

## The Strife of The Gods

### *Celtic Mythology*

J. Arnott MacCulloch

1916

•

THE annalistic account of the groups of people who successively came to Ireland, some to perish utterly, others to remain as colonists, represents the unscientific historian's attempt to explain the different races existing there in his time, or of whom tradition spoke. He wrote, too, with an eye upon Biblical story, and connected the descendants of the patriarchs with the folk of Ireland. Three different groups of Noah's lineage arrived in successive waves. The first of these, headed by Noah's grand-daughter, Cessair, perished, with the exception of her husband. Then came the Fomorians, descendants of Ham ; and finally the Nemedians, also of the stock of Noah, arrived. According to one tradition, they, like Cessair's people and another group unconnected with Noah — the race of Partholan (Bartholomew) — died to a man, although another legend says that they returned to Spain, whence they had come. Spain figures frequently in these annalistic stories, and a close connexion between it and Ireland is taken for granted. This may be a reminiscence of a link by way of trade between the two countries in prehistoric days, of which, indeed, archaeology presents some proof. Possibly, too, early Celtic colonists reached Ireland directly from Spain, rather than through Gaul and Britain. Still another tradition makes Nemedian survivors wander over the world, some of their descendants becoming the Britons, while others returned to Ireland as a new colonizing group—Firbolgs, Fir-Domnann, and Galioin. A third group of their descendants who had learned magic came to Ireland—the Tuatha De Danann. Finally the Milesians, the ancestors of the Irish, arrived and conquered the Tuatha De Danann, as these had defeated the Fomorians. [1]

Little of this is actual history, but how much of it is invention, and how much is based on mythic traditions floating down from the past, is uncertain. What is certain is that the annalists, partly as a result of the euhemerizing process, partly through misunderstanding, mingled groups of gods with tribes or races of men and regarded them as more or less human. These various traditions are introductory to the story of the two battles of Mag-Tured, enlarged from an earlier tale of a single conflict. An interval of twenty-seven years elapsed between the two battles, and they were fought in different parts of Ireland bearing the same name, one in Mayo and the other in Sligo, the first battle being fought against the Firbolgs, and the second against the Fomorians, by the Tuatha Dé Danann.

Having reached Ireland, the Tuatha Dé Danann established themselves at Mag-Rein in Connaught. The Firbolgs sent a huge warrior, Sreng, to parley with them, and to him approached Bres, son of Elatha, of the Tuatha Dé Danann. The warriors gazed long upon each other ; then they mutually admired their weapons, and finally exchanged them, Bres receiving the heavy, broad-pointed spears of the Firbolg, and Sreng the light, sharp-pointed lances of Bres. The demand of the invaders was surrender of the half of Ireland, but to this the Firbolgs would not agree. Meanwhile the Tuatha Dé Danann, terrified at the heavy Firbolg spears, retreated to Mag-Tured, Badb, Morrígan, and Macha, three of their women, producing frogs, rain of fire, and streams of blood against the Firbolgs. By mutual agreement an armistice was arranged for preparation, and some from each side even engaged in a hurling match. Such were the tactics of the time ! Each party prepared a healing well for the wounded, in which medicinal herbs were placed. Dagda led the forces on the first day, when the Tuatha Dé Danann were defeated ; but under the command of Ogma, Midir, Bodb Dearg,

Diancecht, Aengaba of Norway, Badb, Macha, Morrigan, and Danann, they were successful on the second day. On the third day Dagda again led, “ for in me you have an excellent god” ; on the fourth day *badba*, *bledlochtana*, and *amaite aidgill* (“ furies,” “ monsters,” “ hags of doom”) cried aloud, and their voices resounded in the rocks, waterfalls, and hollows of the earth. Sreng severed the arm of Nuada, king of the Tuatha Dé Danann ; Bres was slain by Eochaid, who, overpowered by thirst, sought water throughout Ireland, but the wizards of the Tuatha Dé Danann hid all streams from him, and he was slain. The Firbolgs, reduced to three hundred, were still prepared to fight, but when the Tuatha Dé Danann offered them peace and the province of Connaught, this was accepted. [2]

As we shall see, the Tuatha Dé Danann were gods, and their strife against the Firbolgs, a non-Celtic group, is probably based on a tradition of war between incoming Celts and aborigines. Meanwhile the Tuatha Dé Danann made alliance with the Fomorians, Ethne, daughter of Balor, married Cian, son of Diancecht, her son being the famous Lug. Nuada’s mutilation prevented his continuing as King, for no maimed person could reign ; and the women insisted that the Fomorian Bres, their adopted son, should receive the throne, since he was son of Elatha, the Fomorian King. Eri, sister of Elatha, was counted of the Tuatha Dé Danann, perhaps because their mother was also of them, an instance of succession through the female line ; and this would account for Bres becoming King, though these genealogies are doubtless inventions of the annalists. Bres was son of Elatha and Eri. Such unions of brother and sister (or half-sister) are common in mythology and were not unknown in royal houses, e. g. in Egypt and Peru, as a means of keeping the dynasty pure. One day Eri saw a silver boat approaching. A noble warrior with golden locks stepped ashore, clad in an embroidered mantle and wearing a jewelled golden brooch, and five golden torques round his neck. He carried two silvery pointed spears with bronze shafts, and a golden-hilted sword inlaid with silver. Eri was so overcome by his appearance that she easily surrendered to him and wept bitterly when he rose to leave her. Then he drew from his finger a golden ring and bade her not part with it save to one whose finger it should fit. Elatha was his name, and she would bear a son Eochaid Bres, or “ the Beautiful.” At seven years old Bres was as a boy of fourteen. [3]

Bres was miserly and caused much murmuring among the Tuatha Dé Danann. “ Their knives were not greased by him ; and however often they visited him their breaths did not smell of ale.” No poets, bards, or musicians were in his household, and no champions proved their prowess, save Ogma, who had the slavish daily task of carrying a load of fuel, two-thirds of which were swept from him by the sea, because he was weak through hunger. [4] Bres claimed the milk of all brown, hairless cows, and when these proved to be few in number, he caused the kine of Munster to pass through a fire of bracken so that they might become hair-less and brown, [5] this tale being possibly connected with the ritual passing of cattle through fires at Beltane (May-Day). Another version of the tale, however, makes it less pleasant for Bres. He demanded a hundred men’s drink from the milk of a hornless dun cow or a cow of some other colour from every house in Ireland ; but by the advice of Lug and Findgoll, Nechtan, King of Munster, singed the kine in a fire of fern and smeared them with a porridge of flax-seed. Three hundred wooden cows with dark brown pails in lieu of udders were made, and the pails were dipped in black bog-stuff. When Bres inspected them, the bog-stuff was squeezed out like milk ; but since he was under *geis*, or tabu, to drink whatever was milked, the result of his swallowing so much bog-stuff was a gradual wasting away, until he died when traversing Ireland to seek a cure. Stokes conjectures that Bres required the milk of one-coloured cows as a means of removing his wife’s barrenness. [6]

Another account of Bres’s death tells how Corpre the poet came to his house. It was narrow, dark, and fireless, and (or food the guest received only three small unbuttered cakes. Next morning, filled with a poet’s scorn, he chanted a satire :

“ Without food quickly on a dish,  
Without a cow’s milk whereon a calf grows.  
Without a man’s abode under the gloom of night,  
Without paying a company of story-tellers,  
Let that be the condition of Bres.”

This was the first satire made in Ireland, but it had all the effect which later belief attributed to satire, and Bres declined from that hour. Surrendering his sovereignty and going to his mother, he asked whence was his origin ; and when she tried the ring on his finger, she found that it fitted him. Bres and she then went to the Fomorians’ land, where his father recognized the ring and upbraided Bres for leaving the kingdom. Bres acknowledged the injustice of his rule, but asked his father’s help, whereupon Elatha sent him to Balor, grandson of Nét, the Fomorian war-god, and to Indech, who assembled a huge force in order to impose their rule on the Tuatha Dé Danann. [7]

Some curious incidents may be mentioned here. While Bres ruled, the Fomorian Kings, Indech, Elatha, and Tethra, bound tribute on Ireland and reduced some of the Tuatha Dé Danann to servitude. The Fomorians had formerly exacted tribute of the Nemedians, and it was collected by one of their women in an iron vessel — fifty fills of corn and milk, of butter, and of flour. This may be a memory of sacrifice. Ogma had to carry fuel, and even Dagda was obliged to become a builder of *raths*, or forts. In the house where he lived was a lampooner named Cridenbél who demanded from him the three best bits of his ration, and thus Dagda’s health suffered ; but Oengus, Dagda’s son, hearing of this, gave him three gold coins to put into Cridenbél’s portion. These would cause his death, and Bres would be told that Dagda had poisoned him. Then he must tell the story to Bres, who would cause the lampooner’s stomach to be opened ; and if the gold were not found there, Dagda would have to die. In the sequel Oengus advised Dagda to ask as reward for his *rath*-building only a black-maned heifer ; and although this seemed weakness to Bres, the astuteness of Oengus was seen when, after the second battle, the heifer’s lowing brought to Dagda the cattle exacted by the Fomorians. [8]

This mythical story of Bres’s sovereignty, and of the servitude of beings who are gods, is probably parallel to other myths of the temporary eclipse of deities, as when the Babylonian high gods were afraid of Tīāmat and her brood, or cowered in terror before the flood. It may also represent an old nature dualism — the apparent paralysis of gods of sunshine and fruitfulness in the death and cold of winter ; or it may hint at some temporary defeat of Celtic invaders, which even their gods seemed to share. Whatever the Fomorians be, their final defeat was at hand.

When Bres retired, Nuada was again made King because his hand was restored. Diancecht (a divinity of leechcraft), assisted by Creidne, god of smith-work, made for him a silver hand, but Miach, Diancecht’s son, not content with this, obtained the mutilated hand and by means of such a spell as is common to many races — “ joint to joint, sinew to sinew ” — he set it to the stump, caused skin to grow, and restored the hand. In another version he made a new arm with a swineherd’s arm-bone. [9] Through envy Diancecht struck Miach four blows, three of which Miach healed, but the fourth was fatal. His father buried him, and from his grave sprang as many herbs as he had joints and sinews. Airmed, his sister, separated them according to their properties, but Diancecht confused them so that none might know their right values. [10] These incidents reflect beliefs about magico-medical skill, and the last may be a myth of divine jealousy at man’s obtaining knowledge. Nuada now made a feast for the gods, and as they banqueted, a warrior, coming to the portal, bade the door-keepers announce him as Lug, son of Cian, son of Diancecht, and of Ethne, Baler’s daughter. He was also known as *samildánach* (“ possessing many arts ”), and when asked what he practised, he answered that he was a carpenter, only to hear the door-keeper reply, “ Already we have a carpenter.” In

succession he declared himself smith, champion, harper, hero, poet, magician, leech, cup-bearer, and brazier, but the Tuatha Dé Danann possessed each one of thee. Lug, however, because he knew all these arts, gained entrance and among other feats played the three magic harp-strains so often referred to in Irish texts — sleep-strain, wail-strain, and laughter-strain, which in turn caused slumber, mourning, and joy. [11]

In another version of Lug's coming, from *The Children of Tuirenn (Aided Chlainne Tuirenn)*, as he approached, "like the setting sun was the splendour of his countenance," and none could gaze on it. His army was the fairy cavalcade from the Land of Promise, [12] and with them were his foster-brothers, Manannan's sons. Lug rode Manannan's steed, Enbarr, fleet as the spring wind, and on whose back no rider could be killed; he wore Manannan's *lorica* which preserved from wounds, his breastplate which no weapon could pierce, and his sword, the wound of which none survived, while the strength of all who faced it became weakness. When the Fomorians came for tribute, Lug killed some of them, whereupon Balor's wife, Céthlionn, told him that this was their grandson and that it had been prophesied that when he arrived, the power of the Fomorians would depart. As Lug went to meet the Fomorians, Bres was surprised that the sun seemed rising in the west, but his Druids said that this was the radiance from the face of Lug, who cast a spell on the cattle taken for tribute, so that they returned to the Tuatha Dé Danann. When his fairy cavalcade arrived, Bres begged his life on condition of bringing over the Fomorians, while he offered sun, moon, sea, and land as guarantees that he would not again fight; and to this Lug agreed. The guarantee points to an animistic view of nature, for it means that sun, etc., would punish Bres if he was unfaithful. [13]

To return to the other account, Nuada gave Lug his throne, and for a year the gods remained in council, consulting the wizards, leeches, and smiths. Mathgen the wizard announced that the mountains would aid them and that he would cast them on the Fomorians; the cup-bearer said that through his power the Fomorians would find no water in lough or river; Figol the Druid promised to rain showers of fire on the foe and to remove from them two-thirds of their might, while increase of strength would come to the Tuatha Dé Danann, who would not be weary if they fought seven years; Dagda said that he would do more than all the others together. For seven years weapons were prepared under the charge of Lug. [14]

At this point comes the episode of Dagda's assignation with the war-goddess Morrígan, who was washing in a river, one foot at Echumech in the north, the other at Loscuinn in the south. This enormous size is a token of divinity in Celtic myths, and the place where Dagda and Morrígan met was now known as "the couple's bed." She bade him summon the men of knowledge and to them she gave two handfuls of the blood of Indech's heart, of which she had deprived him, as well as valour from his kidneys. These men now chanted spells against the Fomorians — a practice invariably preceding battle among the Celts. [15]

Another incident shows that the Celts, like other races, could recount irreverent stories about their gods. Dagda had been sent to spy out the Fomorians' camp and to ask a truce. Much porridge was made for him, boiled with goats, sheep, and swine, and the mess being poured into a hole in the ground, he was bidden to eat it under pain of death. Taking a ladle big enough for a man and woman to lie in, he began his meal and ate it all, after which sleep overcame him, and the Fomorians mocked his distended paunch. When he rose, uneasy was his movement, but he bravely bore his huge branched fork or club, dragging it till its track was like a boundary-ditch, so that men call that "the track of Dagda's club." An obscene story follows regarding his amour with Indech's daughter, who agreed to practise magic against her father's army. [16]

Before the battle each chief promised Lug prodigies of valour, craftsmanship, or magic — weapons, and armour in unfailing abundance, enfeeblement and destruction of the enemy, the power of satire upon them, magical healing of wounded or slain. Lug's two witches said, "We will enchant the trees and the stones and the sods of the earth so that they shall become a host under arms against the foe" ; but Lug was prevented from going to the fray, because "they feared an early death for the hero owing to the multitude of his arts." Preliminary combats occurred in which the superior magic of the Tuatha Dé Danann was apparent. Weapons were restored or new ones made in a twinkling by Goibniu, Luchtine, and Creidne. Goibniu (cf. Old Irish *goba*, "smith") had promised that though the battle lasted seven years, he would replace every broken sword or spear-head ; no spear-head forged by him would miss, and none whom it pierced would continue in life. He kept his promise, making weapons by three turns in his forge, and renewed the blunted or broken instruments of war. Elsewhere we learn that Goibniu's immortal ale, like nectar and soma, made the divinities immortal, [17] so that he is the equivalent of the Greek Hephaistos, god of craftsmen, who poured out nectar for the gods at their banquet, and of the Vedic deity Tvaṣṭṛ, who made the cup from which the gods drank. [18] Why divine smiths should be associated with the drink of the gods is not clear, but probably we have here different forms of a myth common to the Indo-European peoples. Goibniu is still remembered in Irish folk-tales.

Creidne, the *cerd*, or brazier, promised to supply rivets for the spears, hilts for the swords, and bosses and rims for the shields ; he made the rivets in three turns and cast the rings to them. Creidne, whom euhemerizing tradition described as having been drowned while bringing golden ore from Spain to Ireland, may be compared with Lén Linfiach, *cerd* of the god Bodb, who lived in Loch Léin, making the bright vessels of Fand, daughter of Flidais. Every evening he threw his anvil eastward as far as a grave-mound at Indeóin na nDése and it in turn cast three showers toward the grave, of water, of fire, and of purple gems. [19]

Luchta the carpenter (*saer*) promised to supply all the shields and javelin-shafts required for the battle. These shafts he made with three chippings, the third completing them and setting them in the rings of the spears, or he threw them with marvellous accuracy at the sockets of the spear-heads stuck by Goibniu in the door-lintels, this being precisely paralleled by the art of Caoilte, the survivor of the Féinn. [20]

The mortally wounded were placed in a well over which Diancecht and his children sang spells, or into which he put healing herbs ; and thus they became whole. [21] The Fomorians sent Ruadan, son of Bres and of Brig, daughter of Dagda, to discover the reason of these things ; and a second time he was sent to kill one of the divine craftsmen. He obtained one of the magic spears and wounded Goibniu, who slew Ruadan and then entered the healing well, while Brig bewailed her son with the first death-keen heard in Ireland. Here, as so often, the origin of mourning chants and runes is ascribed to divinities. [22]

Before the battle Lug escaped from his guards and heartened the host by circum-ambulating them on one foot with one eye closed, chanting a spell for their protection — the attitude of the savage medicine-man, probably signifying concentration. Then came the clash of battle, "gory, shivering, crowded, sanguineous, the river ran in corpses of foes." Nuada and Macha were slain by Balor, who possessed an evil eye, or was a personification of the evil eye, so much feared by the Celts. Once when his father's Druids were concocting magic potions, the fumes gave his eye poisonous power, and his eyelid was raised by four men, but only on the battle-field, where no army could resist it. When Lug appeared, Balor desired it to be lifted, but Lug cast a stone at the eye, so that it was carried through his head, blasting some of his own men. [23] In a ballad account of this, Balor was beheaded by Lug, but asked him to set the head upon his own and earn his blessing. Fortunately for himself, however. Lug set it on a hazel, and it dropped poison which split the hazel in two. The tree became the abode of vultures and ravens for many years, until Manannan caused it to be dug up, when a

poisonous vapour from its roots killed and wounded many of the workmen. Of the wood Luchta made a shield for Manannan, which became one of the famous shields of Erin. It could not be touched in battle and it always caused utter rout. Finally it became Fionn's shield. [24]

The war-goddess Morrígan sang a magic rune to hearten the host, and the battle became a rout for the Fomorians, though not before Ogma and Indech had fallen in single combat. Bres was found unguarded by Lug and others, and made three offers for his life ; but two of these —that Ireland's kine should always be in milk, and that corn would be reaped every quarter —were rejected. Life was offered him, however, if he would tell how the men of Erin should plough, sow, and reap ; and when Bres said that these things should always be done on a Tuesday, he was set free. [25] In another account four Fomorians escaped, ruining corn, milk, fruit, and sea produce ; but on November Eve (Samhain) they were expelled by Bodb, Midir, Oengus, and the Morrígan, so that never more should their depredations occur. [26] This points to the conception of the Fomorians as powers of blight ; that of Bres suggests rather that they were pre-Celtic gods of fertility.

Two curious incidents, revealing the magic powers of weapons, which were worshipped by the Celts, and of musical instruments, occur here. Ogma captured the sword of the war-god Tethra, and when unsheathed it told the deeds it had done, as was the custom with swords in those days, for, as the Christian compiler adds, “ the reason why demons spake from weapons was because weapons were then worshipped and acted as safe-guards.” The other incident tells how Dagda's harp was carried off and was found by Lug, Ogma, and Dagda in the house where Bres and his friends were. No melody would sound from it until Dagda uttered a charm ; but then the harp came to him, killing nine men on its way, after which he played the three magic strains of sleep, mourning, and laughter. [27] This harp resembles that of Teirtu in the Welsh tale of *Kulhwch and Olwen*, which played or stopped playing of itself when so desired. [28]

Thus the Tuatha Dé Danann conquered, and the Morrígan proclaimed the victory to the royal heights of Ireland, its hosts of the *side*, its chief waters, and its river-mouths — a reminiscence of the animistic view or the personalization of nature. Then she sang of the world's end and of the evils to come — one of the few eschatological references in Irish mythology, though it is most likely of Christian origin. [29]

This curious story is undoubtedly based on old myths of divine wars, but what these denoted is uncertain. Both Tuatha Dé Danann and Fomorians are superhuman. Vaguely we discern behind the legend a strife of anthropomorphic figures of summer, light, growth, and order, with powers of winter, darkness, blight, and disorder. Such powers agree but ill. There is strife between them, as, to the untutored eye, there is strife in the parts of nature for which they stand ; and this apparent dualism is reflected on the life of the beings who represent the powers of nature. All mythologies echo the strife. The Babylonian Marduk and the gods battle with Tiāmat and her brood ; gods and Titans (or Jötuns), Rê' and 'Apop, fight, and those hostile to gods of light and growth, gods dear to man's heart, are represented in demoniac guise. If Tuatha Dé Danann and Fomorians were both divine but hostile groups of the Irish Celts, the sinister character of the latter would not be forgotten by the annalists, who regarded both with puzzled eyes and sought vainly to envisage them as mortals. Or, again, the two may be hostile sets of deities, because divinities respectively of Celts and aborigines. The Fomorians are, in fact, called gods of the menial Firbolgs, who are undoubtedly an aboriginal race, while Fomorians are described in later Christian times as ungracious and demoniac, unlike the Tuatha Dé Danann; and the pagan Celts must already have regarded them as evil. The gods of a conquering race are often regarded as hostile to those of the aborigines, and *vice versa*, and now new myths arise. In either case the close relationship in which the groups stand by marriage or descent need not be an invention of the compiler. Pagan mythology is

inconsistent, and compromise is inevitable. Conquerors and conquered tend to coalesce, and this is true of their gods ; or, as different tribes of one race now intermarry, now fight, so also may their evil and their friendly divinities. Zeus was son of the Titan Kronos, yet hostile to him. Vile, Ve, and Odin, father of the gods, were sons of a giant, and the gods fought with giants. Other parallels might be cited ; but what is certain is that gods of an orderly world — of growth, craftsmanship, medicine, poetry, and eloquence, if also of magic and war — are opposed to beings envisaged, on the whole, as harmful. In this combat some of the gods are slain. If this were told of them in the old myths, probably it did not affect the continuance of their cult. Pagan gods are mortal and immortal ; their life is a perennial drama, which ever begins and ends, and is ever being renewed — a reflexion of the life of nature itself.

In another story the strife of powers of light and growth with those of darkness and blight is suggested, though the latter are euhemeristically described as mortals. Three men came from Athens with their mother Carman — Valiant, Black, and Evil, sons of Extinction, who was son of Darkness, and he son of Ailment. By her incantations Carman ruined every place where she came, while her sons destroyed through plundering and dishonesty. They came to Ireland to blight the corn of the Tuatha Dé Danann, who sent against them Ai, a poet, Cridenbél the lampooner, Lugh Laebach, a wizard, and Béchuille, a witch. some of whom have already played a part in the story of Mag-Tured. By spells they drove the men oversea, but not until they gave the Seven Things which they served as security that they would not return, and left their mother as a hostage. She died of grief, begging the gods to hold an annual festival at her burial-place and to call it by her name ; and as long as they kept it the Leinstermen were promised plenty of corn, fruit, milk, and fish. [30] No explanation is given as to what the mysterious “ Seven Things ” were.

In other tales groups of gods are seen at strife with each other and in their conflict they were sometimes not too mighty to seek the help of heroes. An example of this occurs in the story of Cúchulainn’s visit to Elysium. In spite of the prowess of the god Labraid, sung by the goddesses Fand and Liban, the time has come when he must give battle to supernatural foes — Senach the Unearthly, Eochaid, Eol, and Eogan the Stream, the last mentioned in the *Book of Invasions (Leabhar Gabála)* as hostile to the Tuatha Dé Danann. [31] These were united, apparently, with Manannan, whose consort Fand, Labraid’s sister, had left him. [32] Labraid was afraid, for the contest would be of doubtful issue. Glad indeed would he be of the hero Cúchulainn’s aid, and for that assistance he was willing to give him his sister Fand. When Cúchulainn arrived in the gods’ domain and was welcomed by Labraid, they gazed on the vast armies of the foe, while two ravens, skilled in Druidic secrets, announced the hero’s presence to the hosts. Next morning Eochaid went to wash at a stream, when Cúchulainn slew him ; and a great fight followed between Cúchulainn and Senach, who also was slain. Cúchulainn then put forth all his might, and so great was the carnage that Labraid himself entreated him to end it ; and then Labraid sang :

“ A mighty host, with multitudes of horses,  
Attacked me on every side ;  
They were the people of Manannan, son of the sea,  
Whom Eogan had called to his aid.”

Another instance occurs in the story of Loegaire, son of the King of Connaught. The people of Connaught were met in assembly near the Loch of the Birds in the plain of Ai, when a stranger approached them through the mist which rose from the lake. He wore a purple cloak, and his yellow hair fell upon his shoulders. A golden-hilted sword hung at his side ; in his right hand he carried a five-pointed spear, and on his left arm a shield with a golden boss. Loegaire welcomed him, and he told how he had come from the gods’ land to seek the aid of warriors. Fiachna was his name, and he had slain his wife’s ravisher, but had been attacked by his nephew, Goll, son of the king of the fort of Mag Mell, and in seven

battles had been vanquished, so that in view of a new conflict he had come for succour. He sang of the beauty of the land and of the bloody combats fought there among the people of majestic race, and how silver and gold awaited those who would help him. Beautiful were the divine warriors, with blue eyes of powerful sight, teeth brilliant as glass, and red lips. Mighty in conflict, in their assemblies they sang in melodious verse of learned matters. [33] Fiachna disappeared into the lake, and now Loegaire appealed to his men. Fifty warriors plunged with him into the water and in the divine land under the loch joined Fiachna against his foe, besieging the fort of Mag Mell, where his wife was a prisoner. The defenders released her, and she followed the vanquishers, singing of her love for Goll. Fiachna gave his daughter, Sun Tear, to Loegaire, and each of his men also received a wife. For a year they remained in the divine land, until they became home-sick ; and as they left him Fiachna bade them mount on horseback and not alight on the earth if they wished to return to him. The people of Connaught rejoiced to see them again, for sorely had they mourned them, but now Loegaire announced their return to the gods' land, nor would he remain, although his father offered him the kingdom, its gold, and its women. The unmoved son sang of the divine land, where beer fell in showers, and every army was of a hundred thousand warriors, while as one went from kingdom to kingdom, the melodious music of the gods was heard. He told of his goddess wife and those of his comrades and of the cauldrons and drinking-horns taken from the fort ; for one night of the nights of the *sid* he would not accept his father's kingdom. With these words he quitted the king for ever and returned to Mag Mell, there to share the sovereignty with Fiachna — a noble divine reward to a mortal. [34] In the heroic cycle of Fionn other instances of heroes helping gods will be found.

War between different divine groups is also found in the story of Caibell and Etar, Kings of the *side* (divine or fairy-folk), each of whom had a beautiful daughter. Two Kings who sought the maidens in marriage were offered battle for them. If, however, the combat was fought in the *sid*, the *sid* would be polluted — an idea contrary to that of these other instances of war in the gods' land ; and if the *sid*-folk were seen among men, they would no longer be invisible at will. The fight, therefore, took place at night, lest there should be no distinction between them and men ; and the *side* took the form of deer. So terrible was the struggle that four hillocks were made of the hoofs and antlers of the slain ; and to quell it, water broke forth from a well and formed Loch Riach, into which if white sheep are cast every seventh year at the proper hour, they become crimson. Etar alone of the kings survived. [35]

The Christian scribes were puzzled over the Tuatha Dé Danann. The earliest reference to them says that because of their knowledge they were banished from heaven, arriving in Ireland in clouds and mists — the smoke of their burning ships, says an eubemerizing tradition. Eochaid ua Flainn, in the tenth century, calls them “ phantoms ” (*siabhra*) and asks whether they came from heaven or earth ; were they demons or men. They were affiliated to Japhet, yet regarded as demons in the *Book of Invasions*. Another tradition makes them a branch of the descendants of Nemed who, after being in the Northern isles learning wizardry, returned to Ireland. The annalists treated them more or less as men ; official Christianity more or less as demons ; popular belief and romance as a kind of beautiful fairy race with much of their old divine aspect.

D'Arbois translates *Tuatha Dé Danann* as “ people of the god whose mother is called Danu ” ; [36] Stokes renders it “ folk or folks of the goddess Danu ” ; [37] Stern prefers to regard Danann as a later addition and to take the earlier name as *Tuatha Dé* or *Fir Dea* — “ the divine tribe,” or “ the men of the god.” [38] Three insignificant members of the group, Brian, Iuchar, and Iucharba, are sometimes called “ three gods of Danu ” ; and hence also, perhaps, the whole group is designated “ men of the three gods.” Brian, Iuchar, and Iucharba are also termed *tri dée dána*, or “ three gods of *dán*” i.e. “ knowledge,” or “ fate.” Danand (Danu) is mentioned with Béchuille as a separate goddess, and both are called foster-mothers of the gods. Cormac's Glossary knows nothing of Danu, but speaks of a goddess Anu, *mater*

*deorum hibernensium* — “ It was well she nursed the gods” — while he refers to two hills in Kerry as “ the paps of Anu,” which a later glossary calls “ the paps of Danu.” Ireland is called Iath n’Anann, and Anu is mentioned with Macha, Morrígan, and Badb, the war-goddesses, though other passages give Danu along with these. Possibly Danu is a mistake for Anu, through confusion with *dán*, “ knowledge,” knowledge as a function of Brian, Iuchar, and Iucharba being personified as Danu, so that they would then be called gods or sons of Danu, though they were actually sons of Brigit. As Stern points out, Danu can scarcely be mother of the whole group, since she herself is daughter of Delbaeth, who was brother of Dagda, Ogma, Bres, etc. If Anu was mother of the group, the likeness of her name to Danu would also lead to the mistake ; and Anu as goddess is perhaps a personification of Ireland, a kind of earth mother. On the whole, the general relationship of the euhemerized gods evolved by the annalists is as mythical as the pagan stories themselves.

In the story of *The Children of Tuirenn* Brian, Iuchar, and Iucharba are sons of Tuirenn, son of Ogma. One day Cian, at enmity with them, saw them approaching. Striking himself with a Druidic wand, he became a pig, but Brian noticed this and changed himself and his brothers into hounds which chased and killed Cian with stones, because he said that weapons would tell the deed to his son. They buried his body seven times ere the earth ceased to reject it. Lug, Cian’s son, was told of this deed by the earth, and he forced the children of Tuirenn to bring many magical treasures, in getting which danger was incurred. By their father’s advice they crossed the sea in Manannan’s canoe and succeeded in obtaining the treasures, but now had to give “ three shouts on Cnoc Miodhchaoin,” a hill on which Miodhchaoin and his sons prohibited all shouting. Here, then, they were wounded by these men, and their father asked Lug for the magic pig’s skin which healed all wounds. He refused it, even when Brian was carried before him, and thus the murderers perished miserably. [39]

Most of the names of the chief gods have already been mentioned — Dagda or Eochaid Ollathair, who in one place is called an “ earth god” to the Tuatha Dé Danann, and also their “ god of wizardry” — probably a deity of fruitfulness and fertility ; Oengus ; Nuada ; Ogma, god of poetry ; Goibniu, god of smiths ; Creidne, of braziers ; Diancecht, of medicine ; Manannan, son of Ler ; Midir ; Bodb Dearg ; Lug, perhaps a sun-god ; and other lesser divinities. Of goddesses there are Anu or Danu ; Brigit, goddess of poetry and primitive culture ; Etain ; and the war-goddesses — Morrígan, Macha, and Neman, while Badb constitutes a fourth or sometimes takes the place of one of the triple group. The Tuatha Dé Danann had power over agriculture and cattle, but they had other functions, while all of them had great magic potency. Unfortunately few myths about these functions exist, and their precise nature must be matter of conjecture. The mythico-magical nature of the gods’ possessions survives even in records which regard them as mortals. The preface to the story of the battle of Mag-Tured tells how from Falias was brought the stone of Fal, which roared under every king who would assume the sovereignty. From Gorias was brought Lug’s spear ; no battle was ever won against it or against him who bore it. From Findias came Nuada’s sword, which none could escape when it was drawn. From Murias came Dagda’s cauldron, from which no company ever went away unthankful. [40] Their magic food and other possessions will be mentioned later. Some things of which no myths remain are said to have been in the Brug na Boinne — the bed of Dagda, the two paps of Morrígan, the comb and casket of Dagda’s wife (i.e. two hills), the stone wall of Oengus, the shot of Midir’s eye, and the like.

[1] Keating, i. 141 ff. (*ITS*).

[2] MS H 2, 18 ; text and translation in *Ériu*, viii. i ff. (1915).

[3] Harleian MS. 5280, text and translation by W. Stokes, in *RCel.* xii S. (1891).

[4] *ib.* XV. 69 (1894).

[5] *LL* 169 a, 214 b.

[6] *RCel* xv. 439 (1894).

[7] Harleian MS. 5280, § 39 f.

- [8] *ib.* §§ 25 f., 165.
- [9] E. O'Curry, in *Atlantis*, iv. 159 (1863).
- [10] Harleian MS. 5280, §§ 11, 33 f.
- [11] *ib.* § 53 f.
- [12] The "Land of Promise" is a name for Elysium, perhaps borrowed by Christian editors from Biblical sources.
- [13] E. O'Curry, in *Atlantis*, iv. 159 ff. (1863).
- [14] Harleian MS. 5280, § 74 f.
- [15] *ib.* § 84 f.
- [16] *ib.* § 88 f.
- [17] *ib.* §§ 96, 122 ; see also *infra*, pp. 51, 120.
- [18] See *Mythology of All Races*, Boston, 1917, vi. 50.
- [19] Harleian MS. 5280, §§ 100, 122, *LL* 11 *a*, W. Stokes, in *RCel* XV. 541 (1894).
- [20] Harleian MS. 5280, §§ 102, 122, S. H. O'Grady, ii. 219.
- [21] Harleian MS. 5280, § 123, W. Stokes, in *RCel* xvi. 59 (1895).
- [22] Harleian MS. 5280, § 125 f.
- [23] *ib.* § 129 f.
- [24] MacNeill, i. 135 (*ITS*).
- [25] Harleian MS. 5280, §§ 137, 149 f.
- [26] *Book of Fermoy*, 24 *b*.
- [27] Harleian MS. 5280, § 162 f.
- [28] Loth, *Mabinogion*, i. 306.
- [29] Harlwan MS. 5280, 1 166 f.
- [30] W. Stokes, in *RCel* xv. 311 f. (1894).
- [31] *LL* 9 *b*.
- [32] There is some connexion between Manannan and Eogan, for Fand says that she dwelt in Eogan's bower.
- [33] Cf. *supra*, pp. 14-15, on Plutarch's myth of Elysium.
- [34] *LL* 275 *b* ; d'Arbois, *Cours*, ii. 356 ff.
- [35] W. Stokes, in *RCel* xvi. 273 (1895).
- [36] D'Arbois, *Cours*, ii. 145.
- [37] W. Stokes, in *RCel* xii. 129 (1891).
- [38] L. C. Stern, in *Festschrift Whitley Stokes . . . gewidmet* Leipzig, 1900, p. 17.
- [39] Text and translation by E. O'Curry, in *Atlantis*, iv. 159 ff. (1863).
- [40] Harleian MS. 5280, S 3 f.

The Mythology of all races .. (1916)

Author : Gray, Louis H. (Louis Herbert), 1875-1955, ed ; Moore, George Foot, 1851-1931, joint ed ; MacCulloch, J. A. (John Arnott), 1868-1950, joint ed

Volume : 3

Subject : Mythology

Publisher : Boston, Marshall Jones Company

Year : 1918

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : Google

Book from the collections of : Harvard University

Collection : americana

Source : Internet Archive

<http://www.archive.org/details/mythologyallrac00carngoog>

Edited and uploaded to [www.aughty.org](http://www.aughty.org)

January 30 2012