

# The Red Hand of Ulster



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## Other Stories by Arthur McKeown

*The Don of Donegal*, Publishing Ulster, Belfast, 2006

*Towards the Workhouse Door*, Publishing Ulster, Belfast, 2006

*Battle of the Somme*, Children's Poolbeg, Dublin, 1999

*Ricky Banks – Music Star*, Richmond Publishing, London, 1998

*The Man from Peru*, Richmond Publishing, London, 1998

*Famine*, Children's Poolbeg, Dublin, 1997

*Titanic*, Children's Poolbeg, Dublin, 1996

*Robin Hood of the Cave Hill*, Children's Poolbeg, Dublin, 1993

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## Contents

Chapter One	<i>Dermot and O'Neill</i>	1
Chapter Two	<i>The Argument and the Fights</i>	4
Chapter Three	<i>The Great King's Test</i>	8
Chapter Four	<i>Getting Ready for the Race</i>	12
Chapter Five	<i>The Great King's Feast</i>	14
Chapter Six	<i>The Race Starts</i>	19
Chapter Seven	<i>Watching the Race</i>	22
Chapter Eight	<i>Reaching the Top of the Hill</i>	25
Chapter Nine	<i>Arriving at the River</i>	27
Chapter Ten	<i>The End of the Race</i>	31



## Chapter One

# Dermot and O'Neill



Many years ago two men wanted to be king of Ulster.

But both men could not be king.

*Draw your picture of Dermot:*



One man was Dermot.

He was tall and thin.

He had black trousers, a yellow shirt and a brown coat.

He was a good runner and a very good horseman.

*Draw your picture of O'Neill:*



The other man was O'Neill.

He was short and fat.

He had blue trousers, a red shirt and a green coat.

He had a big black beard.

He was a very good fighter.

He also was a very good horseman.

## Chapter Two

# The Argument and the Fights



For years O'Neill and Dermot argued and argued about who was going to be king of Ulster.

*“My family has lived here for more than a thousand years. You’re the new people,”* said Dermot. *“It’s our land. I must be king.”*



*“No, that’s not right,” said O’Neill. “There are more people on my side. They want me to be king. It’s our land. I must be king.”*

This argument went on for years and years.

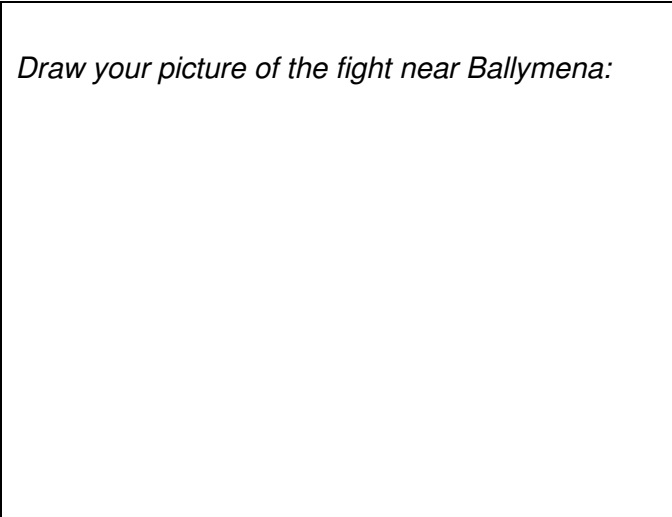
Sometimes their people had fights.

One year there was a fight in the north near Ballymena.

Men fought with short swords and long spears.

Twenty men on both sides died in the battle.

*Draw your picture of the fight near Ballymena:*



The next year there was a fight in the south near Downpatrick.

Some men fought with long swords. Others used short spears.

In the big battle fifty men on both sides died

In the third year there was a fight in the east near Bangor.

Some men fought with long swords. Others used long spears.

This was the biggest battle.

One hundred men on both sides died.

## Chapter Three

# The Great King's Test



Then one day the Great King of Ireland called Dermot and O'Neill to his castle.

*"This fighting can't continue,"* said the Great King.  
*"You must stop arguing and fighting."*

He was wearing a long blue coat, a green shirt and red trousers. He was sitting on a big chair.

The Great King's soldiers were standing near him. They were all wearing brown trousers, blue shirts and short red coats.

Some soldiers had short swords. The others had long spears.

*“Ulster is a rich land,”* said the Great King. *“It has good farms. It’s a good place to live. The fighting isn’t good for anyone. You must agree who’s going to be king of Ulster.”*

*“What do we have to do?”* asked Dermot and O’Neill, speaking together.

*“You must have a test,”* said the Great King. *“The winner will become the king of Ulster.”*

*Draw your picture of Dermot and O'Neill:*

*“Let’s have a fight,” said Dermot. “I’m the best fighter in Ulster. I’ll win and I’ll be king of Ulster.”*

*“No,” said O’Neill. “I don’t want to have a fight. I want to have a race. I’m the best runner in Ulster. I’ll win and I’ll be king of Ulster.”*

*Draw your picture of the Great King speaking to Dermot and O'Neill:*

*“No,” said the Great King. “I don’t want you to have a fight. I don’t want you to have a race. You must have a test which is fair to both of you.”*

*“So what do you want us to do?” asked Dermot.*

*“What sort of test can we have?” asked O'Neill. “We must decide who is going to be king of Ulster.”*

*“I want you to have a horse race,” said the Great King. “You are both good horsemen. A horse race will be a good test for both of you. The winner will become king of Ulster.”*

## Chapter Four

# Getting Ready for the Race



So the two men agreed to have a horse race to decide who was going to be the king of Ulster.

*“Listen carefully,”* said the Great King. *“The race will begin at ten o’clock tomorrow morning. You must start here at my castle. The winner will be the first man to put his hand on Ulster.”*

*“I’ll be the winner!”* said Dermot. *“I’m a great horseman. My hand will touch the land of Ulster first!”*

*“No!”* said O’Neill. *“I’ll be the winner! My horse is the best in Ireland. I’ll be in Ulster first!”*

*“The winner will be the first man to put his hand on the land of Ulster,”* said the Great King. *“Do you both agree to this test?”*

*“I agree,”* said Dermot.

*“I also agree,”* said O’Neill.

*“Good!”* said the Great King. *“Come here to my castle at ten o’clock tomorrow morning.”*



## Chapter Five

# The Great King's Feast

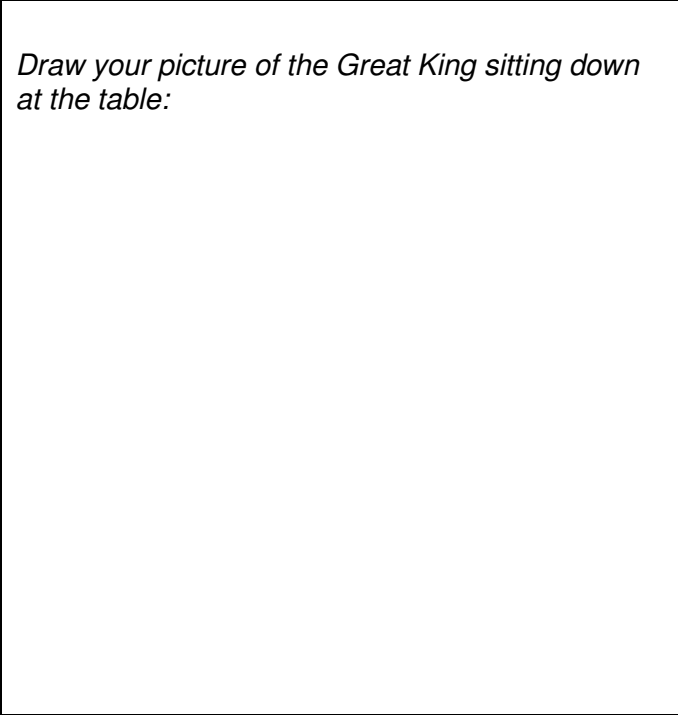


The Great King told everyone to come to a feast at his castle in the evening.

Some servants worked hard. They put tables in the hall. Others cooked beef on a big fire.

Soon the tables were full of good things to eat – meat, fish from the rivers, fruit, lots of cheese and bread.

*Draw your picture of the Great King sitting down at the table:*

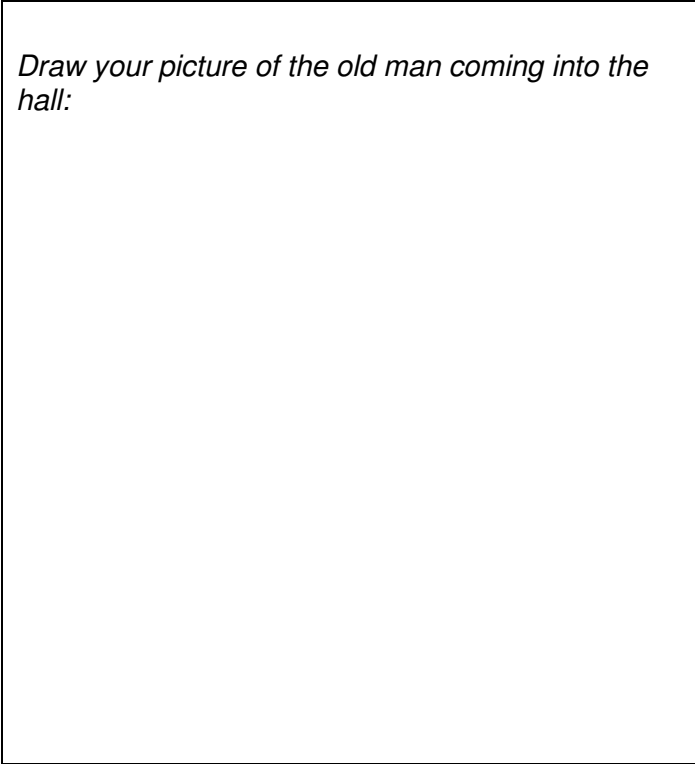


The Great King arrived with his soldiers.

He sat down at the table.

*“Sit down, O’Neill, on my left,”* said the Great King. *“And you, Dermot, sit here on my right. It’s time to eat.”*

*Draw your picture of the old man coming into the hall:*



After everyone had finished eating an old man came into the great hall of the castle. He was a famous singer and storyteller.

He walked slowly to the middle of the big room.

*“Welcome, old man,”* said the Great King. *“We’ve finished eating. Now it’s time for you to tell us stories about the past.”*

The old man started to speak in a strong, clear voice. Sometimes he sang songs.

He talked and sang for a long time.

He told stories about great battles long ago.

He sang songs about the great families of Ireland.

Everyone in the hall listened carefully to everything he said and sang.

*“Thank you, old man,”* said the Great King when the old man stopped for the last time. *“All the people in Ireland like your stories and songs.”*

It was late in the evening when he finished. Everyone started to leave the great hall.

*Draw your picture of the two men talking:*

Dermot and O'Neill looked at each other before they left the hall of the Great King.

*"Tomorrow we'll have the race," said O'Neill. "Soon there'll be a new king in Ulster."*

*"Sleep well, O'Neill" said Dermot. "Tomorrow will be a hard day for both of us."*

## Chapter Six

### The Race Starts

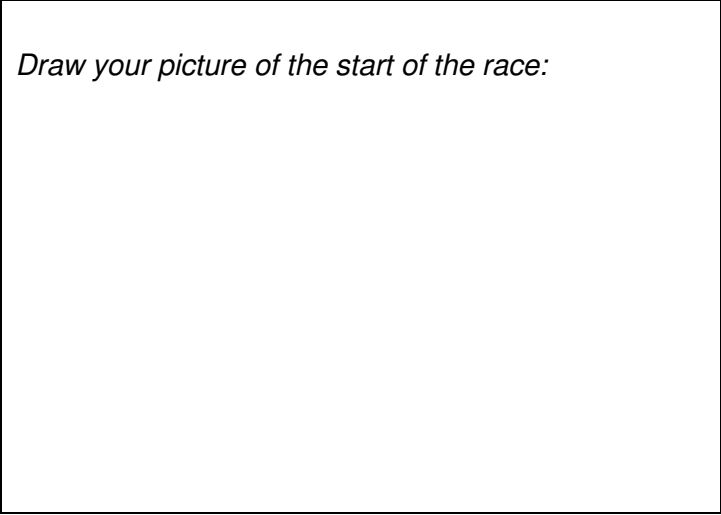


Early the next morning the two men got ready for the horse race.

Dermot had a big white horse. He was wearing red trousers and a blue shirt.

O'Neill had a big black horse. He was wearing brown trousers and a white shirt.

*Draw your picture of the start of the race:*



*“Ready!”* shouted the Great King.

Dermot’s white horse nodded his head, ready for the race.

*“Steady!”* shouted the Great King.

O’Neill’s black horse snorted.

*“Go!”* shouted the Great King.

... and off the two horsemen raced!

The two horses and their riders raced away from the Great King's castle.

All the soldiers of the Great King cheered loudly.

The horses ran and ran, with their riders on their backs.

Dermot went fast on his white horse. He shouted loudly to make his horse run even faster.

O'Neill went fast on his black horse.

The two men and their horses raced north, away from the Great King's castle.



## Chapter Seven

# Watching the Race



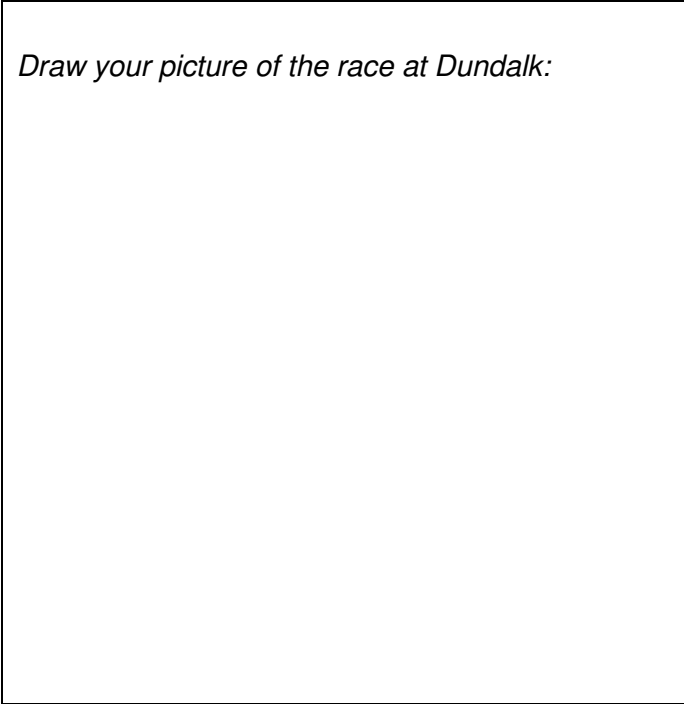
Lots of people came out from the villages to watch the race.

Sometimes Dermot was in front ... and sometimes O'Neill was in front.

At Drogheda O'Neill was leading on his black horse.

*“Who’s going to win?”* asked the people as Dermot and O'Neill raced past on their horses. *“O’Neill’s horse is winning - but Dermot’s horse isn’t so tired.”*

*Draw your picture of the race at Dundalk:*



At Dundalk Dermot was in front on his white horse.

*“Who’s going to win?”* asked the people from Dundalk as Dermot and O’Neill raced past them on their horses. *“Dermot’s horse is winning. But it’s a very close race!”*

*Draw your picture of the men and horses starting to climb the mountain road:*

The two riders and their horses still had the hardest part of the race.

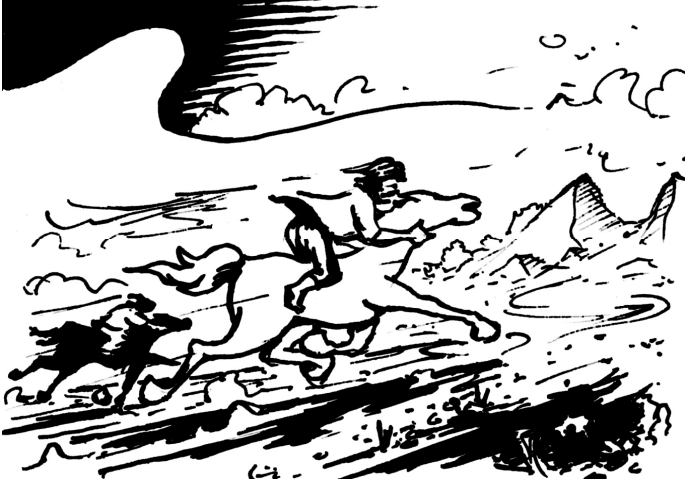
They had to cross the high hills.

The two horsemen were equal as they started to climb the mountain road.

Both horses were snorting and panting as they raced up the steep road towards Ulster.

## Chapter Eight

# Reaching the Top of the Hill



At last they reached the top of the hill.

There was a narrow gap between two cliffs. There was room for only one horse and its rider.

Dermot reached it first. He was in front. Dermot and his white horse went through the gap first.

O'Neill followed close behind on his black horse.

Dermot's horse was tired, but so was O'Neill's. The two horsemen were very close.

Dermot was in front!

Then they raced down the hill. A minute later O'Neill was in front.

Every minute there was a change and a chance for the other horseman.

Both riders thought about the great prize they could win.

The horsemen were not racing for a silver cup or any prize like that. No, they were racing to decide who was going to be king of Ulster!

They both shouted loudly to make their horses run even faster.

## Chapter Nine

### Arriving at the River



Then the horsemen saw the wide river.

This was the last part of the race.

The two men and their horses ran faster than ever.

Faster and faster raced the horses!

The two riders shouted louder and louder as they got closer and closer to the deep river.

Dermot got to the river first.

He did not stop on the bank.

His horse snorted loudly as it jumped into the cold water. The panting horse with its rider on its back started swimming.

O'Neill had a different idea.

He stopped and got off his horse.

He stood on the bank of the river.

He watched Dermot and his horse. They had already reached the middle of the river.

Had he lost the test?

O'Neill took his sword in his left hand.

He closed his eyes. He lifted his sword high above his head.

He had one chance.

He held out his right hand.

With one great blow he cut it off!

The bleeding hand fell to the ground. There was blood everywhere.

O'Neill bent down and lifted his bleeding hand high in the air. He looked carefully over the water and threw his hand across the river.



*Draw your picture of the hand flying through the air:*

The bleeding hand flew through the air.

Which was going to arrive first - the bleeding hand or the panting horse with its tired rider?

## Chapter Ten

# The End of the Race

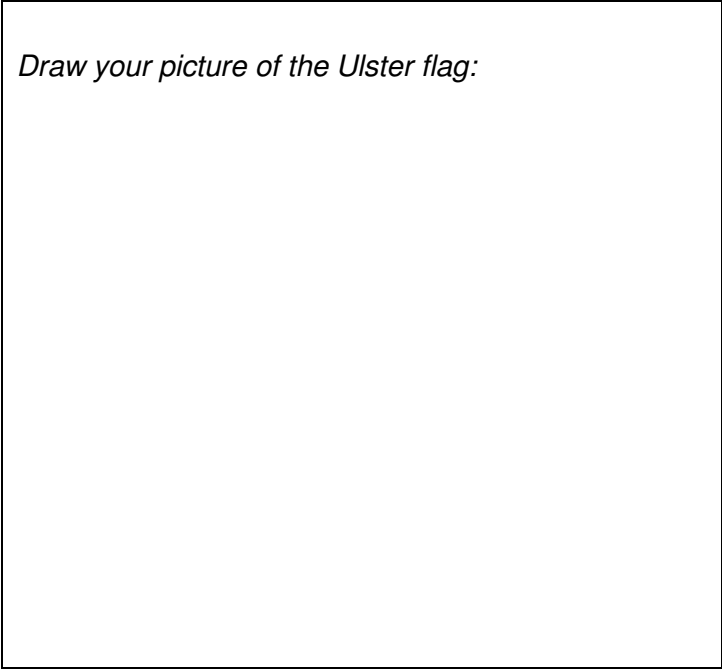


Some of O'Neill's men were standing on the Ulster side.

*"We win! We win!"* they shouted as the bleeding hand of their leader landed on the bank of the river. *"We win! Ulster is ours! O'Neill is the king of Ulster!"*

Dermot and his horse were still in the middle of the river.

*Draw your picture of the Ulster flag:*



And so the story finishes.

O'Neill became king of Ulster.

Dermot and his men went to live far away in the west.

The flag of Ulster still has the Red Hand of O'Neill.

