

repute soon began to be felt by the nobles of Ulster, who found themselves no longer able to make head with their accustomed success against the southern provinces. They therefore urged Conor to abandon his resentment, and recall the fugitives. Conor, with no other intention than that of repossessing himself of Deirdré, feigned compliance. But, to induce Clan Usnach (as the fugitives were called) to trust themselves again in the hands of him whom their leader had so outraged, it was necessary that the message of pardon should be borne by one on whose warranty of safe conduct the most implicit reliance could be placed. After sounding some of his chief nobles who were of sufficient authority to undertake the mission, among the rest Cuchullin, and finding that any attempt to tamper with them would be unavailing, Conor fixes on Fergus, the son of Roy, as a more likely instrument, and commits the embassy to him. But though he does not so much fear the consequences of compromising the safe conduct of Fergus, as of Cuchullin or the others, he yet does not venture openly to enlist him in the meditated treachery, but proceeds by a stratagem which, in these days, may appear somewhat far-fetched, yet probably was not inconsistent with the manners of that time. Fergus was of the order of the Red Branch, and the brethren of the Red Branch were under vow not to refuse hospitality at one another's hands. Conor, therefore, arranged with Barach, one of his minions, and a brother of the order, to intercept Fergus on his return, by the tender of a three days' banquet, well knowing that the Clan Usnach must in that case proceed to Emania without the presence of their protector. Meanwhile Fergus, arriving in the harbour of Loch Etive, where dwelt Clan Usnach in green hunting booths along the shore, "sends forth the loud cry of a mighty man of chase." Then follows a characteristic passage:—"Deirdré and Naisi sat together in their tent, and Conor's polished chessboard between them. And Naisi, hearing the cry, said, 'I hear the call of a man of Erin.' 'That was not the call of a man of Erin,' replied Deirdré, 'but the call of a man of Alba.' Then again Fergus shouted a second time. 'Surely that was the call of a man of Erin,' said Naisi. 'Surely no,' said Deirdré; 'let us play on.' Then again Fergus shouted a third time, and Naisi knew that it was the cry of Fergus, and he said, 'If the son of Roy be in existence, I hear his hunting shout from the loch; go forth, Ardan, my brother, and give our kinsman welcome.' 'Alas!' cried Deirdré, 'I knew the call of Fergus from the first.'" For she has a prophetic dread that foul play is intended them, and this feeling never subsides in her breast from that hour till the catastrophe. Quite different are the feelings of Naisi; he reposes the most unlimited confidence in the safe conduct vouched for by his brother in arms, and, in spite of the remonstrances of Deirdré, embarks with all his retainers for Ireland. Deirdré, on leaving the only secure or happy home she ever expects to enjoy, sings a