

## The Voyage of Mael Duin's Boat

Immram curaig Maíle Duin

LU, YBL, Harl. 5280, Eg. 1782

Translated by Whitley Stokes

### PROLOGUE

"Three years and seven months was it wandering in the ocean."



There was a famous man of the Eoganacht of Ninuss (that is, the Eoganacht of the Arans): his name was Ailill of the "Edge of Battle." A mighty soldier was he, and a hero lord of his own tribe and kindred. And there was a young nun, the prioress of a church of nuns, with whom he met. Between them both there was a noble boy, Mael Duin, son of Ailill.

This is the way according to which Mael Duin's conception and his birth came to pass. Once upon a time the king of the Eoganacht went on a raid into another district and province and with him fared Ailill of the Edge of Battle. They unyoked and encamped on an upland therein. There was a church of nuns near to that upland. At midnight, then, when everyone had ceased moving in the camp, Ailill went to the church. It was the hour that the (aforesaid) nun went to strike the bell for nocturne. Ailill caught her hand, and threw her down, and lay with her.

Said the woman to him: "Unblessed is our state." Saith she: "(for) this is the time for my conceiving. Which is thy race and what is thy name?"

Said the hero: "Ailill of the Edge of Battle is my name (and I am) of the Eoganacht of Ninuss in Thomond."

Then after ravaging and taking hostages, the king returned to his district, Ailill also being with him.

Soon after Ailill had reached his tribe, marauders of Leix slew him. They burnt (the church named) Dubcluain upon him.

At the end of nine months the woman brought forth a boy, and gave him a name, Mael Duin was he. The boy was afterwards taken secretly to her friends, even to the king's queen; and by her Mael Duin was reared; and she gave out that she was his mother.

Now the one foster-mother reared him and the king's three sons, in one cradle, and on one breast, and on one lap.

Beautiful, indeed, was his form; and it is doubtful if there has been in flesh anyone as beautiful as he. So he grew up till he was a young warrior and fit to use weapons. Great then, was his brightness and his gaiety and his playfulness. In his play he outwent all his comrades, both in throwing balls and running, and leaping, and putting stones, and racing horses. He had, in sooth, the victory in each of those games. One day, then, a certain soldier warrior grew envious against him, and he said in transport and anger: "Thou," saith he, "whose clan and kindred no one knows, whose mother and father no-one knows, vanquish *us* in every game, whether we contend with you on land or on water, or on the draughtboard!"

So then Mael Duin was silent, for till then he had thought that he was a son of the king and of the queen his foster-mother. Then he said to his foster-mother: "I will not dine and I will not drink until thou tell me," saith he, "my mother and my father." "But," saith she, "why art thou inquiring after that? Do not take to heart the words of the haughty warriors. I am thy mother." Saith she: "The love of the people of the earth for their sons is no greater than the love I bear to you."

"That may be" he said: "nevertheless, make known my parents to me."

So his foster-mother went with him, and delivered him into his (own) mother's hand; and thereafter he entreated his mother to declare his father to him.

"Silly," saith she, "is what you art adoing, for if you shouldst know thy father you hast no good of him, and you shalt be the gladder, for he died long ago."

"Tis the better for me to know it," saith he, "however."

Then his mother told him the truth. "Ailill of the Edge of Battle was thy father," saith she, "of the Eoganacht of Ninuss."

Then Mael Duin went to his fatherland and to his own heritage, having his (three) foster-brothers with him; and beloved warriors were they. And then his kindred welcomed him, and bade him be of good cheer.

At a certain time afterwards there was a number of warriors in the graveyard of the church of Dubcluain, putting stones. So Mael Duin's foot was planted on the scorched ruin of the church, and over it he was flinging the stone. A certain poison-tongued man of the community of the church, Briccne was his name, said to Mael Duin: "It were better," saith he, "to avenge the man who was burnt there than to cast stones over his bare burnt bones."

"Who (was) that ?" saith Mael Duin.

"Ailill," saith he, "thine (own) father."

"Who killed him ?" asked Mael Duin.

Briccne replied: "Marauders of Leix," saith he, "and they destroyed him on this spot."

Then Mael Duin threw away the stone (which he was about to cast), and took his mantle round him, and his armour on him; and he was mournful thereat. And he asked the way to wend to Leix, and the guides told him that he could only go by sea.

So he went into the country of Corcomroe to seek a charm and a blessing of the wizard who dwelt there, to begin building a boat. (Nuca was the wizard's name and it is from him that Boirenn Nuca is named). He told Mael Duin the day on which he should begin the boat, and the number of the crew that should go in her, to wit, seventeen men, or sixty according to others. And he (also) told him that no number greater or less than that should go; and he (lastly) told him the day he should set to sea.

Then Mael Duin built a three-skinned boat; and they who were to go in it in his company were ready. German was there and Diuran the Rhymer. So then he went to sea on the day that the wizard had told him to set out. When they had gone a little from land after hoisting the sail, then came into the harbour after them his three foster-brothers, the three sons of his foster-father and foster-mother; and they shouted to them to come back again to them to the end that they might go with them.

"Get you home," saith Mael Duin; "for even though we should return (to land), only the number we have here shall go with me."

"We will go after thee into the sea and be drowned therein, unless thou come unto us."

Then the three of them cast themselves into the sea, and they swam far from land. When Mael Duin saw that, he turned towards them so that they might not be drowned, and he brought them into his boat.

## I

That day till vespers they were a-rowing, and the night after it till midnight, when they found two small bare islands, with two forts in them; and then they heard out of the forts the noise and outcry of intoxication, and the soldiers, and the trophies. And this was what one man said to the other: "stand off from me," saith he, "for I am a better hero than thou, for it, is I that slew Ailill of the Edge of Battle, and burnt Dubcluain on him and no evil hath hitherto been done to me therefor by his kindred; and thou hast never done the like of that!"

"We have the victory in our hands," saith German, and saith Diuran the Rhymer: "God hath brought us direct and God hath guided our barque. Let us go and wreck these two forts, since God hath revealed to us our enemies in them!"

As they were saying these words, a great wind came upon, them, so that they were driven (over the sea, all) that night until morning. And even after morning they saw nor earth nor land, and they knew not whither they were going. Then said Mael Duin: "Leave the boat still, without rowing and whither soever it shall please God to bring it, bring."

Then they entered the great, endless ocean; and Mael Duin afterwards said to his foster-brothers: "Ye have caused this to us, casting yourselves upon us in the boat in spite of the word of the enchanter and wizard, who told us that on board the boat we should go only the number that we were before you came."

They had no answer, save only to be silent for a little space.

## II

Three days and three nights were they, and they found neither land nor ground. Then on the morning of the third day they heard a sound from the north-east. "This is the voice of a wave against a shore," said Mael Duin. Now when the day was bright they made towards land. As they were casting lots to see which of them should go on shore, there came a great swarm of ants each of them the size of a foal, down to the strand towards them, and into the sea. What the ants desired was to eat the crew and their boat: so the sailors fled for three days and three nights; and they saw nor land nor ground.

## III

On the morning of the third day they heard the sound of a wave against the beach, and with the daylight they saw an island high and great; and terraces all round about it. Lower was each of them than the other, and there was a row of trees around it, and many great birds on these trees. And they were taking counsel as to who should go to explore the island and see whether the birds were gentle. "I will go," saith Mael Duin. So Mael Duin went, and warily searched the island, and found nothing evil therein. And they ate their fill of the birds and brought some of them on board their boat.

## IV

Three days thereafter, and three nights were they at sea. But on the morning of the fourth day they perceived another great island. Sandy was its soil. When they came to the shore of the island they saw therein a beast like a horse. The legs of a hound he had, with rough, sharp nails; and great was his joy at seeing them. And he was prancing (?) before them, for he longed to devour them and their boat. "He is not sorry to meet us," saith Mael Duin; "let us go back from the

island." That was done; and when the beast perceived them fleeing, he went down to the strand and, began digging up the beach with his sharp nails, and pelting them (with the pebbles), and they did not expect to escape from him.

## V

Thereafter they rowed afar, and a great, flat island they see before them. Then to German fell an ill lot to go and look at that island. "Both of us will go," saith Diuran the Rhymer, "and thou wilt come with me some other time into an island which it falls to my lot to explore." So the two of them entered the island. Great was its size and its breadth, and they saw therein a long, great green, with vast hoof-marks of horses upon it. As large as the sail of a ship was the mark of the hoof of each horse. They saw, moreover, the shells of huge nuts like \*\*\* and they saw, there, also great leavings (?) of the plunder of many men. So they dreaded that which they saw, and they called their people to them to see what they beheld. They were afraid then, after seeing what they beheld, and they all, swiftly, hastily, went on board their boat.

When they had gone a little from land, they beheld (rushing) along the sea to the island a great multitude, which, after reaching the green of the island, held a horse-race. And swifter than the wind was each horse, and great was the shouting (of the multitude) and their outcry and noise. And then the strokes of their horse-rods at the meeting were heard by Mael Duin, and he heard, moreover, what each of them was saying: "Bring the grey steed"; "Drive the dun horse there" ; "Bring the white horse!" ; "My steed is faster!" ; "My horse leaps better."

When the wanderers heard those words, they went away with all their might for they felt sure it was a meeting of demons they beheld.

## VI

A full week were they voyaging, in hunger and in thirst, when they discovered a great, high island with a great house therein on the seashore and a doorway out of the house into the plain of the island and another door (opening) into the sea, and against that door there was a valve of stone. That valve was pierced by an aperture, through which the sea-waves were flinging the salmon into the midst of that house. Mael Duin and his men entered that house, and therein they found no one. After this they beheld a testered bed for the chief of the house alone, and a bed for every three of his household, and food for three before every bed, and a vessel of glass with good liquor before every bed and a cup of glass on every vessel. So they dined off that food and liquor and they give thanks to Almighty God, who had helped them from their hunger.

## VII

When they went from the island they were a long while voyaging, without food, hungrily, till they found (another) island, with a great cliff round it on every side, and therein was a long, narrow wood, and great was its length and its narrowness. When Mael Duin reached that wood he took (from it) a rod in his hand as he passed it. Three days and three nights the rod remained in his hand, while the boat was under sail, coasting the cliff, and on the third day he found a cluster, of three apples at the end of the rod. For forty nights each of these apples sufficed them.

## VIII

Thereafter, then, they found another island, with a fence of stone around it. When they drew near it a huge beast sprang up in the island, and raced round about the island. To Mael Duin it seemed swifter than the wind. And then it went to the height of the island and there it performed (the feat called) 'straightening of body', to wit, its head below and its feet above; and thus it used to be: it turned in its skin that is, the flesh and the bones revolved, but the skin outside was unmoved. Or at another time the skin outside turned like a mill, the bones and the flesh remaining still.

When it had been for long in that wise, it sprang up again and raced round about the island as it had done at first. Then it returned to the same place; and this time the lower half of its skin was unmoved, and the other half above ran round and round like a millstone. That, then, was its practice when it was going round the island.

Mael Duin and his people fled with all their might, and the beast perceived them fleeing and it went into the beach to seize them, and began to smite them, and it cast and lashed after them with stones of the harbour. Now one of these stones came into their boat, and pierced through Mael Duin's shield, and lodged in the keel of the curragh.

## IX

Now not long after that they found another lofty island, and it was delightful, and therein were many great animals like unto horses. Each of them would take a piece out of another's side, and carry it away with its skin and its flesh, so that out of their sides streams of crimson blood were breaking, and thereof the ground was full.

So they left that island swiftly, madly, hastily (and they were) sad, complaining, feeble; and they knew nothing whither in the world they were going and in what stead they should find aidance or land or ground.

## X

Now they came to another great island, after great weariness of hunger and thirsting and they sad and sighing, having lost all hope of aidance. In that island were many trees: full-fruited were they, with great golden apples upon them. Red short animals like swine were under those trees. Now, they used to go to those trees and strike them with their hind-legs, so that the apples would fall from the trees, and then they would consume them. From dawn to sunset the animals did not appear at all, but they used to stay in the caverns of the ground. Round about that island many birds were swimming out on the waves. From Matins to None further and further they used to swim from the island. But from None to Vespers nearer and nearer they used to come to the island, and arrive therein after sunset.

Then they used to strip off the apples and eat them. "Let us go," saith Mael Duin, "into the island wherein the birds are. Not harder for us (to do so) than for the birds." \*\*\* One of the crew went to see the island, and he called his comrade to him on shore. Hot was the ground under their feet, and they could not dwell there for its warmth, because it was a fiery land, and the animals used to heat the ground above them.

On the first day they brought with them a few of the apples which they were eating in their boat. When the morning was bright the birds went from the island swimming to sea. With that the fiery animals were up-raising their heads out of the, caves, and kept eating the apples till sundown. When they were put back into their caves the birds use to come in place of them, to eat the apples. Then Mael Duin went with his people, and they collected all the apples that were there that night. Alike did the apples forbid hunger and thirst from them. So then they filled their boat with the apples as seemed good to them, and went again to sea.

## XI

Now when those apples failed and their hunger and thirst were great and when their mouths and their noses were full of the stench of the sea, they sighted an island which was not large, and therein (stood) a fort surrounded by, a white, high rampart as if it were built of burnt lime, or as if it were all one rock of chalk. Great was its height from the sea: it all but reached the clouds. The fort was open wide. Round the rampart were great, snow-white houses. When they entered the largest of these they saw no one there, save a small cat which was in the midst of the house playing on the four stone pillars that were there. It was leaping, from each pillar to the other. It looked a little at the men, and did not stop itself from its play. After that, they saw three rows on the wall of the house round about, from one door post to the other. A row there, first, of brooches of gold and of silver, with their pins in the wall, and a row of neck-torques of gold and of silver: like hoops of a vat was each of them. The third row (was) of great swords, with hilts of gold and of silver, The rooms were full of white quilts and shining garments. A roasted ox moreover, and a flitch in the midst of the house, and great vessels with good intoxicating liquor. "Hath this been left for us?" saith Mael Duin to the cat. It looked at him suddenly and began to play again. Then Mael Duin recognised that it was for them that the dinner had been left.

So they dined and drank and slept. They put the leavings (?) of the liquor into the pots and stored up the leavings (?) of the food. Now when they proposed to go, Mael Duin's third foster-brother said: "shall I take with me a necklace of these necklaces?" "Nay," saith Mael Duin, "not without guard is the house." Howbeit he took it as far as the middle of the enclosure. The cat followed them, and leapt through him (the foster-brother) like a fiery arrow, and burnt him so that he became ashes, and (then) went back till it was on its pillar. Then Mael Duin soothed the cat with his words, and set the necklace in its place and cleansed the ashes from the floor of the enclosure, and cast them on the shore of the sea.

Then they went on board their boat, praising and, magnifying the Lord.

## XII

Early on the morning of the third day after that they espy another island, with a brazen palisade over the midst of it which divided the island in two, and they espied great flocks of sheep therein, even a black flock on this side of the fence and a white flock on the far side. And they saw a big man separating the flocks. When he used to fling a white sheep over the fence from this side to the black sheep it became black at once. So, when he used to cast a black sheep over the fence to the far side, it became white at once. The men were adread at seeing that. "This were well for us (to do)" saith Mael Duin: "let us cast two rods into the island. If they change colour we (also) shall change if we land on it." So they flung a rod with black bark on the side wherein were the white sheep, and it became white at once. Then they flung a peeled white rod on the side wherein were the black sheep and it became black at once.

"Not fortunate (?) was that experiment," saith Mael Duin. "Let us not land on the island. Doubtless ours colour would not have fared better than the rods."

They went back from the island in terror. On the third day afterwards they perceived another island great and wide, with a herd of beautiful swine. therein. Of these they killed a small pig. Then they were unable to carry it to be roasted so they all came round, it. They cooked it and bore it into their boat.

Then they saw a great mountain in the island, and they proposed to go and view the island from it. Now when Diuran the Rhymer and German went to visit the mountain they found before them a broad river which was not deep. Into this river German dipped the handle of his spear and at once it was consumed as if fire had burnt it. And (so) they went no further. Then, too, they saw, on the other side of the river, great hornless oxen lying down, and a huge man sitting by them. German after this struck his spear-shaft against his shield. to frighten the oxen. "Why dost thou frighten the silly

calves?" saith that huge herdsman. "Where are the dams of these calves" saith German. "They are on the other side of yonder mountain," saith he Diuran and German return to their comrades, and tell them the tidings.

So thence they (all) went.

#### XIV

Not long thereafter they found an island, with a great hideous mill, wherein was a miller huge \*\*\* hideous. They asked him "what mill is this?" "Not \*\*\* indeed," saith he "\*\*\*\* asks what ye shall not know." "Nay" say they. "Half the corn of your country," saith he, "is ground here. Every thing which is begrudged is ground in this mill" saith he.

With that they see the heavy, countless loads on horses, and, human beings (going) to the mill and from it, again; only that what was brought from it was carried westward. Again they asked: "What is the name of this mill?" "Inber Tre-cenand," saith the miller. Then after this they signed themselves with the sign of Christ's cross. When they heard and saw all these things they went on their way, into their boat.

#### XV

Now when they went from that island of the mill they found a large island, and a great multitude of human beings therein. Black were these, both in bodies and raiment. Fillets round their heads, and they rested not from wailing. An unlucky lot fell to one of Mael Duin's two foster-brothers to land on the island. When he went to the people who were wailing he at once became a comrade of theirs and began to weep along with them. Two were sent to bring him thence, and they did not recognise him amongst the others (and) they themselves turned to lament. Then said Mael Duin: "Let four (of you)" saith he, "go with your weapons, and bring ye the men perforce, and look not at the land nor the air, and put your garments round your noses and round your mouths, and breathe not the air of the land, and take not your eyes off your own men" \*\*\*\* The four went, and brought back with them perforce the \*\*\* other two. When they were asked what they had seen in the land, they would say: "Verily, we know not," say they; "but what we saw (others doing) we did."

Thereafter they came rapidly from the island.

#### XVI

Thereafter they come to another lofty island, wherein were four fences, which divided it into four parts. A fence of gold, first: another of silver: the third fence of brass: and the fourth of crystal. Kings in the fourth division, queens in a another, warriors in another, maidens in the other. A maiden went to meet them and brought them on land, and gave them food. They likened it to cheese; and whatever taster was pleasing to anyone he would find it therein. And she dealt (liquor) to them out of a little vessel, so that they, slept an intoxication of three days and three nights. All this time the maiden was tending them. When they awoke on the third day they were in their boat at sea. Nowhere did they see their island or their maiden.

Then they rowed away.

#### XVII

Thereafter they found another island which was not large. Therein was a fortress with a brazen door and brazen fastenings thereon. A bridge of glass (rose) by the portal. When they used to go up on the bridge they would fall down backwards. With that they espy a woman coming out from the fortress, with a pail in her hand. Out of the lower part of the bridge she lifts a slab of glass, and she filled the pail out of the fountain which flowed beneath the bridge, and went again into the fortress.

"A housekeeper comes for Mael Duin!" saith German. "Mael Duin indeed," saith she, closing the door behind her.

After this they were striking the brazen fastenings and the brazen net that was before them, and then the sound which they made was a sweet and soothing music, which sent them to sleep till the morrow morning.

When they awoke they saw the same woman (coming) out of the fortress, with her pail in her hand and she fills (it) under the same slab.

"But a housekeeper comes to meet Mael Duin!" saith German.

"Marvelously valuable do I deem Mael Duin!" saith she, shutting the enclosure after her.

The same melody lays them low then till the morrow. Three days and three nights were they in that wise. On the fourth day thereafter the woman went to them. Beautiful, verily, came she there. She wore a white mantle, with a circlet of gold round her hair. Golden hair she had. Two sandals of silver on her rosy feet. A brooch of silver with studs of gold in her mantle, and a filmy, silken smock next her white skin.

"My welcome to thee, O Mael Duin!" saith she; and she named each man (of the crew) apart, by his own name. "It is long since your coming here hath been known and understood."

Then she takes (them) with her into a great house that stood near the sea, and hauls up their boat on shore. Then they saw before them in the house a couch for Mael Duin alone, and a couch for every three of his people. She brought them in one pannier food like unto cheese or *táth*. Sheer gave a share to every three. Every savour that each desired this he would find therein. There she tended Mael Duin apart. And she filled her pail under the same slab, and dealt liquor to them. A turn for every three she had. Then she knew when they had enough. She rested from dealing to them.

"A fitting wife for Mael Duin were this woman," saith every man of his people.

Then she went away from them, with her one vessel and with her pail.

Said his people to Mael Duin: "shall we say to her, would she, perchance, sleep with thee?"

"How would it hurt you," saith he, "to speak to her?" She comes on the morrow. They said to her: "Wilt thou shew affection to Mael Duin, and sleep with him? and why not stay here tonight?" She said she knew no sin, had never known, what sin was. Then she went from them to her house; and on the morrow, at the same hour, comes with her attendance to them. And when they were drunken and sated, they say the same words to her.

"Tomorrow" saith she, "an answer concerning that will be given to you." Then she went to her house, and they sleep on their couches. When they awoke they were in their boat on a crag and they saw not the island, nor the fortress, nor the lady, nor the place wherein they had been.

As they went from that place they heard in the north-east a great cry and chant as it were a singing of psalms. That night and the next day till none they were rowing that they might know what cry or what chant they heard. They behold a high, mountainous island, full of birds, black and dun and speckled, shouting and speaking loudly.

They rowed a little from that island, and found an island which was not large. Therein were many trees and on them many birds. And after that they saw in the island a man whose clothing was his hair. So they asked him who he was, and whence his kindred. "Of the men of Ireland am I," saith he. "I went on my pilgrimage in a small: boat, and when I had gone a little from land my boat split under me." "I went again to land," saith he, "and I put under my feet sod from my country, and on it I get me up to sea and the Lord established that sod for me in this place," saith he, "and God addeth a foot to its breadth every year from that to this, and a tree every year to grow therein. The birds which thou beholdest in the trees," saith he, "are the souls of my children and my kindred, both women and men, who are yonder awaiting Doomsday. Half a cake, and a slice of fish, and the liquor of the well God hath given me. That cometh to me daily," saith he, "by the ministry of angels. At the hour of none, moreover, another half-cake and slice of fish come to every man yonder and to every woman, and liquor of the well, as is enough for everyone."

When their three nights of guesting were complete; thy bade (the pilgrim) farewell, and he said to them: "Ye shall all," saith he, "reach your country save one man."

XX

On the third day after that they find another island, with a golden rampart around it and the midst of it white like down. They see therein a man, and this was his raiment the hair of his own body. Then they asked him what sustenance he used. "Verily," saith he, "there is here a fountain in this island. On Friday and on Wednesday whey or water is yielded by it. On Sundays, however, and on feasts of martyrs good milk is yielded by it. But on the feasts of apostles, and of Mary and of John Baptist and also on the hightides (of the year), it is ale and wine that are yielded by it." At none, then, there came to every man of them half a cake and a piece of fish; and they drank their fill of the liquor which was yielded to them out of the fountain of the island. And it cast them into a heavy sleep, from that hour till the morrow. When they had passed three nights of guesting, the cleric ordered, them to go. So then they went forth on their way, and afterwards bade him farewell.

XXI

Now when they had, been long avoyaging on the waves they saw far from them an island, and as they approached it, they heard the noise of the smiths smiting a mass (of iron) on the anvil with sledges, like the smiting of three or; of four. Now when they had drawn near it they heard one man asking of another: "Are they close at hand?" saith he. "Yea" saith the other. "Who," saith another man, "are these ye say are coining there?" "Little boys they seem in a little trough yonder," saith he. When Mael Duin heard what the smiths said, he saith: "Let us retreat," saith he, "and let us not turn the boat, but let her sterns be foremost, so that they may not perceive that we are fleeing."

Then they rowed away, with the boat stern-foremost. Again the same man who was bidding in the forge asked: "Are they now near the harbour?" saith he. "They are at rest," saith the watchman: "they come not here and they go not there."

Not long thereafter he asked again: "what are they doing now?" saith he. "I think," saith the look-out man, "that they are running away; me seems they are further from the port now than they were some time ago." Then the smith came out of the forge, holding in the tongs a huge mass (of glowing iron), and he cast that mass after the boat into the sea; and all the sea boiled; but he did not; for they fled with all their warriors' might, swiftly hurried forth into the great ocean.

## XXII

After that they voyaged till they entered a sea which resembled green glass. Such was its purity that the gravel and the sand of that sea were clearly visible through it; and they saw no monsters nor beasts therein among the crags, but only the pure gravel and the green sand. For a long space of the day they were voyaging in that sea, and great was its splendour and its beauty.

They afterwards put forth into another sea like a cloud and it seemed to them that it would not support them or the boat. Then they beheld under the sea down below them roofed strongholds and a beautiful country. And they see a beast huge, awful, monstrous, in a tree there, and a drove of herds and the tree, and flocks round about the tree and beside the tree an armed man, with shield and spear and sword. When he beheld yon huge beast that abode in the tree he goeth thence in and flight. The beast stretched forth his neck out of the tree and sets his head into the back of the largest ox of the herd and dragged it into the tree, and anon devours it in the twinkling of an eye. The flocks and the herdsmen flee away, at once. and when Mael Duin and his people saw that greater terror and fear seize them, for they supposed that they would never cross that sea without falling down through it, by reason of its tenuity like mist.

So after much danger, they pass over it.

## XXIV

Thereafter they found another island, and up around it rose the sea making vast cliffs (of water) all about it. As the people of that country perceived them, they set to screaming at them and saying: "Tis they! It is they!" till they were out of breath. Then Mael Duin and his men beheld many human beings, and great herds of cattle, and troops of horses and many flocks of sheep. Then there was a woman from below with large nuts which remained floating on the sea, waves above by them, Much of those nuts they gathered and took with them. (Then) they went back from the island and thereat the screams ceased.

"Where are they now," saith the man who was after them at the scream. "They have gone away" saith another band, of them. "They are not so," saith another band.

Now it is likely that there was someone concerning whom they (the islanders) had a prophecy that he would ruin their country and expel them from their land.

## XXV

They got them to another island, wherein a strange thing was shewn to them, to wit, a great stream rose up out of the strand of the island and went, like a rainbow, over the whole island, and descended into the other strand of the island on the other side thereof. And they were lying, under it (the stream) below without being wet. And they were piercing (with their spears) the stream above; and (them) great, enormous salmon were tumbling from above out of the stream down upon the soil of the island. And all the island was full of the stench (of the fish), for there was no one who could finish gathering them because of their abundance.

From Sunday eventide to Monday forenoon that stream did not move, but remained at rest in its sea round about the island. Then they bring into one place the largest of the salmon, and they filled their boat with them, and went back from that island still on the ocean.

## XXVI

Thereafter they voyaged till they found a great silvern column. It had four sides, and the width of each of these sides was two oar-strokes of a the boat, so that in its whole circumference there were eight oar-strokes of the boat. And not a single sod of earth was about it, but (only) the boundless ocean. And they saw not how its base was below, or because of its height how its summit was above. Out of its summit came a silvern net far away from it; and the boat went under sail through a mesh of that net. And Diuran gave a blow of the edge of his spear over the mesh. "Destroy not the net," saith Mael Duin, "for what we see is the work of mighty men. For the praise of God's name," saith Diuran, "I do this, so that my tidings may be the more believed; and provided I reach Ireland (this piece of the mesh) shall be offered by me on the altar of Armagh." Two ounces and a half was its weight when measured (afterwards) in Armagh.

And then they heard a voice from the summit of yonder pillar, mighty, and clear, and distinct. But they knew not the tongue it spake, or the words it uttered.

## XXVII

Then they see another island (standing) on a single pedestal, to wit, one foot supporting it. And they rowed round it to select way into it, and they found no way there into; but they saw down in the base of the pedestal, closed door under lock. They understood that that was the way by which the island was entered. And they saw a crowd on the top of the island; but they held speech with no one, and no one held speech with them. They (then) go away back (to sea).

## XXVIII

After that they came to a island, and there was a great plain therein, and on this a great tableland heatherless, but grassy and smooth. They saw in that island near the sea, a fortress, large, high and strong and a great house therein adorned and with good couches. Seventeen grown-up girls were there preparing a bath. And they (Mael Duin and his men) landed on that island and sat on a hillock before the fort. Mael Duin said this: "We are sure that yonder, bath is getting ready for us." Now at the hour of none they beheld a rider on a race-horse (coming) to the fortress. A good, adorned horse-cloth under her seat: she wore a hood, blue and she wore a bordered purple mantle. Gloves with gold embroidery on her hands; and on her feet, adorned sandals. As she alighted, a girl of the girls at once on the horse. Then she entered the fortress and went into the bath. Then they saw that it was a woman that had alighted from the horse, and not long afterwards came a girl of the girls unto them. "Welcome is your arrival!" saith she. "Come into the fort: the queen invites you." So they entered the fort and they all bathed. The queen sat on one side of the house, and her seventeen girls about her. Mael Duin. sat on the other side, over against the queen, with his seventeen men around him. Then a platter with good food thereon was brought to Mael Duin, and along with it a vessel of glass full of good liquor; and (there was) a platter for every three and a vessel for every three of his people. When they had eaten their dinner the queen said this "How will the guests sleep?" saith she. "As thou shalt say," saith Mael Duin. "Your going from the island," saith she, "Let each of you take his woman, even her who is over against him, and let him go into the chamber behind her." For there were seventeen canopied chambers in the house with good beds set. So the seventeen men and the seventeen grown-up girls slept together, and Mael Duin slept with the queen. After this they slumbered till the morrow morning. Then after morning they arose (to depart). "Stay here," saith the queen, and age will not fall on you, but the age that ye have attained. And lasting, life ye shall have always and what came to you last night shall come to you every night without any labour. And be no longer awandering from island to island on the ocean!"

"Tell us," saith Mael Duin, "how thou art here."

"Not hard (to say), indeed," she saith. "There dwelt a good man in this island, the king of the island. To him I bore yon seventeen girls, and I was their mother. Then their father died, and left no heir. So I took the kinship of this island after him. Every day," she saith, "I go into the great plain there is in the island, to judge the folk and to decide (their disputes)."

"But why dost thou leave us today?" saith Mael Duin.

"Unless I go," she saith, "what happened to us last night will not come to us (again)." "Only stay," she saith, "in your house, and ye need not labour. I will go to judge the folk for sake of you."

So they abode in that island for the three months of winter; and it seemed to them that (those months) were three years. "It is long were here," saith one of his people to Mael Duin. "Why do we not fare to our country?" saith he.

"What you say is not good," saith Mael Duin "for we shall not find in our own country aught better than that which we find here."

(But) his people began to murmur greatly against Mael Duin, and they said this great is the love which Mael Duin hath for his woman. "Let him," then stay "with her if he desires," saith the people. "We will go to our country."

"I will not stay after you," saith Mael Duin.

One day, then, the queen went to the judging where into she used to go every day. When she had gone. they went on board their boat. Then she comes on her horse, and flings a clew after them, and Mael Duin catches it, and it clung to his hand. A thread of the clew was in her band, and she draws the boat unto her, by means of the thread, back to the harbour.

So then they stayed with her thrice three months. Then they came to (this) counsel. "Of this we are sure, now," saith his people, "that great is Mael Duin's love for his woman. Therefore he attends the clew, that it may cleave to his hand and that we may be brought back to the fortress." "Let some one else attend the clew," saith Mael Duin, "and, if it clings to his hand, let his hand be cut off."

So they went on board their boat. (The queen came and) flung the clew after them. Another man in the boat catches it, and it clings to his hand. Diuran cuts off his hand, and it fell, with the clew, (into the sea). When she saw that, she at once began to wail and shriek, so that all the land was one cry, wail and shrieking.

So in that wise they escaped from her, out of the island.

## XXIX

They were for a very long while afterwards driven about on the waves, till they found an island with trees upon it like willow or hazel. Thereon were marvelous fruits thereon, great berries. So of these then they stript a little tree, and then they cast lots to see who should prove the fruit that had been on the tree. (The lot) fell to Mael Duin. He squeezed some of the berries into a vessel and drank (the juice), and it cast him into a deep sleep from that hour to the same hour on the morrow. And they knew not whether he was alive or dead, with the red foam round his lips, till on the morrow he awoke.

(Then) he said to them "Gather ye this fruit, for great is its excellence." So they gathered (it), and they mingled. water with it, to moderate its power to intoxicate and send asleep. Then they gathered all there was of it and were squeezing it and filling (with its juice) all the vessels they had; and (then) they rowed away from that island.

XXX

Thereafter they land on another large island. One of its two sides was a wood with yews and great oaks herein. The other side was a plain with a little lake in it. Great herds of sheep were therein. They beheld there a small church and a fortress. They went to the church. An ancient grey cleric was in the church, and his hair clothed him altogether. Mael Duin asked him: "Whence art thou?" saith he.

"I am the fifteenth man of the community of Brenainn of Birr. We went on our pilgrimage into the ocean and came into this island. They have all died save me alone." And then he shewed them Brenainn's tablet, which they the monks had taken with them on their pilgrimage. They all prostrated themselves to the tablet, and Mael Duin gave it a kiss.

"Now," saith the ancient man, "eat your fill of the sheep, and do not consume more than sufficeth you."

So for a season they are fed there on the flesh of the fat sheep.

One day, then, as they were looking out from the island they see (what they take to be) a cloud coming towards them from the south-west. After a while, as they were still looking, they perceived that it was a bird; for they saw the pinions waving. Then it came into the island and alighted on a hill near the lake. Then they supposed it would carry them in its talons out to sea. Now it brought with it a branch of a great tree. Bigger than one of the great oaks (was) the branch and large twigs grew out of it, and a dense top was on it (covered) with fresh leaves. Heavy, abundant fruit it bore red berries like unto grapes only they were bigger. So (the wanderers) were in hiding, awatching what the bird would do. Because of its weariness, it remained for while at rest. (Then) it began to eat some of the fruit of the tree. So Mael Duin went till he was at the edge of the hill on which the bird was to see whether it would do him any evil, and it did none. All his people then went after him to that place.

"Let one of us go," saith Mael Duin "and gather some of the fruit of the branch which is before the bird."

So one of them went and he gathers a portion of the berries and the bird blamed him not, and did not (even) look (at him) or make movement. They, the eighteen men, with their shields, went behind it, and it did no evil to them.

Now at the hour of none of the day they beheld two great castles in the south-west, in the place whence the great bird had come, and they, swooped down in front of the great bird. When they had been for a long while at rest, they began to pick and strip off the lice that infested the upper and, lower parts of the great bird's jaws, and its eyes and ears.

They (the two eagles) kept at this till vespers. Then the three of them began to eat the berries and the fruit of the branch. From the morrow morning till midday, they were picking the same vermin out of all its body and plucking the old feathers out. of it and picking, out completely the old scales of the mange. At midday, however they stripped the berries from the branch, and with their beaks they were breaking them against the stones and then casting "them into the sea so that its foam upon it became red. After that the great bird went into the lake and remained washing himself therein nearly. till the close of the day. After that he went out of the lake and settled on another lace in the same hill, lest, the lice which had been taken out of him should come (again).

On the morrow morning the (two) birds with their bills still picked and sleeked the plumage (of the third), as if it were done with a comb. They kept at this till midday. Then they rested a little, and then they went away to the quarter whence they had come.

Howbeit the great bird remained behind them preening himself and shaking his pinions till "the end of the third day. There at the hour of tierce on the third day he. soared and flew thrice round the island. and alighted for a little rest on the same hill. And afterwards he fared afar towards the quarter whence he had come. Swifter and stronger (was) his flight at that time than (it had been) before. Wherefore it was manifest to them all that this was his renewal from old age into youth, according to the word of the prophet, who saith "*Thy youth shall be renewed like the eagle's.*"

Then Diuran, seeing, that great marvel, said: "Let us go into the lake to renew ourselves where the bird has been renewed."

"Nay," saith another, "for the bird hath left his venom therein."

"Thou sayest ill," saith Diuran, "I the first will go into it."

Then he went in and bathes himself there and plunged the lips into (the) water, and drank sups thereof. Passing strong were his eyes thereafter so long as he remained alive; and not a tooth of him fell (from his jaw), nor a hair from his head; and he never suffered weakness or infirmity from that time forth.

Thereafter they bade farewell to their ancient man; and of the sheep they took with them provision. They set their boat on the sea, and then they seek the ocean.

XXXI

They find another large island, with a great level plain therein. A great multitude were on that plain, playing and laughing without any cessation. Lots are cast by Mael Duin and his men to see unto whom it should fall to enter the island and explore it. The lot fell on the third of Mael Duin's foster-brothers. When he went he at once began to play and to laugh continually along with the islanders as if he had been by them all his life. His comrades stayed for a long, long space expecting him, and he came not to them. So then they leave him.

XXXII

After that they sight another island, which was not large; and a fiery rampart was round about it; and that rampart used to revolve round the island. There was an open doorway in the side of that rampart. Now, whenever the doorway would come (in its revolution) opposite to them, they used to see (through it) the whole island, and all, that was therein, and all its indwellers, even human beings beautiful, abundant, wearing adorned garments and feasting with golden vessels in their hands. And the wanderers heard. their ale-music. And for a long space were they seeing the marvel they beheld, and they deemed it delightful.

XXXIII

Not long after they had gone from that island they see far off among the waves a shape (?) like a white bird. They turned the prow of the boat unto it southward, to perceive what they beheld. So when they had drawn near it in rowing. they

saw that it was a human being and that he was clothed only with the white hair of his body. He threw himself in prostrations on a broad rock.

When they had come to him, they entreat a blessing from him, and ask him whence he had gone to yonder rock.

"From Torach, verily," saith he, "I have come here, and in Torach I was reared. Then it came to pass that I was cook therein; and I was an evil cook, for the food of the church wherein I was dwelling I used to sell for treasures and jewels for myself: so that my house became full of counterpanes and pillows and of raiment, both linen and wool colour, and of brazen pails and of small brazen *tellenna*, and of brooches of silver with pins of gold. Insomuch that unto my house there was nothing wanting of all that is hoarded by man; both golden books and book-satchels adorned with brass and gold. And I used to dig under the houses of the church and carry many treasures out of them."

"Great then was my pride and my haughtiness."

"Now one day I was told to dig a grave for the corpse of a peasant, which had been brought into the island. As I was (working) at that grave I heard from below me the voice out of the ground under my feet: "But do not dig up that place!," saith the voice. "Do not put the corpse of the sinner on *me* a holy pious person!"

"(Be it) between me and God, I will put (it)," say I, "in my excessive haughtiness."

"Even so," saith he. "If you put it on me," saith the holy man, "thou shalt perish on the third day hence, and thou shalt be an inhabitant of hell and the corpse will not remain here."

Said I to the ancient man: "What good wilt thou bestow me if I shall not bury the man above you?"

"To abide in eternal life along with God," saith he.

"How," say I, "shall I know that?"

"That is neither hard nor for thee," saith he. "The grave thou art digging will now become full of sand." "Thence, wilt not be able to but will be manifest to thee that thou art the man above me, (even) though thou buriest me." That word was not ended when the grave became full of the sand. So thereafter I buried the corpse in another. Now at a certain time set a new boat with tanned hide on the sea. I went on board my boat, and I was glad. So I looked around me: and I left in my house nothing from small to great, that was not brought by me, with my vats and wise lets and with my dishes while I was in that looking. at the sea, and the sea was calm for me great winds" come upon me, and draw me into the main, so that I saw neither land nor soil. Here my boat became still, and thereafter it stirred not from one stead. As I looked round me on every side, I beheld on my right hand the man sitting upon the wave. "Then" he said to me "Whither goest thou" saith he. "Pleasant to me," say I, "is the direction in which I am gazing over the sea now" "It would not be pleasant to thee, if thou keepest the band that surrounds thee." "What may this band be?" say I. Saith he to me: "so far as thy sight reaches over sea and up to the clouds is one, crowd of demons all around thee, because of thy covetousness and thy pride and haughtiness, and because of thy theft and thin other evil deeds. Knowest thou," saith he, "why thy boat stops?" "Verily, I know not." "Thy boat shall not go out of the place wherein it stand until thou do my will." "Mayhap I shall not endure it," say I. "Then thou wilt endure the pains of helplessness till you endure my will." He came towards me then, and lays his hand on me; and me duly promised to do his will. "Fling" said he, "into the sea all the wealth that thou hast in the boat." "It is a pity," say I, "that it should go to loss." "It shall in no wise go to loss. There will be one whom thou wilt profit." (Then) I fling every thing into the sea, save a little cup. "Go now" saith he to me, "and forth the stead in which thy boat will pause stay therein." And then he gave me for provision a cup of whey-water and seven cakes. "So I went," saith the ancient man, "in the directions that my boat and the wind carried me: for I had platform oars and my rudder. As I was there then, a tossing among, the waves, I am cast upon this rock, and then I doubted whether the boat had stopt, for I saw neither land nor soil here. And I remembered what had been said, namely, to sit in the sea where my

boat should stop. So I stood up and saw a little crag, against which the wave beat. Then I set my foot, on that little crag, and my boat escapes from me and the crag. I lifted me up, and the waves withdrew. Seven years am I here," saith he "(living) on the seven cakes and on the cup of whey-water which was given me by the man who sent me from him. And I had no (provision) save only my cup of whey-water. This still remained there. After that I was in a three days fast," saith he. "Now after my three days, at the hour of none, an otter brought me a salmon out of the sea. I pondered in my mind that it was not possible for me to eat a raw salmon. I threw it again into the sea," saith he, "and I was fasting for another space of three days. At the third none, then, I saw an otter bring the salmon to me again out of the sea, and another otter brought flaming firewood, and set it down, and blew with his breath, so that the fire blazed thereout. So I cooked the salmon, and for seven other years I lived in that wise. And every day," saith he, "a salmon used to come to me, with its fire, and the crag increaseth so that (now) it is large. And on that day seven years my salmon is not given me: (so) I remained I am (fasting) for another space of three days. At the third none of the three days there half a cake of wheat, and a piece of fish were cast up. Then my cup of whey-water escapes from me and came to me a cup of the same size filled with good liquor which is on the crag here and it is full every day. And neither wind, nor wet, nor heat, nor cold affects me this place. Those are my narratives" saith the ancient man. Now when the. hour of none arrived, half a cake and a piece of fish come to each of them all, and in the cup which stood before the cleric on the rock was, found their fill of good liquor. Thereafter said the ancient man to them "Ye will all reach your country, and the man that slew thy father, O Mael Duin, you will find him in a fortress before you. And slay him not, but forgive him because God hath saved you from manifold great perils, and ye too are men deserving of death." Then they bade farewell to the ancient man and went on their accustomed way.

#### XXXIV

Now after they had gone thence they come to an island with abundant cattle, and with oxen and kine and sheep. There were no houses nor forts therein, and so they eat the flesh of the sheep. Then said some of them seeing a large falcon there: "The falcon is like the falcons of Ireland!" "That is true indeed," say some of the others. "Watch it" saith Mael Duin, "and see how the bird will go from us." They saw that it flew from them to the southeast. So they rowed after the bird, in the direction in which it had gone from them. They rowed that day till vespers. At nightfall they sight land like the land of Ireland. They row towards it. They find a small island and it was from this very island that the wind had borne them into the ocean when the first went to sea.

Then they put their prow on shore, and they went toward the fortress that was in the island, and they were listening, and the inhabitants of the fortress were then dining.

They heard some of them saying: "It is well for us if we should not see Mael Duin."

"That Mael Duin has been drowned," saith another man of them.

"Mayhap it is he who will wake you out of your sleep," saith another man.

"If he should come now," saith another, "what should we do?"

"That were not hard (to say)" saith the chief of the house: "great welcome to him if he should come, for he hath been for a long space in much tribulation."

Thereat Mael Duin strikes the clapper against the door valve. "Who is there?" saith the doorkeeper.

"Mael Duin is here," saith he himself. "Then open!" saith the chief, "welcome is thy coming."

So they entered the house, and great welcome is made to them, and new garments are given them. Then they, declare all the marvels which God had revealed to them according to the word of the sacred poet who saith *Haec olim meminisse iuuabit*. Mael Duin (then) went to his own district, and Diuran the Rhymer took the five half-ounces (of silver) which brought from the net, and laid them on the altar of Armagh in triumph and in exultation at the miracles and great marvel which God had wrought for them. And they declared their adventures from beginning to end, and all the dangers and perils they had found on sea and land. Now Aed the Fair, chief sage of Ireland, arranged this story as it standeth here; and he did (so), for delighting the mind and for the folks of Ireland after him.

[http://sejh.pagesperso-orange.fr/keltia/immrama/maeldun\\_en.html](http://sejh.pagesperso-orange.fr/keltia/immrama/maeldun_en.html)

Sources : Whitley Stokes, Revue Celtique 9 & 10