

The Gilla decair.

Flight and Pursuit of the *Gilla decair* and his wonderful Horse, a favourite tale of a more or less burlesque nature : from a paper MS. written by Labhrás Mac Analla 'Lawrence Mac Nally,' of the county Meath, in 1765 ; formerly in my own possession, now Additional 34,119 in the British Museum; a good MS. of its class. The piece is not found on vellum.

SILVA GADELICA

(I.— XXXI.)

A COLLECTION OF TALES IN IRISH

WITH EXTRACTS ILLUSTRATING PERSONS AND PLACES

EDITED FROM MSS. AND TRANSLATED BY

Standish H. O'Grady

1892

This is the pursuit of the Gilla decair and his Horse.

A noble king and an excellent that once on a time held royal rule and supreme sway over Ireland : Cormac son of Art son of Conn of the Hundred Battles ; in which stout sovereign's day Ireland was disciplined and prosperous, peaceable and happy, rich, full of all good things. Nor was her being so matter of wonderment : seeing that in exercise of hospitality this Cormac was a hospitaller, in poesy a poet, and in martial worthiness a very king.

In the same sturdy king's time too Finn son of Cumall son of Baeiscne's grandson Trenmor was in the chief command over Ireland's Fianna, that is to say : Cormac was monarch of all ; after whom came the provincial kings [five in number] and the royal captains, Finn [chief of these latter] being in order the seventh king that men reckon to have at that period been in Ireland.

Copious were the profits and wage of Finn and of the Fianna : in every *tuath* a townland, in each townland a cartron of land, and in every house there a wolf-dog whelp or else a beagle pup [at nurse] from All-hallows to Beltane, with-many another privilege not recounted here. But great prerogatives as were these, greater yet by far the pains and hardships which in return lay on Finn and the Fianna his followers : to fend off and to repel from Ireland strangers and over-sea aggressors, thievery and enterprise of outlaws, with all other villany ; so that, as here is set forth, 'twas much of wearing work the Fianna had to safeguard Ireland.

One day then that Finn and the Fianna (they being in Leinster's spacious Almhain) enjoyed All-hallowtide's exhilarating and cheerily resounding banquet, Finn — who had their gentles and chief nobles close beside him — enquired of them whether now they held it time to go hunt and to pursue the chase ; for thus it was that he and they used to pass the year: from Beltane to All-hallows in hunting and in deeds of venery ; from All-hallows to Beltane again in the prescribed keeping of all Ireland.

At all events among them then it was resolved to proceed with the ordering of that noble chase, and the ground to which for that purpose they repaired was Munster's two proud provinces [Thomond and Desmond namely]. From Almhain accordingly they set out by the nearest paths, and on till they reached *tuath ó mBuilc*, the centre of Fircall, and the Brosna river in Slievebloom ; so to Eibhliu's twelve mountains or ' Slievephelim,' to *cnámhchoill* or

‘ Cleghile’ of *macRaighne*, and to *drom collchoille* which now is called *Aine cliach* or ‘ Knockany’.

The hunt was thrown out and extended by them along the borders of that forest which to-day men name *magh Breogain* ; through blind and trackless places, and the broken lands ; over fair and open level confines, and Desmond’s lofty hills called at this day *luachair Deghaid* or ‘ Slievelogher’ ; in among Slievicrot, beautiful and pleasant, *sliabh na mucs* bonny smooth *tulachs*, the even banks of azure-streaming Suir ; athwart the green-grassed verdure-coated plain of Femen, and Eithne’s high-lying rugged Decies, on to dark-wooded Ballachgowran.

Brief : nor wood nor plain nor hill-country in both provinces of Munster but a chief of nine hunted there and plied woodcraft, deploying and distributing the chase. Finn sat on his hunting-mound, and certain of the good warriors tarried by him : his own son Ossian, Ossian’s son Oscar ; Goll mac Morna, Art ‘ of the great strokes’ mac Morna ; Dathchain’s son Sciathbreac, bearer of Finn’s shield ; the three Balbhs : three sons of the ‘ caird of Berra’ ; Caeilte son of Ronan, Duibhne’s grandson Dermot of the glittering teeth, Liathan *Luath* or ‘ the swift’ from *luachair Deghaid* ; Conan mac Morna, the Fianna’s man of scurrilous and abusive speech, with Finn Bane son of Bresal ; and in the forests and waste places round about him Finn and his accompanying Fianna deemed it sweet to hear the hounds’ cry and their baying, the striplings’ hurried call, the strong men’s noise and din, whistling and blithe shouting of the Fianna.

Of such as were with him Finn enquired who would go watch and ward the hill [on the side of which the mound his seat was made], and Finn Bane son of Baeiscne’s grandson Bresal answered the chief captain that he would go to it. Over his broad weapons he extended a good warrior’s ready hand, betook him to the hill-top, and fell to look abroad on all sides : westwards and eastwards, to the southward and to the north. Nor had he been long so when out of the eastern airt directly he marked draw towards him a ruffian, virile indeed but right ugly, a creature devilish and misshapen, a grumpy-looking and ill-favoured loon, equipped as thus : a shield that on the convex was black and loathly coloured, gloomy, hung on his back’s expanse ; upon his dingy grimy left thigh all distorted was a wide-grooved and clean-striking sword ; stuck up at his shoulder he had two long javelins, broad in the head, which for a length of time before had not been raised in fight or mêlée ; over his armature and harness was thrown a mantle of a limp texture, while every limb of him was blacker than smith’s coal quenched in cold ice-water. A sulky cross-built horse was there, gaunt in the carcase, with skimpy grey hind-quarters shambling upon weedy legs, and wearing a rude iron halter. This beast his master towed behind him, and how he failed to drag the head from the neck and this from the attenuated body was a wonder : such plucks he communicated to the clumsy iron halter, and sought thus to knock some travel or progression out of his nag. But a marvel greater yet than this it was that the latter missed of wrenching from his owner’s corporal barrel the thick long arms appertaining to the big man : such the sudden stands and stops he made against him, and the jibbing. In the mean time, even as the thunder of some vast mighty surf was the resonance of each ponderously lusty vigorous whack that with an iron cudgel the big man laid well into the horse, in the endeavour [as we have said] thus to get some travel and progression out of him. All which when Finn Bane son of Bresal saw, within himself he conceived that such-like stranger and over-sea adventurer it were not right without their knowledge to admit to Finn and to the Fianna. With strong swift steps, with speedy-footed rush, he started therefore and reached both Finn and Fianna, then uttered this lay : —

“ May the gods bless thee, Finn, O man of affable discourse . . .”

After this lay they saw the big man approach ; but short as was his distance from them now, yet for his gait of going and his progress that was so bad he was a long time in covering it. When at length he came into Finn’s presence he saluted him, and bowed his head and bent his knee, giving him symptom of obeisance. Finn raised his hand over him, granted him leave of

utterance and speech, then sought news : “ whether of the world’s noble or ignoble bloods art thou ?” He answered that he knew not of whom he might be, [nor aught else of his particulars] save one thing only : that he was a Fomorian who in quest of wage and stipend visited on his own account the equitably judging kings of Christendom, and had heard that in respect of pay Finn never yet had denied any man. “ He never has indeed,” said Finn, “ neither now will deny thee ; but, big man, what brings thee without a horseboy ?” “ A good cause it is : nothing in the world irks me more than to have a horseboy with me, because it is a hundred men’s meal of meat and comestibles that up to one day’s end serves my turn, and even this I account all too little for myself alone ; I grudge therefore to have any such boy to meddle with it” “ And what name bearest thou ?” “ The *gilla decair*,” he replied. “ Wherefore was ‘ the *gilla decair* ’ imposed on thee ?” “ Again the cause was a good one : in the whole world nought find I that comes harder to me than for the benefit of my lord for the time being, or of any man that ‘ has me ’ [i.e. retains me], to do any one single thing. But, Conan mac Morna,” the big man went on, “ among the Fianna whether of the two is greater : a horseman’s stipend or a footman’s ?” “ A horseman’s wage,” said Conan : “ for as against a footman he has twice as much.” “ Thee then I call to witness, Conan, that I am a horseman : that I have a horse, and that in very act of horsemanship it was that I approached the Fianna. Thou, Finn son of Cumall : upon thy guarantee then and on the Fianna’s I will e’en turn out my horse among their own.” “ Turn him out,” quoth Finn. The big man chucked the coarse iron halter which confined his horse’s head, and the creature with rapid strides careering made away till he reached the Fianna’s troop of horses, which anon he fell to lacerate, and to kill promptly : with a bite he would whip the eye out of one, with a snap would snip the ear off a second, and yet another one’s leg would fracture with a kick. “ Take thy horse out of that, big man,” cried Conan : “ by Heaven’s parts and Earth’s I pledge myself that, were it not the manner in which under Finn’s and the Fianna’s security thou hast enlarged him, I would let his brains out through his head’s and his capital summit’s several ‘ windows ’ [i.e. ears, eyes, nose and mouth] ; and many a sorry prize as heretofore Finn has drawn in Ireland, a worse than thyself he never had” “ By Heaven’s parts and Earth’s as well I too pledge myself that take him out of that I never will ; for horseboy that should do me his office I have none, and to lead my own horse by hand is no job of mine.”

Conan mac Morna rises, takes the halter and claps it on the big man’s horse ; where Finn and the Fianna were, thither he brings him and for a long time holds him. Said Finn : “ even to such an one as in all accomplishments of Fianry should far surpass the big man thou, Conail mac Morna, hadst ne’er consented to render horseboy’s service ; but wouldst thou give my counsel action, it were that thou shouldst mount the big man’s horse and with him search out all hills and hollows and delicately flowered plains, until in reward of the Fianna’s horse-troop that he has destroyed his heart were broken in his body [i.e. take and gallop him to death up hill and down dale].” Then Conan went, with a horseman’s vault he backed the big man’s horse, and violently, to his best eadeavour, dug both his heels into him ; but never a bit he stirred for that. “ I perceive what ails him,” Finn said : “ until he have on him a number of people the very counterpoise of his own cavalier no motion may be had of him.” At Conan’s back now thirteen men of Ireland’s Fianna mounted the big man’s horse ; he lay down under them and then got up again. “ I esteem that ye make a mock of my horse, and that not even I myself escape you scot-free ; therefore, Finn, and considering all that in this first day I have seen of your contemptuous frivolity, I were to be pitied should I put in the residue of my year with you. I recognise moreover that that which currently obtains of thee is but a mock report” ; then he pronounced a lay, as follows : —

“ Now will I be parting from thee, Finn . . . ”

This lay ended, in spiritless and inactive guise, weakly and wearily, the big man proceeded until betwixt himself and Ireland’s Fianna he had placed a certain hill that lay in his way : but so soon as he had surmounted its topmost pinnacle [and thereby was lost to view] he kilted his coat right up, aye over his spherical hinder protuberances, and away with him as though

with the swallow's or with the roe-deer's speed — or as it were vociferous wind's blast over mighty mountain in mid-month of March — even such were the vigorous rapidity, the violence and energy, of the thundering rush that the big man made as he left the hill.

When the horse saw his lord that departed from him he could not endure it but, great as was his load, with sudden course of keenest gallop took his way, following his lord. At sight of those thirteen men behind Conan mac Morna on the big man's horse and he in motion Finn and the Fianna guffawed with a shout of mockery, flouting Conan. He then, perceiving that to dismount was not within his means, screamed and screeched on Finn and the Fianna that they should not let him go with the so hideous and terrific big one (concerning whom it was all unknown what clan or kind were his) and took to reproaching and reviling of them : “ a deadly giddiness over water take thee, Finn — may some serfs or some robber's son of the ignoble blood — one that by way of a father's and a mother's son shall be even worse than thou — take from thee all that might preserve thy life, and [in the end] have thy head, unless thou follow us and, whate'er the region or the island into which the big man shall transport us, bring us to Ireland back again !” Thereupon Finn and the Fianna set out : over each great hill's bald pate, into the depth of every glen, across every estuary's swimming-place they followed the *gilla decair* ; on to pleasant *sliabh luachra*, to *tulach na senghaoithe* now called *berna chabair* and into, the borders of *corca Dhuibhne* or ‘ Corcaguiny’ in Kerry, where the *gilla decair* set his face right towards the deep sea and [would have sped away] over the green-waved ocean brine. But Liagan Luath of Luachair Deghaid got his two hands on the tail of the *gilla decair's* horse, thinking to have hauled him in by the long horse-hair and so to have detained them that rode him. To Liagan Luath however he on the contrary gave a lusty right valiant tug, and into the expanse of sea and ocean dragged him in his wake. Tightly now Liagan clutched the tail ; and aye as they went the sea in huge round swells kept rolling after them, but shewed a sandy strand ahead.

That those fifteen men of his people thus were taken from him was a worry to Finn, himself too being left under bonds to recover them. “ What shall we do now?” Ossian enquired of him. “ What should we do but, be the region or island what it may into which the big man shall convey them, to follow our people and by fair means or by foul to retrieve them back again to Ireland?” “ What can we effect without either ship or fast galley ?” “ There is this,” Finn answered: “ that to the children of *Gaedhel glas* [i.e. the Gael] son of Fenius Farsa son of Niul the *tuatha dé danann* once by way of special gift bequeathed that, whosoever of them should have occasion to leave Ireland for a time, let him but resort to Ben-Edar and, be the number what it would that accompanied him thither, there they should find a ship or a speedy galley to suffice them.”

Here Finn glanced towards the sea and saw, on a straight course towards him, a brace of valorous fellows : bulkiest of heroes, most powerful of fighting men, hardest of champions. Upon his dorsal superficies the first one wore a ribbed and gaudy-coloured shield with forms of lions, of leopards, and of marvellous griffins designed exactly and embossed on it ; at his left leg's thigh was a massy mighty-striking sword, steel-flashing, very terrible, and at his shoulder two thick great spears ; a scarlet mantle with a fibula of gold surmounting his breast wrapped him ; on his head he had a twisted fillet of white bronze ; gold underlay either foot [i.e. he had golden sandals]. On the second man was just such bravery. No long tarrying they made before they came upon the spot, and bowed their heads and bent their knees, rendering to Finn tokens of obeisance. He raised his hand over them, gave them licence of discourse and utterance, and enquired whether they were of the world's noble or of its ignoble bloods. They averred themselves to be sons to the king of Ind, and that their peregrination into Ireland was moved by an intent there to be for a year on Finn's wage and stipend: “ for,” said they, “ we have heard that in all Ireland is not a man that would prove more acute than he in judging between [i.e. in appraising] the accomplishments which we two possess.” “ And these that ye have, what are they?” asked Finn. The first man said : “ in the way of special art I have a carpenter's axe and a sling ; and though in one spot I had thirty hundred of Ireland's

men, yet with the striking of three strokes of my axe upon the sling-stick I would produce either ship or speedy galley to suffice them, while as for co-operation I would require of them none other than that during delivery of such three strokes they should bow down their heads.” “ Good art,” quoth Finn: “ and now what art hath that other man?” The second rejoined : “ I by way of art have this : that I would carry the teal’s trail over nine ridges and nine furrows, until I came on her in her dwelling and on her bed ; and upon either sea or land would do the thing indifferently.” “ Good art,” Finn said again : “ and would ye lend us help in tracking we would have great use for you.” A man of them asked : “ What is taken from you ?” Finn told them the *gilla decair’s* history from first to last, and questioned them: “ what are the names ye bear?” The first replied: “ I indeed bear the king of Ind’s son: Feradach the very valorous.” Thereupon Ireland’s Fianna incline their heads and the very valorous Feradach proceeds to inflict on his sling-stick three stokes of the axe he had, by which process he made the bay’s whole circumference and the sheltering haven to be all full of ships and of speedy galleys. Finn asked now : “ what shall we do with the so great number of those vessels?” Feradach made answer: “ saving only so many as will serve thy turn we will do away with them.”

Then Caeilte rose and emitted three loud tremendous shouts, so that in all airts where they were Ireland’s Fianna hearing him surmised that at the hands of extern and over-sea assailants Finn and the rest of the Fianna were in some dire necessity and strait In small separate squads [as they chanced to be] they set out therefore and [converging] reached *clochán cinn chait* or ‘ the cat’s head’s stepping-stones’ in Corcaguiny’s western part, where they sought to learn of Finn what need or what thing of horror had overtaken him in that from their several slipping-stations, hunting forests and various wiles of venery, he drew them thus away. Finn told them all the *gilla decair’s* business from first to last

Between themselves now Finn and Ossian took counsel, and what seemed good to them was this : since but fifteen men of his people were carried off from Finn, he with fifteen others to go upon their track ; Ossian to be left in the Fianna’s command-in-chief, and to keep Ireland. Then Finn and Ossian made a lay: —

“ Thou departing on adventure, red-weaponed and blood-shedding Finn . . .”

After which lay a grand ship of great burthen was fitted out for Finn and his people ; and in her were stowed victual where it might be got at to consume, gold where it could be had to give away. Then along the sides and bulwarks of that ship in which they were now embarked those stalwart young men and comely valiant heroes took their seats ; in their expert wide-grasping and enduring hands they gripped the broad-bladed tough oars ; and so athwart the deep and heaving main’s expanse, the valleys of the vast terrible sea’s frowning masses, over the gaping white-foamed gulfs broad-backed black-visaged and swift-hurling surges, with straining mighty effort they pulled off.

Now rose the sea, turning to become a wondrous and loud-bellowing thing of awe, in fierce and diverse-sounding mad-careering ponderous volume ; in eminences restless, curving and grim-headed ; in gloomy murk impenetrable surfaces ; in wide-jawed white-skinned waves ; in mighty mane-clad hills [which in their motion seemed] frenzied, reason-reft ; in dire currents fed of many lesser streams, and in much-burthen-bearing far-extended broken green-hued waters. To Finn and his people it was both a lullaby and again an early morning rouse-call to hear broad ocean’s concert as against their ship’s sides it purred one while, anon loudly boomed, accompanying her ever.

Three days he and his passed thus, nor of mainland, of isle or island, saw any coast at all. But at the end of that period a man of Finn’s folk went into the ship’s head, and away out from him descried a rugged grey huge precipice ; towards which cliff they drove their craft, and found that on it there abutted a rock, solid and cylindrical, having sides slipperier than dorsal fin of eel on river’s bottom. Up to this they got the *gilla decair’s* track, but found none

that left it. Now spoke Fergus Truelips, Finn's ollave, and said: "cowardly and punily thou shrinkest, Dermot ; for with most potent Manannan son of Lir thou studiedst and wast brought up, in the land of promise and in the bay-indented coasts ; with Angus Oge too, the Daghdha's son, wast most accurately taught ; and it is not just that now thou lackest even a modicum of their skill and daring, such as might serve to convey Finn and his party up this rock or bastion." At these words Dermot's face grew red ; he laid hold on Manannan's magic staves that he had and, as once again he redly blushed, by dint of skill in martial feats he with a leap rose on his javelins' shafts and so gained his two soles' breadth of the solid glebe that overhung the water's edge. Under him and downwards Duibhne's grandson looked on Finn and his people but, much as he longed to descend again and bring them up, he could not compass it. He left the rock behind him therefore ; and was not gone far when he perceived a waste and tangled sylvan tract : shelter-giving woods of densest thicket which, of all that ever he had ranged, did most abound in foliage, in babble of burn and sough of wind, in melody of birds, in hum of bees. From east and west, from south and north, Duibhne's grandson traversed the plain and, as he looked abroad, was aware of a vast tree with interlacing boughs and thickly furnished ; hard by which was a great mass of stone furnished on its very apex with an ornamented pointed drinking-horn, and having at its base a fair well of water in all its purity. Now after his passage of the sea, drouth and thirst were set in on Dermot, and he lusted to drink a hornful of the spring's water ; down he stooped to it, but heard a loud and rumbling noise that [so it seemed] came toward him, and he perceived then that of the fountain's special spells it was that none must drink a drop of its water. Nevertheless he said : " I will quaff my fill of it."

This done he was no long time before he saw approach to him a wizard wearing mien and garb of hostile import ; nor was it courteous salutation that he when he came up addressed to Dermot, but he outrageously upbraided him : saying that to roam his forest and domain of waste, and to drink up his store of water, was an iniquitous thing for him to do. Boldly and vehemently then Dermot and the magician faced each one the other, and in valiant manful right heroic wise : mutually answering and requiting with rapid sharp-dealt strokes and stern buffets until even-tide and day's end overtook them. Here the wizard judged it time to knock off from fighting with Dermot, and dived to the bottom of the well quite away from him ; but to Dermot it was a vexation that his partner in the combat was divorced from him thus. He looks to the four airts however, and sees a herd of deer draw through the forest ; then draws near to them and into the next stag sends a right javelin-cast that rips out his entrails and inwards, leaving them on the ground. He carried him off [to a fitting place], took out his kindling gear and made a large fire ; of the deer's flesh he cut individual small gobbets, imposed them on spits of the white hazel, and that night used his sufficiency of venison and of the spring's water both.

At early morn he roused himself and at the well before him found the magician, who said : " grandson of Duibhne, it seems to me that to have had the travelling of my waste and forest sufficed thee not but thou must enjoy its ventry as well." At all events [at it they went again] and dealt each other blow for blow, wound for wound, prod for prod, until for the second time evening and the day's end caught them. For three twenty-four hours they fought thus all day, and nightly Dermot had a mighty hart ; but on their contest's last day Dermot, when the magician made his usual nimble jump for the well, would have thrown his arm around the other's neck and [in the effort] both together dived into it, once underneath which the wizard forsook Dermot. He leaving the well behind him followed after and found before him a wide open country, beautiful and flowery : in its midst a regal splendid city and, on the green fronting the citadel, a serried host and multitude who, whenever they saw Dermot make for the wizard, left to the latter as it might be a royal road and common way until through the portal he was passed into the place of strength, and on him then they shut the fortress gates. Then the whole host turned on Dermot ; yet never a whit of faintness did that breed in him, nor diminution of his hardihood : but under them, and through and over them, he passed as would hawk through flight of small birds, or wolf through sheep-flock ; or as the weighty rush of a mad swollen stream in spate that over and adown a cliff of ocean spouts, even such

was he as he mangled and slew those companies, whelming them utterly, till in the end they betook them some to the country's fast wild woods, and the remnant inward through the fort's gates which, as well as the city's, they closed after them. That stubborn fight thus ended, Dermot all full of hurts and wounds and drenched in blood lay down upon the ground.

To him enters now a burly wizard of great daring, and from the direction of his rear impinges on him with a kick. Dermot rouses himself and to his weapons reaches his ready warrior hand, but : " grandson of Duibhne," the sorcerer cried, " take it easy : not to do thee harm or hurt am I come, but to apprise thee that an ill place of sleep and of sound slumber is that in which thou art, on thine enemies' and thy foemen's green ; rather come with me, and thou shalt have a better sleeping berth." Dermot followed the wizard : long and far they journeyed from the spot, and until they found ahead of them a towering fortress in which were thrice fifty high-mettled men-at-arms with their suitable allowance of gentle women, forby a white-toothed rosy-cheeked delicate-handed and black-eyebrowed maiden that sat against the castle wall : a silken mantle, a tunic netted of golden threads she had about her and, on her head, a queen's rightful decorated wimple. A most friendly welcome in his own name and surname was given to Dermot ; he was bestowed in an infirmary, herbs of price and virtue were applied to his hurts and he was healed completely, made ' all smooth' again. Now were the castle's boards and benches set ; nor was villain set in gentle's room, nor a gentle in the villain's, but at said tables each one according to his rank, his patrimony or his art, was in his own becoming place. Excellent toothsome viands were brought in to them, together with well-flavoured strong drinks ; the fore-part of night they passed in banqueting, the second with re-creation of intelligence and mind, and the third they brought to with soundest sleep lasting until at morrow's morn the sun in his fiery orb rose over the grossly earthy world. For three days and three nights Dermot was in the fort, the best feast that ever he had had being served to him the while ; and at the end of that space he enquired what might be the castle and what the country in which he found himself, and who was head over it. The wizard told him that this was *tír fó thuinn* or ' the submerged land' [*lit* 'terra sub unda'] ; he that had fought with him being king of that realm, and his sobriquet in chivalry ' the Wizard of the Well,' who to him that now spoke was ' a foeman of the red hand' [i.e. there was a blood feud between them]. He farther told Dermot that he himself was ' the Wizard of Chivalry,' and for a year had been on wage and stipend with Cumall's son Finn in Ireland, than which year also he never had put over him one that he had found more delectable ; after which he desired to learn of Dermot what were the journey and the undertaking that lay before him. Then Dermot rehearsed to him from first to last the history of Finn and the *gilla decair*.

Howbeit when to Finn and his folk it now seemed too long that Dermot was away from them, of the ship's cordage they made ladders and applied them to scale the jutting crag in order to trace out Duibhne's grandson ; then they came upon the remnant of his venison, for never yet had he eaten flesh but he left some fragment Finn looked on all sides, and in the open saw a horseman that came towards him : a horse of a handsome colour was under him, one of darkest bay, which a most comely bridle of the red gold held. When he came up Finn saluted him ; he for his part bent his head, gave Finn kisses three, and intreated him with him to his dwelling. Long and far they went thence and at last found in their front a mighty and spacious place of arms, well garrisoned, and on the green before this fort a numerous army. Here Finn and company spend three days and three nights, the finest feast that ever they had being served to them the while, and most decently. That interval being run out, and Finn questioning what might be the fortress and what the country in which he was, the other answered that this was the land of *Sorcha* and he its king ; that for a year, than which he never had passed a more delectable, he once had been on wage and stipend with Finn in Ireland.

By Finn and the king of Sorcha accordingly a day of gathering and of high convention was appointed, and [when it came] they saw a she-courier or, in other words, a feminine running footman progress through the assembly to them. The king examined her for news, and such indeed she owned to having : as that the bay's limits and the harbour's were full of ships and galleys ; armed bodies throughout all the land, and they plundering the country, " I see it all,"

quoth the king : “ the monarch of the Greeks it is that’s there, in prosecution of his conquests all the world over ; he would reduce the universe at large under his own rule and tribute and, as he has seized all other countries, so now he takes this as well.” With that the king glanced at Finn, who within himself understood that it was help and participation that thereby the king sought of him ; he said therefore : “ the holding and the maintaining of this land I take upon myself until I quit it.”

He and his, with the king of Sorcha, set out and followed up that host, of whom by-and-by, after great slaughter of warriors and *óglaechs* they made headlong lamentable fugitives : a mere frightened unenduring bird-flock, and suffered not to escape but barely so many of them as might suffice to tell their tale. The monarch of the Greeks spoke now, saying : “ who is it that has made this grievous carnage of my people?” and he proceeded to affirm that never before had he heard of the men of Ireland’s valiance and achievement either as existing presently or as being even matter of tradition ; but that, as matters stood, he would even to the world’s very last end banish all progeny of Gael Glas son of Niul son of Fenius Farsa. Finn and the king pitched a green pavilion right in view of the monarch’s fleet, nearest to which of all the country’s forces was the tent occupied by Goll mac Morna and by Ossian’s son Oscar.

Again the Grecian monarch spoke, and said : “ whom may I find to avenge on Finn and on the king of Sorcha my people’s slaughter and dishonour? ” “ Thou shalt have me, ” answered the king of Franks’ son and, after gathering together the bulk of his household, marched on the tent in which Finn and the king of Sorcha were. Goll mac Morna when he saw this rose to meet and to answer them ; but Oscar asked : “ what then is this that thou wouldst do, Goll?” and he replied: “ this day’s fight I desire to fight for Finn.” “ So do not,” said Oscar : “ thy hand it is that in battles and in fights of two is proved the most ; rather now suffer me in Finn’s behalf to endure this day’s set-to.” Goll having yielded Oscar licence of the combat, he and the king of Franks’ son faced each other : like two rabid dragons, like two far-reaching terrible lightning-jets, or two surges of most violent spring-tide surmounting pinacles of rock — such might fitly be that pair of worthy champions’ commemoration and description. Yet Goll mac Morna, after clasping of his body in its armature of battle, came and upon the king of Franks’ men made a charge so brave and undismayed, so fraught with hewing and with blood-spilling, that he converted them into crazed-like erratic lightly driven leaves [the sport of winds] ; in such measure that heads were left bodiless, bodies lifeless, wives reft of their husbands, and mothers wanting their sons.

Oscar of the martial weapons now triumphantly pressed home to execute, to behead, the king of Franks’ son ; which being accomplished he turned to Goll and helped him to destroy so many of the whilom prince’s household as he had not yet killed. Their leader’s head he shook full in sight of the Grecian monarch’s fleet, and the two together emitted that which to Finn and his people was a shout of victory and of exultation, but to the Greeks one of gloom and of discouragement

At this point the king of Greeks again delivered himself, and said : “ whom can I have that on Finn and the king of Sorcha will avenge my own shame and my people’s?” “ Thou shalt have me,” answered an enormous stripling : the king of Africs son. With the full number of his own contingent this youth sought the tent in which the king of Sorcha lay, and when the king of India’s sons saw the move they came to meet them. “ What would ye do ?” Finn asked of these, and the very valiant Feradach made answer: “ this day’s strife we would gladly undertake for thee.” “ That shalt thou not,” said Finn : “ for as yet ye are not in my pay during a space of time such as might entitle you to a fight of the kind.” But they [speaking severally] rejoined : “ by my arms of prowess and of chivalry I vow that, if thou grant us not liberty of the fray, we will no longer be thy stipendiaries.” With that, on either side those pillars of battle, those prodigies of performance, fought a fight that was desperate and cruel, with thundering onset and with pitiless laying on of blows, so that they shivered their thick-shafted crimson-headed and broad-socketted spears ; and all those good warriors with their hewing and sore vehemence cleft each other’s shapely helmets wrought of cunning

armourers. As for the king of India's sons : in front of both armies the tall youth, prince of Africa, was beheaded by them, and his head they shook at the Grecian host. At Finn they vented a shout of triumph and of exultation, which to the Grecian potentate's forces was one of melancholy and of discouragement.

Yet again he spoke: "whom may I have to take vengeance on Finn and on the king of Sorcha for my own and my people's shame?" "Thou shalt have me," said his own son : "to cope with the fifteen men that Finn has I will lead other fifteen, and will myself bring thee his head ; each one of my people also bringing that of another."

The king of Greeks had a spinster daughter (*Taise*, called *taebghel* or 'white-sided' was her name) who — as the sea surpasses all torrents, the Shannon other rivers, and the eagle birds — in form, in beauty and in aspect, transcended the whole world's universal women ; and for his fame and wide renown she loved Finn though she had not seen him. Of her father therefore she craved as a boon that he would admit her to look on at the Combat set betwixt Finn and her brother. This leave the king vouchsafed her, and she brought with her the hand-maid whose it was to bear her Company.

The Greek prince faced the tent in which were Finn and the king his friend, whereupon Finn said : "I see it all — single combat he would have of me, and one of my people to fight with each man of his." Like two most doughty lions he and the Greek confronted or, for hostility, like a pair of venomous snakes, of again in swift-footed rushes like two talon-wearing griffins ; so that the earth of ponderous glebe shook beneath their tread, and with the rapidity and fervour of those good warriors' right striking they fairly hurled the straight swords from their hands, making themselves heard among the crags and distant recesses. At last Finn dealt the prince a weighty stroke of mighty impact and from his graceful neck, from off his body, sent his head flying far. A shout of victory and of triumph was sent forth by Finn and his ; by them of the Grecian fleet, one of gloom and discouragement. Over the grave of the fallen the monumental stone was raised, their names written in Ogham above them all ; and great as was the love which at the first Taise of the white body had borne to Finn, seven times so much she bestowed on him while he butchered her brother. Privily therefore she sent him an embassy, offering herself to him : a matter which to Finn was one of gladness and of complete inclination.

That night Taise stole away to him. On the morrow the monarch awoke, and it was told him how Taise was fled away to Finn. Not the loss of his people he lamented now, but white-bodied Taise ; and declared that on him who should retrieve her from Finn he would confer many precious things, and wealth.

A chief captain of the household of the monarch's folk spoke : "fulfill me that which thou hast promised, in which case I will from Finn recover thee the maid ; for I possess a certain special branch of great beauty, and though I had the whole world's hosts together in one spot, with the mere sound of my sprig waved over against them I would throw them all into trance of sleep and soundest slumber." The chief captain of the house-hold went his way for the tent in which Finn and the king of Sorcha were, waved the branch at them, and threw them into a stupor such that in the same night he kidnapped Taise. But the determination to which the monarch came was that, Taise being thus restored, no more of his people must be slain by Finn ; accordingly he took himself off to the land of Greece.

On the morrow Finn quivered to find that Taise was [as he supposed] departed on the sly, and after the monarch's daughter he felt dark and spirit-faint "O Finn," Sorcha's king said, "nor gloom nor discouragement afflict thee with grieving for the maiden ! I with a numerous host will myself bear thee company to the Greek monarch's land, where by fair means or by foul we will win back his daughter ;" and he pronounced a lay: —
"That was well won, O son of Cumall ! . . ."

After this lay a day of general gathering and of high convention was set by Finn and the king of Sorcha ; and [as all were assembled] they saw banners, diversely gaudy, ornamented variously, standards of soft silk, well-tempered battle-swords carried at warriors' and at champions' shoulders, dense great groves of lengthy spears, tall and tough, reared over them and (in that numerous company's forefront) Dermot of the glittering teeth. Him Finn recognises, and despatches to him Fergus Truelips to enquire what it all might mean : what was the band with which he came, or had he procured tidings to bring to him of his people gone with the *gilla decair*. Dermot made answer that this was the Wizard of Chivalry, who by his magic art had shewn him that it was Allchad's son Abartach who from Finn had carried off those fifteen men of his into the land of promise. Hereupon Finn was determined what he would do : Dermot being now joined with Goll and Oscar he would send them on to the Grecian lands to fetch the monarch's daughter and, along with them, Fergus to proclaim their slaughters and their triumphs ; himself and the rest of his folk to make for the promised-land, and whosoever should the first be there to await the other party.

For Finn and people a brave ship of burthen was fitted out ; and of their farther doings record there is none until they found themselves in the land of promise, where they saw a grand gathering held in which was Abartach son of Allchad. To him Finn sends a messenger to require of him his missing men, or else battle. Abartach chose rather to restore him his people, and in damage of his long journey to pay him that which himself he might assess. Then he took Finn home with him to his own strong place, where the best feast that ever Finn had had was ministered to him most becomingly ; and Finn tarries in the land of promise until Goll and Oscar should join him.

Touching which two, for them also a tall ship of great capacity was made ready: one with a sharp and decorated prow, one built solidly. They turned their backs to the land and set their faces to the sea: to the green-chequered ocean's borders, to the angry and frowning cold-wet acclivities of the main ; with strenuous labouring and with swift career holding their course till they listened to utterance, of sea-hogs and of mermaids, to wondrous monsters of the abyss, and on the coasts of fair and lovely Greece finally came into port. Their craft they beached where wave might not buffet her nor pound her into little bits, nor rock break her up. Forth from them now they saw the city of Athens which is in Greece and, when they were landed, chanced upon the state's herdsmen and the cattle of the country [i.e. the national stock]. Of these herdsmen they sought to learn how was the city named which they saw, what the country in which it stood, and who might be its head ? The others for their part interrogated the strangers whether it were in obscure and devious glens of some kind that they were bom [and reared], inasmuch as they lacked all knowledge of this city, and even of its name ; then proceeded to tell them that it was the city of Athens in Greece, than which not one in all the world abounded more in strong arms of soldiers and of martial men in crowded companies, and given up to practice of valour and of chivalry. Said Oscar to Goll: " and what shall we do now?" Goll said to Oscar: " what should we do but enter into the city and, by fair means or by foul, fetch away Taise ?" " Not so will we do," said Fergus Truelips, " but rather weave ye your hair in four-ply tresses and give out that ye are poets, keen-edged, correct of diction, that wander to visit all Christendom's equitably judging kings." But Goll said : " supposing a cast of our art to be required of us, what shall we do then ?" and Fergus replied: " in your behalf I will supply the same." This they did, and headed for the fort ; then with a poet's wand struck a stroke on the lintel of the city gate. The gate-ward told them that the king was not at home, but gone to hunt; that within were none but Taise and her companion waitingmaid, to whom until the king should be returned access was not to be had by any.

The monarch came back : for he had that day disposed a great hunting party whereby hounds had red muzzles, and warriors crimsoned hands ; while by effect of that heavily productive chase the followers and villains of the king's household were all spent with toil. Goll and Oscar saluted the king, and he sought their tidings ; Taise of the white side knew them, but never spoke to them. The time of sleep and slumber being now at hand however, in order to their reciting of some tales for her pastime she required to have those unknown men of art

admitted to her sole company. Into the one chamber therefore they all went, and there disclosed themselves: each to other. To Fergus demanding the stratagem by which for the second time she would elope to Finn, she said that on the morrow the monarch would prosecute the same hunting ; as for herself, with Goll and Oscar she would steal away to the ship out of which they were but now come. The king went afield, and Taise quietly made off with the two [who pulled out and away] till they were in the land of promise. Finn when he perceived these five individuals at a distance passed on them an opinion of recognition, saying that those with whom he would compare these comers he held in dear affection : Goll and Oscar namely, Fergus Truelips, Taise and the waitingmaid her fellow.

His people now being all re-united thus with Finn, Abartach son of Allchad told him to make his own assessment of indemnity for the affront put on him, and for his long peregrination ; but Finn said that the wage which [at his first engaging of him] he had promised to Abartach, and the damages [now due to himself], he would suffer to stand one against the other. Nevertheless Abartach replied : “ in all this there is not any advantage to me so long as the Fianna’s man of abuse and their reviler, Conan mac Morna, remains without his own award of compensation.” Here Conan cried: “ by Heaven’s divers parts, and Earth’s, I bind myself that in default of that same I will not rest contented !” So much Abartach promised him, and the adjudication that Conan made was this : that he should carry off fourteen women (best that were in the promised land), besides Abartach’s own wife; the same lady to be stuck, as had been Liagan Luath of Luachair Deghaid, at the horse’s tail ; and the fourteen aforesaid to bestride him until again he should be in the western part of Corcaguiny.

And know now that neither gold nor silver it was that Conan awarded himself, but simply as we have said : he to carry off fourteen women (best in the land of promise), along with Abartach’s wife who, like the swift Liagan, must be stuck at the horse’s tail ; while the fourteen other women (even as Conan and the rest of his people had done) should ride him till again they should be at *clochán cinn chait* in the west of Corcaguiny.

“ There are thy people, Finn !” said Abartach ; and the chief looked on every side of him, but whether up or whether down he saw no more Abartach. Home to Leinster’s spacious Almhain he carried Taise, and they of the place made the couple’s wedding feast

This then is the Pursuit of the *Gilla decair* and the romance relating to him, from first to last.

Finis.

Silva gadelica (I-XXXI) : a collection of tales in Irish with extracts illustrating persons and places (1892)

Author : O’Grady, Standish Hayes, 1832-1915 ed. and tr

Volume : 2

Subject : Irish literature ; Folklore; Irish literature ; English literature ; Tales

Publisher : London : Williams and Norgate

Year : 1892

Language : Irish ; English

Digitizing sponsor : Google

Book from the collections of : Harvard University

Collection : americana

Source : Internet Archive

<http://www.archive.org/details/silvagadelicaix02gragoog>

Edited and uploaded to www.aughty.org

June 28 2010