



THE SON OF STRENGTH

AN IRISH STORY FOR CHILDREN. TOLD BY SEUMAS MACMANUS.

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ONCE upon a time, when pigeons built their nests in old men's beards and the turkeys chewed tobacco, there was a race of rich bad people in the North of Ireland and there was a race of good poor people in Connaught; and these poor people used to have to go to the North of Ireland to work and earn money to support their families. The people they worked for were very bad and very cruel, and the bargain they always made with their servants was that the servant could not claim any wages at the end of the year if he hadn't done everything that was laid before him. And because they offered a big penny in wages the unfortunate poor Connaught people used always to accept the terms. And then, when it would come near the end of the year, there would be some things laid before them to do that would either kill them altogether out and out, or else they would have to refuse to do it, and in that way lose all their wages for the year.

Now, there was a poor man once who hired himself out three times with these bad people; and the first year he went home to his wife with his wages, but with the life just barely in him, for only that he was such a brave man he would never have got through it all and won his wages. But when poverty drove him to it he had to go and hire for a second year, and when he came home at the

end of the second year he had his wages bravely with him sure enough, but his life barely. And his poor wife had to nurse him for six months to make him the same man again; but the third time he came home he was only able to stagger as far as his own door's threshold, and there he fell down from the weakness. And he said the last he had got to do, and which killed him out and out, was to carry a big oak tree on his back for three miles from the wood to his master's house, and he said it broke his heart and took his life.

"When I die, wife," says he, "there is closed up in that left fist of mine an acorn of that oak tree. I want you to open my fist when I am dead, and take that acorn and plant it in the garden; and I want you to nurse that little son of mine, Rory, that you have on your knee; I want you to nurse him, until he is able to catch and pull up by the roots the tree that grows from that acorn. When my son is able to do that he will be the Son of Strength, and well fitted to go into the North Country and to break the hearts of the bad people there; and to revenge me and the hundreds of our poor people that they have cheated and killed."

His poor wife promised she would do this, and then he died. When he was dead she opened his fist and took out the acorn and she planted it in the garden, and very soon a

young tree sprang up out of it. And she nursed her little son till he was seven years of age, and on the day he was seven years old she took him out into the garden and gave him a hold of the oak tree with both of his hands and told him to pull, and he pulled with all his might, but he only shook the tree and could not get it up.

Then she nursed him for seven years more. And on the day that he was fourteen years old she took him out into the garden again and gave him a hold of the oak tree, which was now grown big, and told him to pull with all his might. And with all his might Rory did pull: he loosened the tree in the ground, but it just didn't come with him.

So she took Rory and she nursed him for seven years more. And on the day he was twenty-one years old she went out with him into the garden again, and the tree was now a big one, and she told Rory to take hold of the tree and to pull with all his might. And Rory took hold of the tree and he pulled with all his might and it came with him, and he swung it three times round his head and threw it from him over three miles.

"And now, Rory," says his mother, "you

are the Son of Strength, and you're surely fit to go into the North Country and break the bad people's hearts there, and revenge your poor father's death."

So she baked for Rory and gave him three cakes of hard bread and her blessing, and sent him off to hire in the North Country. And a long, long journey Rory had of it till he came into the North Country; and when he came there he met a man who asked him where he was going and what he wanted. And Rory said he had come to look for a master.

"That's luck," says the man, says he, "for I was travelling looking for a boy."

"What's your terms?" says Rory.

Says the man: "My terms are, provided," says he, "you do faithful and well all the work I lay afore you, ye'll get a pound for every day of the year."

"Well," says Rory, says he, "it's fine terms surely, and I agree to it"; and home with his new master he went, and he got his supper and a soft bed.

And early in the morning the master had him up and took him out to show him his first work, and he took him to a big barn where there was as much corn as thirteen men could thrash in thirteen weeks and gave Rory a flail, and he told him when he would have all that corn thrashed he might come home for his breakfast; then he went away. Rory looked at the bit of a flail he gave him

and then he swung it over his head and fired it away one-and-twenty miles, where it fell upon a city and swept off all the roofs of the houses and the heads of the people. Then he went out to the wood and he pulled up two oak trees by the roots and he made a flail out of them; and he came to the barn and started to thrash, and every time he swung the flail he was knocking a bit out of the roof, and every

time he struck, the corn and the straw were flying and falling all over the country for ten miles on every side; and the people didn't know what was happening at all,



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and they thought the end of the world must surely be come when it was raining corn and broken straws from the sky. And in a very short time Rory had finished the thrashing, and then there wasn't a patch of roof to the barn. He started for home and he met his master, who asked where he was going and what he wanted.

"As I thought it was too early for breakfast," says Rory, "I come to ask you for another wee job to do between now and then."

of them. So, after they had consulted for long, it was agreed that they should send him to the Wood of the Wild Bulls to bring home a year-old heifer. "And if," says they, "he comes back from there alive it's more than we bargain for." So the master went to Rory after he got his breakfast, and he said he wanted him to fetch home a year-old heifer from the Wood of the Wild Bulls. And Rory said he would do that; so off he set, and when he came into the Wood of the Wild Bulls, the wild bull that was king of the others took a half-mile race at him, meaning to toss him to the stars, and all the other wild bulls came and stood around to watch the play.

Rory said nothing, but stood quietly till the wild bull came tearing into his reach and then he took a hold of him by the two horns, gave him three swings round his head, and began slashing at the other wild bulls with him; and he slashed the life out of nineteen



"Didn't I give you enough corn to thrash?" says the master, in wonderment.

"Oh, not at all," says Rory, says he; "I have that done long ago"; and at this the master was frightened out and out, and he told Rory he had nothing else for him to do just now, so he could rest until breakfast-time.

And then he went and he got the people together and he told them about this wonderful fellow that was come from Connaught, and that when he was beginning this way there was no knowing what he would do, for he might take it into his head to kill all

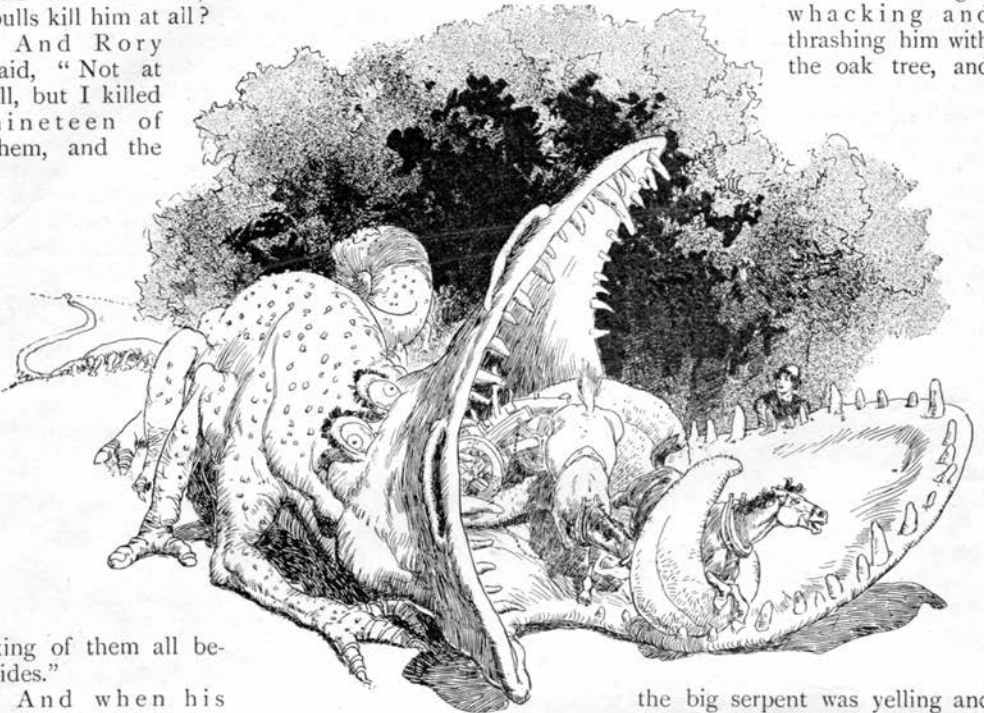
of them before he let him go, and when he laid him down then he was as dead as a door-nail and there wasn't a bone in his body

"HE TOOK A HOLD OF HIM BY THE TWO HORNS AND GAVE HIM THREE SWINGS ROUND HIS HEAD."

that wasn't in jelly. And then he picked the best year-old heifer he could find and drove it home to his master, and when he came home with it his master was in wonderment, and he asked him, didn't the bulls kill him at all?

And Rory said, "Not at all, but I killed nineteen of them, and the

and cart at one gulp, and then he started towards Rory, but Rory got hold of an oak tree he was after cutting down, and he gave one jump and jumped clean on the serpent's back and began whacking and thrashing him with the oak tree, and



"THE FIRST THING HE DID WAS TO SWALLOW THE TWO HORSES AND CART AT ONE GULP."

king of them all besides."

And when his master heard this he went off again and he called the people together and he consulted with them, and they all agreed that if they didn't kill Rory, Rory would surely kill them.

So the best way they thought to get rid of him now was to send him to the Mountain of Oak Woods with horses and a cart to cut down oak trees and draw them home. For no man had ever gone there before and come out of it alive; but the big serpent of the Oak Woods had devoured him and his horses and carts.

A cart and two big horses Rory got. Then he was sent off to draw oak trees from the mountain, and when Rory came to the mountain he tied his horses to one of the trees and he began to cut down. Well, a very short time he was at this till the big Serpent of the Woods appeared, and he was crawling on ninety-nine legs and the open mouth of him was as wide as a mountain, but Rory didn't mind one bit, only went on cutting the trees. Up the serpent came, and the first thing he did was to swallow the two horses

the big serpent was yelling and screeching that he could be heard in the eastern world. But Rory didn't stop whacking and slashing till the serpent begged for his mercy.

"Ye've swallowed my two horses and cart, and it's small mercy I have for ye, for ye have left me without anything to draw the oak trees home, and now it's you yourself that'll have to draw them home for me."

And the big serpent was only too glad to get off on these terms. So Rory got his ropes round the whole oak wood and tied it to the serpent's tail, and then he started driving him with his oak tree; and he drove him till he drove him right up to his master's hall door; and everybody as he came along barred and bolted the doors and windows and went in under their beds. And when Rory had the oak wood safe at his master's door he let the big serpent loose and gave him three whacks of the oak tree and sent him to the mountain again.

And when the people got up courage enough to go out, they got together again and consulted what to do with Rory, for he would surely be the death of all of them. It was agreed that his master should set him to

dig a well ninety feet deep, and when he would be down at the bottom of the well they were to throw mill-stones in on the top of him to hold him down whilst they should begin to fill up the well with clay again.

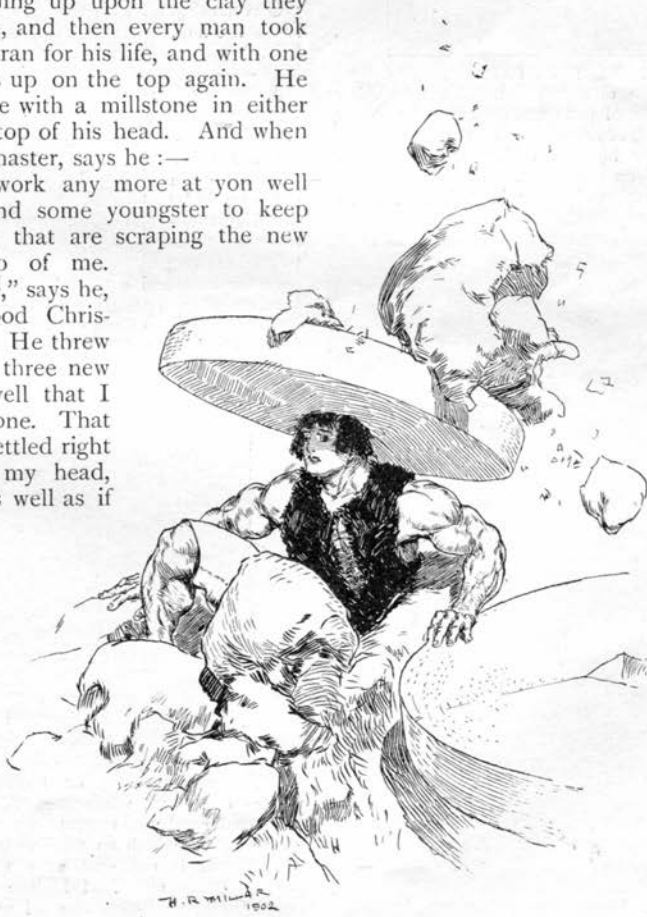
So next day when Rory asked the master what he was to do this time, the master told him to go down to the meadow and dig a well ninety feet deep, because he had great scarcity of water. Down to the meadow Rory went and started digging the well, and they were watching him till he got to the bottom ninety feet down, and then they had three mill-stones ready, and they rolled the three of them on top of Rory, and a hundred men at the same time began with spades and shovels slapping in the clay as fast as ever they could; but in one minute more they saw Rory's head with a mill-stone sitting right on the top of it coming up upon the clay they were throwing in, and then every man took to his heels and ran for his life, and with one spring Rory was up on the top again. He started for home with a millstone in either hand and one atop of his head. And when he reached his master, says he:—

"I will not work any more at yon well if you don't send some youngster to keep away the crows that are scraping the new clay down atop of me. And do you see," says he, "what some good Christian has done? He threw me down these three new hats knowing well that I was in need of one. That one there just settled right on the top of my head, and it fits me as well as if my measure was taken for it. Here's two," says he to the

master, "and I wish you'd put them away for me till this one is worn out."

And Rory whirled the two mill-stones into the kitchen, and after that he never went in or out or round about that he hadn't one of the new hats on him. And the people were all of them very much put out now, and they didn't well know what to do, and when they came together again and consulted some of them said there was no use in any more consulting, for they could not get rid of him, and that they might as well get up and run off now that he was out of sight, and leave the country to him entirely; and every man took to his heels and cleared out of the country. And when Rory came home that night all the country-side was deserted, and there wasn't a man, woman, or child to claim land or strand, house or hill, and he was master himself of all of it.

When he got himself gathered together he started away for his own home, and there he got his old mother on his back and carried her with him to the new country-side that he had got, and he built a castle on it, and himself and his mother lived happy and well ever after.



"THEY SAW RORY'S HEAD WITH A MILL-STONE SITTING RIGHT ON THE TOP OF IT."