks among them, and brought them with him to their hunting-booth. After that he would hunt for them constantly.

“Go from us now, lad,” said the women-warriors to him, “for the sons of Morna are watching to kill thee.”

Alone he went from them until he reached Loch Lone, above Luachar, and there he took military service with the king of Bantry. At that place he did not make himself known. However, there was not at that time a hunter his equal. Thus said the king to him:

“If Cumall had left a son,” said he, “one would think thou wast he. However, we have not heard of his leaving a son, except Tulcha son of Cumall, and he is in military service with the king of Scotland.”

Later he bade farewell to the king, and went from them to Carbrige, which at this day is called Kerry, where he took military service with the king of that land. Then, on a certain day, the king came to play chess. He was prompted by Finn, and won seven games one after another.

“Who art thou?” said the king.

“The son of a peasant of the Luagni of Tara,” said he.

“No,” said the king; “thou art the son whom Muirne bore to Cumall; stay here no longer, lest thou be slain while under my protection.”

Then he went forth to Cullen of the Ui Cuanacb, to the house of Lochan, a chief smith, who had a very beautiful daughter, Cruithne by name. She fell in love with the youth.

“I shall give thee my daughter, though I know not who thou art.” Thereupon the girl slept with the youth.

“Make spears for me,” said the youth to the smith. So Loeban made two spears for him. He then bade farewell to Lochan, and went away.

“My boy,” said Lochan, “do not go upon the road on which is the sow called the Beo.” She it was that devastated the midlands of Munster. But what happened to the youth was to go upon the very road on which the sow was. Then the sow charged him; but he thrust his spear at her, so that it went through her, and left her without life. Then he took the head of the sow with him to the smith as a bridal gift for his daughter. Hence is Sliab Muck (Pig Mountain) in Munster.

After that the youth went onwards into Connacht to seek Crimall, the son of Treninor. As he was on his way, he heard the wail of a woman. He went towards it, and saw a woman; and now it was tears of blood, and now a gush of blood, so that her mouth was red. “Thou art red-mouthed, woman!” said he.

“Good cause have I,” said she, “for my only son has been slain by a tall, very terrible warrior who came in my way.”

“What was thy son’s name?” said he.

“Glonda was his name,” said she. Hence is the Ford of Glonda and the Causeway of Glonda on Moinxnoy, and from that redness of mouth the Ford of the Red Mouth has been so called ever since. Then Finn went in pursuit of the warrior, and they fought a combat, and Finn slew the warrior. This is how he was: he had the treasure-bag with him, the treasures of Cumall. He who had fallen there was the Gray one of Luachar, who had dealt the first wound to Cumall in the battle of Cnucha.

Thereupon Finn went into Connacht, and found Crimall as an old man in a desert wood there, and a number of the old flann together with him; and it is they who did the hunting for him. Then he showed him the bag and told him his story from beginning to end; how he had slain the man of the treasures. Finn bade farewell to Crimall, and went to learn poetry from Finneces, who was on the Boyne. He durst not remain in Ireland else, until he took to poetry, for fear of the sons of Urgriu, and of the sons of Morna.

Seven years Finneces had been on the Boyne, watching the salmon of Fec’s Pool; for it had been prophesied of him that he would eat the salmon of Fee, after which nothing

would remain unknown to him. The salmon was found, and Demne was then ordered to cook it; and the poet told him not to eat anything of the salmon. The youth brought him the salmon after cooking it. "Hast thou eaten any of the salmon, my lad?" said the poet.

"No," said the youth, "but I burned my thumb, and put it into my mouth afterwards."

"What is thy name, my lad?" said he.

"Demne," said the youth. "Finn is thy name, my lad," said he; "and to thee was the salmon given to be eaten, and indeed thou art the Finn." Thereupon the youth ate the salmon. It is that which gave the knowledge to Finn, so that, whenever he put his thumb into his mouth and sang through, teinm laida, then whatever he had been ignorant of would be revealed to him.

He learnt the three things that constitute a poet: teinm laida, imbas forosna, and dichetul dichennaib. It is then Finn made this lay to prove his poetry:

May-day, season surpassing! Splendid is color then. Blackbirds sing a full lay, if there be a slender shaft of day.

The dust-colored cuckoo calls aloud: Welcome, splendid summer! The bitterness of bad weather is past, the boughs of the wood are a thicket.

Summer cuts the river down, the swift herd of horses seeks the pool, the long hair of the heather is outspread, the soft white bog-down grows.

Panic startles the heart of the deer, the smooth sea runs apace-season when ocean sinks asleep-blossom covers the world.

Bees with puny strength carry a goodly burden, the harvest of blossoms; up the mountain-side kine take with them mud, the ant makes a rich meal.

The harp of the forest sounds music, the sail gathers-perfect peace. Color has settled on every height, haze on the lake of full waters.

The corncrake, a strenuous bard, discourses; the lofty virgin waterfall sings a welcome to the warm pool; the talk of the rushes is come.

Light swallows dart aloft, loud melody reaches round the hill, the soft rich mast buds, the stuttering quagmire rehearses.

The peat-bog is as the raven's coat, the loud cuckoo bids welcome, the speckled fish leaps, strong is the bound of the swift warrior.

Man flourishes, the maiden buds in her fair strong pride; perfect each forest from top to ground, perfect each great stately plain.

Delightful is the season's splendor, rough winter has gone, white is every fruitful wood, a joyous peace in summer.

A flock of birds settles in the midst of meadows; the green field rustles, wherein is a

brawling white stream.

A wild longing is on you to race horses, the ranked host is ranged around:

A bright shaft has been shot into the land, so that the water-flag is gold beneath it.

A timorous tiny persistent little fellow sings at the top of his voice, the lark sings clear tidings: surpassing May-day of delicate colors!

However, Finn went to Cethern, the son of Fintan, further to learn poetry with him. At that time there was a very beautiful maiden in Bri Ele, that is to say, in the fairy knoll of Bri Ele, and the name of that maiden was Ele. The men of Ireland were at feud about that maiden. One man after another went to woo her. Every year on Samain the wooing used to take place; for the fairy-mounds of Ireland were always open about Samain; for on Samain nothing could ever be hidden in the fairy-mounds. To each man that went to woo her this used to happen: one of his people was slain. This was done to mark the occasion, nor was it ever found out who did it.

Like everybody else, the poet Cethern went to woo the maiden. However, Finn did not like the poet's going on that errand. As they went to the wooing they formed themselves into three bands. There were nine in each band. As they went towards the fairy-mound, a man of their people was slain between them; and it was not known who had slain him. Oircbel the poet was the name of the man that was slain there. Hence is Fert Oircbeil, the Grave of Oircbel, in Clonfad. Thereupon they separated, and Finn went from them... However, Finn thought it a grievance and a great disgrace.

He went until he came to the house of the champion Fiacal mac Conchinn, at Shah Mairge. It is there his dwelling was at that time. To him, then, Finn made his complaint, and told him how the man had been slain among them in the fairy-mound. Fiacal told him to go and sit down by the two Paps of Anti, behind Luachar. So he went and sat down between the two strongholds which are between the two Paps of Anu.

Now, when Finn was there between them, on Samain night, he saw the two fairy-mounds opened around him, even the two strongholds, their ramparts having vanished before them. And he saw a great fire in either of the two strongholds; and he heard a voice from one of them, which said: "Is your sweet-root good?"

"Good, indeed!" said a voice in the other fairy-mound.

"Question: shall anything be taken from us to you?"

"If that be given to us, something will be given to you in return." While Finn was there he saw a man coming out of the fairy-mound. A kneading-trough was in his hand with a pig upon it, and a cooked calf, and a bunch of wild garlic upon it. The time was Samain. The man came past Finn to reach the other fairy-mound. Finn made a cast with the spear of

Fiacal mac Conchinn. He hurled it southward from him towards Sliab Mairge. Then said Finn: "If the spear should reach any one of us, may he escape alive from it! I think this a revenge for my comrade."

That passed, till forthwith he heard a lament, and a great wail, saying:

On the Barrow, by a sharp-pointed spear,
Aed, Fidga's son, has fallen:
By the spear of Fiacal,
Finn has slain him.

Then Fiacal came to Finn, and was at the two Paps of Anu. Fiacal asked him whom he had slain. "I know not," said Finn, "whether any good has come from the cast which I have thrown."

"'Tis likely, indeed," said Fiacal, "that some one has been slain. It seems to me if thou dost not do it to-night, thou wilt not do it to the end of another year." However, Finn said that he had sent a cast, and that it seemed likely to him that it had reached some one. And he heard a great wailing in the fairy-mound, saying:

Venom is this spear,
And venomous he whose it is,
Venomous whoever threw it,
Venom for him whom it laid low.

Outside the fairy-mound of Cruachan Bri Ele Finn seized a woman in pledge for his spear. The woman promised to send out the spear if he released her. Finn let the woman from him into the knoll. Then, as she went into the knoll the woman said:

Venom the spear,
And venom the hand that threw it
If it is not cast out of the knoll,
A murrain will seize the land.

Thereupon the spear was thrown out, and Finn took it with him to where Fiacal was.

"Well," said Fiacal, "keep the spear with which thou hast done the famous deed." Then Fiacal said the occasion was fortunate, since the man had been slain who had killed Finn's comrade.

"He whom thou hast slain here," said he, "'tis he who used to kill every man that came to woo the maiden, because it is he who loved the maiden."

Thereupon Finn and Fiacal went onward. Now, Thacal had a tryst with the fian at Inber Colptha. Then he said to Finn that they should go home . . . since their business was finished. Said Finn: "Let me go with thee," said he.

“I do not wish thee to go with me,” says Fiacal, “lest thy strength should fail thee.”

“I shall find out,” said Finn.

Then they went forth. Twelve balls of lead were round the neck of Fiacal to restrain his vigor, such was his swiftness. He would throw one ball after another from him, and Finn took them with him, and yet Thacal's running was no swifter than Finn's.

They reached Inber Colptha. Then Finn brought all the twelve balls of lead to him, and he was pleased. That night they slept there. They made Finn keep watch that night, and he was told to wake the warrior if he heard any cry of outrage. Now, one hour of the night, as Finn was watching, he heard a cry from the north, and did not wake the warrior. He went alone in the direction of the cry to Sliab Slanga. While Finn was there, among the men of Ulster, at the hour of midnight, he overtook three women before him, at a green mound, with cloaks of fairy-women.

As they were wailing on that mound, they would all put their hands on the mound. Then the women fled into the fairy-mound before Finn. Finn caught one of the women as she was going into the fairy-mound of Slanga, and snatched her brooch out of her cloak. The woman went after him, and besought Finn to give her back the brooch of her cloak, and said it was not fit for her to go into the fairy-mound with a blemish, and she promised a reward for her release...

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