

BOOK III

The Coming of the Gael



CHAPTER I

The Landing

It is not known, now, for what length of time the Tuatha de Danaan had the sway over Ireland, and it is likely it was a long time they had it, but they were put from it at last.

It was at Inver Slane, to the north of Leinster, the sons of Gaedhal of the Shining Armour, the Very Gentle, that were called afterwards the Sons of the Gael, made their first attempt to land in Ireland to avenge Ith, one of their race that had come there one time and had met with his death.

It is under the leadership of the sons of Miled they were, and it was from the south they came, and their Druids had told them there was no country for them to settle in till they would come to that island in the west. "And if you do not get possession of it yourselves," they said, "your children will get possession of it."

But when the Tuatha de Danaan saw the ships coming, they flocked to the shore, and by their enchantments they cast such a cloud over the whole island that the sons of Miled were confused, and all they could see was some large thing that had the appearance of a pig.

And when they were hindered from landing there by enchantments, they went sailing along the coast till at last they were able to make a landing at Inver Sceine in the west of Munster.

From that they marched in good order as far as Slieve Mis. And there they were met by a queen of the Tuatha de Danaan, and a train of beautiful women attending on her, and her Druids and wise men following her. Amergin, one of the sons of Miled, spoke to her then, and asked her name, and she said it was Banba, wife of Mac Cuill, Son of the Hazel.

They went on then till they came to Slieve Eibhline, and there another queen of the Tuatha de Danaan met them, and her women and her Druids after her, and they asked her name, and she said it was Fodhla, wife of Mac Cecht, Son of the Plough.

They went on then till they came to the hill of Uisnech, and there they saw

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another woman coming towards them. And there was wonder on them while they were looking at her, for in the one moment she would be a wide-eyed most beautiful queen, and in another she would be a sharp-beaked, grey-white crow. She came on to where Eremon, one of the sons of Miled, was, and sat down before him, and he asked her who was she, and she said: "I am Eriu, wife of Mac Greine, Son of the Sun."

And the names of those three queens were often given to Ireland in the after time.

The Sons of the Gael went on after that to Teamhair, where the three sons of Cermait Honey-Mouth, son of the Dagda, that had the kingship between them at that time held their court. And these three were quarrelling with one another about the division of the treasures their father had left, and the quarrel was so hot it seemed likely it would come to a battle in the end.

And the Sons of the Gael wondered to see them quarrelling about such things, and they having so fruitful an island, where the air was so wholesome, and the sun not too strong, or the cold too bitter, and where there was such a plenty of honey and acorns, and of milk, and of fish, and of corn, and room enough for them all.

Great grandeur they were living in, and their Druids about them, at the palace of Teamhair. And Amergin went to them, and it is what he said, that they must give up the kingship there and then, or they must leave it to the chance of a battle. And he said he asked this in revenge for the death of Ith, of the race of the Gael, that had come to their court before that time, and that had been killed by treachery.

When the sons of Cermait Honey-Mouth heard Amergin saying such fierce words, there was wonder on them, and it is what they said, that they were not willing to fight at that time, for their army was not ready. "But let you make an offer to us," they said, "for we see well you have good judgment and knowledge. But if you make an offer that is not fair," they said, "we will destroy you with our enchantments."

At that Amergin bade the men that were with him to go back to Inver Sceine, and to hurry again into their ships with the rest of the Sons of the Gael, and to go out the length of nine waves from the shore. And then he made his offer to the Tuatha de Danaan, that if they could hinder his men from landing on their island, he and all his ships would go back again to their own country, and would never make any attempt to come again; but that if the Sons of the Gael could land on the coast in spite of them, then the Tuatha de Danaan should give up the kingship and be under their sway.

The Tuatha de Danaan were well pleased with that offer, for they thought that by the powers of their enchantments over the winds and the sea, and by their arts, they would be well able to keep them from ever setting foot in the country again.

So the Sons of the Gael did as Amergin bade them and they went back into their ship and drew up their anchors, and moved out to the length of nine waves from

LADY GREGORY

As soon as the Men of Dea saw they had left the land, they took to their enchantments and spells, and they raised a great wind that scattered the ships of the Gael, and drove them from one another. But Amergin knew it was not a natural storm was in it, and Arranan, son of Miled, knew that as well, and he went up in the mast of his ship to look about him. But a great blast of wind came against him, and he fell back into the ship and died on the moment. And there was great confusion on the Gael, for the ships were tossed to and fro, and had like to be lost. And the ship that Donn, son of Miled, was in command of was parted from the others by the dint of the storm, and was broken in pieces, and he himself and all with him were drowned, four-and-twenty men and women in all. And Ir, son of Miled, came to his death in the same way, and his body was cast on the shore, and it was buried in a small island that is now called Sceilg Michill. A brave man Ir was, leading the Sons of the Gael to the front of every battle, and their help and their shelter in battle, and his enemies were in dread of his name.

And Heremon, another of the sons of Miled, with his share of the ships, was driven to the left of the island, and it is hardly he got safe to land. And the place where he landed was called Inver Colpa, because Colpa of the Sword, another of the sons of Miled, was drowned there, and he trying to get to land. Five of the sons of Miled in all were destroyed by the storm and the winds the Men of Dea had raised by their enchantments, and there were but three of them left, Heber, and Heremon, and Amergin.

And one of them, Donn, before he was swept into the sea, called out: "It is treachery our knowledgeable men are doing on us, not to put down this wind." "There is no treachery," said Amergin, his brother. And he rose up then before them, and whatever enchantment he did on the winds and the sea, he said these words along with it:

"That they that are tossing in the great wide food giving sea may reach now to the land.

"That they may find a place upon its plains, its mountains, and its valleys; in its forests that are full of nuts and of all fruits; on its rivers and its streams, on its lakes and its great waters.

"That we may have our gatherings and our races in this land; that there may be a king of our own in Teamhair; that it may be the possession of our many kings.

"That the sons of Miled may be seen in this land, that their ships and their boats may find a place there.

"This land that is now under darkness, it is for it we are asking; let our chief men, let their learned wives, ask that we may come to the noble woman, great Eriu."

After he had said this, the wind went down and the sea was quiet again on the moment.

And those that were left of the sons of Miled and of the Sons of the Gael landed then at Inver Sceine.

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And Amergin was the first to put his foot on land, and when he stood on the shore of Ireland, it is what he said:

"I am the wind on the sea;
I am the wave of the sea;
I am the bull of seven battles;
I am the eagle on the rock;
I am a flash from the sun;
I am the most beautiful of plants;
I am a strong wild boar;
I am a salmon in the water;
I am a lake in the plain;
I am the word of knowledge;
I am the head of the spear in battle;
I am the god that puts fire in the head;
Who spreads light in the gathering on the hills?
Who can tell the ages of the moon?
Who can tell the place where the sun rests?"

CHAPTER II

The Battle of Tailtin

And three days after the landing of the Gael, they were attacked by Eriu, wife of Mac Greine, Son of the Sun, and she having a good share of men with her. And they fought a hard battle, and many were killed on both sides. And this was the first battle fought between the Sons of the Gael and the Men of Dea for the kingship of Ireland.

It was in that battle Fais, wife of Un, was killed in a valley at the foot of the mountain, and it was called after her, the Valley of Fais. And Scota, wife of Miled, got her death in the battle, and she was buried in a valley on the north side of the mountain near the sea. But the Sons of the Gael lost no more than three hundred men, and they beat back the Men of Dea and killed a thousand of them. And Eriu was beaten back to Tailtin, and as many of her men as she could hold together; and when she came there she told the people how she had been worsted in the battle, and the best of her men had got their death. But the Gael stopped on the battle-field, and buried their dead, and they gave a great burial to two of their Druids, Aer and Eithis, that were killed in the fight.

And after they had rested for a while, they went on to Inver Colpa in Leinster, and Heremon and his men joined them there. And then they sent messengers to