

CHAPTER VI: THE DEMON HORSE-RACE

AFTER sailing a long distance, they came in view of a broad, flat island. It fell to the lot of Germane to go and examine it, and he did not think the task a pleasant one. Then his friend Diuran said to him; "I will go with you this time ; and when next it falls to my lot to visit an island, you shall come with me." So both went together.

They found the island very large; and some distance from the shore they came to a broad green race-course, in which they saw immense hoof-marks, the size of a ship's sail, or of a large dining-table. They found nut-shells, as large as helmets, scattered about ; and although they could see no one, they observed all the marks and tokens that people of huge size were lately employed there at sundry kinds of work.

Seeing these strange signs, they became alarmed, and went and called their companions from the boat to view them. But the others, when they had seen them, were also struck with fear, and all quickly retired from the place and went on board their curragh.

When they had got a little way from the land, they saw dimly, as it were through a mist, a vast multitude of people on the sea, of gigantic size and demoniac look, rushing along the crests of the waves with great outcry. As soon as this shadowy host had landed, they went to the green, where they arranged a horse-race.

The horses were swifter than the wind; and as they pressed forward in the race, the multitudes raised a mighty shout like thunder, which reached the crew as if it were beside them. Maildun and his men, as they sat in their curragh, heard the strokes of the whips and the cries of the riders ; and though the race was far off, they could distinguish the eager words of the spectators: "Observe the grey horse!" "See that chestnut horse!" "Watch the horse with the white spots!" "My horse leaps better than yours!"

After seeing and hearing these things, the crew sailed away from the island as quickly as they were able, into the open ocean, for they felt quite sure that the multitude they saw was a gathering of demons.

A spacious isle of meadowy plains, with a broad and sandy shore:

Two bold and trusty spies are sent, its wonders to explore.

Mysterious signs, strange, awful sights, now meet the wanderers' eyes:

Vast hoof-marks, and the traces dire of men of monstrous size:

And lo ! on the sea, in countless hosts, their shadowy forms expand;

They pass the affrighted sailors by, and like demons they rush to land;

They mount their steeds, and the race is run, in the midst of hell's uproar:

Then the wanderers quickly raise their sails, and leave the accursed shore.

