
The Founding of Emain Macha

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THE FOUNDING OF EMAIN MACHA.

Emain Macha was the Capital and chief strength of the Red Branch in the days of their glory. Even for centuries after its overthrow the armies of Ulster were accustomed to march three times solemnly round the ruins before going forth to war. The ancient authorities have been followed closely enough in "Fionnuala's" story of the events leading up to its foundation.—Ed.

It is so long since Queen Macha lived and ruled in Eire that her name, her wars, and the founding of Emain Macha, that old city we now call Armagh, are almost unknown to Eire's people. Prophetess and seeress also, wisest of her generation, perchance in future years she will come again, to lead and rule over our island race as in those ancient days.

The three chief kings of Eire, Aedh Ruaidh, Dithorba, and Kimbooth, son of Fintann, met together. They were the rulers of the north, the west, and the south of Eire, but Kimbooth, the Southern King, had sent messengers to Aedh and Dithorba, saying:

"Come to my dun by Loch Len, for I would speak with you of a project I have in my mind for the welfare and advancement of our subjects, whereby they may be united and desolating war avoided."

The twilight of spring had merged into the dawning of summer when, at the close of the lengthening day, two brilliant hosts were discerned travelling along the mountain passes. First came the Olne-macian King, Dithorba, attended by his five sons and numerous casters of the javelin and spearmen. Their war-chariots glittered with findruiney and silver, but the warriors bore the white shields of the feast. Then came Aedh Ruaidh, with his only child, Macha, of the wavy hair, beautiful, fierce as the warlike hawk, yet gentle as the soft white fawn that played in the woods of Murthemney. Their retinue was greater than that of Dithorba, for Aedh was the conquering Ultonian King, and besides the chiefs and men of battle came also noble youths in fosterage and royal druids and jesters, poets, harpers, and the players of the pipes, with many more of the household of Aedh. Lofty in stature and of noble appearance were all the people of the distant north, and the bright-haired Macha, though but a girl, was tall as the tallest warrior among them. Often the people of Ulla compared her to some clear-shining star that men loved and watched afar off, desiring to draw near to, but because of its great height unable to approach.

Kimbooth had prepared a great feast for his guests, partly because he wished to honour Macha, whom before he had never seen, but the fame of whose loveliness and great deeds had reached him. Macha that evening sat on the high seat on the right of the southern King, and next to her was the royal bard, while beyond him were the harpers of the King-visitors and those belonging to Kimbooth. Among the latter was a youth, dressed in a white lena and gold-embroidered green bratta, with gold bands round his otherwise bare legs. Art was the youth's name, and though not the chief harper, he was the King's favourite. He was a wayward youth, and his merriment alternated with strange abstractions, when he would absent himself from the dun and wander into the woods, listening to the music that chose for its harp-strings leaves and flowers and tall swaying grasses, and watching gigantic figures

sweep across the leagues of night-sky far above him. From one of these nocturnal strays he had just returned, and silently he stood there amid the others, in his ecstasy delicately touching his harp, bringing therefrom a sweet faery music which the King delighted to hear.

The night passed on, and when the stars were at the third hour before their paling the chief bard arose with his golden harp, and sang of the days when the gods dwelt and moved on the hills and in the valleys of Eire. He sang, too, of the great mother of the gods—that ancient one whom men call the Mor Reega—and of the time when she should return to the world and rule, great as of long-gone years, with the rule and the heart of one truly god-like. Then the druidic fire awoke in the bard, and he became far-seeing and far-hearing. With a fiery hand he struck the chords, and lifted up his voice in a chant to the gods, for he saw that the hall of the dun was filled with shining beings invisible to most there, and he saw also one of these shining ones, the mightiest of all, standing by Macha, inclined towards her. And as he sang these things men's voices grew hushed and silenced was their laughter; even the tall white candles burned steadily and slowly, without a flicker, as though they too were enwrapped in the secret peace that filled the vast hall. A little restless bird fluttered in out of the night and twittered for a moment as it flew down the hall, then sat quietly on a bare brown twig projecting from the tree-made side of the dun. Still Ilvaen the bard sang on, and the magical murmur of his song filled the warriors' ears and their hearts until they too beheld those whose glory he chanted; then, as the vision of the Mor Reega flashed clear upon them, the dun was filled and far out into the night travelled one long shout of joy that this should happen in their midst. Ilvaen ceased; the vision passed; and Kimbooth uprose and, with a silver wand, struck the canopy above his head. He spoke, and solemnly sounded his voice down the bronze-pillared hall.

"Far-journeying kings and warriors, and you my people, who have seen this night a vision which for centuries has not been seen in Eire: long ago it was foretold that the Mor Reega would reappear on earth, and be a ruler and leader of men, but whether the time is here I cannot say, for I am not a druid and do not understand the minds of the hidden ones of the hills. What the coming of the great queen portends I know not; but whether she comes with the shield and the cath-barr of battle, or the shimmering robe of peace, the heroes of Eire will ever be ready to follow her bidding, for she alone bestows high courage and warlike ardour upon those of noble hearts. Now let each depart to his own quarters, for to-morrow we have many things to discuss concerning the welfare of our island."

Still with the awe of that divine presence upon them each man unhooked his shield from the wall and walked slowly and broodingly through the unclosed doors of the dun into the stillness of the night, each to his own tent or wattled house; there to dream, perchance, that in Macha they could discern the might, the beauty, and the wisdom of the great queen.

(To be Continued).

CHANGE OF ADDRESS.

All communications, literary or otherwise, will in future be addressed to me to Archersfield, Kilkenny.