

The Rowan-Tree of Clonfert

Duanaire Finn -The Book of the lays of Fionn

Eoin Mac Neill

1908

Goll, having gone to war with Fionn, retires into South Connacht, his own country, and keeps guard on the fords of the Shannon. Fionn reaches the river by night, and hears the mighty sound of Goll's snoring, for, worn out with many watches, Goll had at length fallen asleep. Crossing the river alone, Fionn comes up to his sleeping enemy and stands over him with drawn sword. Goll awakes and grasps his spear. Fionn calmly reminds him : "Long since I might have cut off thy head," and tells him to prepare for battle. At this moment, a large body of Goll's forces take their stand between Fionn and the river. It is Fionn now who is at the mercy of his enemy ; but Goll repays the debt by escorting Fionn safely back to his army. Then the battle begins, and in the end Goll is forced to retreat. He makes a stout defence, and draws off in good order.

The Rowan-tree of Clonfert.

Thou Rowan-tree of Clonfert,
we went from thee on an expedition
to Cronnmhoin of the hundreds of hosts,
an event through which fell Suca Great-nose.

On that day, fair Rowan-tree,
was many a brave man by thy side,
under Goll from the pleasant bright cow-fold,
under Garaidh from the red-mottled summit.

Under Daighre of the harp of music,
a-playing for us sweetly, gently,
under Conan and his bright kin,
under Aodh, under Art of the maidens.

Under Glas from Glais Leacach of pools,
and under Art from the turf-bright plain,
under Conn from white Berramhain,
under Cas and under Cannan.

And under the Red Man from Raith na bh-Fian,
and from Fionnros too of the Fians,
under Aonghus from the round Craibheach
and under the Strong Hand from Liathdruim.

Ten hundred handsome shield-bearers
of the house of the grandmother of keen Goll :
on that day we were filled on this hillock,
O Rowan-tree.

From thee we went southward
to Dún Glais of the cold water :
merry were we at evening,
on the night before Cronnmhóin's battle.

Goll, handsome of body, said
' Let us be watchful here to-night :
I recognize,' said the valorous lord,
' Fionn's keen fetch coming against me.'

The Black River came by our side,
we passed the ford of Inis Aodha ;
Leogha was left on guard at the pool,
and I on the Rowan-tree hill.

Feorann and Modha, for my love,
guarding the two fords :
and Goll, to Goll's ford went he,
guarding against Fionn of Almha.

No place from the Blue River of the Fians
as far as Ráith Fraoich to the west of us
without an officer over nine fierce men
of the House of Morna till the morning.

As it came on to evening,
Fionn comes with six brave battalions ;
Frenchmen, Englishmen among them,
Welshmen, Irishmen, men of Islay.

They sat down, a formidable camp,
at the ford where Goll stayed :
the son of Morna is sleeping soundly,
he has heard neither shout nor turmoil.

Seventeen day-thirds was weapon-clear
Iollann without sleep, without slumber,
having taken but one draught of clear pleasant water
and five berries of the rowan.

'Twas no wonder that pleasant Goll
was famished, wearied, exhausted,
watching against Fionn of the Fians
from Clíodhna's Wave to the Curlew Hills.

At close of night upon his couch,
when men and woods were one in hue,
Fionn of bright aspect awoke :
he rises in the early morn.

When he had reached the ford,
Cumhall's son, undetected of the others,
it is not long till the hero heard there
the hero's hollow snore.

Swiftly he came across the ford,
found Goll in a heavy sleep :
Fionn unsheathed the hard sword
above the son of mane-red Morna.

Goll awoke, and not in fright,
at the weapon-clang of the fierce sword :
raised his hand to his spear,
brandished the quivering shaft.

‘ Were it my pleasure,’ said Fionn,
‘ thou great Goll that ill obeyest me,
long since I had set with my blade thy head
on a hard wattle of Rowan-tree.

‘ I have taken from thee thy shapely shield,
and I have taken thy blue keen knife :
here, take, ere thou make for home,
thy battle gear, my hero.

‘ Rise up, Goll, take thy lance,
summon to thy side the House of Morna :
see there the brave battalions come against thee
in the narrow of Cronnmhóin.’

‘ My blessing on thee, noble Fionn :
it is folly for me not to submit to thee :
ten hundred under young Art of the spears, lo !
here against thee of my nation.

‘ Ten hundred under terror-striking Garaidh,
they have come between thee and the ford :
raise thy spear above thy arm :
seest thou the array of Conan’s hosts ?’

‘ Protect me thou against them all,
and escort me across the ford :
ward off from me thy nation and thy kin,
ere my mortal wounding befall.’

‘ Go forth under my protection into the shallow:
quickly, Fionn, seize thy weapons,
till I escort thee,’ quoth bright Goll,
‘ whole without wound from my nation.’

Goll escorted Fionn of the Fians
unwounded of all as he asked—
there was the great hero I—
as far as the very midst of the army.

Five battalions attacking Goll
till he got back over the ford :
they parted not from the brave hero
till he reached the centre of Cronnmhóin.

Oisin’s spear, hardy Caoilte’s spear,
and stout Raighne’s lance,
high in air they quickly fall
like rays into the grasp of Goll.

Firmly, fiercely we make our way
under Goll of the good House of Morna —
happy his grandsire's race —
ten hundred red shields in the rear.

Goll before us and Goll behind us on high
Cronnmhóin of long weapons :
we from him and to him
as it were the brood of a sow.

Eastward or westward
we shook not off Caoilte and Oisín and noble Fionn,
Conbrón's son Caireall who loved me,
with his seventeen hundred of Scotland's levy.

The House of Cúán, the House of lasting Baoisne,
and the House of stout Rónán,
Dubh Diothrabh's race that were no weak array,
upon our heels as far as Duibhféith.

Then goes Goll out of our midst
to the wounding of Caireall of comely form :
three hundred he bravely slew
on the hard flank of Cronnmhóin.

Hardy Caireall came up to us
with Scotland's excelling soldiery :
he left ten hundred dead on the bog,
the son of triumphant Ua Conbróin.

Fionn flanked us on the road,
leading a great grim battalion of young fellows :
to aid our fair battalion
came Iollann against them.

Few as we were ourselves
to Fionn's own six battalions,
we abandoned neither hound nor man,
with Iollann herding us.

Great was our courage and our confidence
till at last night fell on us,
till we were left worn out
on this hillock of the Rowan-tree.

We were staunch, relying on Goll,
against every levy ridge on ridge :
now that Goll of the feasts lives not,
every man is bold against us.

Garaidh of fame am I :
it is no small part of my heart's anguish,
Magh Maoin a wilderness since Goll is gone,
and I living on the berries of a rowan-tree.

It is a cause of misery and woe,
Magh Maoin without the good House of Morna,
myself a refugee from the Fian of Fionn
under the shelter of thy branches, Rowan-tree.

Dúnadh Daighre is this western dún,
where music and honour were ours :
beloved is this lake hard by us,
Loch Riach of ruddiest rowan-trees.

Blithely as we were wont to go
to the famous chase of Beann Boirne,
we would see in beauty from the ridge
thy scarlet top, Rowan-tree.

I will go out into Meath
as far as Magh Bile to-morrow :
I will burn the womanfolk of the Fian of Fionn :
I will not stay under the protection of a rowan-tree.

The next day I will come from the east,
I will pass through lovely Gleann Conain :
I will eat good apples in the glen,
and fragrant berries of rowan-tree.

Here foretold Brendan the famed,
and the great prophet will make it good,
Heaven for the soul of each one that goes into it,
into the earth of the hill of the Rowan-tree.

Druid Diorraing foretold to me,
in this wood by my side,
that my body should rest in the hollow,
beside the hillock of the Rowan-tree.

Thou Rowan-tree.

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