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LAYS OF FIONN, PART I**

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EOIN MAC NEILL

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THE BOOK OF THE LAYS OF FIONN

DUANAIRE FIONN

THE BOOK OF THE LAYS OF FIONN

PART I

IRISH TEXT, WITH TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH

BY

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DUBLIN

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CONTENTS

AND ARGUMENT OF THE POEMS.

	Text page	Trans. page
I. THE ABDUCTION OF EARGNA,	1	95

Bonan and the Grey Man of Luachair had been slain by Fionn. Their sons, Aodh Rinn and Conan, had made peace with Fionn and joined his Fiana. [Fionn distrusted such reconciliations; and in this story he appears to contrive the death of Aodh and Conan.] Aodh had retired to live in his stronghold. His daughter Eargna alone bore him company. He loved her dearly; and lest he should have to part with her, he proclaimed his resolve to kill any hero who should ask her of him to wife. His special vanity was to pride himself on fidelity to his vows. The wife of Conan died, and Fionn took the opportunity of advising Conan to marry Eargna [expecting his death or Aodh's to be the result of the suit]. Conan went wooing, and brought with him a strong armed force supplied by Fionn. It happened that Aodh just then was away from home. Conan carried off the girl and made her his wife. Aodh, returning, declared himself satisfied with the match. There had been no suit. His vow therefore remained intact, and Fionn's design was frustrated. Aodh returned to the Fiana, and took occasion in Fionn's presence to boast of his unbroken vows. Fionn understood the cause of the boast, and turned it to advantage. He replied by taunting Aodh with having allowed the abduction of his daughter, and having neglected to punish the offender. The truth of the taunt was undeniable. Aodh in his anger could only say that he would kill Conan. Fionn desired no mere feud, but an instant duel. He therefore besought Aodh to be satisfied with lawful compensation for the wrong. Meanwhile Conan had lost his bride. She was taken from him by Oisín son of Fionn. Mad with jealousy, he was not likely to pay compensation for a stolen wife. He refused to pay; and Aodh's only alternative was a challenge to combat. The duel resulted in the death of both heroes. Those who allowed the quarrel to take place are denounced by the poet, who has in mind no doubt the part played by Fionn. It is a story devoted to the dark side of Fionn's character.

	Text page	Trans. page
II. FIONN'S FORAY TO TARA,	4	98

At a feast which Fionn and his friends attended in Tara, Cormac the king, having drunk deep, challenged Fionn to a duel. Fionn put aside the challenge, reminding the king of his ill success in former quarrels. Cormac retorted with the victory of his father over Fionn's father. This opening of the old wound provoked a bitter discussion, which would have ended in blows, had not Ciothruaidh the musician interposed with his chant. Fionn and Cormac parted to prepare for war. Fionn made an alliance with Aonghus the god of Brugh. He then raided the lands of Tara and carried off Cormac's cattle—the usual form of a challenge to war. Cormac came in pursuit. Aonghus alone tended the prey, leaving the Fiana free to face the king. They defeated Cormac, and captured his son Cairbre, refusing to release Cairbre until the king should "go under the fork of the caldron." But lest the story should represent the king of Ireland as subject to Fionn, it makes Fionn magnanimous enough to go himself under the fork at the same time.

III. THE ROWAN-TREE OF CLONFERT,	7	102
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Goll, having gone to war with Fionn, retires into South Connacht, his own country, and keeps guard on the fords of the Shannon. Fionn reaches the river by night, and hears the mighty sound of Goll's snoring, for, worn out with many watches, Goll had at length fallen asleep. Crossing the river alone, Fionn comes up to his sleeping enemy and stands over him with drawn sword. Goll awakes and grasps his spear. Fionn calmly reminds him: "Long since I might have cut off thy head," and tells him to prepare for battle. At this moment, a large body of Goll's forces take their stand between Fionn and the river. It is Fionn now who is at the mercy of his enemy; but Goll repays the debt by escorting Fionn safely back to his army. Then the battle begins, and in the end Goll is forced to retreat. He makes a stout defence, and draws off in good order.

IV. THE BATTLE OF CRONNMHÓIN,	10	106
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The story of the previous lay retold. This is a later version. Fionn has to arm Goll for the combat, Goll being evidently seen as a mail-clad knight of the Norman period. Except for the sleeping episode, which takes a new form, the tale consists mainly of a list of the divisions of the Fiana and their fortunes in the battle. Goll inflicts

CONTENTS AND ARGUMENT.

ix

IV.—(continued).

Text Trans.
page page

terrible loss on them all and suffers none, but is nevertheless driven from the field. The topography is no less lacking in verisimilitude. Fionn attacks Goll from the south, and drives him across the Shannon, apparently as far as "Dovea," now a village in Tipperary.

V. THE BATHING OF OISIN'S HEAD, 14 111

Oisín laments his better days, and tells of the hidden treasures of the Fianna. The occasion is the washing of his head by a woman, possibly a traditional rite of pagan significance. The poet sets it in contrast to baptism.

VI. THE FRAY AT LOCH LUIG, 17 114

A conflict between some of the Fianna and some of Cormac's people. The Fianna are victorious. The cause is afterwards referred to Cormac's judges, who decide in favour of the Fianna.

VII. CAOILTE'S MISCHIEF-MAKING, 19 116

Fionn is with Cormac at Tara, where he is apparently held as a hostage. Caoilte keeps up a sort of freakish warfare in the country, setting loose calves and horses, burning mills and kilns, &c. Then he enters Tara, where he disguises himself as a candle-bearer to the king, and continues the series of vexatious pranks indoors. Next day he asks Cormac to fix a ransom for Fionn, whose release was doubtless the object of the previous performances. Cormac thinks that so clever a champion should get an appropriate task, and the ransom claimed is one or a pair of various kinds of wild beast or bird. Caoilte, the swift-footed, succeeds in performing the task. The list of animals is much smaller here than in the Dean of Lismore's version.

VIII. THE CRANE-BAG, 21 118

Aoife daughter of Dealbhaoth (a divinity) was changed into a crane by her jealous rival Iuchra. The crane lived and died in the household of Manannan; and by him its skin was made into a magic bag, of which the contents were visible only at high water. The poem, which is incomplete, goes on to name the owners of this treasure in succession to Manannan. The Crane-bag is mentioned in the *Macgnimártha*, but the special interest attaching to it is obscure.

	Text page	Trans. page
IX. GOLL'S MALEDICTION,	22	120
Goll, at his last stand, leaves his curse on the House of Baoisgne.		
X. GOLL'S PARTING WITH HIS WIFE,	23	121
Goll is driven to bay on a rocky promontory of the sea. His wife alone stays by him. Without hope of escape from death, he advises her to go back to the Fianna, and take another husband. She refuses to leave him. He complains that he is overcome not by valour but by hunger and thirst. She counsels him to eat the flesh of his dead assailants, and to drink the milk of her breasts; but his <i>gessa</i> forbid him to obey the advice of a woman.		
XI. THE KINDRED OF FIONN,	24	123
A partial genealogy of the house of Baoisgne. Fionn's pedigree here (son of Cumbhall, son of Fergus Luathfhionn called also Baoisgne, son of Trenmor, otherwise called Fionn File) is quite different from each of the pedigrees cited from Mac Fir-Bhisigh in the Introduction to this volume. The duplication of Fionn may arise from an effort to harmonize two chronologies.		
XII. THE HOUSEHOLD OF ALMHA,	25	124
An account of the great house of Almha, amounting to little more than an inventory of its chief treasures and a list of the leaders of the Fianna.		
XIII. THE HEADLESS PHANTOMS,	28	127
Fiacha, king of Munster, holds assembly at Loch Goir. In the horse-racing, the druid Dál Mac Da Chreg wins the three chief prizes with his black horse. Fiacha buys the horse and presents it to Fionn. Three days later, Fionn takes leave of Fiacha. Caoilte and Oisín go with him; and he tries the speed of his new horse against their horses. After a long ride through the mountains of West Munster, they reach a lonely valley in the evening. Here they find a house where no house stood before. Upon their approach, the householder, a grisly Churl, welcomes them. They enter. The Churl calls on his household to sing for the guests. Nine		