

The Conquest of Nemed

From The Book of Invasions

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Now Ireland was waste thirty years after the plague–burial of Partholon's people, till Nemed son of Agnoman son of Pamp son of Tai son of Ser son of Sru son of Esru son of Brament son of Aitech son of Magog, etc., of the Greeks of Scythia, reached it.

Now this is the account of Nemed. He came from Scythia westward, a–rowing the Caspian sea, till he reached in his wandering the great Northern Ocean. Thirty–four ships were his number, and thirty in each ship. While they were thus wandering, there appeared to them a golden tower on the sea close by them. Thus it was: when the sea was in ebb the tower appeared above it, and when it flowed it rose above the tower. Nemed went with his people towards it for greed of the gold. From the greatness of their covetousness for they did not perceive the sea filling around them, so that the eddy took their ships from them all but a few, and their crews were drowned, except those of them whom Nemed and his children rescued by dint of rowing. A year and half were they after that wandering on the sea, till they reached Ireland. They remain in it.

Now as for Nemed, he had four chiefs with him, – Starn, Iarbanel the Prophet, Fergus Redside, and Ainninn. They were the four sons of Nemed. Macha was the name of his wife, Medb, Machu, Yba, and Cera were the names of the wives of the chieftains he had.

The twelfth day after they reached Ireland, the wife of Nemed died; she was the first dead in Ireland from among them.

Four lake–bursts over Ireland in the time of Nemed; Loch Calin Ui Niallan, and Rath Cimbaith in Seimme. The four sons of Madan Fat –Neck of the Fomorians dug Rath Cinn Eich in one day–Boc, Roboc, Ruibne, and Rodan were their names. For they were kept in servitude by Nemed, with their father Madan, before they completed the excavation.

Twelve plains were cleared by Nemed in Ireland in servitude likewise; namely, Mag Cera and Mag Eba in Connacht, Mag Tochair in Tir Eoghain, Leccmag in Munster, Mag mBernsa in Leinster, Mag Cuille Tolad in Connacht, Mag Lughad in Ui Tuirte, Mag Sered in Tethba, Mag Seimni in Dal Araide, Mag Luirg in Connacht, Mag Muirthemne in Conaille, and Mag Macha in Argialla.

Nemed won three battles over the Fomorians; namely the battle of Murbolg in Dal Riada, where fell Starn son of Nemed at the hands of Conann son of Faebair, in Lethet of Lachtmag in Murbolg; the battle of Ros Fraechain in Connacht, which is called the battle of Badgna; there fell two kings of the Fomorians, namely, Gann and Sengann; and the battle of Cnamros in Leinster, where fell a slaughter of the men of Ireland, with Beoan son of Starn son of Nemed, by the same Conann.

Moreover, by Nemed where these three battles won, although his people suffered great hurt in them.

Nemed died afterwards of plague in the island of Ard Nemed in Ui Liathan, in Munster; and three thousand with him.

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Now there was a great oppression on the Children of Nemed after that, since their champions and their chieftains were destroyed in the aforesaid battles, and since Nemed died with the number we have mentioned. Those at whose hands they suffered that oppression were Conann son of Faebair of the Fomorians, and Morc son of Dele the other chief. The fortress of Conann at that time was at Tor Conainn, which is called Torinis Cetne, to the northwest of Ireland. A sheep-land was made of Ireland by them, so that not a venture was made to let smoke be seen by day from a house that was in it, except with the consent of the Fomorians. Two-thirds of their corn, their milk, and their children, with other intolerable burdens, the Fomorians used to demand, this is what was given to them; and the men of Ireland had to deliver every item to them always on Samhain eve {Hallowe'en} at Mag Cetne. For this reason it is called Mag Cetne, for the frequency they had to pay the heavy tax there to the Fomorians; and the men of Ireland had a byword at that time, asking of one another, "Is it to the same plain {mag cetne} the tax will be brought on this occasion?" So that thence the plain was named.

Now wrath and rage seized the Children of Nemed for the heaviness of their distress and the injuriousness of their tax; so that their three chieftains plotted to cause their people throughout Ireland to collect and assemble, so that they should arrive at one place. They acted accordingly; and having reached one spot, they resolved on one counsel, to proceed to Conann's tower to demand alleviation of their oppression from the Fomorians, or to fight with them.

These were their chieftains: Fergus Redside son of Nemed, Semeon son of Iarbanel son of Nemed, and Erglan son of Beoan son of Starn son of Nemed. There were other princes and nobles in that assembly besides with Artur the Great son of Nemed, and Alma One-tooth son of Nemed, etc. Thirty thousand on sea, and the same number on land, was the number of the Children of Nemed who went to that destruction, besides foreigners, wastrels, and a rabble, which they brought to increase their muster against the oppression of the Fomorians.

After they had reached the shore of Torinis they made booths and huts about the borders of the bay. Then they resolved on the counsel to send Alma One-Tooth to Conann, to ask a respite in the matter of the tax to the end of three years. Alma went and reached the fortress of Conann. When he heard his speech, Conann was enraged with the martial prince, so that he got no good of his journey. Alma returned to his people and told them the words of the chief. Downcast were they at hearing them, and they induced Alma to go back again, to ask a respite of one year of Conann, to show him their poverty and need, to bear witness to their inability to produce there the heavy tax of that year, and to promise that it should come to him in its fulness at the end of that time. They said to him further, unless he should obtain the remission he was asking, to proclaim battle against Conann; for they well-nigh preferred to fall together in one place, men, women, and boys and girls, than to be under the great distress in which they were any longer.

Alma went forward to Conann and told him the words of the Children of Nemed in his presence. "They will get the grace," said Conann, "on condition that they neither separate nor scatter from one another till the end of that year, so that I and the Fomorians get them in one place, for their destruction, unless they pay the tax in full at the end of the grace."

Alma returned to his brothers and told them the news. They then accepted it, in the hope that they should send messengers to their brothers and their original stock in Greece, to ask the help of an army from them against the Fomorians. For Relbeo, daughter of the king of Greece, was mother of two of those children of Nemed, Fergus Redside and Alma One-Tooth. Smol son of Esmol was king of Greece at that time.

When the messengers from Ireland reached Greece, Smol cause the nobles of Greece to come and assemble together in common, so that he brought together an immense host of the choice of warriors, of druids and druidesses, of wolves and venomous animals throughout the coasts. He sends them before to the Children of Nemed, and himself joins them afterwards with the full muster of the Greeks, and they all set for Ireland. The progress of that voyage is not related up to the time they took harbor at Conann's Tower.

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Welcoming were the Children of Nemed to them; and this was agreed upon by them after their arrival, to declare war on Conann unless he yielded them their freedom. They send messengers to him about this. Conann was enraged with them after hearing their speech, so that he agreed to give battle. The messengers went back to their people. Conann sent for Morc son of Dele, the other prince of the Fomorians. Notwithstanding, he thought it inglorious to delay answering the battle at once, for he felt sure that the Children of Nemed were not ready to undertake battle with him, on account of the valor and multitude of his host.

Then the men of Ireland sent a spy to the tower of Conann, namely, Relbeo, daughter of the king of Greece, who came in the host of her children. A druidess was she, and she went in the form of the concubine of Conann to the tower, so that she was with him in lover's wise for a while, through the confusion of his mind. A battle was begun first between their druids, and another between their druidesses, so that it went against the Fomorians. In short, every battle which was fought for a while after that went against the Fomorians, so that their people were destroyed to a great extent.

A wall strong and hard to pull down was made by the Children of Nemed near the tower after that, at the advice of their spy; and they sent the hurtful animals the Greeks had brought to their assistance to the tower, so that they breached every quarter and every side of it before them; and the attacking party went on their trail through the ways they made, forward to the tower. The mighty men of the tower were not able to remain within it, because of the strength and venom of the hurtful strange animals mingled with them.

Conann with his war squadrons fled at once, and he thought it ignoble not to attack the hosts face to face. For he considered it easier to give them battle, than to wait in the tower for the wild venomous beasts who came through the walls after they had destroyed them. The attacking host after that secured both hounds and venomous swine, after the warriors had left the tower. They then left a guard over it, and proceeded to the combat. Each of them took his battle-duties upon him on this side and that. After they had been thus fighting together for a while, this was what happened: Conann fell by the hand of Fergus Redside son of Nemed in fair fight. The Fomorians had two valiant knightly warriors beside that, Gilcas son of Faebair, and Orcifanat; and the Fomorians closed round them after losing their leader. They took to raising high their warlike efforts and their deeds of valor, till the Children of Nemed remembered their hostility and their cruelty to them up till then. So Semeon son of Starn and Gilcas son of Faebair were matched as well as Iarbanel and Orcifanat. This was the end of it, that the Fomorians were beheaded by the hands of those warriors who happened to be matched against them.

The battle at last went against the tribe of the Fomorians, and the men of Ireland took to encircling and surrounding them, so that not a fugitive escaped from them. The host proceeded to the tower, and took its treasures, its gold, its silver, and all its valuables in general. They put fires at every quarter of it after that, so that not higher was its smoke than its flame. Its women and women servants, its boys and girls were burnt, and not a fugitive escaped from it.

The Children of Nemed shared the booty of the tower among the nobles and the great men of the Greeks before parting from them, and they were grateful, one towards the other. Now the Children of Nemed stayed in the place of conflict after the departure of the Greeks from them, burying those of their nobles who were slain.

Not long were they thus when they saw a full-great fleet approaching them; three-score ships was its number teeming with a choice of warriors, led by Morc son of Dele, the other chief of the Fomorians, coming to help Conann. They landed in their presence. The Children of Nemed went to hold the harbor against them, though they were worn out; for this was their resolve, not to suffer the Fomorians any longer to frequent Ireland.

Howbeit, although great was the despite and hatred of Morc son of Dele against the Children of Nemed before that, it was far the greatest on that occasion. A hot desperate battle was fought between them on every side. Such was the intensity of the fighting, and the greatness of the mutual hostility, that they did not perceive the gigantic wave of the tide filling up on every side about them, for there was not any heed in their minds but for their

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battle—feats alone; so that the majority were drowned and annihilated, except the people of one ship of the Fomorians and one group of thirty men of the children of Nemed. The crew of that ship arrived back and they told their news to the people, and they were downcast at hearing it.

As for the thirty warriors of the Children of Nemed who escaped from that destruction, the three chieftains that were over them divided Ireland into three parts between them after that. These are the chieftains: Beothach son of Iarbanel son of Nemed, Semeon son of Erglan son of Beoan son of Starn son of Nemed, and Britain son of Fergus Redside son of nemed. The third of Beothach first, from Torinis to the Boyne to Belach Conglais; the third of Semeon from the Boyne to Belach Conglais; the third of Britain from Belach Conglais to Torinis Cetne.

However, they did not abide long by that division without separating and scattering into other countries over sea; for they stood in fear of the Fomorians lest what remained of them should wreak their resentment upon them after the battles that had been fought between them. Another cause: they themselves were not friendly or heartloving one to the other; and then, in addition, they were terrified of the plagues by which the troops of their chieftains and of their men had died before the storming of the tower. So for these causes they separated one from the other. These are the lands whither they went. Semeon with his nine to the lands of Greece—he had gone after the death of his father to Ireland; Britain and his father Fergus Redside to Mon Conainn in Britain. {The foregoing prose account is followed by a versified treatment ascribed to the poet Eochaid Ua Flainn, who died A.D. 1003}