

The Dream of Macsen Wledig

Macsen Wledig was Emperor of Rome and was the handsomest and wisest of men, and the best fitted to be emperor of all that had gone before him. And one day he held an assembly of kings and he said to his friends, 'To-morrow,' said he, 'I intend to go a hunting.' On the morrow early he set out with his retinue and came to the valley of a river which runs down towards Rome. He hunted the valley until it was midday. Moreover, there was with him two-and-thirty crowned kings, his vassals at that time. Not for the joy of hunting did the emperor hunt with them so long, but because he had been made a man of such high dignity that he was lord over all those kings.

And the sun was high in the heavens above their heads, and the heat great. And sleep came upon him, and his chamberlains set their shields about him on their spear shafts, as a ward against the sun; they set a gold-chased shield under his head, and in this wise Macsen slept.

And then he saw a dream. The dream that he saw was how he was making along the river valley towards its upper reaches; and he came to the highest mountain in the world. He thought that the mountain was as high as heaven; and as he came over the mountain he could see how he was traversing the fairest and most level regions that mortal had ever seen, on the far side of the mountain. And he saw great wide rivers making from the mountains to the sea, and he journeyed towards the sea-fords on the rivers: however long he was journeying so, he came to the mouth of the river, the greatest any one had seen. And he saw a great city at the mouth of the river, and in the city a great castle, and he saw many great towers of various colours on the castle. And he saw a fleet at the mouth of the river, and that was the biggest fleet that mortal had ever seen, And amidst the fleet he saw a ship; and bigger was that by far and fairer than all the others. And what he might see of the ship above water, one plank he saw of gold, and the next of silver. He saw a bridge of walrus-ivory from the ship to the land, and he thought how he came along the bridge on to the ship. A sail was hoisted on the ship, and away she went over sea and ocean, He saw how they came to an island, the fairest in the whole world, and after he had traversed the island from sea to answering sea, even to the uttermost bound of the island, he could see valleys and steeps and towering rocks, and harsh rugged terrain whose like he had never seen. And from there he saw in the sea, facing that rugged land, an island. And between him and that island he saw a country whose plain was the length of its sea, its mountains the length of its woodland. And from that mountain he saw a river flow through the land, making towards the sea. And at the river mouth he could see a great castle, the fairest that mortal had ever seen, and the gate of the castle he saw open, and he came to the castle. Inside the castle he saw a fair hall. The roof of the hall he thought to be all gold; the sides of the hall he thought to be of glittering stones, each as costly as its neighbour; the hall doors he thought to be all gold. Golden couches he saw in the hall and tables of silver. And on the couch facing him he could see two auburn-haired youths playing at gwyddbwyll. A silver board he saw for the gwyddbwyll, and golden pieces thereon. The garments of the youths were of pure black brocaded silk, and frontlets of red gold holding their hair in place, and sparkling jewels of great price therein, rubies and gems alternately therein, and imperial stones. Buskins of new cordwain were on their feet, and bars of red gold to fasten them.

And at the foot of the hall-pillar he saw a hoary-headed man seated in a chair of ivory, with the images of two eagles in red gold thereon. Armlets of gold were upon his arms, and many gold rings on his hands; and a golden torque about his neck, and a golden frontlet holding his hair in place; and his presence august. A board of gold and gwyddbwyll

before him, and in his hand a rod of gold, and hard files. And he was carving men for gwyddbwyll.

And he saw a maiden sitting before him in a chair of red gold. No more than it would be easy to look upon the sun when it is brightest, no easier would it be than that to look on her by reason of her excelling beauty. Vests of white silk were upon the maiden, with clasps of red gold at the breast; and a surcoat of gold brocaded silk upon her, and a mantle to look to it, and a brooch of red gold holding it about her, and a frontlet of red gold on her head, with rubies and gems on the frontlet, and pearls alternatively, and imperial stones; and a girdle of red gold around her; and the fairest sight to see of mortal kind.

And the maiden arose to meet him from the chair of gold and he threw his arms around the maiden's neck, and they both sat down in the chair of gold. And the chair was not straiter for them both than for the maiden alone.

And when when he had his arms around the maiden's neck, and his cheek against her cheek, what with the dogs straining at their leashes, and the shoulders of the shields coming against each other, and the spear shafts striking together and the neighing and stamping of the horses, the emperor awoke. And when he awoke neither life nor existence nor being was left him, for the maiden he had seen in his sleep. Not one bone-joint of his was there, not the middle of a single nail, to say nothing of a part that might be greater than that, but was filled with love of the maiden. And then his retinue said to him 'Lord' said they, 'it is past time for thee to take thy meat.' And the emperor mounted his palfrey, the saddest man that mortal had ever seen, and made his way towards Rome.

And he was thus the whole week. Whenever the retinue went to drink wine and mead out of golden vessels, he went not with any of them. Whenever they went to listen to songs and entertainment he went not with them; and nothing could be got from him save sleep. As often as he slept he could see in his sleep the woman he loved best; but when he was not sleeping he cared for naught because of her, for he knew not in the world where she was.

And one day a chamberlain spoke to him and chamberlain though he was, he was king of the Romani. 'Lord,' said he, 'thy men all speak ill of thee.' 'Why do they speak ill of me?' said the emperor. 'Because they get from thee neither message nor answer, such as men get from their lord. And that is the reason thou art ill-spoken of.' 'Why, man,' said the emperor, 'do thou bring around me the wise men of Rome, and I will tell thee why I am sad.'

And then the wise men of Rome were brought around the emperor, and he said, 'Wise men of Rome,' said he, 'a dream have I seen. And in the dream I saw a maiden. Neither life nor existence nor being is there in me for that maiden.' 'Lord,' said they, 'since thou hast entrusted us to counsel thee, counsel thee we will. And this is our counsel to thee: to send messengers for three years to the three divisions of the earth, to seek thy dream. And since thou knowest not what day, what night, good tidings may come to thee, that much hope may sustain thee.'

Then the messengers journeyed till the end of the year, wandering the world, and seeking tidings concerning the dream. When they returned at the end of the year they knew not one word more than on the day they set out. And thereupon the emperor grieved to think that he should never get tidings of the lady he loved best.

And then said the king of the Romani to the emperor, 'Lord,' said he, 'go forth to hunt the way thou sawest thyself go, whether to the east or to the west.' And then the emperor went forth to hunt and came to the bank of the river. 'It was here,' said he, 'that I was when I saw the dream, and towards the river's upper reaches westwards was I journeying.'

And thereupon thirteen men set forth as messengers of the emperor. And before them they saw a huge mountain which they thought touched heaven. Now this was the guise in which the messengers journeyed: one sleeve there was on the cape of each one of them to his front, in token that they were messengers, so that through, whatever warring land

they might journey, no harm would be done them. And as they crossed that mountain, they could see wide level regions, and great wide rivers flowing through them. 'Lo,' said they, 'the land our lord saw.'

They journeyed towards the sea-fiords on the rivers till they came to a great river which they saw making towards the sea, and a great city at the mouth of the river, and in that city a great castle, and great towers of various colours on the castle. They saw the biggest fleet in the world at the mouth of the river, and one ship which was bigger than any of the others. 'Lo, once more,' said they, 'the dream which our lord saw.' And in that big ship they voyaged over the sea and came to the Island of Britain. And they traversed that island untill they came to Eryri. 'Lo, once more,' said they, 'the rugged land our lord saw. They pressed forward till they could see Môn facing them, and till they could see Arfon likewise. 'Lo,' said they, 'the land our lord saw in his sleep.' And Aber Seint they saw, and the castle at the mouth of the river. The gate of the castle they saw open. They came into the castle. Inside the castle they saw a hall. 'Lo,' said they, 'the hall our lord saw in his sleep.' They came into the hall. They saw the two youths playing gwyddbwyll on the golden couch, and they saw the hoary-headed man at the foot of the pillar, in the ivory chair, carving the men for the gwyddbwyll. And they saw the maiden sitting in a chair of red gold.

Down on their knees went the messengers. 'Empress of Rome, all hail!' 'Ah, good sirs,' said the maiden, 'I see on you the mark of high born men, and the badge of messengers. What mockery do you make of me?' 'No mockery lady, do we make of thee. But the emperor of Rome hath seen thee in his sleep. Neither life nor existence has he because of thee. A choice thou shalt have of us, lady, whether to come with us, to be made empress in Rome, or the emperor to come hither and take thee to wife..' 'Ah, good sirs,' said the maiden, 'I doubt not what you tell me, nor on the other hand do I overmuch believe it. But if 'tis I whom the emperor loves, then let him come hither to fetch me.'

And by day and by night the messengers sped them back and as their horses failed they left them and purchased others anew. And when they reached Rome they greeted the emperor and asked for their reward, and that they received even as they named it. 'We will be thy guide lord.' said they, 'by sea and by land, to the place where that lady is whom thou lovest best. And we know her name, her kindred and her lineage.'

And straight away the emperor set out with his host, and those men as their guide. Towards the Island of Britain they came, over the sea and ocean, and he conquered the island from Beli son of Manogan and his sons, and drove them into the sea. And he came straight on to Arfon; and the emperor recognized the land the moment he saw it. And the moment he saw the castle of Aber Seint, 'See yonder,' said he, 'the castle wherein I saw the lady I love best.' And he came straight to the castle and into the hall and there he saw Cynan son of Eudaf and Gadeon son of Eudaf playing at gwyddbwyll. And he saw Eudaf son of Caradawg sitting in a chair of ivory, carving pieces for the gwyddbwyll. The maiden he had seen in his sleep he saw sitting in the chair of red gold. 'Empress of Rome,' said he, 'all hail !,' And the emperor threw his arms around her neck. And that night he slept with her.

And on the morrow early the maiden asked for her maiden fee, because she had been found a maid; and he asked her to name her maiden fee. And she named for her father the Island of Britain from the North sea to the Irish Sea, and the three adjacent islands, to be held under the empress of Rome, and that three chief strongholds be made for her in the three places she might choose in the Island of Britain.. And she chose that the most exalted stronghold be made for her in Arfon, and soil from Rome was brought there so that it might be healthier for the emperor to sleep and sit and move about. later the other two strongholds were made for her, none other than Caer Llion and Caer Fyrddin.

And one day the emperor went to Caer Fyrddin to hunt, and he went as far as the top of Y Frennin Fawr, and there the emperor pitched his tent. And that camping-ground is called Cadeir Facsen from that day to this. Caer Fyrddin, on the other hand, was so named

because the stronghold was built by a myriad men.

Thereafter Elen thought to make high roads from one stronghold to another across the Island of Britain. And the roads were made. And for that reason they are called the Roads of Elen of the Hosts, because she was sprung from the Island of Britain, and the men of the Island of Britain would not have made those hostings for any save for her.

Seven years was the emperor in this Island. Now it was the custom of the Romans at that time, that whatever emperor should stay in foreign parts a-conquering seven years, he must remain in that conquered territory, and not be permitted to return to Rome. And then they made them a new emperor. And then that emperor drew up a letter of threat to Macsen. It was no more of a letter than: IF THOU COME, AND IF EVER THOU COME TO ROME. And that letter and the tidings came all the way to Caer Llion to Macsen. And thence he in return sent a letter to the man who said he was emperor in Rome. In that letter too there was nothing save: AND IF I GO TO ROME, AND IF I GO.

And then Macsen set out with his host for Rome, and France he conquered, and Burgundy, and all the countries as far as Rome, and he laid siege to the city of Rome.

A year was the emperor before the city; his taking it was no nearer than on the first day. But behind him came brothers of Helen of the Hosts from the Island of Britain, and a small host with them, and better fighters were in that small host than twice their number of the men of Rome. The emperor was told how the host was seen dismounting near his own host and pitching its tents, and never had mortal seen a host handsomer or better furnished or with braver standards for its size than that was. And Elen came to look on the host, and she recognized her brothers' standards. And then came Cynan son of Eudaf and Gadeon son of Eudaf to visit the emperor, and the emperor welcomed them and embraced them

And then they watched the Romans assault the city. And Cynan said to his brother, 'We shall seek to assault the city more cannily than this.' And then they measured by night the height of the rampart, and they sent their carpenters to the forest, and a ladder was made for every four of their men. And when they had those ready, every day at mid-day the two emperors would take their meat, and on both sides they would cease fighting till all had finished eating. But the men of the Island of Britain took their meat in the morning, and drank till they were inspirited. And while the two emperors were at meat the Britons approached the rampart and planted their ladders against it. And forthwith they went in over the rampart. The new emperor had not time to take up arms before they fell on him and slew him, and many along with him. And three nights and three days were they subduing the men who were in the city and conquering the city, and another company of them guarding the city lest any of Macsen's host should come inside until they had subdued all to their will.

And then Macsen said to Elen of the Hosts: 'It is a great marvel to me, lady,' said he, 'that it was not for me thy brothers should conquer this city.' 'Lord Emperor,' she answered, 'my brothers are the wisest youths in the world. Now go thyself to ask for the city. And if they are masters of it thou shalt have it gladly.' And then the emperor and Elen came to ask for the city. And then they told the emperor that taking the city and bestowing it upon him was the concern of none save the men of the Island of Britain. And then the gates of the city of Rome were opened, and the emperor sat on his throne, and all the Romans did homage.

And then the emperor said to Cynan and Gadeon, 'Good sirs,' said he, 'I have gained possession of all my empire. And this host I will give you to conquer what region of the world you will.' And then they set out and conquered lands and castles and cities, and they slew all their men, but the women they left alive. And this wise they continued until the youths who had come with them were hoary-headed men with the length of time they had been about that conquest.. And then Cynan said to Gadeon, his brother, 'Which wilt thou,' said he, 'remain in this land or go to the land from whence thou art sprung?' So he

determined to go to his own land, and many along with him; but Cynan and another company stayed on to live there. And they determined to cut out the tongues of the women, lest their language be corrupted. And because the women were silenced of their speech, and the men spoke on, the men of Llydaw were called Brytanieid. And thence there often came, and still come from the Island of Britain, men of that tongue. And this tale is called the Dream of Macsen Wledig, emperor of Rome. And here is an end to it .

TRIADS REFERING TO MAXEN WLEDIG From the 4 books

Three Chief Officers of the Island of Britain: Gwydar son of Rhun song of Beli; and Cawrdaf son of Caradawg; and Owain son of Maxen Wledig.

Three supreme servants of the Island of Prydain. Caradawc son of Bran; and Caurdaf son of Caradawc; and Owen son of Maxen Guledic.

When a Host went to Llychlyn.

An army (of assistance) went with Yrp of the Hosts to Llychlyn. And that man came here in the time of Cadyal of the Blows(?) to ask for a levy from this Island. And nobody came with him but Mathuthavar his servant. This is what he asked from the ten-and-twenty Chief Fortresses that there are in this Island: that twice as many men as went with him to each of them should come away with him (from it). And to the first Fortress there came only himself and his servant. (And that proved grievous to the men of this Island.) And they granted it to him. And that was the most complete levy that ever departed from this Island. And with those men he conquered the way he went. Those men remained in the two islands close to the Greek sea: namely, Clas and Avena.

And the second (army) went with **Elen of the Hosts and Maxen Wledig** to Llychlyn: and they never returned to this Island.

And the third (army) went with Caswallawn son of Beli, and Gwennwynwyn and Gwanar, sons of Lliaw son of Nwyfre, and Arianrhod daughter of Beli their mother. And (it was) from Erch and Heledd that those men came. And they went with Caswallawn their uncle in pursuit of the men of Caesar from this Island. The place where those men are is in Gascony. The number that went with each of (those armies) was twenty-one thousand men. And those were the Three Silver Hosts of the Island of Britain.

Three Dishonoured Men who were in the Island of Britain:

One of them: Afarwy son of Lludd son of Beli. He first summoned Julius Caesar and the men of Rome to this Island, and he caused the payment of three thousand pounds in money as tribute from this Island every year, because of a quarrel with Caswallawn his uncle.

And the second is Gwrtheyrn [**Vortigern**] the Thin, who first gave land to the Saxons in this Island, and was the first to enter into an alliance with them. He caused the death of Custennin the Younger, son of Custennin the Blessed, by his treachery, and exiled the two brothers Emrys Wledig and **Uthur Penndragon** from this Island to Armorica, and deceitfully took the crown and the kingdom into his own possession. And in the end Uthur and Emrys burned Gwrtheyrn in Castell Gwerthrynyawn beside the Wye, in a single conflagration to avenge their brother.

The third and worst was **Medrawd**, when **Arthur** left with him the government of the Island of Britain, at the same time when he himself went across the sea to oppose Lles [Lucius], emperor of Rome, who had dispatched messengers to **Arthur** in Caerleon to demand (payment of) tribute to him and to the men of Rome, from this Island, in the measure that it had been paid (from the time of) Caswallawn son of Beli until the time of Custennin the Blessed, Arthur's grandfather. This is the answer that Arthur gave to the emperor's messengers: that the men of Rome had no greater claim to tribute from the men of this Island, than the men of the Island of Britain had from them. For Bran son of Dyfnwal and Custennin son of Elen had been emperors in Rome, and they were two men of this Island. And they Arthur mustered the most select warriors of his kingdom (and led them)

across the sea against the emperor. And they met beyond the mountain of Mynneu [the Alps], and an untold number was slain on each side that day. And in the end Arthur encountered the emperor, and Arthur slew him. And Arthur's best men were slain there. When Medrawd heard that Arthur's host was dispersed, he turned against Arthur, and the Saxons and the Picts and the Scots united with him to hold this Island against Arthur. And when Arthur heard that, he turned back with all that had survived of his army, and succeeded by violence in landing on this Island in opposition to Medrawd. And then there took place the Battle of Camlan between Arthur and Medrawd, and was himself wounded to death. And from that (wound) he died, and was buried in a hall on the Island of Afallach.