AN ANTHOLOGY OF IRISH LITERATURE

EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION, BY

David H. Greene, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

THE MODERN LIBRARY · NEW YORK
The Boyhood Deeds of Cuchulain

"This boy," said Fergus, "was reared in his father's and his mother's house, by the seaside northwards in the plain of Muirthemne, where someone gave him an account of the macrad or 'boy-corps' of Emain Macha; how that Conchobar divides his day into three parts: the first being devoted to watching the boy-corps at their sport, especially that of hurling; the second to the playing of chess and draughts; the third to pleasurable consuming of meat and drink until drowsiness sets in, which then is promoted by the exertions of minstrels and musicians to induce favorable placidity of mind and disposition. And, for all that we are banished from him," continued Fergus, "by my word I swear that neither in Ireland nor in Scotland is there a warrior his (i.e., Conchobar's) counterpart. The little lad, then, as aforesaid, having heard of all this, one day told his mother that he was bent on a visit to Emain Macha to test the boy-corps at their own sports. She objected that he was immature, and ought to wait until some grown warrior or other, or some confidential of Conchobar's should, in order to insure his safety, bind over the boy-corps to keep the peace toward him. He told his mother that that was too long an outlook, that he could not wait, and that all she had to do was to set him a course for Emain Macha, since he did not know in which direction it lay.

1 The Achilles of the Ulster cycle was the son of Dechtire, sister of King Conchubor, by Lug, a prince of the Tuatha De Danann, or by Sualtach, an Ulster chieftain. His name Setanta was changed to Cuchulain (lit. the hound of Culann) when, at the age of seven, he destroyed the famous hound of Culann the smith. This story of Cuchulain's youth is taken from The Cattle Raid of Cooley, the great epic of the Ulster cycle and is told to Ailill and Maeve by several of the Ulster exiles serving in Maeve's army. See Introduction, p. xiii.

2 The capital of Ulster near Armagh.

It is a weary way from here,' said the mother, 'for between thee and it lies Sliab Fuait.'

'Give me the bearings,' said he; and she did so.

Away he went then, taking with him his hurly of brass, his ball of silver, his throwing javelin, and his toy spear; with which equipment he fell to shortening the way for himself. He did it thus: with his hurly he would strike the ball and drive it a great distance; then he pelted the hurly after it, and drove it just as far again; then he threw his javelin, lastly the spear. Which done, he would make a playful rush after them all, pick up the hurly, the ball and the javelin, while, before the spear's tip could touch the earth, he had caught the missile by the other end.

In due course Cu Chulainn reached Emain Macha, where he found the boy-corps, thrice fifty in number, hurling on the green and practising martial exercises with Conchobar's son Follamain at their head. The lad dived right in among them and took a hand in the game. He got the ball between his legs and hold it there, not suffering it to travel higher up than his knees or lower down than his ankle-joints, and so making it impossible for them to get in a stroke or in any other way to touch it. In this manner he brought it along and sent it home over the goal. In utter amazement the whole corps looked on; but Follamain mac Conchobar cried: 'Good now, boys, all together meet this youngster as he deserves, and kill him; because it is taboo to have such a one join himself to you and interfere in your game, without first having had the civility to procure your guarantee that his life should be respected. Together then and at once attack him and avenge violation of your taboo; for we know that he is the son of some petty Ulster warrior, such as without safe-conduct is not accustomed to intrude into your play.'

The whole of them assailed Cu Chulainn, and simultaneously sent their hurleys at his head; he, however, parried all the hundred and fifty and was unharmed. The same with the balls, which he fended off with fists, fore-arms, and palms alone.
Their thrice fifty toy spears he received in his little shield, and still was unhurt. In turn now, Cu Chulainn went among them, and laid low fifty of the best: five more of them," said Fergus, "came past the spot where myself and Conchobar sat at chess-play, with the young lad close in their wake.

"Hold, my little fellow," said Conchobar, "I see this is no gentle game thou playest with the boy-corps."

"And good cause I have too," cried Cu Chulainn: "after coming out of a far land to them, I have not had a guest's reception."

"How now, little one," said the king, "knowest thou not the boy-corps' conditions: that a newcomer must have them bound by their honor to respect his life?"

"I knew it not," said the boy, "otherwise I had conformed, and taken measures beforehand."

"'Tis well," said the king: "take it now upon yourselves to let the boy go safe."

"We do," the boy-corps answered.

"They resumed play; Cu Chulainn did as he would with them, and again laid out fifty of them on the ground. Their fathers deemed they could not but be dead. No such thing, however; it was merely that with his blows and pushes and repeated charges, he so terrified them that they took to the grass.

"'What on earth is he at with them now?' asked Conchobar.

"'I swear by my gods,' said Cu Chulainn, 'that until they in their turn come under my protection and guarantee, I will not lighten my hand from off them.'"

"This they did at once. Now," said Fergus in conclusion, "I submit, that a youngster who did all this when he was just five years old, needs not to excite our wonder because, now being turned of seventeen years, he in this Cattle-Raid of Cooley cut a four-pronged pole and the rest, and that he should have killed a man, or two, or three men, or even, as indeed he has done, four."

Conchobar's son Cormac Conlonges spoke now, saying, "In the year after that, the same little boy did another deed."

"And what was that?" Ailill asked.

"Well," continued Cormac, "in Ulster there was a good smith and artificer, by name Culann. He prepared a banquet for Conchobar, and traveled to Emain Macha to bid him to it. He begged Conchobar to bring with him only a moderate number of warriors, because neither land nor domain had he, but merely the product of his hammer, of his anvil, and of his tongs. Conchobar promised that he would bring no more than a small company. Culann returned home to make his last preparations, Conchobar remaining in Emain Macha until the meeting broke up and the day came to a close. Then the king put on his light convenient travelling garb, and betook him to the green in order to bid the boy-corps farewell before he started. There, however, he saw a curious sight. One hundred and fifty youths at one end of the green, and at the other, a single one and he taking the goal against the crowd of them. Again, when they played the hole-game, and it was their turn to aim at the hole, it being his to defend it, he stopped all thrice fifty balls just at the edge of the hole, so that not one went in; when the defence was theirs and it was his turn to shoot, he would hole the entire set without missing one. When the game was to tear one another's clothes off, he would have the mantles off them all, while the full number could not even pull out his brooch. When it was to upset each other, he would knock over the hundred and fifty and they could not stretch him on the ground. All which when Conchobar had witnessed, he said: 'I congratulate the land into which the little boy has come; were his full-grown deeds to prove consonant with his boyish exploits, he would indeed be of some solid use.'"

"To this doubtful expression Fergus objected, saying to Conchobar, 'That is not justly said; for according as the little boy grows, so also will his deeds increase with him.'"

"'Have the child called to us,' said the king, 'that he may come with us to share the banquet.'"

"'I cannot go thither just now,' said the boy.

"'How so?' asked Conchobar.

"'The boy-corps have not yet had enough of play.'"

"'It would be too long for us to wait until they had,' said the king.
"Wait not at all; I will follow after you."
"But, young one, knowest thou the way?"
"I will follow the trail of the company, of the horses, and the chariots' tracks."

"Thereupon Conchobar started; eventually he reached Culann's house, was received in becoming fashion, fresh rushes were laid, and they fell to the banquet. Presently the smith said to Conchobar, 'Good now, O king, has any one promised that this night he would follow thee to this dwelling?'

"'No, not one,' answered Conchobar (quite forgetting the little boy); 'but wherefore do you ask?'

"'It is only that I have an excellent ban-dog, from which when his chain is taken off no one may dare to be near him; for saving myself he knows not any man, and in him resides the strength of an hundred.'

"Conchobar said, 'Loose him then, and let him guard this place.'

"So Culann did; the dog made the circuit of his country, then took up his usual position whence to watch the house, and there he crouched with his head on his paws. Surely an extraordinary, cruel, fierce and savage dog was he.

"As for the boy-corps, until it was time to separate, they continued in Emain Macha; then they dispersed, each one to his parent's house, or to his nurse's, or to his guardian's. But the little fellow, trusting to the trail, as aforesaid, struck out for Culann's house. With his club and his ball he shortened the way for himself as he went. So soon as ever he came to the green of Culann's fort, the ban-dog became aware of him and gave tongue in such a way as to be heard throughout all the countryside; not was it to carve the boy decently as for a feast that he was minded, but at one gulp to swallow him down. The child was without all reasonable means of defence; therefore as the dog charged at him open-jawed he threw his playing ball down his throat with great force, which mortally punished the creature's inwards. Cu Chulainn seized him by the hind legs and banged him against a rock to such purpose that he strewed all the ground in broken fragments.

The Boyhood of Cuchulain

"The whole company within had heard the ban-dog's challenge, at the sound of which Conchobar said, 'Tis no good luck has brought us on our present trip."

"'Your meaning?' asked the others.

"'I mean that the little boy, my sister Deichtire's son, Setanta mac Sualtach, had promised to come after me; and he even now must be killed by the ban-dog.'

"To a man the heroes rose; and though the fort's doors were thrown open, out they stormed over the ramparts to seek him. Speedy as they were, yet did Fergus outstrip them; he picked up the boy, hoisted him on his shoulder, and carried him to Conchobar. Culann himself had come out, and there he saw his ban-dog lie in scraps and pieces; which was a heart's vexation to him. He went back indoors and said, 'Thy father and thy mother are welcome both, but most unwelcome thou.'

"'Why, what hast thou against the little fellow?' asked Conchobar.

"'It was no good luck that inspired me to make my feast for thee, O Conchobar: my dog now being gone, my substance is but substance wasted; my livelihood, a means of living set all astray. Little boy,' he continued, 'that was a good member of my family thou tookest from me: a safeguard of raiment, of flocks, and of herds.'

"'Be not angered thereat,' said the child; 'for in this matter myself will pronounce a just award.'

"'And what might that be?' inquired Conchobar.

"The little boy replied, 'If in all Ireland there be a whelp of that dog's breed, by me he shall be nurtured till he be fit for action as was his sire. In the meantime I, O Culann, myself will do thee a ban-dog's service, in guarding of thy cattle and substance and stronghold.'

"'Well hast thou made the award,' said Conchobar; and Cathbad the Druid, chiming in, declared that not in his own person could he have done it better, and that henceforth the boy must bear the name Cu Chulainn, 'Culann's Hound.' The youngsters, however, objected; 'I like my own name better: Setanta mac Sualtach.'
"Say not so," Cathbad remonstrated; 'for all men in the world shall have their mouths full of that name.'

"The boy answered that on those terms the name would be well pleasing to him, and in this way it came to pass that it stuck to him. Now the little fellow," continued Cormac Conlones the narrator of all this, "who when just touching six years of age slew the dog which even a great company did not dare to approach, it were not reasonable to be astonished though the same at seventeen should come to the border of the province, and kill a man, or two, or three, or four, on the Cattle-Raid of Cooley."

Another exiled Ulsterman, Fiacha mac Firaba, taking up the recital, said that in the very year following that adventure of the dog, the little boy had performed a third exploit.

"And what was that?" Ailill asked.

"Why, it was Cathbad the druid," continued Fiacha, "who to the north-east of Emain Macha taught his pupils, there being with him eight from among the students of his art. When one of them questioned him as to what purpose that day was more especially favorable, Cathbad told him that any stripling who on that day should for the first time assume arms and armor, the name of such an one forever would surpass those of all Ireland's youths besides. His life, however, must be fleeting, short. The boy was some distance away on the south side of Emain Macha; nevertheless he heard Cathbad's speech. He put off his playing suit and laid aside his implements of sport; then he entered Conchobar's sleeping house and said, 'All good be thine, O king.'

"Conchobar answered, 'Little boy, what is thy request?'

"'I desire to take arms.'

"'And who prompted thee to that?'

"'Cathbad the druid,' answered the boy.

"'Thou shalt not be denied,' said the king, and forthwith gave him two spears with sword and shield. The boy supplied and brandished the weapons and in the process broke them all to shivers and splinters. In short, whereas in Emain Macha Conchobar had seventeen weapon-equipments ready for the boy-corps' service—since whenever one of them took arms, Conchobar it was who invested him with the outfit and brought him luck in the using of it—the boy made fragments of them all. Which done, he said, 'O my master, O Conchobar, these arms are not good; they suffice me not.' Thereupon the king gave him his own two spears, his own sword, and his own shield. In every possible way the boy tested them; he even bent them point to hilt and head to butt, yet never broke them: they endured him. 'These arms are good,' said he, 'and worthy of me. Fair fall the land and the region which for its king has him whose arms and armor are these.'

"Just then it was that Cathbad the druid came into the house and wondering asked, 'Is the little boy assuming arms?'

"'Ay, indeed,' said the king.

"'It is not his mother's son we would care to see assume them on this day,' said the druid.

"'How now,' said the king, 'was it not thysel that prompted him?'

"'Not I, of a surety.'

"'Brat,' cried the king, 'what meanest thou by telling me that it was so, wherein thou hast lied to me?'

"'O king, be not wroth,' the boy pleaded; 'for he it was that prompted me when he instructed his other pupils. For when they asked him what special virtue lay in this day, he told them that the name of whatsoever youth should therein for the first time take arms, would top the fame of all other Erin's men; nor thereby should he suffer resulting disadvantage, save that his life must be fleeting, short.'

"'And it is true for me,' said Cathbad; 'noble and famous indeed thou shalt be, but transitory, soon gone.'

"'Little care I,' said Cu Chulainn, 'nor though I were but one day or one night in being, so long as after me the history of myself and doings may endure.'

"Then said Cathbad again, 'Well then, get into a chariot, boy, and proceed to test in thine own person whether mine utterance be truth.'

"So Cu Chulainn mounted a chariot; in divers ways he tried
its strength, and reduced it to fragments. He mounted a second, with the same result. In brief, whereas in Emain Macha for the boy-corps’ service Conchobar had seventeen chariots, in like wise the little fellow smashed them all; then he said, ‘These chariots of thine, O Conchobar, are no good at all, nor worthy of me.’

‘Where is Iubar mac Riangabra?’ cried Conchobar.
‘Here I am,’ he answered.
‘Prepare my own chariot and harness my own horses for him there.’

The driver did his will, Cu Chulainn mounted, tested the chariot, and it endured him. ‘This chariot is good,’ he said, ‘and my worthy match.’

‘Good now, little boy,’ said Iubar, ‘let the horses be turned out to grass.’

‘Too early for that yet, Iubar; drive on and round Emain Macha.’

‘Let the horses go out to graze.’

‘Too early yet, Iubar; drive ahead, that the boy-corps may give me salutation on this the first day of my taking arms.’

‘They came to the place where the boy-corps was, and the cry of them resounded, ‘These are arms that thou hast taken.’

‘The very thing indeed,’ he said.

‘They wished him success in spoil-winning and in first-slaying, but expressed regret that he was weaned away from them and their sports. Cu Chulainn assured them that it was not so, but that it was something in the nature of a charm that had caused him to take arms on this day of all others. Again Iubar pressed him to have the horses taken out, and again the boy refused. He questioned the driver, ‘Whither leads this great road here running by us?’ Iubar answered that it ran to Ath an Foraire (the Lookout Ford) in Sliabh Fuait. In answer to further questions with which he plied the charioteer, Cu Chulainn learned that the ford had that name from the fact that daily

1 Conchobar’s charioteer. His brother Loeg became Cuchulain’s charioteer.
alone to frequent the border, the Ulstermen would avenge it on me.'

"Conall had his chariot made ready and his horses harnessed; he started on his errand of protection, and soon overtook Cu Chulainn, who had cut the matter short and had gone on before. They now being abreast, the boy deemed that, in event of opportunity to do some deed of mortal daring, Conall would never allow him to execute it. From the ground therefore he picked up a stone about the size of his fist, and took very careful aim at Conall's chariot-yoke. He broke it in two, the vehicle came down, and Conall was hurled prone, so falling that his mouth was brought over one shoulder.

"'What's all this, boy?'

"'It was I: in order to see whether my marksmanship was good and whether there was in me the material of a good warrior.'

"'Poison take both thy shot and thyself as well; and though thy head should fall as a prize to some foe over yonder, yet never a foot further will I budge to save thee!'

"'The very thing I crave of thee,' said the boy; 'and I do this in this particular manner because to you Ulstermen it is taboo to persist after violence is done to you.' With that Conall went back to his post at the ford.

"As for the little boy, southwards he went his way to the shallows of Loch Echtra, and until the day's end abode there. Then spoke Iubar: 'If to thee we might venture to say so much, little one, I should be more than rejoiced that we made instant return to Emain Macha. For already for some time the carving has been going on there; and whereas there thou hast thine appointed place kept till thou come—between Conchobar's knees—I on the contrary can do nothing but join the messengers and jesters of his house, to fit in where I may; for which reason I judge it now fitting that I were back in time to scramble with them.'

"Cu Chulainn ordered him to harness the chariot; which being done, they drove off, and Cu Chulainn inquired the name of a mountain that he saw. He learned that it was Sliab Morne, and further asked the meaning of a white cairn which appeared on a summit. It was Finncharn; the boy thought it inviting, and ordered the driver to take him thither. Iubar expressed great reluctance and Cu Chulainn said, 'Thou art a lazy loon, considering that this is my first adventure-quest, and this is thy first trip with me.'

"'And if it is,' said Iubar, 'and if I ever reach Emain Macha, for ever and for ever may it be my last!'

"'Good now, driver,' said the boy when they were on the top of the hillock; 'in all directions point out to me the topography of Ulster, a country in which I know not my way about.' The charioteer from that position pointed out the hills and the plain lands and the strongholds of the province.

"'Tis well, O driver; and what now is yon well-defined gleen-seamed plain before us to the southward?'

"'That is the plain of Bray (Mag Breg).'

"'Proceed then and instruct me concerning the strongholds and forts of that plain.' Then Iubar pointed out to him Tara and Tailtia, Cletty and Knowth and the brug of Angus mac Oc on the Boyne, and the stronghold of Nechtan Scine's sons.

"'Are they those sons of Nechtan of whom it is said, that the number of Ulstermen now alive exceeds not the number of them fallen by their hands?'

"'The same,' said Iubar.

"'Away with us then to the stronghold of Nechtan's sons.'

"'Woe waits on such a speech; and whosoever he be that goes there, I will not be the one.'

"Cu Chulainn said, 'Alive or dead, thither shalt thou go, however.'

"'Alive I go then, and dead I shall be left there.'

"They made their way to the stronghold, and the little boy dismounted upon the green, a green with this particular feature: in its center stood a pillar stone, encircled with an iron collar, test of heroic accomplishment; for it bore graven writing to the effect that any man (if only he were one that carried arms) who should enter on this green, must hold it taboo to him to depart from it without challenging to single combat some of the
dwellers in the stronghold. The little boy read the Ogam,1 threw his arms around the stone to start it, and eventually pitched it, collar and all, into the water close at hand.

"'In my poor opinion,' ventured Iubar, 'it is no better so than it was before; and I well know that this time at all events thou wilt find the object of thy search: a prompt and violent death.'

"'Good, good, O driver, spread me now the chariot-coverings that I may sleep a little while.'

"'Alas that one should speak so; for a land of foemen and not of friends is this.'

'Iubar obeyed, and on the green at once the little fellow fell asleep. Just then it was that Foill mac Nechtain issued forth, and, at the sight of the chariot, called out, 'Driver, do not unharness those horses!' Iubar made answer that he still held the reins in his hand—a sign that he was not about to unharness them.

"'What horses are these?'

"'Conchobar's two piebalds.'

"'Even such at sight I took them to be,' said Foill; 'and who has brought them into these borders?'

"'A young bit of a little boy; one who for luck has taken arms to-day, and for the purpose of showing off his form and fashion has come into the borders.'

"'Never let it thrive with him,' said Foill; 'were it sure that he is capable of action, it is dead in place of alive that he would go back to Emain Macha.'

"'Indeed he is not capable, nor could it be rightly imputed to him; this is but the seventh year since his birth.' Here the little one lifted his face from the ground; not only that but his whole body to his feet, blushed deep at the affront which he had overheard, and said, 'Ay, I am fit for action!'

"But Foill rejoined, 'I rather would incline to hold that thou art not.'

1 An alphabet of twenty characters used by the ancient British and Irish. NED.
Nechtain, and said, 'But simpletons they were with whom thou hast had to do.' Cu Chulainn asked him what he meant, and Fainné invited him to come away down and out upon the water where his foot would not touch bottom, himself on the instant darting to the ford. Still Iubar warned the boy to be on his guard. 'How is that then?' said Cu Chulainn.

"Because that is Fainné mac Nechtain; and the reason why he bears that name is that as it were a Fainné (swallow) or a weasel, even so for swiftness he travels on the water's surface, nor can the whole world's swimmers attempt to cope with him.'

"'Not to me ought such a thing to be said,' objected the boy again; 'for thou knowest the river which we have in Emain Macha, the Callan: well, when the boy-corps break off from their sports and plunge into it to swim, on either shoulder I take a lad of them, on either palm another, nor in the transit across that water ever wet as much as my ankles.'

"Then he and Fainné entered the ford and there wrestled. The younger clasped his arms around him and got him just flush with the water; then he dealt him a stroke with Conchobar's sword and took his head, letting the body go with the current. To finish up, Cu Chulainn entered the stronghold and harried it; then he and Iubar fired it and left it burning brightly, then turned about to retrace their step through Sliab Fuait, not forgetting to carry with them the heads of Nechtan Seeine's sons.

"Soon they saw in front of them a herd of deer, and the boy sought to know what were those numerous and restless cattle. Iubar explained that they were not cattle, but a herd of wild deer that kept in the dark glens of Sliab Fuait. He being urged to goad the horses in their direction, did so; but the king's fat horses could not attain to join company with the hard-conditioned deer. Cu Chulainn dismounted therefore and by sheer running and mere speed captured in the moor two stags of the greatest bulk, which he made fast to the chariot with thongs. Still they held a course for Emain Macha, and by-and-by, when nearing it, perceived a certain flock of whitest swans. The boy asked were they pet birds or wild, and learned that they were wild swans which used to congregate from rocks and islands of the sea, and for feeding's sake, infest the country. Cu Chulainn questioned further, and wished to know which was the rarer thing: to bring some of them back to Emain Macha alive, or to bring them dead. Iubar did not hesitate to say that bringing them back living would be the more creditable by far; 'for,' said he, 'you may find plenty to bring them in dead; perhaps not one to bring them in living.'

"Into his sling Cu Chulainn laid a little stone, and with it at a cast brought down eight swans of the number. Again he loaded, this time with a larger stone, and now brought down sixteen. 'Driver, bring along the birds,' he said.

"'But Iubar hesitated. 'I hardly can do that.'

"'And why not?' said the boy.

"'Because if I quit my present position, the horses' speed and the action being what they are, the chariot wheels will cut me into pieces; or else the stags' antlers will pierce and otherwise wound me.'

"'No true warrior art thou, Iubar; but come, the horses I will gaze upon with such a look that they shall not break their regulation pace; as for the gaze that I will bend upon the stags, they will stoop their heads for awe.'

"At this Iubar ventured down and retrieved the swans, which with more of the thongs and ropes he secured to the chariot. In this manner they covered the rest of the way to Emain Macha.

"Leborcham, daughter of Aed and messenger to the king, perceived them now and cried, 'A solitary chariot-fighter draws near to thee now, O Conchobar, and terribly he comes! The chariot is graced with the bleeding heads of his enemies; beautiful white birds he has which in the chariot bear him company, and wild unbroken stags bound and tethered to the same. Indeed if measures be not taken to receive him prudently, the best of the Ulstermen must fall by his hand.'

"'I know that little chariot-fighter,' Conchobar said: 'the
little boy, my sister’s son, who this very day went to the border. Surely he will have reddened his hand; and should his fury not be timely met, all Emain Macha’s young men will perish by him."

"At last they hit upon a method to abate his manly rage (the result of having shed blood), and it was this: Emain Macha’s women all (six score and ten in number) bared their bosoms, and without subterfuge of any kind trooped out to meet him (their manoeuvres being based on Cu Chulainn’s well-known modesty, which, like all his other qualities, was excessive). The little fellow leaned his head against the rail of the chariot and shut them from his sight. Then was the desired moment; all unawares he was seized, and soosed in a vat of cold water ready for the purpose. In this first vessel the heat generated by his immersion was such that the staves and hoops flew asunder instantly. In a second vat the water escaped (by boiling over); in yet a third the water still was hotter than one could bear. By this time, however, the little boy’s fury had died down in him; from crown to sole he blushed a beautiful pink red all over, and they clad him in his festive clothes. Thus his natural form and feature were restored to him.

"A beautiful boy indeed was that: seven toes to each foot he had, and to either hand as many fingers; his eyes were bright with seven pupils apiece, each one of which glittered with seven gem-like sparkles. On either cheek he had four moles: a blue, a crimson, a green, and a yellow one. Between one ear and the other he had fifty clear-yellow long tresses that were as the yellow wax of bees, or like a brooch of white gold as it glints in the sun unobscured. He wore a green mantle silver-clasped upon his breast, a gold-thread shirt. The small boy took his place between Conchobar’s knees, and the king began to stroke his hair. Now the stripling who by the time seven years were completed since his birth, had done such deeds: had destroyed the champions by whom two-thirds of the Ulstermen had fallen unavenged,—I hold," said Fiacha mac Firaba, the narrator, "that there is scant room for wonder though at seventeen he comes to the border, and kills a man, ay, two or three, or four, all in the Cattle-Raid of Cooley."

9TH CENTURY.
Translator Standish Hayes O’Grady.

The Tragic Death of Connla

WHAT was the cause for which Cu Chulainn slew his son?
Not hard to tell. Cu Chulainn went to be taught craft of arms by Scathach, daughter of Ardgeimm, in Letha, until he attained mastership of feats with her. And Aife, a neighboring princess, went to him, and he left her pregnant. And he said to her that she would bear a son. "Keep this golden thumb-ring," said he, "until it fits the boy. When it fits him, let him come to seek me in Ireland. Let no man put him off his road, let him not make himself known to any man, nor let him refuse combat to any."

That day seven years the boy went forth to seek his father. The men of Ulster were at a gathering by Tracht Eisi (Strand of the Track), when they saw the boy coming towards them across the sea, a skiff of bronze under him, and girt oars in his hand. In the skiff he had a heap of stones. He would put a stone in his staff-sling, and launch a stunning shot at the sea-birds, so that he brought them down, and they alight. Then would he let them up into the air again. He would perform his palate-feat, between both hands, so that it was too quick for the eye to perceive. He would tune his voice for them, and bring them down for the second time. Then he revived them once more.

"Well, now," said Conchobar, "woe to the land into which yonder lad comes! If grown-up men of the island from which he comes were to come, they would grind us to dust, when a

\[1\] See Introduction, p. xvi.
\[2\] Brittany or the continent in general.