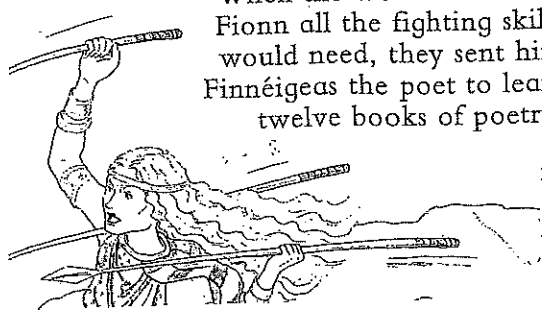


The Salmon of Knowledge

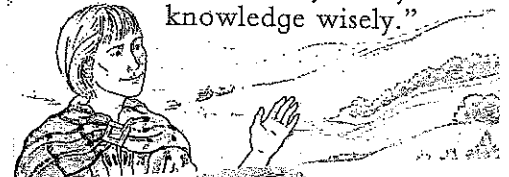
When the women had taught Fionn all the fighting skills he would need, they sent him to Finnéigeas the poet to learn the twelve books of poetry.



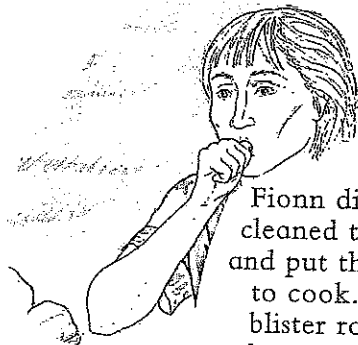
Finnéigeas lived on the banks of the river Boyne. He had spent many years living beside this river and fishing in it. There was a fish in the Boyne known as the Salmon of Knowledge. The person who caught and ate it would know everything there was to know in the world. Finnéigeas liked the young fair-haired Fionn and agreed to become his teacher.

At that time, any youth wishing to join the Fianna had to pass very difficult tests. He had to defend himself against the spears of nine men using only a shield; he had to jump over a pole as high as his head; and he had to recite twelve books of poetry.

The old man looked at Fionn and saw in his eyes the knowledge he had spent so many years searching for. "There is nothing for me to teach you now," he said sadly. "You must go to Tara and take your father's place at the head of the Fianna. Always use your knowledge wisely."



Fionn did as he was told. He cleaned the salmon, lit the fire and put the salmon over the fire to cook. All was well until a blister rose on the side of the salmon. Without thinking, Fionn reached out and broke the skin of the blister. In doing so he burnt his thumb and sucked it to stop the pain. He finished cooking the fish as Finnéigeas returned.



Fionn set off at once to join the Fianna. From then on, whenever he had a problem, all he had to do was to put his thumb in his mouth and he had the answer at once.



So she took him to two women warriors who lived on the slopes of the Sliabh Bloom Mountains. She asked the women to teach the young boy all that a son of Cumhall should know, for she knew that one day her son would become one of the Fianna.

One day as Fionn was learning poetry he heard a shout. He rushed to the river and there stood Finnéigeas holding a large salmon. "Take the fish and cook it for me please, Fionn," he said. "Remember you must not eat any of it."

Long ago in Ireland the king had a special army of soldiers called the Fianna to guard him. Cumhall was their most famous leader. His enemies were jealous of him, so they killed him. Cumhall's wife was afraid that her young son Fionn might also be killed.

