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of Long Ago**

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SERIES



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The Little Cousins of Long Ago Series

OUR LITTLE CELTIC COUSIN OF LONG AGO

Being the Story of Ferdiad,
a Boy of Ireland, in the
Time of Brian Boru

BY
EVALEEN STEIN

Author of "Our Little Frankish Cousin of Long
Ago," "Our Little Norman Cousin
of Long Ago," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY
JOHN GOSS



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Y B A B U

General

OCT 30 1939

**TO MY COUSIN
OF THE CHILD HEART
LUCY CLARKSON TORR**

PREFACE

TO THE BOYS AND GIRLS

AGES and ages ago, so far back that the world has almost forgotten about it, the Celtic people had a great empire spreading over a large part of Europe. Then, after a long while, something happened to break up this empire; nobody knows exactly what, but most probably they fought among themselves or with other people, or both, or perhaps some stronger race swept into their country and thrust them out. At any rate, by and by it came about that all that was left of the empire of the Celts was that part of it which we now call France and the British Isles; they called them Gaul and Britain and Ireland.

Meantime the great city of Rome had been growing more and more powerful and sending her conquering armies everywhere till at last

she brought most of Europe under her sway. And the Celtic people, whose proudest boast had been that once upon a time they had captured the great city, now found themselves under her dominion and soon beginning to have Roman ideas about things. For no nation could be ruled by Rome and be just the same as before. There was one part of the Celtic lands, however, that did not change, and this was Ireland. Far off to the west, for some reason she was never visited by the Roman soldiers and so managed to keep her affairs all to herself.

Thus several centuries passed; and then, as you perhaps know from your histories, Rome herself, with all her pride and splendor, was conquered and overwhelmed by the wild tribes to the north of her, and Europe, which had been growing more and more civilized, sank back into ignorance and barbarism which it took hundreds of years to shake off.

But all the while Ireland, off there in the western ocean, kept to herself. Just as she was not conquered by Rome, neither was she overwhelmed by the barbarians when Rome fell, but kept right on living her Celtic life and doing things in her own Celtic way clear down to the time when the rest of Europe began to rouse up and learn things again. Indeed, the Celtic people did much to help wake up Europe; for though they had not been conquered by the Romans, nevertheless the Celtic scholars had been wise enough to study the best books written by them and by the Greeks, and these, together with much other knowledge which they gained for themselves, they kept from being forgotten by the world.

Though it is true that a hundred years after the time of our story the Norman race invaded Ireland and in the centuries that followed her people have gradually changed in many ways from the Celts of long ago, yet still the Celtic

blood and the Celtic spirit so lives in Ireland that when to-day we speak of the Celts we most often mean the Irish rather than those other descendants of the old race who still are scattered through many parts of Europe and even Asia.

Now the Celts have always been an interesting people, and those of long ago left many things for us to admire and treasure. Though they did not build great and beautiful temples and palaces whose ruins still speak of past glory, as did other races of the old world, yet in the more delicate handicrafts no one ever did finer work, as is proved by the innumerable beautiful objects of gold and silver and enamel still to be seen in Irish museums. The lovely chalice of Ardagh, the Tara brooch, the cross of Cong and the bell-shrine of St. Patrick, these are famous beyond Ireland; while as for the painted books made by the old-time Celtic artists, of the many of surpassing beauty one

was so marvelous — but, no, I must not tell you about it now, for it is part of our story!

But besides these things which we of to-day can see and touch, the Celts of long ago left a great deal more. They left to the world an inheritance of beautiful myths and romantic stories and poems and fairy tales, some of which you have perhaps already read as you surely will read more of them by and by. These belong to every one; but to their own children and ever-so-great-great grandchildren, down through the centuries, the Celts of long ago left an inheritance of delight in beauty, of joy in the loveliness of the lovely world about us, in the blue sky and the green earth, joy in bright and beautiful colors, a love of poetry and fairy stories, and, best of all, a way of losing themselves in wonderful dreams, dreams sometimes tinged with a wistful sadness, perhaps, yet always beautiful. It is this inheritance that so marks the Celtic people to-day, wherever they

may chance to live, that when we know some one who specially loves all these things, we say he must have in his veins a strain of Celtic blood; and very likely he has.

But it is high time to get to our story, which has been waiting all this while. Our little Celtic cousin, Ferdiad, is ready to meet you in the first chapter and take you back to the long ago, and I hope you and he may become very good friends.

EVALEEN STEIN.

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PRONUNCIATION OF PROPER NAMES AND SOME OTHER WORDS

Aibell (ee' bell)
Ardagh (ar' dah)
Armagh (ar mah')
An' gus
Bo-aire'
Bri' an Bo ru'
Celt (selt)
Clon tarf'
Col' um kille'
Con' co bar'
Cuculain (koo koo' lin)
Curragh (kur' ach)
Dec' ter a
De Dan' aans
Dun (doon)

Eileen (i leen')
Fer' di ad
Fianna (fee an' na)
Fir' bolg
Green' an
Killaloe (kil a lo')
Kin kor' a
Lugh (loo)
Mun' ster
Meath (meeth)
Ol' lave
Se tan' ta
Taill' tenn
Torque (tork)

Our Little Celtic Cousin of Long Ago

CHAPTER I

THE TAILLTENN FAIR

THE August sun was shining brightly over the Irish meadows skirting a narrow river that glittered with such a silvery light you would never have thought its name was the Blackwater. Neither would you have supposed the place on its bank in front of which were moored scores of oddly built boats was really the very tiny old village of Tailltenn. No, you would have declared that it was a gay though rather queer looking city, and could scarcely have believed that in a week's time all its noise and

bustle would vanish and only the few wattled houses of the little village be left.

For Tailltenn in August, when its great fair was held, and Tailltenn the rest of the year were two very different places.

But never mind about Tailltenn the rest of the year, for our story begins right in the middle of the fair, which was surprisingly like our fairs of to-day. And this seems strange, considering that it was almost exactly nine hundred years ago; that is to say, it was August of the year 1013.

But people nine hundred years ago liked to show and buy things and enjoyed racing and games and entertainment of all kinds just as well as we do, and any one who could amuse was sure to have plenty of folks looking on. So it was that the Celtic boy, Ferdiad, who had stopped to watch a specially skilful juggler, soon found himself squeezed into a crowded circle of people and presently a red-headed lad

of about his own age was pushed close beside him.

Both smiled good-naturedly, and, "Look!" cried Ferdiad, bending his eyes on the juggler, "I have counted, and he has nine swords and nine little silver shields and nine balls, and he keeps them all up in the air at once and hasn't let one fall!"

"He's the best I ever saw!" said the other boy gazing admiringly at the man, who was dressed in a loose tunic of saffron-colored linen with a wide girdle of scarlet. On his legs were long tight-fitting trousers of the same material and his shoes were of thick leather without heels and laced with red cords. A short scarlet cape with a pointed hood lay on the ground where he had thrown it when he began his performance.

Suddenly, with a few dextrous movements, he caught one by one the balls and swords and shields he had been tossing about, and snatch-

ing up one of the latter began passing it among the crowd.

A few small silver coins were dropped into it and two or three little silver rings which often passed instead of coins. People used but little regular money and generally paid for things by exchanging something else for them, as perhaps a measure of wheat or honey, which every one liked; or, if the thing bought was valuable, often a cow or two did for money.

As now the juggler was coming their way with his shield, the two boys strolled off together; for though each had a few silver rings tucked into his girdle for spending money, they had other plans for disposing of these.

When they had gone a short distance they stopped and looked each other over. Both were tall and straight and well grown for their age, which was about twelve years; and their bare heads shone in the sunlight, Ferdiad's as yellow as the other boy's was red. Ferdiad

wore a scarlet jacket with sleeves striped with green and a knee-length skirt reaching just above his bare knees; below them were leggings of soft leather laced with cords tipped with silver as were also his moccasin-like shoes. He had a short cape made of strips of brown and green cloth sewn together, but as the day was warm this hung over one shoulder and was only loosely fastened by a silver brooch. The other boy, who had come from a little different part of the country, was dressed in the fashion of his own home. His jacket was much like Ferdiad's except that it was yellow, and instead of kilts he wore long tight-fitting trousers of gray; his cape also was gray figured with black.

Presently he said to Ferdiad, with a frank smile, "My name is Conn and my home is in the kingdom of Munster where my father is a bo-aire. I guess yours must be a flaith from the colors of your clothes. My foster-father

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is a bo-aire, too, and we came to the fair this morning in our chariot and I drove all the way from near Kinkora where we live. What is your name?"

"Ferdiad O'Neill," answered Ferdiad; but seeing Conn look bewildered, "O'Neill," he explained, "means my father's name is Neill; you know 'O' stands for son of."

"Yes," said Conn in surprise, "but why do you have *two* names?"

"Well," replied Ferdiad, "my father says that the high king, Brian Boru, wants people to start having two names instead of just one. You see, if each family settles on a second name that they can add to their first, then you can tell better who folks are and who are their kin. My father, who is a flaith as you guessed, don't want to put anything after his own name for every one in the kingdom of Meath, where my home is, knows him as Neill. But he says I may as well begin with the two names. I

suppose everybody will have family names afterwhile."

"I suppose so," said Conn, who had been listening with interest. "I hadn't heard about it before, but if you can start a family name by adding 'O' to your father's, then I would be Conn O'Keefe!" and he laughed at the odd new fashion. "But," he went on, "who is your foster-father?"

"He is Angus the poet," answered Ferdiad with a touch of pride. "We live beyond Kells on the Blackwater, and we all came to the fair yesterday. We rowed down the river in our curragh."

Now do not suppose that these two boys were orphans because they talked about their foster-fathers. Far from it! In fact, most Celtic boys, and many girls too, were extra well supplied with parents; for they usually had not only their own real fathers and mothers but also the foster-fathers and mothers with

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whom they lived from the time they were seven, or even younger, until they were seventeen. This custom of putting children to be trained in the home of some one else seems strange to us, but the Celtic people of those days thought it the best way to bring them up. Sometimes their foster-parents were close friends of their own fathers and mothers and took the children for the sake of the affection they felt for one another; and sometimes people placed their children with some one they thought specially fitted to train them, and then they paid a certain sum of money for it, or, more likely, a number of cows.

For the Celtic people then had no large cities and few towns even, but lived mostly in the country and the more cows they had the better off they considered themselves. They were divided into tribes or clans with chiefs of different degrees of rank. A bo-aire, as was Conn's father, though a respectable chief,

owned no land but was obliged to rent it of some higher chief, or flaith, such as Ferdiad's father; but a bo-aire always had plenty of cattle of his own. So probably Conn's foster-father received enough fat cows to pay for the support of the boy.

Indeed, the Celtic laws decided just what must be paid for feeding and clothing foster children, and decided also, according to their rank, what they should eat and wear; and every one paid a great deal of attention to the laws. It was because of these that Conn had barley porridge with a lump of salty butter on it for breakfast while Ferdiad ate oatmeal with saltless butter which was considered finer; if either had been a king's son he would have had honey on his porridge. And because of these same laws Conn and Ferdiad at once knew each other's rank; for sons of flaiths might wear red, green and brown clothes, while the colors for boys of bo-aire were yellow, black and gray.

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But while we have been talking about them, the boys have not been standing still. They had decided at once to be friends, and "My foster-father said I was to go around and find what I wanted to look at," said Conn, "but I think it would be more fun seeing the fair together."

"So do I!" answered Ferdiad. "Let's look around and see what's going on."

CHAPTER II

FERDIAD AND CONN SEE THE SIGHTS

THE boys were just starting off together when a sudden shouting arose.

"O, look over there!" cried Ferdiad, "I believe they are beginning to course the hounds!"

Both lads ran across a space of green grass to where a low wattled fence enclosed a large oval race-course. People were gathered about it talking excitedly as they watched the lively capers of a dozen or more large wolf hounds that several men held in leash by long leather thongs. The dogs were straining impatiently at their collars, and the moment the signal was given and they were unleashed, "*Br-rh-rh-rh-rh-rh!!*" off they darted, their noses pointing

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straight ahead and their long legs and powerful bodies bounding past so swiftly that neither Ferdiad nor Conn could make out one from another.

But in a few moments the fastest began to sweep ahead, and Conn cried out excitedly, "Look! Look! That big light brown one I picked out is leading!"

"Not now!" called back Ferdiad, as they hurried along the fence following the racing dogs with their eyes. "No! now it's the one with the white tip to his tail!"

"Whew!" shouted Conn, as "*Br-rh-rh-rh-rh-rh!*" with a deep roar the baying pack swept past again, "If there isn't that bright blue one that was 'way behind leading them all now!"

And, sure enough, when the panting hounds came around the last quarter of the track it was the bright blue that leaped first across the streak of white lime that marked the goal. There was a great shouting and clapping of hands by

the bystanders as the tired dogs were led off.

"Whose hound was it that won? Do you know?" asked Conn of Ferdiad.

"I heard a man say he belonged to Prince Cormac of Cromarty," answered Ferdiad. "They say the prize is an enameled dog-collar and a leather leash trimmed with silver. I wonder when the high king will give it to him?"

"Not till the end of the fair, boy," said a tall man standing near. "The high king isn't here yet but is coming to-morrow, and there will be games and chariot races yet, and, last of all, the poets' and story-tellers' contest."

"Well," said Conn as the boys turned away, "that hound race was good,—but I never thought the blue one would win! He was such a handsome color I suppose Prince Cormac must have had him specially dyed for the fair."

"I dare say," said Ferdiad, "but I have a green hound at home that is just as handsome, and my foster-mother says when she colors the

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next wool she spins maybe she will have enough red left to dye another one."

For the Celts thought oddly colored animals very pretty, and women when they dyed the yarn which they all spun for themselves often emptied what was left in their dye-pots over the family pets. So a purple cat or blue or red dog was no uncommon sight.

But the boys had wandered off from the race track and had come to an open space where were a number of booths covered with green boughs. Here merchants were selling all sorts of things; there were bows and arrows, swords, shields and spears, bronze horns and trumpets and harps, homespun woolen and linen cloth, and fine silks from beyond the sea, and there were wonderful bracelets and necklaces and torques, a kind of twisted collar, and brooches, all of finely wrought gold and silver; for the Celts, both men and women, loved to wear quantities of golden ornaments and nowhere in

all the world were more skilful goldsmiths than theirs.

In one of the better built booths covered with a thatched roof several scribes were busy. Each held in his lap a thin board with a sheet of vellum on which he wrote, dipping his swan-feather pen into ink held in the tip of a cow's horn fastened to the arm of his chair. Some were writing letters for people who had no ink or vellum of their own or perhaps could not write themselves; while others were copying from books beside them, all of which were for sale. No one had dreamed yet of printing books on presses, so copying them by hand was the only way to make them. Some of the books had initial letters painted in gold and colors, and as the boys passed they looked critically at these.

"They are not so well done as some at the Kinkora monastery where I go to school," said Conn. For the most beautiful books were

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made by the patient hands of the Celtic monks.

"No," said Ferdiad, "I dare say not. And they can't compare with the books at the monastery of Kells near where we live.

"Oh," he went on eagerly, "you just ought to see the Great Gospel of Saint Columkille that is kept at Kells! The monks there say there's nothing like it in the whole world!"

"I've heard something of that book," said Conn, "but I don't know much about it. What is it?"

"Well," answered Ferdiad, "it's hundreds of years old and painted with the most wonderful borders and initials and pictures that anybody ever made! The patterns are so fine and the lines lace in and out so perfectly that they say if your eyes are sharp enough you can count hundreds of loops and ornaments on a spot no wider than your finger!"

"I don't see how anybody ever painted pat-

terns like that!" said Conn. "Who made it?"

"Nobody knows for sure," answered Ferdia. "Some say Saint Columkille had it made and some say he did it himself. But everybody declares that whoever painted it, an angel must have guided his hand, for nobody could have done it without help from Heaven. And then the book has the most wonderful gold case you ever saw!" For most handsome books then each had its own box-like case of gold or silver or carved wood or ivory.

Just then a horse's whinney caught the boys' attention and they went over to the pens where horses and sheep and cows were for sale, and enormous wolf-hounds some of them as large as calves. Around these hounds especially was always a crowd of interested buyers, for the Celts delighted in racing them; also these powerful dogs were useful in protecting their homes at night and in chasing off the packs of wolves

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that roamed through the great wild forests that covered so much of the land. Presently both boys began to sniff hungrily as they came to that part of the fair where food was being sold.

“Let’s get something to eat!” said Conn, “Aren’t you hungry?”

“Yes,” said Ferdiad, looking up at the sun, “it’s past midday!” And they made their way toward the nearest booth. Beside it was an open fire and over this hung a great bronze kettle in which pieces of meat were boiling. A man in cook’s cap and apron stood by with a long hook of bronze.

“We would like some of your meat, sir,” said Ferdiad, and at once the man hooked out some pieces which he placed on an earthen platter; this he set on a low wooden table on the grass beside him, and the boys sitting down on the ground began eating with their fingers as people did then. They finished with some milk served in cups hollowed out of yew wood and

some wheaten cakes which the cook's wife had kneaded up with honey and baked on a flat hot stone in front of the fire.

When the boys had eaten, "You be my guest, Conn," said Ferdiad as he paid the man with one of the small silver rings he took from his girdle.

By this time the crowd seemed to be moving toward the grassy space within the race track, so of course Ferdiad and Conn went along. When they reached the place a wrestling match had already begun and after that was running and jumping and quoit throwing and fencing contests, and all the while there was a blaring of trumpets and blowing of great horns or else somebody was twanging on a harp or shaking castanets of bone, keeping up a noise and excitement for all the world like fairs of to-day.

When the sports were over the afternoon was almost spent and Ferdiad and Conn fairly tired

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of sight seeing. "Come on," said Ferdiad, "let's go find our curragh and take a row on the river before you go back to your foster-father."

"All right!" said Conn, and off they went toward the river. Near its bank was another grassy space and scattered through it a number of houses, all of them round; for that was the shape most Celtic people preferred. Each was built of poles placed upright in the ground forming a circle; long rods of hazel from which the bark had been peeled were woven between the poles, making a wattled wall, and the cone-shaped roof was thatched with rushes. These houses, which belonged to the fair and had been built long before for the use of the high-born people attending it, had been freshened up with coats of lime, some glistening, dazzling white in the sunlight, and others decorated with bright stripes in different colors.

Several gayly dressed ladies were walking

about and there was a sound of harpstrings in the air. "Are those queens?" asked Conn of Ferdiaid, for it was his first visit to the fair and he had found Ferdiaid had been there before.

"Yes," said Ferdiaid, "and my foster-mother is one of the ladies attending the Queen of Meath, so she and my foster-sister, Eileen, stay in that striped house under the big quicken tree. These houses are for the queens and their ladies and those yonder are for the kings."

For you must know that Ireland was a land not only of many kinds of parents but also of quantities of kings and queens. The country was divided into ever so many little kingdoms belonging to different tribes or clans, and, as I have told you, in these tribes were many chiefs or flaiths of different degrees of rank, but over them all in each kingdom was the king. Some of the kingdoms were larger and stronger

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than others, so the kings varied in power; but none of them was so important as the high king who ruled them all just as each of them ruled the chiefs under him. But though the high king was called the King of Ireland, the smaller kings fought and quarreled so much among themselves, and so many bold chiefs from countries near by were always trying to gain a foothold in Ireland that the high king seldom really governed the whole land. However, the one who came nearest to doing it was the great Brian Boru, who hadn't come to the fair yet but was expected the next day. Ferdiad pointed out to Conn a long wooden house built on top of a grassy mound in the middle of the fair where the high king would stay, and close beside it another large building where he would give a great feast in the evening.

Meantime all the other fifteen or twenty kings with their queens and followers were hav-

ing the best kind of a time and behaving in the politest way to each other; for no matter how much they fought at other times, no one dared to start a quarrel at any of the great Celtic fairs, for everybody knew perfectly well that the punishment was death.

But Ferdiad and Conn had come to the water's edge and were just looking for the right boat when a little girl with flying yellow curls came racing toward them, her blue mantle fluttering and her little sandaled feet twinkling as she ran. "O, Ferdiad," she called out, "I was just wishing you would come! Mother says I may go for a little ride on the river if you will take me!"

Then seeing Conn, whom she had not noticed in her eagerness, she drew back with a touch of bashfulness.

"This is my new friend Conn, from Munster," explained Ferdiad, "and he is going with us. Conn," he added turning to the boy who

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was staring shyly at the little girl, "this is my foster-sister, Eileen."

At this Eileen, with a friendly smile for the new friend, took Ferdiad's hand as he helped her clamber down the bank and they picked out the boat in which they had come to the fair. It was the kind the Celts called a "curragh" and was made of wickerwork covered with tanned cow-hides which had been stained a dark red. When Eileen had stepped daintily in and seated herself and the boys followed, "Let's go across the river and see how the fair looks from the other side," she said, "and then let's go around the bend and back!"

And Ferdiad and Conn taking up the long oars of hickory did exactly as Eileen commanded.



"THEY PICKED OUT THE BOAT IN WHICH THEY HAD COME"

CHAPTER III

THE HIGH KING COMES TO THE FAIR

"FATHER, father!" called Eileen the morning after the boat ride, as she ran out of the round wattled house where she and her mother had slept.

She had caught sight of a tall man coming swiftly toward her, and in a moment he stooped and kissing her rosy cheek three times lifted her in his arms so she could nestle her golden head on his bosom in the pretty Celtic fashion of greeting those one loved.

"O, father," she said, as hand in hand they went to meet her mother, Fianna, who had just stepped out into the sunshine, "isn't this the day you sing your song before the high king?"

"Yes, child," answered her father smiling,

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"but do not be too sure I shall win the prize. There are many fine poets here and everybody thinks the prize will not be the jeweled ring only, but that Brian Boru will choose the winner for his chief poet in place of Niall who is dead. You know I told you Niall was a great master of his art, so the high king will not be easy to please."

Eileen laughed confidently, "So are you a master!" she declared. Then, "Where is Ferdiad?" she asked.

"He will be along in a minute," answered her father; "the poets' house was so crowded last night he went off and slept in the tent with his friend Conn and his foster-father."

As the three stood waiting for Ferdiad, you would have thought them a handsome family. Eileen's yellow curls, white skin and oval face were like her mother's, and she was dressed in much the same fashion only that her close-fit-

ting tunic and narrow clinging skirt of figured green and white linen were not so long as her mother's yellow and white ones, and her bratt (which was the Celtic name for the loose mantle almost every one wore), was blue instead of green striped. Her head was bare while her mother's was partly covered with folds of fine filmy linen; but both had the same kind of sandals on their feet.

Angus, Eileen's father, was tall and straight; his long light hair was parted and hung over his shoulders in carefully twisted strands while his beard also was parted and curled in fork-shape, a very fashionable way. He wore a crimson jacket, olive green trousers, and shoes of brown leather embroidered in gold; round his jacket was a saffron-colored girdle, his cape was of checkered turquoise blue and black, fastened with a large silver brooch, and on his head was a saffron yellow pointed cap with a very narrow brim. Now if you have counted

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the colors in his clothes you will know there were six; and any Celt could have told you that meant that poets were thought so much of that they ranked next to kings; for no one else was allowed to wear six colors at once. To do so was considered a great honor, for everybody delighted in the brightest colors; but people who were neither kings nor poets had to be satisfied with five or less, according to their rank, down to the poor slaves who could wear only a single coarse garment of gray.

Eileen's father carried in his hand a small quaintly shaped harp with strings of bronze; though he was not playing on it, yet as he walked along there was always a sweet tinkling sound. That was because fastened to his pointed cap was a musical branch such as all Celtic poets wore. It was curving like a little bough from a tree, only it was made of silver and in place of leaves was hung with tiny silver bells. This meant that Angus ranked as an

ollave, or master poet, and had studied his art for seven years. If he had been a poet less skillful his musical branch would have been bronze, while, on the other hand, the chief poet of the high king wore one of pure gold.

But Ferdiad had already come up and been kissed three times by Angus and Fianna, and then they began planning the day, for next morning they were to return home.

“Eileen,” said her mother, “you and I will go to the merchants’ booths. I want to buy some things before we go home, and perhaps I will get a new necklace and bracelets for you; then we must see the embroidering women, for the queen’s ladies say they make beautiful things.”

Eileen had half wanted to go along with Ferdiad and Conn, but her eyes sparkled at the prospect of buying some new finery, so she was quite satisfied with her mother’s plan.

“Then you boys can put in the morning to-

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gether," said Angus, "and I will be free to practice my new song for the contest."

"O, father," cried Eileen, "*can't* we hear it?"

"No," answered Angus, "that is to be in the Hall of Feasting this evening, and only the chief grown folks will be there. But then," he added, seeing the disappointment in her face, "there are to be story-tellers on the fair green this afternoon, and you children can go there."

So presently off they scattered, Angus strolling down to a quiet place on the river bank, Eileen tripping along beside her mother, while Ferdiad hurried over to the race course where he was to meet Conn.

"Well," said the latter, who was eagerly watching for him, "you are just in time for the morning races. They are to be with horses and chariots to-day instead of hounds."

Sure enough, there was a tremendous squeaking of axles as a number of two-wheeled chariots

were being driven toward the track. All were made of wicker strengthened by a framework of wood, and their seven-spoked wheels were rimmed with bronze. Some were quite open and others gayly canopied, and each held two persons; one who merely rode, and the charioteer who sat nearest the front and drove the horses.

As chariot after chariot came along, the boys looked at them with interest. "Just see that one!" Ferdiad said, "how fine the wickerwork is and what handsome bridle reins all covered with red enamel!"

"Yes," said Conn, "and there comes another just as fine with a blue canopy and silver trimmed reins."

All the while the crowd was becoming larger and larger and presently an extra loud squeaking arose.

"My!" exclaimed Ferdiad, "that must be somebody important coming! Do hear what a

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noise his chariot makes!" For Celtic people thought it very fine to attract attention as they drove along and the more noise their wheels made the better they liked it.

By this time everybody was looking in the same direction and as the chariot came nearer, "I should think it *is* somebody important!" said Conn. "Why, that is the high king! I've often seen him at Kinkora; you know his palace is there."

It was Brian Boru, who had just come to the fair. In front of him walked four stalwart soldiers each carrying a battle ax. His chariot was of the finest wicker with a purple canopy embroidered in gold, and the two horses drawing it were snow-white with ears dyed scarlet while their long manes and tails were royal purple and their harness was richly decorated with gold.

The chariot stopped at a wooden pavilion overlooking the race course, and the high king

alighted and took his place on a seat piled with deerskin cushions.

The boys had been staring hard at everything. "I didn't remember Brian Boru was so old!" whispered Ferdiad, who had only glimpsed the high king at the fair the year before. "But he's handsome yet!"

"Yes," said Conn, "he's far past eighty but he's mighty good-looking." Indeed, most Celtic kings were; for the simple reason that they were not allowed to reign if they bore the slightest blemish on face or body.

The high king was of course dressed in six colors and his mantle of purple silk fringed with gold was fastened with a wonderful brooch so large that it reached from shoulder to shoulder. His long beard was parted fork-shape and from beneath his crown, which covered his head like a golden hat, his hair fell in twisted strands ornamented with hollow golden balls, which were thought very stylish. Around

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his neck was a handsome golden torque and many rich bracelets covered his arms.

When the high king had seated himself a group of men who had followed his chariot ranged themselves behind him, while the soldiers stood at each side as guard.

“Who do you suppose all those people are around the high king?” said Conn. “There are ten, not counting the soldiers.”

“Well,” said Ferdiad, “my foster-father told me that at important places like this at least ten people always go around with the high king. Let me see,—one must be a bishop,—”

“Yes,” interrupted Conn, “he must be the one with the top of his head shaved and the little gold box hanging to his necklace. You know bishops carry bits of parchment with verses from the Bible written on them in those boxes.”

“Then,” went on Ferdiad, “one must be a

chief,—maybe it's that one with the red and green spotted bratt and the fine torque. And there's always a poet, but, of course, since Niall's dead and the high king hasn't chosen a new one yet, I guess that must be another chief standing where the poet belongs."

"And that one with the harp and trumpets anybody knows is a musician," put in Conn, "and it's easy enough, too, to tell that the tall man with the leather herb bag at his girdle is a doctor, but who are those two standing beside him?"

"I don't know which is which," said Ferdiad looking perplexed, "but they must be the historian and lawyer, for you can see from their looks and the colors of their clothes that those other three are servants."

By this time a number of other kings and their followers had seated themselves in the pavilion, while in another one near by were various queens and their ladies all in the bright-

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est colors and with many flashing ornaments of gold.

Presently the high king's musician began blowing one of his great trumpets and the races began. There was a sudden thud of bronze-shod hoofs swiftly printing the ground, a glimpse of flying manes and tails, of panting nostrils and taut glittering reins, of rushing chariots and charioteers straining forward with long whips in their hands, and, above all, the excited shouting of the crowd; all of which proves, as I have told you, that the Celtic people of long ago liked racing and managed it at their fairs surprisingly the same as we do.

Of course Ferdiad and Conn stayed till the last race; then they got something to eat and went over to the fair green where they were to meet Eileen and hear the story teller. On their way they saw the high king's chariot going toward the mound where stood the great Hall of Feasting.

"Why," said Conn, "I thought the feast wasn't to be till this evening?"

"It isn't, boy," said a man wearing a soldier's helmet and tunic with a short sword stuck into his girdle; one arm was thrust through the leather holder of a small round shield, though he carried these things only because it was the custom of soldiers, not that he expected to fight at the fair, for that, you know, was forbidden. "The high king is going to the meeting of all the kings and chiefs which they have every year in the Hall over there. They hold the meeting to talk over the affairs of Ireland,—and there's enough to talk about now, youngsters!" went on the soldier. "The way those pirate Danes are coming over here in their long ships and fighting and robbing and burning folks' houses has got to be stopped *some* way," and the soldier's eyes flashed as he fiercely shook his round shield.

"That's what my foster-father thinks!"

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cried Ferdiad. "He says they have been growing bolder and bolder ever since they captured the fort at the Ford of the Hurdles." (This fort was on the river Liffey where the city of Dublin now stands.) "He says, too, he wouldn't be surprised any day to see them come up the Blackwater in their long boats and raid *us!*"

"Why don't your king drive them off?" asked Co

"Well," said Ferdiad, "I guess our king of Meath is as brave as anybody. But my foster-father says it will take more than one king's army to drive off those Danes!"

"That's a true word, son!" said the soldier. "It's work for our best Celtic fighters, and I guess that is what the high king will tell them. And I hope the battle will soon be on!" And the soldier strode off looking very fierce and warlike.

CHAPTER IV

THE STORY OF THE DEDANAANS

WHEN the boys came to the fair green a large circle of people had already gathered to listen to the story tellers, for they liked these almost better than the racing. Several men in gay mantles stood in the midst of the circle tuning the small harps they carried; for usually parts of the stories were in poetry and this they always chanted to the music of their harps. Ferdiad and Conn, however, did not stop here but passed beyond where was a smaller group made up of the boys and girls who had come to the fair and who had a story teller especially for them. All were seated on the grass and the two lads soon found a place by Eileen who was watching for them.

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“ Did you have a good time this morning? ” asked Ferdiad.

“ Yes,” declared Eileen, beaming; “ see this lovely torque mother bought me, and she got some wonderful silk of the merchants from Gaul,”— here she paused,—“ Hush! ” she whispered. “ See! they are going to shake the chain of silence! ”

A tall man had arisen shaking in his hand a short chain of bronze hung with silver bells, and at this signal every one stopped talking, and Fergus, the story teller, stood up ready to begin. Those for the grown folks circle were already asking their hearers if they would rather listen to stories of battles, of cattle raids, courtships, fairies, or histories of Ireland; for to be a story teller in those days was no simple matter; one must study for years and was expected to have hundreds of different stories in his mind ready to tell at a moment's notice. It was by listening to these that the great mass

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of people got not only entertainment but education.

But while the grown folks were choosing, the children's story teller had decided to tell something of the people who had lived in Ireland before the coming of the Celts.

"Long, long ago," he began, "our beautiful land was the home of many different people. One after another they came, the newcomers fighting and driving out the others, till at last a race called the Firbolgs held sway. After they had been here for some time, one day away up somewhere to the north of us a strange rose-colored cloud floated over the seashore, and when it melted away the Firbolgs found that a great number of strangers had landed from boats which they themselves at once burned, showing that they meant to stay."

"They were the DeDanaans!" cried some of the children, "and they live now in the fairy mounds!" for every one had heard of these

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marvelous strangers the memory of whom is still cherished in Ireland.

"Yes," went on Fergus, "they were the DeDanaans; but though wise in all magic arts, they lived above ground and had not yet become fairies. They were a beautiful god-like people with fair skins and blue eyes and hair as yellow as cowslips."

"Where did they come from, sir?" asked Conn, who had been listening attentively.

"From the 'Land of the Ever Young,' " answered Fergus.

"And where is that, sir?" ventured Conn once more.

"Well, boy," said Fergus, a bit severely, "it is called also the 'Land of the Ever Living,' which is the same as the 'Land of the Dead,' " and Conn said no more.

"The Firbolgs," continued Fergus, "talked to the DeDanaans and at first thought they would not fight them. Then they began saying

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among themselves how slim and light were the spears of the strangers, who were a slender people, while their own were big and heavy like they were. So deciding they were much stronger and better armed, they went back and attacked the DeDanaans. But they were terribly fooled in the strangers, who threw their light sharp spears much faster and farther than the clumsy ones of the Firbolgs. So the golden-haired DeDanaans won the battle, though they did not drive the Firbolgs from Ireland but let them still keep a certain part for theirs.

Now the DeDanaans were a wonderful people, full of wisdom and skilled in the arts of magic and in the making of beautiful things. They had come from four of the chief fairy cities in the Land of the Ever Young, and from each they brought a precious gift; there was an invincible sword, a magic spear, an enchanted cauldron from which hosts of men might be

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fed and it would never be empty, but most wonderful of all was the Stone of Destiny, and on this all the high kings of Ireland, for hundreds of years, stood when they were crowned."

"My foster-father said it always roared when the crown was set on the king's head!" broke in Ferdiad.

"Yes, indeed, boy," said Fergus, "it roared like a lion; but only if the king was lawful. If he had no right to the crown then the stone was silent, and you may be sure there was trouble ahead for the false king."

"Where is the stone now?" asked another boy.

"Well," said Fergus, "for a long time it was kept at Tara, the ancient Celtic capital,"—Here another boy broke in, "When we came to the fair, about ten miles from here we passed a great big mound with an earth rampart around it and old looking ruins that my father said was Tara. What happened to it?"

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Fergus took all these interruptions in good part, for the boys' and girls' story teller always expected them to ask many questions.

"Tara," he said, "was for ages the famous capital of all Ireland and the high king had his palace, built of smooth boards carved and painted, on top of the mound you saw protected by the rampart of earth. It was all very splendid, but long, long ago, one day Saint Ruadan became angry at the high king and laid a curse on Tara, and since then no one has dared to live there. But you know I was talking about the Stone of Destiny that the DeDanaans brought and which was first kept at Tara. Now about the time the curse was laid on the place the king of Scotland sent and begged his brother, who was high king of Ireland, for the loan of the stone for a year. The Scottish king wanted to stand on it when he was crowned. The stone was loaned to him but never again has Ireland got it back!"

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Nor has it come back to Ireland to this day; for more than two hundred years after our story, the English king, Edward I, took this magic stone from Scotland to London. It is now the famous Coronation Stone which is part of the throne on which the English kings sit when they have been crowned in Westminster Abbey; and perhaps some day you may see it there.

Meantime Fergus went on with the story of the DeDanaans. "After they had ruled in Ireland for a long while," he said, "another people, this time our own Celtic race, led by their king Miled, sailed to Ireland from somewhere away off to the east. When the DeDanaans saw them coming, by their magic arts they raised a terrible storm hoping in this way to keep the boats from landing. But though many of the boats were destroyed, there were such hosts of Celts that they managed in spite of the storm to land enough men to attack the

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DeDanaans, who were obliged to retreat before them till they came right here to the Blackwater where Tailltenn is now. Here they made a stand and a great battle was fought, and the Celts won. But the DeDanaans were not driven out of Ireland, you know."

"Yes," said some of the children eagerly, "we know. They are fairies now!"

"That is right," said Fergus; "the DeDanaans cast a spell over themselves making them invisible; and this spell they can put on or off as they please, and even now they rule unseen over part of Ireland. Where we can see only green mounds and ruined walls, as at Tara, and under all the pleasant hills, there rise their fairy palaces where they live in continual sunshine and feast on magic meat and ale that keeps them everlastingly young and beautiful."

"I saw a DeDanaan fairy once!" spoke up one little boy.

"So did I!" declared another, and then the

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children all fell to discussing and disputing about how many they had seen till Fergus had to stop them by telling them to scamper off for he was through for the afternoon.

But the boys and girls were quite sure of what they said, and, no doubt, they were right, for everybody knows that to this day there are said to be more fairies in Ireland than in almost any other land.

CHAPTER V

THE HALL OF FEASTING

WHEN the story telling was over and Eileen had gone back to her mother, Ferdiad and Conn hurried up the mound where stood the Hall of Feasting. The high king was to give a dinner there later on and the boys wanted to see what they could.

At big open fires near the Hall cooks were busy turning spits, made of peeled hazel rods, on which venison and hares and wild birds were roasting. Others were tending huge cauldrons filled with boiling beef and sheep and little pigs. Potatoes, which we now call Irish but which are really American born, had not yet come to Ireland, because of course you know Columbus did not find America till more than four hundred years after our story; but there were

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cabbages and onions and beans, and there were puddings and red apples and hazel nuts for dessert.

"See, Conn," said Ferdiad, "the door of the Hall is open; let's go in and look around."

"All right!" said Conn, so they went in and watched as servants spread linen cloths on a number of tables standing close to the walls of the long room. There were seats for these only on the side next the wall; for nobody was expected to have his back to the center of the room where the poets always sang their pieces after dinner.

"These must be the tables for the kings and flaiths," said Ferdiad as they strolled along the room, "for see, there are the hooks in the wall for their shields."

"Yes," said Conn, "and look up a little higher and you can tell exactly each king's place, for there are the king's-candles all ready to light," and he pointed to a number of bronze

brackets holding very large candles of beeswax with great bushy wicks. "And that enormous one, bigger around than I am, is where the high king will sit. It's just like the one that burns at the door of his palace at Kinkora when Brian Boru is there, and my foster-father says that when he goes to war a big candle like that always burns at the door of his tent at night."

"I suppose where those other handsome cloths are is where the queens and their ladies will sit," said Ferdiad, "and down at the end of the Hall where they are spreading the tables with deerskin must be for the servants."

At every place was laid a napkin, a platter, a cup for mead and a knife for cutting up the food, all of which was eaten with the fingers. In front of each was also a small dish of honey, of which every one was immensely fond and in which they liked to dip almost everything, even meat and fish.

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Soon the dinner was ready and servants began bringing in great dishes of meat which later would be carefully carved and distributed according to the rank of the guests. Thus, a certain part of the roast ox was always given to kings and poets, another special part to queens, another to flaiths, and so on till all were served. There was one other part, however, that was always the choicest of all; and of this Conn whispered to Ferdiad, "Who do you suppose will get the hero's morsel?" For this tidbit was the portion of the man who was thought by everybody to have performed the bravest or most heroic exploit.

"I don't know," answered Ferdiad, "of course there are lots of kings and chiefs here at the fair, but I don't know who has done the bravest thing. I dare say it will be the one who has fought and beaten the most Danes."

Just then "Clear out now, youngsters!" said

an official-looking man, who with two others had come into the Hall and taken their places close by the open door.

As the boys slipped out, "I guess it's time for the feast," whispered Ferdiad, "but let's wait outside and see the folks come."

Here one of the men at the door, lifting a large trumpet he carried, blew a loud blast and immediately a number of squires, who had been waiting near by holding the shields of their masters, marched up and handed them to the second of the three men who knew every shield and the rank of its owner. At a second blast from the trumpet the shields were taken into the Hall and hung on the hooks Ferdiad had noticed in the wall over the tables. It was a gay sight when all were placed; most of them were small and round, some made of wicker covered with leather and coated with lime which shone dazzling white, others painted in different colors, while many were ornamented

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with beautiful bands and bosses of gold and silver. When all were arranged the trumpeter blew a third blast, and at this the feasters began to arrive.

“There comes the high king!” said Ferdiad, as the aged monarch, wrapped in a rich purple mantle and attended by his followers, reached the door of the Hall. As he was giving the feast, he stood near the entrance and greeted each guest before turning them over to the third of the three men at the door whose business it was to seat each man under his own shield and to lead the ladies to the tables spread for them.

“Don’t they look fine!” said Conn, as he gazed at the gayly dressed throng coming up the mound.

“Yes, indeed!” echoed Ferdiad, “and oh, there’s my foster-father!”

Angus was with a group of kings and poets who came directly after the high king, and

there was a sweet tinkling of musical branches as they passed.

"I wish my foster-father could go to the feast, too!" said Conn wistfully, flushing slightly at the thought that he was not of high enough rank to be one of the guests.

"Never mind," said Ferdiad quickly, "I'm sure he is a brave man from what you have told me about him, and I don't wonder you think so much of him. I think he was mighty good to take me into your tent to sleep, and I know my foster-father would like to meet him."

Conn looked pleased, and as he was not of an envious disposition, he said he hoped Angus would get the prize and that the high king would choose him for chief poet. "And oh," went on the boy, "if he does you will all come to live at Kinkora where Brian Boru's palace is and you know our home is near there and most likely you will go to the same monastery school where I go!"

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“That would be fine!” exclaimed Ferdiad, “and do tell me more about Kinkora.” And talking of this the two boys wandered off together through the long twilight.

Meantime within the Hall the feasting went merrily on; by and by the dark fell and all the kings'-candles were lighted, and then, when the feast was over, the chain of silence was shaken and the poets one by one stood out and sang their songs. But we have not time in this story to tell of what they sang nor of how beautifully they played on their harps, for they were very skillful musicians as well as makers of songs. Many fine poems were thus given, but, of course, Angus won the prize of the jeweled ring and was chosen by the high king to be his chief poet, while over his shoulders was hung the wonderful mantle of feathers, which was worn only by chief poets, and his silver musical branch was replaced by one of pure gold.

I say of course this happened to Angus, be-

cause Eileen was quite sure it would, and so was Ferdiad, and so was I when he came into this story which must move now for awhile to Kinkora; for Angus and his family would be expected to live in the poet's house by the palace of Brian Boru.

But before we go to Kinkora I must tell you how Ferdiad went with his foster-parents and Eileen back to their home near Kells where Angus wished to arrange his affairs before quitting it for the court of the high king.

CHAPTER VI

KELLS IS RAIDED

THE curragh in which they had come to the fair was pointed up the Blackwater which it parted in long ripples of silver as Ferdiad and Angus pulled at the oars. They were all very proud and happy over the honor Angus had won the night before, and Eileen had hugged and kissed him and begged to hear all about it.

But "There, child," said her father, "I will tell you by and by. We must hurry now to reach Kells, for you know we want to stop there to see the new high-cross they have been putting up, and we must be home by dark, for we cannot sleep in the curragh neither can we camp in the forests; there are too many bears!"

Indeed, for much of their way after leav-

ing Tailltenn the great trees came close to the water's edge and in their deep shadows prowled many dangerous beasts; for a large part of Ireland was still wild and unsettled. Now and then they passed open bog lands with perhaps a glimpse of blue mountain tops in the distance; and sometimes the river led through meadows where cows and sheep were grazing near the homes of their owners. As I have told you, most of the Celtic people lived in the country and their homes, which they called "raths" were much alike. There was always a round or oblong house in the middle of a piece of ground enclosed by a circular wall of earth often planted on top with a prickly hedge to better protect the place from the attack of enemies or wild beasts.

Even the palaces of the kings were built much the same, only larger and finer, and they were called "duns" instead of raths.

But the curragh on the Blackwater had been

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making good progress and before long they could glimpse through the trees the stone walls of Kells, while clustering about rose the thatched roofs of the round wattled huts where lived the young students.

For Kells was not a town but a monastery where a number of monks lived and studied and taught, and in their spare time made beautiful painted books. There were many such places in Ireland and the Celtic monks had become so famous for their learning that people not only from their own country but even from Britain and Gaul (which we now call England and France), sent their sons to be educated by them. Much of Europe was then very heathenish and ignorant, and had it not been for those Celtic monks, many of whom went as missionaries and started schools in other countries, the world would not be nearly so wise as it is to-day.

As they now drew near Kells, "Shall we go to the monastery landing?" asked Ferdiad.

"No," said Angus, "I see the monks working at the new high-cross on the hill yonder. We will land there and go up and look at it."

In a few minutes they had all climbed to the hill top where the new stone cross had just been put in place. It was very large, more than twice as high as a tall man, and wonderfully carved with scenes from the Bible as it was meant to tell its story to people who had no books of their own. There are to-day more than fifty of these great Celtic crosses standing on the hills of Ireland and artists from many countries copy them because of their beauty.

"Oh, father, isn't it fine!" cried Eileen.

"Yes, indeed!" said Angus; "it is one of the finest I have seen. Who of you made it?" he asked, turning to the monks who were standing by.

One of them was about to answer him when

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suddenly there came a sharp jangle of bells from a tall round tower of stone near the monastery.

“Hark!” cried the monk, and as they all paused a moment, there came another wild peal of the bells, and crashing through the woods beyond Kells they could see a score or more people from the country round about running frantically for the tower. Some were carrying children in their arms and others driving before them a few cows or sheep, while from the door of the monastery the brown-robed monks were already pouring out, their arms filled with precious books and such sacred things of gold and silver as they had been able to snatch from the altar of the monastery church. For everywhere the young students were running about shouting “*The Danes! The Danes!*” and everybody knew that those fierce pirate raiders from across the northern sea were heathens who thought no more of stripping a Christian

altar than of driving off a herd of cattle and killing their helpless owner.

"Can you see them coming yet?" asked Angus anxiously of the monks.

"No," they said, "they are probably burning the raths they have raided, but they will be here quickly! We must hurry to reach the tower!" For the monks were no fighters, and, moreover, they all knew they would be far outnumbered by the raiders.

Angus at once snatched up Eileen, who was screaming from fright, and bidding Fianna and Ferdiad to follow, they all ran like deer down the hill.

By this time the country folk had given up hope of saving their cattle and sheep and were trying only to save themselves as both they and the monks and their pupils crowded to the foot of the tower and scrambled as fast as they could up a wooden ladder which led to a door high above the ground. For the tower was

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not only a belfry for the monastery church but also a place of refuge from just such sudden attacks as the Danes were now making. And how often these places of refuge were needed in those wild warring times is proven by the many ancient towers, solitary and deserted, which still rise from innumerable Irish hills and valleys. And very good strongholds they were when every one was inside, the ladder drawn up and the great door barred. If the raiders tried to come too close they were apt to get their heads cracked by a few of the big stones of which there was always a good supply to be dropped from the high windows.

As Angus and the rest now joined the others at the foot of the ladder, Angus saw that Fianna and Eileen got safely in and then telling Ferdiad to climb up too, turned to see if he could help the others. But Ferdiad waited to pick up a child that was lost from its parents and running about crying helplessly. He handed it up

to safety, and just then a group of belated country people came screaming that the Danes were at their heels!

At this there was a wild rush for the ladder by those who were still outside. Angus, who supposed Ferdiad had gone in long before, climbed in with the last of the monks he had been helping, and in the struggle to gain the door no one noticed that Ferdiad was pushed off the ladder by a burly countryman wild with terror, and that the lad fell some distance to the ground.

For a few moments he lay stunned, and when he came to himself the ladder was drawn up as out of the forest came rushing a troop of wild Danes. Some wore chain armor and helmets with cows' horns fastened in front making them look like demons, while others were clad in tunics made from the shaggy skins of beasts; but all carried shields and spears and short swords and were shouting in loud fierce voices.

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Ferdiad's heart quaked and he crouched back at the foot of the tower where he had fallen and where, luckily, some bushes made a fairly good screen.

When the raiders came nearer and found there was nobody to fight, part of them began swarming into the monastery and church and huts of the pupils looking for anything on which they might lay hands, while others started driving off the flocks of the country folks, and still others quarreled among themselves over the booty they had brought from the raths they had afterward destroyed.

Ferdiad, who had all the while been looking sharply about, all at once fairly held his breath as his gaze fell on a sheltered nook in the monastery wall. The Danes being for the time busy elsewhere none of them saw as did Ferdiad that a monk, clutching his robe as if trying to hide something beneath it, had seemingly crawled out of the wall and was creeping

through the bushes in the direction of the tower. Ferdiad guessed at once that he had come out of the underground chambers; and sure enough, the tangle of bushes hid a hole in the wall just big enough for a man's body. This hole was the opening of a secret passage leading from the bee-hive shaped stone chambers such as were built under most monasteries and important houses as a place to hide valuables or the people themselves if attacked too suddenly for them to reach the nearest round tower.

Now this monk of Kells, Brother Giles, had been with the last of those fleeing from the monastery when all at once he had remembered the most precious thing in all Kells and which no one else had thought to try to save. This was the marvelous angel book of Saint Columkille of which Ferdiad had told Conn the monks said there was no other like it in all the world! That it could for a moment have been forgotten would seem unbelievable were it not that

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every one knows that when people are frightened and must pick out what they most care for, as at a fire, they often bring away very silly things and leave the best of all behind.

At any rate, the moment the monk thought of the book he rushed back and snatched it from the drawer where it was kept, then, finding the Danes were already coming toward the door of the monastery, he hurried down the winding stair to the underground chambers, hoping to hide there. But in a few moments the Danes discovered the stair and he could hear them groping their way down, for it was very dark there. At this he began stealthily to feel his way to the secret passage, and because of the darkness he managed to escape from the raiders who were poking in corners for what plunder they could find. The monk, hiding the precious book in its golden case, had just come out of the passage when Ferdiad saw him.

As the boy looked, suddenly Brother Giles



"FERDIAD'S EYES GREW WIDE WITH HORROR"

straightened up and made a dash for the tower hoping to reach it before the Danes saw him.

Forgetting his own danger, Ferdiad tried to call to him that the ladder was up, but could not make him hear. But the poor monk had scarcely run half way till with a fierce shout one of the raiders started in pursuit. Ferdiad's eyes grew wide with horror as the monk sprang forward desperately only to sink lifeless on the ground beneath the sharp thrust of a Danish sword. As the man paused a moment Ferdiad could see his wild cruel face and red-scarred forehead, then suddenly as the dead monk's robe fell apart the Dane caught the gleam of the golden case which held the painted book, and snatching it up greedily ran off with it before Ferdiad's strained gaze could make out just what the object was.

In a little while the other raiders came out of the monastery, having stripped it of every bit of gold and silver they could find, and as they

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could not set fire to the stone buildings they had to content themselves with burning the thatched huts of the students. While these were still smoldering they took themselves off toward the seacoast, driving before them the sheep and cows they had stolen from the country folk.

As soon as they were sure it was all over, the people one by one crept down from the tower, the country folk going sadly back to try patiently to rebuild their desolate homes while the monks began to set things in order about Kells.

Everybody was amazed and delighted to find Ferdiad had escaped with his life, though of course no one had known he was not safe in the tower. The body of Brother Giles was borne sorrowfully into the monastery; and then, when they began to bring back the gold and silver things they had saved and to take stock of what the Danes had stolen, first of all the Abbot discovered that Saint Columkille's book was gone. He was filled with dismay and re-

morse that he had forgotten it, and kept muttering despairingly "The angel book of the blessed Saint Columkille! May all the saints forgive me!"

The monks, too, looked at each other white and terrified, fearing a curse upon Kells because of their unbelievable carelessness. For none of them knew that Brother Giles had given his life in the vain effort to save the beautiful book, and they felt sure that the Celtic people would blame them when it was known the precious volume was lost, for it was even then famous in Ireland.

As Ferdiad heard them lamenting, presently an idea occurred to him. "Reverend Father," he said to the Abbot, "perhaps it was Saint Columkille's book that Brother Giles was carrying when the Dane struck him. I saw the man take something from his robe as he lay on the ground, but could only get a flash of gold. I couldn't see just what it was, as the Dane turned

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from me when he picked it up and he ran off right away."

The Abbot listened gravely, but only said, "Perhaps, boy. But it might have been a golden candlestick you saw; we had many such. And even if it was the book, the Dane will care for nothing but the gold of its case and will surely destroy it when he rejoins his people and looks at it; they have burned countless precious volumes before this!" and the Abbot sighed bitterly.

But, somehow, Ferdiad got it into his head that the book the angels had made would not be destroyed, and he wished more than anything else that some day he might find it.

Meantime, Angus, seeing there was really nothing he could do to help restore order at the monastery, had brought down the curragh and he and Ferdiad had moored it at their landing. Fortunately their rath, being on the other side of the river from Kells, had escaped harm.

CHAPTER VII

THE NEW HOME AT KINKORA

ANGUS had disposed of his home rath to a bo-aire who had given in exchange many bags of wheat and silver rings and gold torques and necklaces. Then, loading in an ox-cart such things as they wished to take with them to Kinkora, they had set out for the river Shannon; for as Brian Boru's palace was on the bank of that river it was easier to make the main journey by boat.

Eileen and her mother and Ferdiad rode in the cart with the driver, but Angus came beside them on a horse, which was considered the only proper way for a poet to ride; his horse had a single bridle and he guided and urged it on, not by a whip, but a small rod of carved yew wood having a curved end with a goad.

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They all greatly enjoyed the journey both by land and water, and slept soundly every night at some comfortable brewy, which was the Celtic name for an inn; though, unlike our inns, they were places of free entertainment. Indeed, there were no other kind among the Celts, who thought so highly of hospitality that at every place where four important roads met they built a brewy. It was thought a great honor to be a brewy master and it was usually given to a man who had served his country well. He was given also a large piece of public farm land and many sheep and cows and was expected always to have food and beds ready for travelers. And lest any one should miss his way, a servant stood always at the cross roads to point out the brewy.

In this way they made the journey to Kinkora and were soon settled in their new home.

The second morning after their arrival, Ferdiad was in a meadow near by knocking

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about a leather ball with a bronze tipped stick when suddenly he threw it down, crying delightedly, "Well, Conn! We have been here two days and I wondered why you didn't come!" and he ran to meet his friend whose red head had just flamed in sight.

Conn laughed with pleasure. "I came the first chance I had," he panted, "and I ran the last half mile. My foster-father has been sick and I had to tend the cows and sheep so I couldn't get away before. How do you like it here?" he added, looking eagerly around. Then, seeing the ball and stick, "Oh," he cried, "why didn't I bring my stick and we could have had a game of hurley!"

"Never mind," said Ferdiad, "come and see where we live now."

"It's inside the high king's dun, isn't it?" asked Conn, looking toward the great earthen wall faced with stone and cement that rose near by enclosing the palace of Brian Boru.

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"Yes," answered Ferdiad, "you know the king's poet and doctor and lawyer and the rest of the folks that always attend him have houses inside the dun."

"I know," said Conn, "and these scattered around through the fields are for the millers and farmers and cloth-makers and everybody who does things for the palace folks."

By this time the boys had come opposite the doorway in the great circular wall and had begun to weave their way among a number of tall upright stones, each as large as a man and placed as irregularly as if a lot of people running toward the dun had suddenly been petrified. It was like playing hide and seek for the boys to try to keep together.

"Well," said Ferdiad, as at last they stood before the open door of heavy oaken beams, "the king of Meath has stones before the wall of his dun, only not half so many as these!"

"They're a wonderful protection," said

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Conn, "and if any army tried to attack Brian Boru's palace they would have a mighty hard time getting inside the dun, for, of course, they would have to make their way between the stones a few at a time, just like we did."

Here the boys stepped inside the enclosure. They did not need to use the small log knocker which lay in a niche in a stone pillar beside the door, as the latter stood open with the keeper blinking in the sun. They crossed a wooden bridge over a moat and this brought them to the door of a second wall of earth thickly planted on top with hazel bushes. Passing through this they came to the very large green space in the center of which was a low mound where stood the wooden palace of Brian Boru. Dotted around near the earthen rampart were a number of round wattled houses where, as Ferdiad had said, the chief attendants of the high king lived.

"I've been here before," said Conn, who had

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often brought things from the farm of his foster-father, "and I've peeped inside the palace once or twice when the high king was away, but I haven't been in any of the chiefs' houses. Which is yours?" —"Oh, I see!" he added, laughing, as Eileen, catching sight of him, came running from an open doorway.

"Come in, Conn!" she cried, seizing both his hands. "Isn't our house pretty? It has stripes just like the queen's house at the fair!" and she pointed to the red and blue and green bands painted on the plaster that overlaid the wattled walls. "And see how nice it is inside!" she went on, leading Conn within.

"Yes," said Conn, "it is very pretty," and he gazed admiringly around. In the center of the house was a carved pole supporting the thatched roof, in which was a hole to let out the smoke when it was cold enough to build a fire on the earthen floor now strewn with rushes. There were several low tables and

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seats cushioned with white fleeces, and around the wall behind partitions of wickerwork stood the beds with posts fixed in the ground.

"I helped weave the coverlids!" said Eileen with pride as they peeped into these tiny bedrooms, "My loom is in our greenan," and she led the way to a separate little house shining white in the sun and covered with vines. For no Celtic home was considered complete without such a little bower, or greenan as they called it, for the mistress and her friends, and it was always placed in the pleasantest and sunniest spot.

Here Ferdiad called "Come on, Conn, let's go and take a look in the palace and around the dun. The high king and most of the flaiths have gone deer hunting and father Angus is practicing a new poem, so we'll poke around awhile and then after dinner maybe we can find somebody to tell us a story."

As the boys ran off together, "Be sure and

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show Conn the queen's greenan all thatched with bird wings!" called Eileen, and Conn smiled, for he had often seen the greenan with its wonderful roof of feathers which were arranged in glistening stripes of white and many colors. So, too, he had seen the great banquet hall of Brian Boru, though he looked in again to please Ferdiad. It was built much in the style of the Hall of Feasting at the Tailltenn fair, only handsomer and more gayly painted, and the heavy door of carved yew wood and the posts on either side were elaborately ornamented with gold and silver and bronze. As they looked inside, "There is where father Angus sits when there is a feast," said Ferdiad, pointing to a seat at one of the long tables next to the high king's throne-like chair.

Back of the banquet hall was a kitchen with open fires and spits for roasting and cauldrons for boiling. There was also on the mound another large wooden house with living rooms

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and curtained beds, although all the more important folks had each a little round sleeping house all to himself.

Outside the main dun were several smaller circular enclosures protected by ramparts, and in these were stables for the horses and chariots, sheds for cows and sheep and pigs, granaries for wheat and barley, and kennels for the great fierce wolf-hounds that were loosed every night to guard the dun from unwelcome visitors.

By the time the boys had seen everything dinner was ready and afterward Ferdiad begged Angus to tell them a story. "It needn't be a long one," he said, "but Conn and I have been looking at the big wolf-hounds of the high king and we wish you would tell us about how Cuculain got his name."

Angus smiled, for he knew the boys had heard many times of the exploits of Cuculain (whose name means "the Hound of Culain"), the most famous of all the Celtic heroes, but he

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knew also that made no matter for the boys loved to hear the same stories over and over. So they went out under a quicken tree near the house where Angus sat on a bench while Ferdiad and Conn stretched out on the grass at his feet.

CHAPTER VIII

HOW CUCULAIN GOT HIS NAME

“YOU know,” began Angus, “it was in the brave days of the Red Branch Knights, hundreds and hundreds of years ago. Every summer these famous warriors used to go to the dun of Concoabar Mac Nessa, king of Ulster, which is in the northern part of Ireland, and while there they would practice drills and hold contests of strength and go through all sorts of feats of arms.

“One summer when they were thus visiting King Concoabar, on a certain day a great flock of birds alighted on the wheat fields and began to eat the ripe grain. The king and a party of his knights went out with slings and stones to drive them off. But the birds kept flying farther

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and farther away till at last when it grew dark they had lured King Concobar and the rest to where a fairy mound rose from the banks of the river Boyne.

“When they looked about for somewhere to sleep, they could find only a tumble-down hut, and with this they had to content themselves; that is, all but one of the knights who went exploring further till he saw an opening in the fairy mound and entering it he came to a beautiful house and was met at the door by a handsome young man who told him his name was Lugh of the Strong Arm. In a little while the young man’s wife came in and the knight stared with surprise for he recognized her as Dectera, a lovely girl who with fifty of her maidens had disappeared from the court of King Concobar a whole year before.

“When the knight went back to the hut where the others were and told what he had seen, King Concobar at once sent for Dectera

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to return to the court with him. She refused, but next morning they found in the hut her beautiful baby boy whom she had sent as a gift to the people of Ulster, for the Druids had made wonderful prophecies about what a great hero he should be."

"Who were the Druids?" asked Conn.

"Why," said Angus, "they were the priests of long ago, before the blessed Saint Patrick came and taught our Celtic people about Christ and started the Christian religion in Ireland.

"But everybody in King Concobar's time believed what the Druids said," went on Angus, "so the Red Branch Knights took the baby back with them and found a nurse for him, and the king gave him a large piece of land and a rath for his inheritance and he was named Setanta. By and by, when he was seven years old, he was sent to be brought up in the court and be a foster-son of King Concobar. He was a fine strong boy and soon excelled all the other boys

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at court in running and leaping and riding horseback and shooting with bow and arrow and in hurling the spear, and all the things you boys now are being taught.

“Now one summer, when Setanta was about ten, King Concobar and some of the knights who had come again for the yearly practice in arms, decided to pay a two days’ visit to their friend a flaith named Culain who lived a number of miles from the king’s palace. When they were ready to start they asked Setanta to go with them, but he was busy playing a game of hurley and wanted to finish it; so he said he would come later in the afternoon.

“The king’s party went on, and Culain welcomed them and spread a great feast and by the time they had finished it was quite late in the evening, and they had forgotten all about Setanta. Then all at once they heard a most ferocious baying outside.”

“Yes,” cried Ferdiad, for the boys were

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very fond of this story, "it was the hound of Culain that had been let loose to guard the rath for the night, and it was as big and fierce as that lion beast that lives across the sea somewhere and everybody is so afraid of! One of the merchants from the south of Gaul told us about it at the fair."

"I have heard of the lion," said Angus, "and they say it is very terrible, but I believe I would as soon meet it as one of our Celtic wolf-hounds on guard. As the folks in Culain's rath listened the noise grew louder as if the hound was fighting fiercely. At this they rushed out—"

"And there stood Setanta with his foot on the dead hound!" broke in Conn excitedly.

"Yes," said Angus, "when it sprang on him he had seized it by the throat and killed it all by himself. The king and knights were amazed and they carried Setanta into the house and declared he would be a great hero. But while they were all exclaiming about Setanta's

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feat, Culain stood apart, sad and silent; for he thought a great deal of his hound that had guarded his rath faithfully for years.

"As soon as Setanta noticed this, he said courteously to Culain that he was sorry he had been obliged to kill his hound, but that if he would give him a young dog he would train it so well that in a few years it would be as brave and faithful as the hound he had lost. And he said that meantime, if Culain would give him a spear and shield, he himself would stay and guard the rath from all harm."

"Wasn't that splendid of Setanta!" exclaimed Ferdiad.

"Yes, indeed!" answered Angus, "and from that time on he was called 'Cuculain,' and every one who knows the stories of our Celtic heroes knows that his is the most famous name of all. But that will do for to-day," and Angus rose to go into the house.

"I must go, too," said Conn, and as the boys

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strolled together to the door of the dun, he added, "Next week school begins in the monastery over on the hill. I'll see you there, won't I?"

"Yes," said Ferdiad, "father Angus says that is where I am to go, so good-by till then."

CHAPTER IX

ON THE MARCH

FERDIAD found the Kinkora school very interesting. Every day when the weather was pleasant the boys gathered in the cloister courtyard where the monks taught them out of doors. If it was cold or rainy they went inside to a schoolroom where the vellum books were kept in leather satchels hanging from wooden pegs ranged round the walls. The boys all had long narrow tablets of wood coated with wax, and with a slender rod of metal they wrote on these the things they must specially remember. They learned grammar, a little geography in rime, some Latin and various bits of wisdom called "oghams," and every school year they must memorize at least ten new poems and stories; for these were thought a very important part

of school work. Ferdiad and Conn sat side by side and told the stories over and over to each other, and were always delighted to get a new one.

Meantime, Eileen was taught at home, where besides her lessons she learned to spin and weave and sew and embroider. There were several other girls and boys whose foster-parents were among the attendants of the high king and queen, and with these they had many merry times. Conn came often to see them, and as the autumn wore away the boys went nutting and hunting and fishing together.

When winter came it was not very cold, but fires were lighted and in the evenings they played chess and checkers and listened to stories and poems and music; for Brain Boru loved such things and always did his best to encourage scholars and poets and artists.

But though life passed happily enough for the boys and girls, the faces of the older people

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began to grow more and more anxious as the weeks went on. Now and again Ferdiad and Eileen would hear talk of some fresh raid by the Danes, who were all the while growing bolder and bolder.

Sometimes Conn came with tales he had heard, and one day he said to Ferdiad: "My foster-father says there's bound to be a fight before long, or those Danes will just settle themselves here in Ireland and we never can drive them out!"

"That's what father Angus thinks, too," said Ferdiad. "He says as soon as spring comes Brian Boru will get all the Celtic kings together and start out after the Danes and there will be a big battle somewhere."

And sure enough, as the winter passed, more and more messengers came and went from Kinkora as the high King completed his plans; and every one around the palace talked of the Danes and how they must be conquered.

"Do you know, Ferdiad," said Conn excitedly one day, "folks say the banshee Aibell has been seen by the O'Brien of Killaloe, and she has given him a magic cloak that will make him invisible as he fights in the battle?"

"Who is Aibell?" asked Ferdiad.

"Oh, I forgot," said Conn, "you haven't lived here long enough to know. She is the fairy queen who specially guards the flaith O'Brien. He's a great champion and lives at Killaloe, not far from here. Aibell is famous around here and her palace is under the rock of Craglea in a glen near the O'Brien's home."

"Well," said Ferdiad, "I hadn't heard about Aibell, but I did hear that a flock of roysten crows flew eastward last night, and some say the battle witches often take the shape of crows and fly ahead when war is coming."

The next day the two boys had still more exciting things to talk about. "Oh, Conn!"

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cried Ferdiad, "what do you think? *We* are going, too! The high King will take along quite a number of the boys from here to run errands, and father Angus says that you can go with the group from the palace because you and I are such friends!"

"Oh, good!" cried Conn, his eyes dancing. "My foster-father and my own father both are going with the soldiers and I suppose quite an army will start from here."

"Yes," said Ferdiad, "some of the Celtic kings and their soldiers will come here to start with Brian Boru and the rest will meet him in the kingdom of Meath, near where the river Liffey empties into the sea, and I am sure my own father, too, will be with the Meath army. They say a lot of the Danes have been camping all winter at the Ford of the Hurdles, and the high King means to attack them somewhere near there."

So the preparations went on; and by and by,

when April came and the hawthorn trees began to bloom and the fields were full of buttercups, the Celtic kings with their poets and attendants began to arrive in chariots, while their soldiers followed on foot. The more important folks were entertained inside the dun, and the common soldiers pitched their tents in the fields without.

In a few days more Eileen and her mother waved a tearful good-by to Angus and Ferdiad and Conn as they took their places in the great host that wound out of the dun and across the fields to the east. At the head went Brian Boru and after him the kings and flaiths riding in chariots, while the poets cantered along on horseback, their musical branches tinkling and their heads full of the battle songs they would chant when the time came. There were also musicians and story tellers and jugglers to provide entertainment when they camped at night, and doctors and priests to attend those who

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would be wounded and dying in the fight. The soldiers trudged along on foot and the baggage followed in ox-carts. Ferdiad and Conn and the other boys marched along with the rest and whenever they were wanted to carry messages or do any service the buglers called them, and when they got tired marching they could climb in the ox-carts and ride for a while.

“How long will it take us to get to the sea-coast? Do you know?” asked Conn of Ferdiad.

“Father Angus said it would be over a week,” said Ferdiad, “but I don’t care how long it takes. I think it will be lots of fun, especially when we camp at night!”

And Ferdiad was right. The boys greatly enjoyed the march, and, best of all, the evenings when the tents were pitched, the protecting wall of earth thrown up around the camp, the fires made and supper being cooked. Later on, when the great king’s-candle was lighted

at the door of Brian Boru's tent, story telling and singing and all sorts of fun went on.

At last they drew near the mouth of the river Liffey and began to smell the salt air of the sea; and on a plain near its shore they made their camp. Close behind rose the Hill of Howth, and not far off the sea glittered and gleamed as the ebbing waves laid bare a wide strand of bowlders covered with long green water weeds. By and by, when the tide would come sweeping in, the great foaming breakers would roar and rumble over the stones like a herd of angry, bellowing bulls, and for this reason the Celtic people called the seashore there "Clontarf," which means in their language the "Lawn of the Bulls," a name which it bears to this day.

Ferdiad and Conn, who had not before seen the ocean, delighted in watching the curling green breakers and wading out as far as they dared. But they did not have much time to

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play, as the next day, which was Palm Sunday, they had many errands to do.

On that morning all the other Celtic kings joined Brian Boru's army, bringing with them their hosts of fighting men dressed, as were all the rest of the Celtic soldiers, in tunics of yellow linen; they had no armor because they thought it cowardly to wear it and protected only their heads with leather helmets and the front of their legs from the knee down with pieces of brown leather. The kings and flaiths did not wear even these, but were arrayed in silk and gay linen bratts and tunics and gold chains and bracelets quite as if they were going to a feast instead of a fight.

Ferdiad and Conn were very busy for the next three or four days, and finally, Thursday evening, Ferdiad said, "I believe they will fight soon now. I wouldn't wonder if it would be to-morrow!"

"Why," said Conn, "that's Good Friday!

I shouldn't think Brian Boru would pick such a holy day to fight. You know he is so religious."

"He is," said Ferdiad, "but I heard the soldiers talking about a prophecy of a Dane soothsayer. I don't know how they found out about it, but the prophecy says if the battle is on Good Friday our Celts will win, though the high king will be killed. Of course nobody wants Brian Boru killed, but the soldiers say they want to fight to-morrow on account of the first part of the prophecy and that they can ward off the last part easy enough as they are sure the high king won't be in the fight because of the day and they will keep an extra strong guard around him besides."

"What does Brian Boru say?" asked Conn.
"Did you hear?"

"They say he has the battle all planned and is willing for it to be to-morrow, though, as the soldiers thought, he himself won't touch weapons on Good Friday because it's against

his religion. It seems to me he is too old to fight anyway! ”

“ Don’t you think it! ” said Conn. “ He is mighty brave and a good fighter yet, if he is ’way past eighty! ”

That night there were no poets’ songs nor story telling nor jugglers’ tricks, for everybody was on the alert for the coming battle. The two boys curled up side by side in one of the ox-carts and, like all the rest of the Celtic host on this night, they did not take off their clothes. Far off in the distance they could see the watch-fires of the Danes at the Ford of the Hurdles, and they went to sleep talking excitedly of the morrow.

CHAPTER X

THE BATTLE OF CLONTARF

SURE enough, at daybreak the next morning there rose the sound of wild war cries as the Celts rushed out from their camp toward the Ford of the Hurdles. The full tide was roaring and bellowing across the Lawn of the Bulls, but its noise was quite drowned as with fierce cries of their own the Danes sprang to meet them.

“Hark! Hark!” exclaimed Ferdiad as he and Conn jumped from the ox-cart where they had slept, “the fight has begun!” As none of the boys were allowed in the way of the battle but had been ordered to stay behind the lines, “Let’s run up the side of the Hill of Howth,” he said, “we can at least see it from

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there. My, how I wish we could be in it!"

"Don't you though!" cried Conn longingly as they scrambled up the steep grassy slopes.

There were others also watching from the Hill; the doctors who must be ready to help the wounded, the priests to comfort the dying, and the historians to write down just what went on. For the Celts liked to keep an account of all their doings.

The boys stood near these, and as the fight became fiercer and fiercer of course they grew more and more excited.

"I wonder where the high king is?" said Conn.

"I don't know," answered Ferdiad,—then, "Look!" he cried, "I believe he is over yonder sitting on a rock! Can you see?"

"Yes," replied Conn, "and there's a ring of men with locked shields standing all around him!"

It was indeed the aged high king. His face

was white and set as if carved from marble, yet his piercing eyes were brave and fearless as he sat watching the battle which he was certain would in some way bring death to him. For the Dane prophecy had sunk deep into his mind, and nothing could shake his belief that it would be fulfilled.

Wilder and wilder grew the struggle. Banners fluttered and fell, and the loud battle cries from thousands of throats, the clanking of Danish armor and rattling of spears and shields all mingled in one hoarse roar as the chariots of the Celtic kings rushed hither and thither and the poets goaded their horses to the front ranks bravely chanting their songs and inspiring the courage of the soldiers.

The sun rose higher and higher and the ebbing tide flowed far out to sea, and still the conflict raged and none could foresee who would be the victors. Now one side and now the other seemed gaining the advantage. But to-

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ward noon the watchers on the Hill began to despair; for they could see the yellow tunics of the Celtic soldiers rolling back in a tawny flood as the gleaming mail of the Danes swept over them.

Ferdiad and Conn scarcely spoke as breathlessly they looked, each wondering whether his father or foster-father still lived or had gone down before the Danish hosts as had already the son and grandson of the high king.

But Brian Boru was too proud and skillful a warrior to allow his armies to meet defeat at the hands of pirates and sea-rovers no matter how many or how powerful. Still standing white and motionless, watching the plain through the ring of shields, nevertheless he was all the while sending swift messengers back and forth ordering the battle, till at length, as the sunset tide again surged in, bellowing, over the waterworn bowlders, the tide of war turned also for the Celts.

Louder and louder rang the songs of the poets, the voice of Angus leading them all, as the Celtic kings and captains rallying their soldiers for a last mighty effort, rushed resistlessly forward, hurling their spears, thrusting with their swords and dealing deadly blows with their battle axes, till suddenly their Danish foes gave way and fled wildly before them.

At this the boys could hold back no longer, but flying down the hillside ran toward the seashore where the victorious Celts were pursuing the Danes, who were trying to reach the long dragon ships in which they had come to Ireland and which were moored at the mouth of the river Liffey. When the tide was low they could easily wade out to these, but now plunging into the great green breakers hundreds and hundreds met their death. Some tried to reach the bridge over the Liffey which led to their fortress only to find escape cut off by the brave Celts who had captured and held it.

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When dusk fell, the great army of the Danes was crushed and defeated. Of those who had not fallen in battle or been drowned in the roaring tide a few had managed to escape, but most were prisoners in the hands of the Celtic soldiers. The Battle of Clontarf was over and the high king, Brian Boru, had forever broken the power of the Danes in Ireland.

But what of the high king himself? Had he escaped the death for which he had waited through all the long day? No, he had not escaped. Faithfully from early dawn to sunset the shield men had guarded him in unbroken ring, and not till the tide of battle turned and the Celts were pursuing the flying Danes did they relax their watch. For how could they know that at the very moment their tired arms dropped to their sides a fugitive Dane, who had managed to escape the Celtic spears and crept through the forest and behind the rocks at the foot of the Hill, would spring



“THUS IT WAS THE SOOTHSAYER’S PROPHECY WAS FULFILLED ”

upon the aged monarch and deal him death with a single thrust of his sword?

But thus it was the soothsayer's prophecy was fulfilled.

CHAPTER XI

FERDIAD AND THE DANE PRISONER

FERDIAD and Conn stood together in a group of soldiers who were making campfires for the night, and many were the stories they all had to tell of the day. But most of all were they wondering how it was that a single Dane had been able to kill the high king in spite of all the shield men.

"It was that heathen prophecy!" declared one soldier, "and nobody could help it!"

"They say the Dane who struck him was a great sorcerer and that no sword could bite his magic armor," said another. And this explanation seemed to satisfy them best; for they did not like to think an ordinary man could have harmed the king they had taken such pains to guard.

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"Did you know the flaith O'Brien was killed?" asked another.

"Yes," spoke up some one else, "his men say that at first he was invisible because of the cloak from the banshee of Craglea, but as the battle grew fiercer he scorned not to be seen and threw it off. It was then a Dane spear struck him, and they say his shield moaned as he fell!"

"Did you see the war witches dancing on the tips of our Celtic spears?" said another voice.

"To be sure!" came an answering one, "And look! they are flying now over the battle field!"

"Do *you* see them, Ferdiad?" whispered Conn, in awed tones.

"It looks like fog coming in from the sea," said Ferdiad, gazing through the gathering dusk, "but I suppose the witches are in it."

Just here some other boys came along on

their way to see the prisoners, and Ferdiad and Conn went with them to the rear of the camp where scores of sullen-looking Danes were standing under guard waiting their turn to be chained. Torches flared here and there, and as their flickering light fell on the faces of the prisoners all at once Ferdiad stopped short with a long "Oh!" He was standing in front of a tall, cruel-looking man with hands chained behind him and an ugly red scar across his forehead.

After his first gasp of surprise, "Conn," whispered Ferdiad excitedly, "he is the man who killed the monk in the raid on Kells! I would know his face in a thousand. And he took what the monk had hid in his robe and I have always thought it was the angel book of Saint Columkille!" Here Ferdiad caught sight of the wooden shield at the Dane's feet: in its center was a pointed boss of iron which was thrust through, and partly held in place,



" HE WAS STANDING IN FRONT OF A TALL, CRUEL LOOKING MAN "



the fragment of a thin sheet of gold. The corners of this were fastened to the wood by a few bronze nails, and the gold was beautifully hammered in a curious design of interlacing lines and queer animal forms with long tails twisting in many intricate spirals.

"Look!" cried Ferdiad, as he examined this eagerly, "now I *know* it was Saint Columkille's book he got! That gold is part of its case, I've seen it and remember the pattern! I suppose he put it on his shield trying to imitate our handsome Celtic ones with their gold ornaments."

Meantime the captive was staring sullenly at Ferdiad, who was saying to Conn, "I wonder if he understands Celtic? I wish I could ask him some questions."

"No, boy," said a soldier standing guard near by, "but if you want to ask him something I can help you, for I know *his* language."

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"Oh," said Ferdiad, "ask him where the *book* is that was in that case. It was the angel book of the blessed Saint Columkille!"

"*It was?*" exclaimed the soldier in surprise, for almost every Celt had heard of that wonderful book. But to the soldier's question the Dane only shrugged his shoulders and would say nothing.

"I was at Kells when the Danes raided it, and I saw him kill the monk who was trying to save the book!" went on Ferdiad.

At this the soldier began fiercely to threaten the man, telling him they would kill him. But still the man sullenly refused to speak; for he had been long enough in Ireland to know that the Celtic law would not allow prisoners to be killed.

Then Ferdiad thought of something. "Tell him," he said, "that my foster-father is the chief poet of Ireland and I will get him to compose a scornful poem about him!"

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Now do not laugh, for this was no idle threat of Ferdiad's, and when he suggested it the soldier said approvingly, "That will settle him!" For a Celt dreaded nothing more than for a poet to chant scornful verses about him. They had a peculiar reverence for their poets and believed that by their songs they could, if they wished, call down terrible misfortunes or even death.

So the soldier took pains to impress all this on the Dane, who turned pale with fright and at last burst out in a torrent of words to which the soldier listened attentively.

"He says," he interpreted, "that that book has been trouble enough to him. When he was carrying it off from Kells another Dane attacked him and tried to get it away, and in the fight he killed the man but not before he had got a sword thrust that blinded one of his eyes,—which served him right! though the wicked heathen was ugly enough already with

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that red scarred forehead of his!"—put in the soldier on his own account as he went on, "he says the gold was what he wanted, and after his fight with the man he tore the book out of its case and threw it away. And may the blessed Saint Columkille send his soul to everlasting torment for it!" added the soldier as he piously crossed himself.

Ferdiad drew a long breath, "Well," he said at last, "at least it wasn't burned!" For everybody knew the Danes had made many a bonfire of the precious books and manuscripts they had stolen from the Celts. "Perhaps it may be found yet," he said to Conn as they walked away together.

"But it would surely be spoiled if it had been lying on the ground all this while!" said Conn.

And still discussing it they went over to the center of the camp where every one was going. For Angus was beginning to chant the mourn-

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ing song for the high king, who lay within his tent with lighted candles at his head and feet and the royal waxen one blazing at the door.

CHAPTER XII

THE BOOK OF KELLS

IT was the day after the battle of Clontarf, and the Celtic camp was already broken up and the soldiers scattering back to their homes. The body of the dead high king, Brian Boru, was to be borne in a cart drawn by white oxen and covered with a purple pall to the church of Armagh, a very sacred place in the kingdom of Ulster. There, with solemn ceremonies, the Celtic monarch would be buried, standing with his face to the east, wrapped in his royal mantle, his shield and spear beside him.

Now it happened that Kells was one of the stopping places on the way to Armagh; and when Ferdiad heard this, he begged his foster-

father that he and Conn might go that far along with the pages who attended the different kings and flaiths.

"We can ride in the cart for the pages, and stay at Kells and you can stop for us when you come back from Armagh!" said Ferdiad eagerly. "I want to hunt for Saint Columkille's book and Conn will help me." For Ferdiad had told his foster-father about what the Dane prisoner had said.

Angus had no hope that the beautiful book might be found, but Ferdiad begged so hard that he agreed and Ferdiad ran off happily to tell Conn.

So it came about that the two boys went along when the funeral procession set off, the white oxen and royal cart leading the way while close behind rode poet Angus chanting sorrowful songs in honor of the dead king. After him came as many of the Celtic kings and flaiths as could arrange to go to Armagh, and last of all

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followed the host of attendants for these, the boys among them.

At Kells the funeral train was received with every honor, and after a brief rest moved on to the north; but Ferdiad and Conn stayed behind. The boys were warmly greeted by the monks, who knew Ferdiad well and were fond of the lad; and they were especially glad to see him as they had not heard from him since the day of the raid.

He soon told them what he had found out about the beautiful book, and Brother Patrick said, "Yes, lad, I remember finding the body of no doubt the very man the Dane prisoner told you he had fought with over the gold case, and we gave the wicked heathen Christian burial where we found him. If the book was thrown away soon after the fight, it must be somewhere not far from that spot."

"Oh, please show us the place and let's begin looking right away!" cried Ferdiad.

"I can show you the Dane's grave," said Brother Patrick with a sigh, "but unless the blessed Saint Columkille has worked a miracle, the beautiful book is surely ruined by this time!"

The spot to which he led the way was in a woodland skirting the monastery fields, and just beyond was a bog where the monks had once cut the peat they burned in winter, though it had now become quite dry. Several of them who had heard Ferdiad's story came along, and all began to search. But most of them were no longer young, and it seemed to them a hopeless task; though they constantly mourned the loss of the most beautiful book in Ireland.

As the Kells school was over for the summer, there were no young students to help search, for they had all gone away for a time; so at last Ferdiad and Conn found themselves the ones who must find the book if any one did.

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Up and down through the trees they went, peering and poking under every swirl of fallen leaves or dead boughs where they glimpsed anything that looked in the least like the brown carved leather that covered the lost book. Ferdiad led the way southeastward from where the two Danes had fought, "For," he said, "that is the direction Brother Patrick says the raiders went after they left Kells, and even yet you can see the broken branches where they drove the cows through the woods on their way toward the sea."

The boys got down on their hands and knees and looked under every thicket of bushes, and Conn even poked under tufts of violets and cowslips.

"Why, Conn," laughed Ferdiad, "it's too big to hide under those! Saint Columkille's book is at least a foot wide and more than that long, and thick through!"

Indeed, they got as interested as in a game

of hide and seek; moreover, the monks offered as prize, if the book was found, a handsome bow and arrows with a quiver of red enameled leather, such as they gave to their best student at the end of his year's school work.

For almost a week the boys searched and searched in vain. At last Ferdiad said, "There's a fairy mound somewhere in these woods, I think not far from here. Let's go around it three times and say a charm and maybe the fairies will help us!"

"All right!" agreed Conn, and soon finding the little hill they walked around it backward three times, each saying softly under his breath a special charm rime; for many such had been handed down among the people from the days of the DeDanaans.

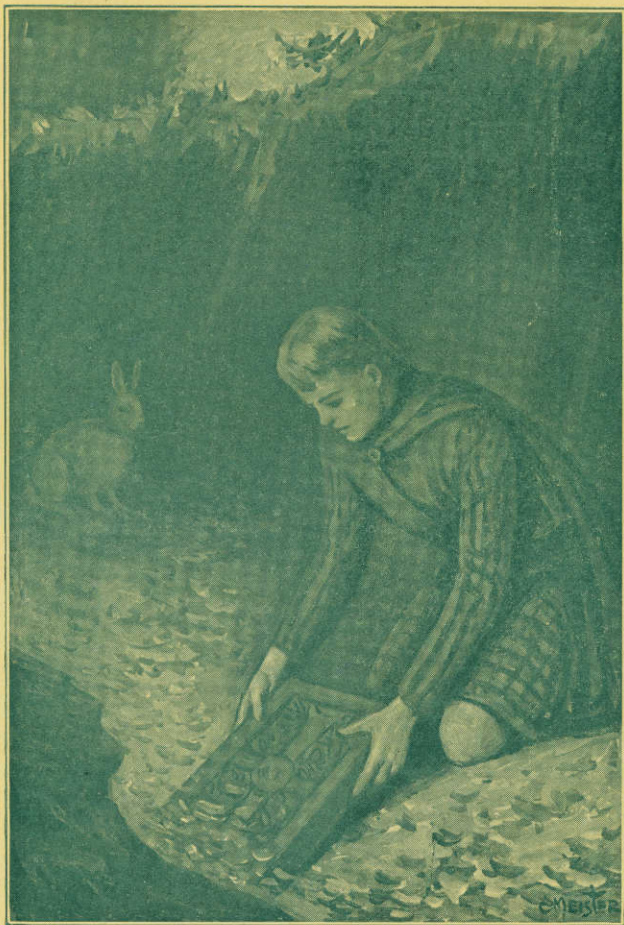
Now it was an odd thing, but that very morning, while Conn with a stick was poking under some hazel bushes, Ferdiad, in looking behind a log at the edge of the woodland, happened to

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start a young hare. Off scampered the little creature out of the woods and over a corner of the peat bog. Suddenly,—*plump!* down it tumbled head over heels in a hole where, long before, the monastery brothers had been cutting their peat.

Ferdiad, who was fond of hunting with his red and green hounds, though he had none with him, instinctively ran after the hare to see what had become of it. Though the ground was spongy lower down, for some distance from the top the bog was dry; and when Ferdiad came to the hole, there was the frightened little hare huddled up at the bottom and in his scrambles to get out his hind legs were scattering the brown dry leaves that had blown over from the forest the autumn before.

As Ferdiad bent over his eyes began to grow very round as he stared, not at the little hare, but at something lying at one side of the ragged hole where the hare had been most active in



"THE DRIFTING LEAVES HAD PROTECTED IT FROM THE WEATHER"

scattering away the leaves. The corner of a brown flat object was laid bare, and Ferdiad, springing down hurriedly, cleared away the rest of the leaves and drew out — but, of course, you have guessed what!

Yes, indeed, it truly was the angel book which by some strange chance had fallen into the peat hole when the Dane, hurrying to join the other raiders, had come out of the woodland and cutting across a corner of the bog had torn it from the case and flung it away. It had dropped under a projecting edge of the peat, and this and the drifting leaves had protected it from the weather so that when Ferdiad lifted it out, though its thick leather cover was marred and discolored in places, yet when he opened it its marvelous painted pages shone out as bright and beautiful and undimmed as when first it came from the hand of the unknown artist hundred of years before!

“*Conn! Conn!*” shouted Ferdiad, trem-

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bling with excitement, "*Come here! I have found it!*"

In a moment Conn came running, and when Ferdiad told him how he had discovered it he stared in surprise. "Do you suppose it could have been a DeDanaan fairy in the form of a hare that helped you find it?" he cried. "I was sure I saw some fairies flitting around there in the woods after we came back from the mound."

"I don't know," said Ferdiad, "it might have been!"

And perhaps it was; and perhaps, too, as the monks declared when Ferdiad bore back the book in triumph to the monastery, the blessed Saint Columkille or the angels who had guided the hand of the bygone artist had indeed wrought a miracle and so saved those rare painted pages from harm as they lay all the long months hidden in the bog.

In very truth, the angels must still guard the sacred volume; for all these things I have told you happened long and long ago. Long and long ago Ferdiad and Conn and Eileen lived out their happy lives and long ago poet Angus sang his last sweet song. The raths of the Celtic people of old and the duns of their high kings are now only ruined walls watched over by the hidden fairies, and their beloved Ireland has passed through many changes and has known much of sorrow. Yet through all the passing centuries the Great Gospel of Saint Columkille, or the Book of Kells, as it is more often called to-day, still keeps its lovely pages untarnished and unfading. In the city of Dublin, which once was but the fortress at the Ford of the Hurdles, still is it jealously cherished, and still is it ranked, as in the days of Ferdiad, the most beautiful book in all the world.

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