CUCHULAIN OF MUIRTHEMNE

Lady Gregory

Sample

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Cuchulain of Muirthemne
The story of the men of the Red Branch of Ulster
Arranged and put into English
by Lady Gregory
(Lady Isabella Augusta Persse Gregory)

First published 1902

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About the Author

Isabella Augusta Persse was born 1852 as the youngest daughter of an Anglo-Irish gentry family in the County Galway in western Ireland. In 1880 she married Sir William Henry Gregory, 30 years her senior, a well-educated man with literary and artistic interests, an estate in County Galway and a house in London, and a large library, and with whom she traveled to Ceylon (where he had been governor), India, Spain, Italy and Egypt (where she had an affair with the English poet Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, whose anti-colonist views she shared). When in London, the couple held weekly salons that were frequented by many leading authors and artists.

While Lady Gregory had been writing pamphlets, short stories and poetry during the time of her marriage, she is better known for her achievements as a playwright, folklorist and theatre manager after Sir William Gregory had died in 1892 — as she later wrote, "If I had not married I should not have learned the quick enrichment of sentences that one gets in conversation; had I not been widowed I should not have found the detachment of mind, the leisure for observation necessary to give insight into character, to express and interpret it. Loneliness made me rich — 'full,' as Bacon says."

In the 1890s Lady Gregory, increasingly interested in Irish literature and mythology, became one of the leading figures of the Irish Literary Revival; in 1896 she met William Butler Yeats, which resulted in a long and fruitful collaboration. In 1899 she was a co-founder of the Irish Literary Theatre, and, after it had to close, of the Abbey Theatre. For both companies she wrote numerous plays, and she remained

an active director of the Abbey Theatre, which still exists today, until her retirement due to ill health in 1928. Coole Park, her late husband's estate in Galway, remained her home; she spent her time in Dublin staying in hotels.

In addition to her work for the theater Lady Gregory produced a number of collections of "Kiltartanese" versions of Irish myths, among them *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, published in 1902. Kiltartanese was her term for her own poetic version of English with Gaelic syntax, as it was spoken in Kiltartan, the barony in which Coole Park was situated.

After her retirement her home at Coole Park remained a focal point for the writers associated with the Irish Literary Revival. In 1932 Lady Gregory succumbed to breast cancer, dying at home. The house was demolished in 1941, but Coole Park remains as a nature reserve, open to the public. On a tree there can still be seen the carved initials of Lady Gregory's friends and collaborators, among them Yeats, John Millington Synge, George Moore, Seán O'Casey, Katharine Tynan, Violet Martin and George Bernard Shaw, who once had called her "the greatest living Irishwoman."

About this Edition

For the present edition the *Notes by Lady Gregory* have been moved forward from the end of the book, since it will make sense to read them before reading the Cuchulain texts.

A few names and terms not mentioned in Lady Gregory's *Notes* I have done my best to explain in footnotes, all of which are mine. (R. S.)

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Dedication of the Irish Edition to the People of Kiltartan

My Dear Friends,

When I began to gather these stories together, it is of you I was thinking, that you would like to have them and to be reading them. For although you have not to go far to get stories of Finn and Goll and Oisin from any old person in the place, there is very little of the history of Cuchulain and his friends left in the memory of the people, but only that they were brave men and good fighters, and that Deirdre was beautiful.

When I went looking for the stories in the old writings, I found that the Irish in them is too hard for any person to read that has not made a long study of it. Some scholars have worked well at them, Irishmen and Germans and Frenchmen, but they have printed them in the old cramped Irish, with translations into German or French or English, and these are not easy for you to get, or to understand, and the stories themselves are confused, every one giving a different account from the others in some small thing, the way there is not much pleasure in reading them. It is what I have tried to do, to take the best of the stories, or whatever parts of each will fit best to one another, and in that way to give a fair account of Cuchulain's life and death. I left out a good deal I thought you would not care about for one reason or another, but I put in nothing of my own that could be helped, only a sentence or so now and again to link the different parts together. I have told the whole story in plain and simple words, in the same way my old

nurse Mary Sheridan used to be telling stories from the Irish long ago, and I a child at Roxborough.

And indeed if there was more respect for Irish things among the learned men that live in the college at Dublin, where so many of these old writings are stored, this work would not have been left to a woman of the house, that has to be minding the place, and listening to complaints, and dividing her share of food.

My friend and your friend the *Craoibhin Aoibhin* has put Irish of today on some of these stories that I have set in order, for I am sure you will like to have the history of the heroes of Ireland told in the language of Ireland. And I am very glad to have something that is worth offering you, for you have been very kind to me ever since I came over to you from Kilchriest, two-and-twenty years ago.

Augusta Gregory
March 1902

Preface by W. B. Yeats

I

I think this book is the best that has come out of Ireland in my time. Perhaps I should say that it is the best book that has ever come out of Ireland; for the stories which it tells are a chief part of Ireland's gift to the imagination of the world — and it tells them perfectly for the first time. Translators from the Irish have hitherto retold one story or the other from some one version, and not often with any fine understanding of English, of those changes of rhythm for instance that are changes of the sense. They have translated the best and fullest manuscripts they knew, as accurately as they could, and that is all we have the right to expect from the first translators of a difficult and old literature. But few of the stories really begin to exist as great works of imagination until somebody has taken the best bits out of many manuscripts. Sometimes, as in Lady Gregory's version of *Deirdre*, a dozen manuscripts have to give their best before the beads are ready for the necklace. It has been necessary also to leave out as to add, for generations of copyists, who had often but little sympathy with the stories they copied, have mixed versions together in a clumsy fashion, often repeating one incident several times, and every century has ornamented what was once a simple story with its own often extravagant ornament. We do not perhaps exaggerate when we say that no story has come down to us in the form it had when the storyteller told it in the winter evenings. Lady Gregory has done her work of compression and selection at once so firmly and so reverently that I cannot

believe that anybody, except now and then for a scientific purpose, will need another text than this, or than the version of it the Gaelic League is about to publish in Modern Irish. When she has added her translations from other cycles, she will have given Ireland its *Mabinogion*, its *Morte d'Arthur*, its *Nibelungenlied*. She has already put a great mass of stories, in which the ancient heart of Ireland still lives, into a shape at once harmonious and characteristic; and without writing more than a very few sentences of her own to link together incidents or thoughts taken from different manuscripts, without adding more indeed than the story-teller must often have added to amend the hesitation of a moment. Perhaps more than all she had discovered a fitting dialect to tell them in. Some years ago I wrote some stories of mediaeval Irish life, and as I wrote I was sometimes made wretched by the thought that I knew of no kind of English that fitted them as the language of Morris's prose stories — the most beautiful language I had ever read — fitted his journeys to woods and wells beyond the world. I knew of no language to write about Ireland in but raw modern English; but now Lady Gregory has discovered a speech as beautiful as that of Morris, and a living speech into the bargain. As she moved about among her people she learned to love the beautiful speech of those who think in Irish, and to understand that it is as true a dialect of English as the dialect that Burns wrote in. It is some hundreds of years old, and age gives a language authority. We find in it the vocabulary of the translators of the Bible, joined to an idiom which makes it tender, compassionate, and complaisant, like the Irish language itself. It is certainly well suited to clothe a literature which never ceased to be folk-lore even when it was recited in the Courts of Kings.

II

Lady Gregory could with less trouble have made a book that would have better pleased the hasty reader. She could have plucked away details, smoothed out characteristics till she had left nothing but the bare stories; but a book of that kind would never have called up the past, or stirred the imagination of a painter or a poet, and would be as little thought of in a few years as if it had been a popular novel.

The abundance of what may seem at first irrelevant invention in a story like the death of Conaire, is essential if we are to recall a time when people were in love with a story, and gave themselves up to imagination as if to a lover. We may think there are too many lyrical outbursts, or too many enigmatical symbols here and there in some other story, but delight will always overtake us in the end. We come to accept without reserve an art that is half epical, half lyrical, like that of the historical parts of the Bible, the art of a time when perhaps men passed more readily than they do now from one mood to another, and found it harder than we do to keep to the mood in which we tot up figures or banter a friend.

III

The Church, when it was most powerful, taught learned and unlearned to climb, as it were, to the great moral realities through hierarchies of Cherubim and Seraphim, through clouds of Saints and Angels who had all their precise duties and privileges. The story-tellers of Ireland, perhaps of every primitive country, created as fine a fellowship, only it was aesthetic realities that they would have us tell for kin and fellow. They created, for learned and unlearned alike, a communion of heroes, a cloud of stalwart witnesses; but because they were as much excited

as a monk over his prayers, they did not think sufficiently about the shape of the poem and the story. We have to get a little weary or a little distrustful of our subject, perhaps, before we can lie awake thinking how to make the most of it. They were more anxious to describe energetic characters, and to invent beautiful stories, than to express themselves with perfect dramatic logic or in perfectly ordered words. They shared their characters and their stories, their very images, with one another, and banded them down from generation to generation; for nobody, even when he had added some new trait, or some new incident, thought of claiming for himself what so obviously lived its own merry or mournful life. The image-maker or worker in mosaic who first put Christ upon the Cross would have as soon claimed as his own a thought which was perhaps put into his mind by Christ himself. The Irish poets had also, it may be, what seemed a supernatural sanction, for a chief poet had to understand not only innumerable kinds of poetry, but how to keep himself for nine days in a trance. Surely they believed or half-believed in the historical reality of their wildest imaginations. And as soon as Christianity made their hearers desire a chronology that would run side by side with that of the Bible, they delighted in arranging their Kings and Queens, the shadows of forgotten mythologies, in long lines that ascended to Adam and his Garden. Those who listened to them must have felt as if the living were like rabbits digging their burrows under walls that had been built by Gods and Giants, or like swallows building their nests in the stone mouths of immense images, carved by nobody knows who. It is no wonder that we sometimes hear about men who saw in a vision ivy-leaves that were greater than shields, and blackbirds whose thighs were like the thighs of oxen. The fruit of all those stories, unless indeed the finest activities of the mind are but a pastime, is the quick

intelligence, the abundant imagination, the courtly manners of the Irish country people.

IV

William Morris came to Dublin when I was a boy, and I had some talk with him about these old stories. He had intended to lecture upon them, but "the ladies and gentlemen" — he put a Communistic fervour of hatred into the phrase — knew nothing about them. He spoke of the Irish account of the battle of Clontarf, and of the Norse account, and said that we saw the Norse and Irish tempers in the two accounts. The Norseman was interested in the way things are done, but the Irishman turned aside, evidently well pleased to be out of so dull a business, to describe beautiful supernatural events. He was thinking, I suppose, of the young man who came from Aoibhell of the Grey Rock, giving up immortal love and youth, that he might fight and die by Murrugh's side. He said that the Norseman had the dramatic temper, and the Irishman had the lyrical. I think I should have said, like Professor Ker, epical and romantic rather than dramatic and lyrical, but his words, which have so great authority, mark the distinction very well, and not only between Irish and Norse, but between Irish and other Un-Celtic literatures. The Irish story-teller could not interest himself with an unbroken interest in the way men like himself burned a house, or won wives no more wonderful than themselves. His mind constantly escaped out of daily circumstance, as a bough that has been held down by a weak hand suddenly straightens itself out. His imagination was always running off to Tir nà nOg, to the Land of Promise, which is as near to the country-people of today as it was to Cuchulain and his companions. His belief in its nearness cherished in its turn the lyrical

temper, which is always athirst for an emotion, a beauty which cannot be found in its perfection upon earth, or only for a moment. His imagination, which had not been able to believe in Cuchulain's greatness, until it had brought the Great Queen, the red-eyebrowed goddess, to woo him upon the battlefield, could not be satisfied with a friendship less romantic and lyrical than that of Cuchulain and Ferdiad, who kissed one another after the day's fighting, or with a love less romantic and lyrical than that of Baile and Aillinn, who died at the report of one another's deaths, and married in Tir nà nOg. His art, too, is often at its greatest when it is most extravagant, for he only feels himself among solid things, among things with fixed laws and satisfying purposes, when he has re-shaped the world according to his heart's desire. He understands as well as Blake that the ruins of time build mansions in eternity, and he never allows anything that we can see and handle to remain long unchanged. The characters must remain the same, but the strength of Fergus may change so greatly that he, who a moment before was merely a strong man among many, becomes the master of Three Blows that would destroy an army, did they not cut off the heads of three little hills instead, and his sword, which a fool had been able to steal out of its sheath, has of a sudden the likeness of a rainbow. A wandering lyric moon must knead and kindle perpetually that moving world of cloaks made out of the fleeces of Manannan; of armed men who change themselves into sea-birds; of goddesses who become crows; of trees that bear fruit and flower at the same time. The great emotions of love, terror, and friendship must alone remain untroubled by the moon in that world, which is still the world of the Irish country-people, who do not open their eyes very wide at the most miraculous change, at the most sudden enchantment. Its events, and things, and people are wild, and are like unbroken

horses, that are so much more beautiful than horses that have learned to run between shafts. We think of actual life, when we read those Norse stories, which were already in decadence, so necessary were the proportions of actual life to their efforts, when a dying man remembered his heroism enough to look down at his wound and say, "Those broad spears are coming into fashion;" but the Irish stories make us understand why the Greeks call myths the activities of the daemons. The great virtues, the great joys, the great privations come in the myths, and, as it were, take mankind between their naked arms, and without putting off their divinity. Poets have taken their themes more often from stories that are all, or half, mythological, than from history or stories that give one the sensation of history, understanding, as I think, that the imagination which remembers the proportions of life is but a long wooing, and that it has to forget them before it becomes the torch and the marriage-bed.

V

We find, as we expect, in the work of men who were not troubled about any probabilities or necessities but those of emotion itself, an immense variety of incident and character and of ways of expressing emotion. Cuchulain fights man after man during the quest of the Brown Bull, and not one of those fights is like another, and not one is lacking in emotion or strangeness; and when we think imagination can do no more, the story of the Two Bulls, emblematic of all contests, suddenly lifts romance into prophecy. The characters too have a distinctness we do not find among the people of the *Mabinogion*, perhaps not even among the people of the *Morte d'Arthur*. We know we shall be long forgetting Cuchulain, whose life is vehement and full

of pleasure, as though he always remembered that it was to be soon over; or the dreamy Fergus who betrays the sons of Usnach for a feast, without ceasing to be noble; or Conall who is fierce and friendly and trustworthy, but has not the sap of divinity that makes Cuchulain mysterious to men, and beloved of women. Women indeed, with their lamentations for lovers and husbands and sons, and for fallen rooftrees and lost wealth, give the stories their most beautiful sentences; and, after Cuchulain, we think most of certain great queens — of angry, amorous Maeve, with her long pale face; of Findabair, her daughter, who dies of shame and of pity; of Deirdre who might be some mild modern housewife but for her prophetic wisdom. If we do not set Deirdre's lamentations among the greatest lyric poems of the world, I think we may be certain that the wine-press of the poets has been trodden for us in vain; and yet I think it may be proud Emer, Cuchulain's fitting wife, who will linger longest in the memory. What a pure flame burns in her always, whether she is the newly married wife fighting for precedence, fierce as some beautiful bird, or the confident housewife, who would awaken her husband from his magic sleep with mocking words; or the great queen who would get him out of the tightening net of his doom, by sending him into the Valley of the Dead, with Niamh, his mistress, because he will be more obedient to her; or the woman whom sorrow has sent with Helen and Iseult and Brunnhilda, and Deirdre, to share their immortality in the rosary of the poets.

"'And oh! my love!' she said, 'we were often in one another's company, and it was happy for us; for if the world had been searched from the rising of the sun to sunset, the like would never have been found in one place, of the Black Sainglain and the Grey of Macha, and Laeg the chariot-driver, and myself and Cuchulain.'"

"And after that Emer bade Conall to make a wide, very deep grave for Cuchulain; and she laid herself down beside her gentle comrade, and she put her mouth to his mouth, and she said: 'Love of my life, my friend, my sweetheart, my one choice of the men of the earth, many is the women, wed or unwed, envied me until today; and now I will not stay living after you.'"

VI

We Irish should keep these personages much in our hearts, for they lived in the places where we ride and go marketing, and sometimes they have met one another on the hills that cast their shadows upon our doors at evening. If we will but tell these stories to our children the Land will begin again to be a Holy Land, as it was before men gave their hearts to Greece and Rome and Judea. When I was a child I had only to climb the bill behind the house to see long, blue, ragged hills flowing along the southern horizon. What beauty was lost to me, what depth of emotion is still perhaps lacking in me, because nobody told me, not even the merchant captains who knew everything, that Cruachan of the Enchantments lay behind those long, blue, ragged hills!

March 1902
W. B. Yeats

Notes by Lady Gregory

The Irish text, from which the greater number of the stories in this book have been taken, has been published either in *Irische Texte* or the *Revue Celtique*, or by O'Curry in *Atlantis* and elsewhere, and I have worked from this text, comparing it with the translations that have been already made. In some cases, as in the greater part of "The War for the Bull of Cuailgne," a very small part of the Irish text has as yet been printed, and I have had to work by comparing and piecing together various translations.

I have had to put a connecting sentence of my own here and there, and I have condensed many passages, and I have sometimes tried to give the meaning of a formula that has lost its old meaning. Thus I have exchanged for the grotesque accounts of Cuchulain's distortion — which no doubt merely meant that in time of great strain or anger he had more than human strength — the more simple formula that his appearance changed to the appearance of a god. In the same way, I have left out Levarcham's distortion, which was the recognised way of saying she was a swift messenger.

As to the date of the stories, I cannot do better than quote from Mr Alfred Nutt's "Cuchulain, the Irish Achilles" —

"It suffices to say that we possess a MS. literature of which Cuchulain and his contemporaries are the subject, the extent of which may be roughly reckoned at 2000 8vo pages. The great bulk of this is contained in MSS. which are older than the twelfth century, or which demonstrably are copied from pre-twelfth century MSS.; where post-twelfth-century versions alone remain, the story itself is nearly always

known from earlier sources; in fact, there is hardly a single scene or incident in the whole cycle which has reached us only in MSS. of the thirteenth and following centuries. At the same time a not inconsiderable portion of the cycle comes before us altered in language, and to some extent in content, style of narrative, and characterisation, showing that the saga as a whole remained a living element of Irish culture and participated in the accidents of its evolution.

"The great bulk of this literature is, as I have said, certainly older than the twelfth century; but we can carry it back much farther, apart from any considerations based upon the subject matter. Arguments of a nature purely philological, based upon the language of the texts, or critical, based upon the relations of the various MSS. to each other, not only allow, but compel us to date the *redaction* of the principal Cuchulain stories, substantially in the form under which they have survived, back to the seventh to ninth centuries. Whether or no they are older yet, is a question that cannot be answered without preliminary examination of the subject-matter. In the meantime it is something to know that the Cuchulain stories were put into permanent literary form at about the same date as Beowulf, some 100 to 250 years before the Scandinavian mythology crystallised into its present form, at least 200 years before the oldest Charlemagne romances, and probably 300 years before the earliest draft of the Nibelungenlied. Irish is the most ancient *vernacular* literature of modern Europe, a fact which of itself commends it to the attention of the student."

A critical account of this and the other Irish cycles is also given in Dr Douglas Hyde's "Literary History of Ireland."

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The Tuatha De Danaan, or the Sidhe, so often mentioned, were the divine race, the people of the Gods of Dana, who conquered the Fomor, the powers of darkness and their helpers the Firbolgs, in the battle of Magh Tuireadh, and possessed Ireland until they were in their turn conquered by the children of the Gael, under the leadership of the Sons of Miled. Then they became invisible, and made their homes in hills and raths.

The Morrigu was their goddess of battle, and Angus Og, Son of the Dagda[1], their god of youth and love, and Lugh, the Master of many Arts, their Hermes, their Apollo, and Manannan, Son of Lir, their Sea-God, or, as some say, the sea itself.

The spelling of Irish names for English readers is always a difficulty. I have not gone by any fixed rule but have taken the spelling of names from various good authorities. As to pronunciation, the modern is generally used, but we know so little what the ancient pronunciation was, that we are left some freedom, and some words have taken a shape from English-speaking generations, that it is hard to change. Teamhair, for instance, has become Tara through a mistaken use of the genitive; Muirthemne is called by Irish speakers "Mur-hev-na," but others call it Muir'them-mé and I am inclined to prefer this for the charm of its sound, and I do not see any stronger reason against using it than against sounding as we do the "s" in Paris. After all, it has not been definitely settled whether Trafalgar is to be spoken in the Spanish or the English way; English poets have given it one or the other emphasis.

This is the approximate pronunciation of some of the more difficult names: —

[1] Chief Celtic god of the Tuatha De Danaan (more often spelled Danann).

Aedh	Ae (rhyming to "day")
Aoife	Eefa
Badb	Bibe (as "jibe")
Bodb	Bove
Cliodna	Cleevna
Conchubar	Conachoor
Cuailgne	Cooley
Cuchulain	Cuhoolin, or Cu-hullin
Cobhthach	Cowhach
Dun Sobairce	Dom Severka
Emain	Avvin
Eochaid	Yohee
Eoghan	Owen
Eocho	Yucho
Fernmaighe	Farney
Glen-na-Bodhar	Glen na Mower (as "bower")
Inbhir	Inver
Lugh	Loo
Magh Tuireadh	Moytirra
Muirthemne	Mur-hev-na
Niamh	Nee-av
Rudraige	Rury
Sidhe	Shee
Slieve Suidhe Laighen	Slieve se lihon
Suibnes	Sivness
Teamhair	T'yower
Tuathmumain	Too-moon

I give below some names of places that can still be identified:[2] —

Ard Inver	Mouth of the Avoca, Co. Wicklow
Argatros	On the Nore, Co. Kilkenny
Ath Cliath	Dublin
Ath Firdiadh	(Ferdiad's Ford) Ardee
Ath Truim	Trim
Beinn Edair	Howth
Boinne River	The Boyne
Brugh na Boinne	On the Boyne
Bri Leith	In Co. Longford
Bregia	Bray
Carraige	Kerry
Cerna	Probably River Muilchean, Co. Limerick
Clartha	Clara, near Mullingar
Cleitech	On the Boyne
Conaille Muirthemne	Between the Cooley Mountains and the Boyne
Cuilsilinne	South-west of Kells
Cuailgne	Cooley, Co. Louth
Cruachan	In Co. Roscommon
Dun[3] Scathach	Isle of Skye
Dundealgan	Dundalk
Dun Rudraige	Dundrum, Co. Down
Dun Sobairce	Dunseverick, Co. Antrim

[2] This list omits Alban, "that land to the east, Alban, with its wonders" — the Isle of Skye.

[3] Dun is a fort built of drystone walls. Dun Scathach is situated *on* the Isle of Skye. Today known as Dunscaith Castle, ruins dating back to the 11th century — a thousand years after Scathach's time — still stand.

Drium Criadh	Drumcree, Co. Westmeath
Emain Macha	Navan fort, near Armagh. A description and plan of Emain are given by D'Arbois de Jubainville in Revue Celtique, vol. xvi
Esro	Ballyshannon
Fearbile	In Co. Westmeath
Femen	At Slieve na Man, Co. Tipperary
Gairech and Ilgaireth	Two hills near Mullingar
Hill of Brughean Mor	In Parish of Drumany, Co. Westmeath
Hy Maine	A part of Roscommon, bordering Sligo and Mayo
Inver Colptha	Estuary of the Boyne
Loch Cuan	Strangford Loch
Loch Riach	In Co. Galway
Leodus, Cadd and Ork	Lewis, Shetland, and Orkney
Magh[4] Ai	In Co. Roscommon
Magh Breagh	In East Meath
Magh Mucrime	Near Athenry, Co. Galway
Magh Slecht	Near Ballymagauran, Co. Cavan
Muirthemne	The part of Co. Lough bordering the sea, between the Boyne and Dundalk
Road of Midluachair	The north-eastern road from Teamhair
Slieve[5] Breagh	Co. Louth
Slieve Cuilinn	Co. Londonderry
Slieve Fuad	Co. Armagh
Slieve Mis	Co. Kerry
Slieve Suidhe Laighen	Mount Leinster

[4] Magh is plain.

[5] Slieve is mountain.

Sleamhain of Meath	Near Mullingar
Sligger Isles	Faröe Isles
Sionnan	The Shannon
Sudiam	Sweden
Tailtin	Telltown
Teamhair	Tara, Co. Meath
Tuathmumain	Thomond
Uaran Garad	River Cruind
Usnech	The Hill of Usnogh in West Meath
Wave[6] of Cliodna	At Glandore, Co. Cork
Wave of Assaroe	At Ballyshannon
Wave of Inbhir	Mouth of the Bann

The following is a list of the authorities I have been chiefly helped by in putting these stories together. But I cannot make it quite accurate, for I have sometimes transferred a mere phrase, sometimes a whole passage from one story to another, where it seemed to fit better. I have occasionally used Scottish Gaelic versions, as in the account of Deirdre's birth, and the manner of her death, and in a part of "The Only Son of Aoife." "O'Curry" stands for his two books, "The Manners and Customs of Ancient Ireland," and "MS. Materials for Ancient Irish History," and his contributions to *Atlantis*.

Birth of Cuchulain — O'Curry; De Jubainville, *Epopée Celtique*; Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*; Kuno Meyer, *Revue Celtique*; Duvau, *Revue Celtique*; Windisch, *Irische Texte*; Stokes, *Irische Texte*.

[6] "The three great waves" shout round the coast of Ireland. In stormy weather, the sea at these places utters a loud and solemn roar — in Irish mythology, warning of deadly danger, foreboding the approaching death of kings or chieftains, or bewailing a king's or a great chief's death.

BOY DEEDS OF CUCHULAIN — Same as “War for the Bull of Cuailgne.”

COURTING OF EMER — Kuno Meyer, *Revue Celtique*; Kuno Meyer, *Archaeological Review*; Dr Douglas Hyde, *Literary History of Ireland*; De Jubainville, *Epopée Celtique*; O’Curry.

BRICRIU’S FEAST, and THE CHAMPIONSHIP OF ULSTER — Text, with Henderson’s translation, published by Irish Texts Society; De Jubainville, *Epopée Celtique*; O’Curry; Windisch, *Irische Texte*.

THE HIGH KING OF IRELAND — Whitley Stokes, *Revue Celtique*; O’Curry; Zimmer, *Keltische Studien*.

FATE OF THE CHILDREN OF USNACH — Text and Translations published by the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language; Hyde, *Literary History of Ireland*; Hyde, *Zeitschrift Celt. Philologie*; O’Curry; Whitley Stokes, *Irische Texte*; Windisch, *Irische Texte*; Cameron, *Reliquae Celticae*; O’Flanagan, *Translations of Gaelic Society*; O’Flanagan, *Reliquae Celticae*; Carmichael, *Transactions of Gaelic Society*; *Ultonian Ballads*, De Jubainville, *Epopée Celtique*; Dottin, *Revue Celtique*.

THE DREAM OF ANGUS — Müller, *Revue Celtique*.

CRUACHAN — Kuno Meyer, *Revue Celtique*; O’Beirne Crowe, *Proceedings of Royal Irish Academy*; O’Curry; Rhys, *Celtic Heathendom*.

WEDDING OF MAINE MORGOR — Windisch, *Irische Texte*.

WAR FOR THE BULL OF CUAILGNE, and AWAKENING OF ULSTER — MS. translations by O’Daly in Royal Irish Academy; MS. translations by O’Looney in Royal Irish Academy; O'Curry; Standish Hayes

O'Grady's Synopsis in Miss Hull's *Cuchulain Saga*; Zimmer, Synopsis in *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Sprachforschung*.

The Two Bulls — Windisch, *Irische Texte*; Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*; O'Curry.

The Only Jealousy of Emer, and Instruction to a Prince — O'Curry, *Atlantis*; De Jubainville, *Epopée Celtique*.

The Sons of Doel Dermait — Windisch, *Irische Texte*; Rhys, *Hibbert Lectures*.

Battle of Rosnaree — Text with Father Hogan's translation; Todd Lecture Series; O'Curry; Kuno Meyer, *Revue Celtique*.

Only Son of Aoife — Keating's *History of Ireland*; Miss Brooke's *Reliques*; Curtain's *Folk Tales*; Some Gaelic Ballads.

Gathering at Muirthemne, and Death of Cuchulain — "Brislech Mor Magh Muirthemne," and "Deargruatar Conaill Cearnaig" — published in *Gaelic Journal*, 1901; S. Hayes O'Grady in Miss Hull's *Cuchulain Saga*; Whitley Stokes, *Revue Celtique*; an unpublished MS. in Dr Hyde's possession.

We must be grateful to all these scholars, workers, or compilers, those who have passed away, and those who are living. And I am personally grateful to my friend Douglas Hyde for patient answering of many questions; and to my friend and critic, W. B. Yeats, for his kindness and for his severity. *A. G.*

I.
Birth of Cuchulain

In the time long ago, Conchubar, son of Ness, was King of Ulster,[7] and beheld his court in the palace of Emain Macha. And this is the way he came to be king. He was but a young lad, and his father was not living, and Fergus, son of Rogh, who was at that time King of Ulster, asked his mother Ness in marriage.

Now Ness, that was at one time the quietest and kindest of the women of Ireland, had got to be unkind and treacherous because of an unkindness that had been done to her, and she planned to get the

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[7] An Old Irish text, the Ard Ruide, thus describes the five provinces of Ireland:
"Connacht [Connaught] in the west is the kingdom of learning, the seat of the greatest and wisest druids and magicians; the men of Connacht are famed for their eloquence, their handsomeness and their ability to pronounce true judgement.
Ulster in the north is the seat of battle valour, of haughtiness, strife, boasting; the men of Ulster are the fiercest warriors of all Ireland, and the queens and goddesses of Ulster are associated with battle and death.
Leinster, the eastern kingdom, is the seat of prosperity, hospitality, the importing of rich foreign wares like silk or wine; the men of Leinster are noble in speech and their women are exceptionally beautiful.
Munster in the south is the kingdom of music and the arts, of harpers, of skilled ficheall players and of skilled horsemen. The fairs of Munster were the greatest in all Ireland.
The last kingdom, Meath, is the kingdom of Kingship, of stewardship, of bounty in government; in Meath lies the Hill of Tara, the traditional seat of the High King of Ireland."
In the Chuchulain stories, though, Ulster and its hero are in conflict with "the four provinces of Ireland."

kingdom away from Fergus for her own son. So she said to Fergus: "Let Conchubar hold the kingdom for a year, so that his children after him may be called the children of a king; and that is the marriage portion I will ask of you."

"You may do that," the men of Ulster said to him; "for even though Conchubar gets the name of being king, it is yourself that will be our king all the time." So Fergus agreed to it, and he took Ness as his wife, and her son Conchubar was made king in his place. But all through the year, Ness was working to keep the kingdom for him, and she gave great presents to the chief men of Ulster to get them on her side. And though Conchubar was but a young lad at that time, he was wise in his judgments, and brave in battle, and good in shape and in form, and they liked him well. And at the end of the year, when Fergus asked to have the kingship back again, they consulted together; and it is what they agreed, that Conchubar was to keep it. And they said: "It is little Fergus thinks about us, when he was so ready to give up his rule over us for a year; and let Conchubar keep the kingship," they said, "and let Fergus keep the wife he has got."

Now it happened one day that Conchubar was making a feast at Emain Macha for the marriage of his sister Dechtire with Sualtim son of Roig. And at the feast Dechtire was thirsty, and they gave her a cup of wine, and as she was drinking it, a mayfly flew into the cup, and she drank it down with the wine. And presently she went into her sunny parlour, and her fifty maidens along with her, and she fell into a deep sleep. And in her sleep, Lugh of the Long Hand appeared to her, and he said: "It is I myself was the mayfly that came to you in the cup, and it is with me you must come away now, and your fifty maidens along with you." And he put on them the appearance of a flock of birds, and they went with him southward till they came to Brugh na Boinne, the

dwelling-place of the Sidhe. And no one at Emain Macha could get tale or tidings of them, or know where they had gone, or what had happened them.

It was about a year after that time, there was another feast in Emain, and Conchubar and his chief men were sitting at the feast. And suddenly they saw from the window a great flock of birds, that lit on the ground and began to eat up everything before them, so that not so much as a blade of grass was left.

The men of Ulster were vexed when they saw the birds destroying all before them, and they yoked nine of their chariots to follow after them. Conchubar was in his own chariot, and there were following with him Fergus son of Rogh, and Laegaire Buadach, the Battle-Winner, and Celthair son of Uithecar, and many others, and Bricriu of the bitter tongue was along with them.

They followed after the birds across the whole country southward, across Slieve Fuad, by Ath Lethan, by Ath Garach and Magh Gossa, between Fir Rois and Fir Ardae; and the birds before them always. They were the most beautiful that had ever been seen; nine flocks of them there were, linked together two and two with a chain of silver, and at the head of every flock there were two birds of different colours, linked together with a chain of gold; and there were three birds that flew by themselves, and they all went before the chariots, to the far end of the country, until the fall of night, and then there was no more seen of them.

And when the dark night was coming on, Conchubar said to his people: "It is best for us to unyoke the chariots now, and to look for some place where we can spend the night."

Then Fergus went forward to look for some place, and what he came to was a very small poor-looking house. A man and a woman

were in it, and when they saw him they said: "Bring your companions here along with you, and they will be welcome." Fergus went back to his companions and told them what he had seen. But Bricriu said: "Where is the use of going into a house like that, with neither room nor provisions nor coverings in it; it is not worth our while to be going there."

Then Bricriu went on himself to the place where the house was. But when he came to it, what he saw was a grand, new, well-lighted house; and at the door there was a young man wearing armour, very tall and handsome and shining. And he said: "Come into the house, Bricriu; why are you looking about you?" And there was a young woman beside him, fine and noble, and with curled hair, and she said: "Surely there is a welcome before you from me." "Why does she welcome me?" said Bricriu. "It is on account of her that I myself welcome you," said the young man. "And is there no one missing from you at Emain?" he said. "There is surely," said Bricriu. "We are missing fifty young girls for the length of a year." "Would you know them again if you saw them?" said the young man. "If I would not know them," said Bricnu, "it is because a year might make a change in them, so that I would not be sure." "Try and know them again," said the man, "for the fifty young girls are in this house, and this woman beside me is their mistress, Dechtire. It was they themselves, changed into birds, that went to Emain Macha to bring you here." Then Dechtire gave Bricriu a purple cloak with gold fringes; and he went back to find his companions. But while he was going he thought to himself: "Conchubar would give great treasure to find these fifty young girls again, and his sister along with them. I will not tell him I have found them. I will only say I have found a house with beautiful women in it, and no more than that."

End of sample

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