

CHAPTER XXI: THE ISLAND OF THE BIG BLACKSMITHS

WHEN they had been for a long time tossed about on the waters, they saw land in the distance. On approaching the shore, they heard the roaring of a great bellows, and the thundering sound of smiths' hammers striking a large glowing mass of iron on an anvil; and every blow seemed to Maildun as loud as if a dozen men had brought down their sledges all together.

When they had come a little nearer, they heard the big voices of the smiths in eager talk.

"Are they near?" asked one.

"Hush! silence!" says another.

"Who are they that you say are coming?" inquired a third.

"Little fellows, that are rowing towards our shore in a pigmy boat," says the first.

When Maildun heard this, he hastily addressed the crew; "Put back at once, but do not turn the curragh: reverse the sweep of your oars, and let her move stern forward, so that those giants may not perceive that we are flying!"

The crew at once obey, and the boat begins to move away from the shore, stern forward, as he had commanded.

The first smith again spoke. "Are they near enough to the shore?" said he to the man who was watching.

"They seem to be at rest," answered the other; "for I cannot perceive that they are coming closer, and they have not turned their little boat to go back."

In a short time the first smith asks again, "What are they doing now?"

"I think," said the watcher, "they are flying; for it seems to me that they are now farther off than they were a while ago."

At this the first smith rushed out of the forge a huge, burly giant holding, in the tongs which he grasped in his right hand, a vast mass of iron sparkling and glowing from the furnace; and, running down to the shore with long, heavy strides, he flung the red-hot mass with all his might after the curragh. It fell a little short, and plunged down just near the prow, causing the whole sea to hiss and boil and heave up around the boat. But they plied their oars, so that they quickly got beyond his reach, and sailed out into the open ocean.

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