

HEROES OF THE DAWN

BY VIOLET RUSSELL



ILLUSTRATED BY BEATRICE ELVERY

NY PUBLIC LIBRARY THE BRANCH LIBRARIES



3 3333 01195 8168

398.22

REFERENCE

36153

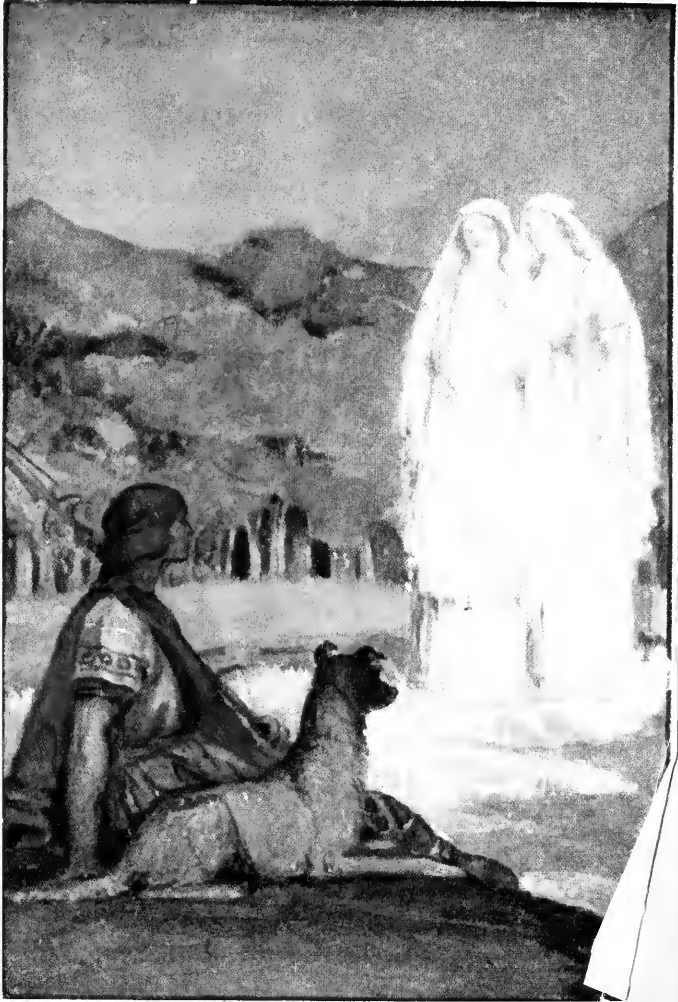
CH-

RUSSELL

TR. TR

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

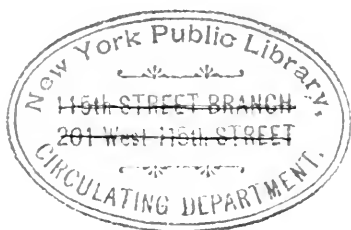
HEROES OF THE DAWN



HEROES OF THE DAWN

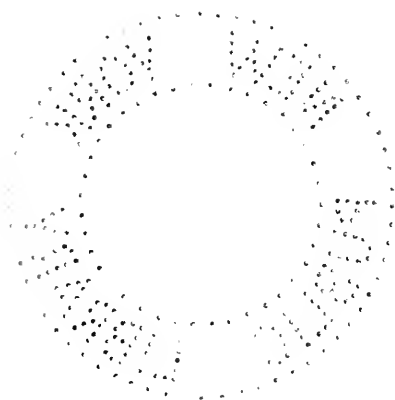
BY VIOLET RUSSELL

ILLUSTRATED BY BEATRICE ELVERY



NEW YORK—THE MACMILLAN CO.
LONDON & DUBLIN—MAUNSEL & CO., LTD.

1914



Printed by R. & R. CLARK, LIMITED, Edinburgh

j 398.22
R

TO BRIAN AND DIARMUID

WHEN you were small, and could not read for yourselves, and the long winter twilights were wearisome to you—sitting by the fire while the shadows played with each other over the room I told you these stories of ancient days, when magic and mystery and the folk of the other world were part of every one's life and every one's belief.

It is because you cared for them that I have re-written some of those about Fionn and his warriors, thinking that other children might wish—as you did—to know something about the old gods so often mentioned in the legends, and about Fionn and the Fianna Eircann.

I would like to think, too, that in these old stories you will find something more than mere adventure or enchantment, for I would have you see in them a record of some qualities which the heroes of ancient times held to be of far greater worth than anything else—an absolute truthfulness and courtesy in thought and speech and action; a nobility and chivalry of mind which refused to believe evil of any one, and was ever ready to praise the good in an enemy; and a generosity which would give to the very end. For the heroes knew that in possessing these qualities they owned a greater wealth than any king of the world had power to bestow, and this is the wealth I desire for you beyond all else.

36153

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE ANCIENT GODS	1
FIONN	9
THE ENCHANTMENT OF TARA	23
THE FAERY HARPER	37
THE CHASE OF GLEANN-NA-SMOL	46
SCATHACH OF THE SHADOWS	63
THE LAKE OF SORROW	72
THE MYSTERIOUS HOUND	85
THE PURSUIT OF THE GILLA DECAIR	99
THE FAERY WOMAN	127
THE ENCHANTED CAVE	139
THE HOUSE OF THE PHANTOMS	150
THE COMING OF THE CARLE	159
THE HOSTING OF SLIEVE-NA-MAN	187

viii HEROES OF THE DAWN

	PAGE
THE DEATH OF OSCUR	202
OISIN GOES TO TIR-NA-NOGE	212
THE PASSING OF THE FIANNA	219
THE RETURN OF OISIN	227
THE SHIELD OF MANANNAN	241
THE SLUMBER OF FIONN	248

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

BLACK AND WHITE DRAWINGS

	FACE PAGE
THE ANCIENT GODS—"Wherever he went a number of white birds flew with him"	4
FIONN—"They found him lying peacefully asleep on his bed of skins and rushes"	14
THE FAERY HARP—"The little man had become transformed into a very beautiful and gigantic figure"	42
THE CHASE OF GLEANN-NA-SMOL—"The whole day he and the woman fought together"	56
SCATHACH OF THE SHADOWS—"The beast changed instantly into a beautiful girl"	66
THE MYSTERIOUS HOUND—"One of the three men lay motionless on the ground"	96
THE PURSUIT OF THE GILLA DECAIR—"A deep clear spring of running water bubbled. Diarmuid walked over to it"	114
THE FAERY WOMAN—"The enchantress, slipping a golden collar on her neck, held her in leash"	134
THE ENCHANTED CAVE—"They seized the heroes and bound them fast"	144
THE HOUSE OF THE PHANTOMS—"There before him stood three figures"	154

	FACE PAGE
HOSTING OF SLIEVE-NA-MAN — “Round his head shone the red light of battle”	200
THE DEATH OF OSCUR — “At last he found Oseur, leaning on his left arm”	208
PASSING OF THE FIANNA — “‘I am the candle-holder of the king,’ the stranger replied”	224
THE RETURN OF OISIN — “We rode on, passing many other islands”	230
THE SHIELD OF MANANNAN — “Manannan put a powerful enchantment on the shield”	246
THE SLUMBER OF FIONN — “Lying on the sandy ground was a multitude of armed and gigantic men”	250

COLOURED ILLUSTRATIONS

THE LAKE OF SORROW — “Where the moonbeams made a pathway on the grass Fionn saw two fair young girls” <i>Frontispiece</i>	
THE ENCHANTMENT OF TARA — “Through the dark- ness came a shaft of flame. Fionn raised his shield to catch it”	32
THE COMING OF THE CARLE — “On the hill-top a strange and wonderful man appeared”	184
OISIN GOES TO TIR-NA-NOGE — “They saw, riding out of the sunset, a beautiful young girl”	212

THE ANCIENT' GODS

MANY thousands of years ago—long, long before the time of Fionn mac Cumall and his heroes, of whom the following stories are written—there lived in Ireland a wise and beautiful race of people, who were called the Tuatha de Danann. So wise was this race that the people who lived in after ages called them gods, and these were the gods whom Fionn and his warriors loved and invoked in time of need; and because some of their names occur very frequently in the stories I will tell you a little about a few of them.

Just as we of these later ages have fathers and mothers, so the gods had a father and mother, and the name of the father was Dagda, and that of the mother Dana. The gods were able to do all kinds of wonderful things; they could make themselves visible

or invisible at will, and they could change into any form they chose. It is said of the Dagda that he had an enchanted harp, in which the music was spell-bound, and he alone could call it forth. When he played, summer would break in bud and blossom all over the land; or winter with its snows and frosts would come; or sleep or laughter or tears would fall on all who heard the music.

The Tuatha de Danann had some very fierce enemies, called the Fomorians, and once, when they were fighting together, the Fomorians captured the Dagda's harp, and carried it away to hang in their feasting-hall. But the Dagda, with some companions, went in pursuit of it, and when they reached the hall the Dagda called to his harp, saying: "O holder of summer and winter, of sleep and joy and sorrow, come to me." Immediately the harp rushed down from the wall and hurried to its master, killing those of the Fomorians who were in its way. Then the Dagda touched the magic wires, and the first music that he played made the Fomorians sorrowful; the women and children, and even the great

warriors, wept and lamented as though all they held dearest had gone from them. Then he played the second strain, and they all ceased their weeping and laughed for joy. He played again, and this time a deep sleep fell upon all who heard the music, and the Dagda and his companions left the hall and went back in safety to their own people.

It is from Dana, the great mother of the gods, that the Tuatha de Danann derived their name, which means "children of the goddess Dana." She is very often called the Mor Riga, or "Great Queen," too, and whenever her people went into battle she watched over them. Once there was a great battle fought between the Fomorians and the Tuatha de Danann, and when the Fomorians were conquered the Mor Riga changed herself into a grey-necked crow, and proclaimed the victory to all the people of Ireland, and to the high mountains and rivers and headlands, singing :

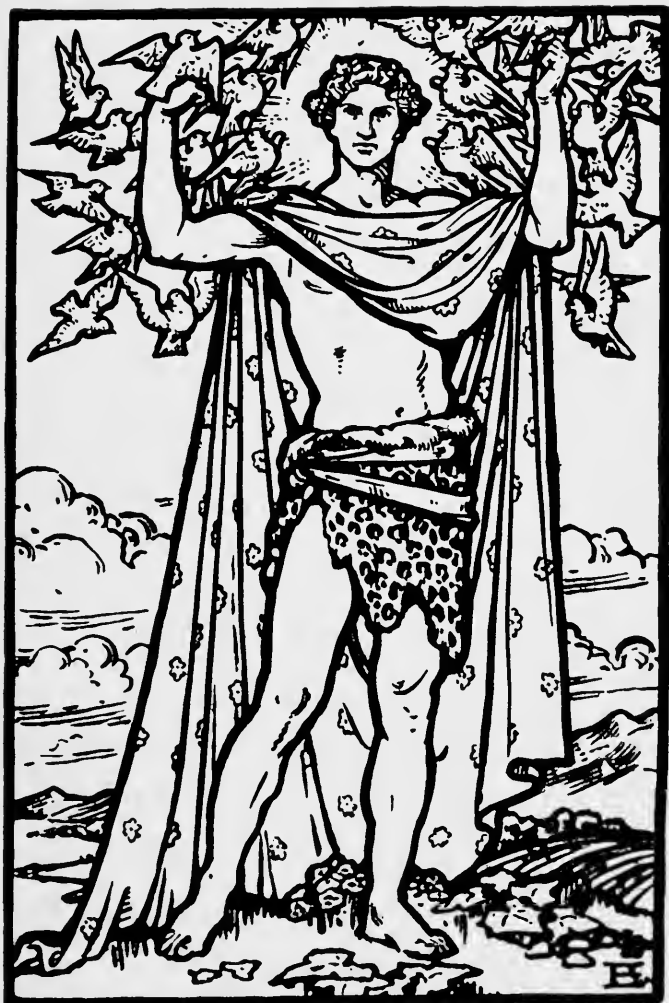
Peace up to Heaven,
Heaven down to earth ;
Earth under Heaven,
Strength in every one.

4 HEROES OF THE DAWN

Sometimes, too, when great heroes were dying Dana would appear to them in the form of a grey-necked crow.

The Dagda had a beautiful son called Angus Oge, or Angus the young. Wherever he went a multitude of white birds flew with him, and the sweet singing of these birds brought love into the hearts of all who heard them. Angus is supposed to have made his home at Newgrange, near the Boyne—the underground temple which was formerly called Brugh na Boinne. The old stories say that three trees grew there which were always heavy with fruit, and whoever rested at Brugh na Boinne and ate of this fruit would be deathless.

One of the most powerful of the gods is Manannan mac Lir, who is lord of the sea. In ancient times, when ships were in danger of being wrecked, the sailors would call on Manannan, and he would appear and guide them to a place of safety. Manannan's home was on a wonderful island far out in the western sea, but sailors, passing to and fro in their ships, were unaware that this island



WHEREVER HE WENT A NUMBER OF WHITE BIRDS FLEW WITH HIM

existed, for Manannan cast an enchanted mist over it which rendered it invisible. Sometimes Manannan would entice great kings and heroes to his isle, where death and sorrow were unknown, but after a time spent there, which seemed to the visitors no more than a day or two, they would return to their own people, only to find that their visit to the faery island of youth had extended over months, and sometimes years.

Two very magical things Manannan possessed: one was a boat called the Ocean-Sweeper, and whoever used that boat needed neither oar nor sail—they simply wished to be at the place they were bound for, and the Ocean-Sweeper glided swiftly over the sea, and were the waves high as mountains it was not hindered in its progress. The other was a milk-white horse, Enbarr of the Flowing Mane, which could travel over the sea-waves as quickly as it could on land, and never get wet; it could fly through the air, too, more swiftly than the strong wind blows in March. Sometimes, when one or other of the heroes had any great deeds to perform, Manannan would

lend his Ocean-Sweeper and his white horse to them, so that they should not fail.

But the great champion of the gods was Lugh Lam-Fada, or Lugh of the Long Hand. When the Tuatha de Danann were oppressed by their enemies the Fomorians, Lugh came riding from the Land of the Ever-Young on the white horse of Manannan, with a light like sunrise round his head, and armed with a fiery sling. He urged the Tuatha de Danann to fight, saying he would lead them against their enemies. So, when they had made all their preparations, Lugh led them out; and Balor, the giant Fomorian king, whose eye of evil either killed or turned to stone whoever it looked upon, led out his people, and the opposing armies fought a great battle on the plain of Moytura. In the midst of the fight the battle-fury came on Lugh, and he rushed out before all his people and with his sling of fire threw a magic ball of light into Balor's eye of death, so that the giant Fomorian died and his people were utterly routed. Then the Mor Riga sang her song of victory, as I have told you before, and peace came to the people of Ireland.

Lugh was also called the Ildana, that is, the man of many arts, because he knew and could do anything. He could write a poem, or play the harp, or build a house, or fight a battle, equally well, he had so much learning.

The last of the gods that I shall tell you about now was Fintann, who was also called the Salmon of Knowledge. Sometimes he would change himself into a salmon, and go to a sacred well where nine mysterious hazel-trees grew, which were called the hazel-trees of wisdom. They produced their blossoms and leaves and nuts at the same time, and as the nuts dropped from the trees to the surface of the water Fintann would eat them, and so he gained wisdom of all that had been or would be. The legends say it is this Salmon of Knowledge that Fionn mac Cumall touched with his thumb one day, when he was a boy, and so gained his knowledge of the past and the future.

At the time that Fionn and his heroes lived, the gods made themselves visible very often; perhaps that was because the people living then believed so thoroughly in them.

8 HEROES OF THE DAWN

Perhaps the reason they do not show themselves so frequently now is because most of us believe in other things, and do not think very much about these ancient gods of our country.

FIONN

ABOUT the middle of the fifth century a very holy man, who was known as St. Patrick, was walking over Ireland with a number of his pupils, some of whom were ordered by him to write down the various events which happened to them as they journeyed through the land, bringing to people a new religion to replace their worship of the ancient gods.

One day they were gathered together on a rath where, two or three centuries before, Fionn mac Cumall with his hero-hunters had often rested, and as they looked out over the plain they saw approaching them a little band of very tall and ancient men, accompanied by huge wolf-hounds. So tall were they that the tallest of Patrick's men reached only to their waists. Patrick and his followers grew afraid as they looked on the old men,

for they thought these were surely the shadows of mighty beings who had lived on the earth long ages before. With slow and heavy footsteps the ancients drew nearer, until they stood before St. Patrick.

They looked at each other in silence, then St. Patrick questioned them :

“Who and what are you?” he asked. “Are you living, or have you returned from the land of the dead?”

“I am Caeilté mac Ronan, a chief of the Fianna Eireann,” said the leader of the little band. “My friends were the noble Fionn, brown-haired Diarmuid, and Oscur the brave. Alas, but few of us remain ; only Oisín with nine men, I and my nine men : soon we, too, shall join our comrades in the Isles of Promise.”

Patrick and his people listened to Caeilté’s words with great astonishment, and wondered that any one could live so long. Some of them were inclined to disbelieve him, but the wise Patrick knew that he spoke the truth, and for many months kept Caeilté with him as he travelled to and fro through Ireland.

As they came to one after another of the places where Fionn and his famous warriors had hunted or battled, Caeilté would stop and narrate to Patrick the history of the place, and tell of the deeds wrought by Fionn and his heroes, and of the adventures which befell them. Then Patrick would tell his chief scribe Brogan to write down all that Caeilté said, so that the memory of the noble Fionn and his Fianna should be preserved to the people that came after.

To make the following stories more interesting to you I will tell you something about the Fianna Eireann and Fionn's boyhood.

At the beginning of the second century there was a famous body of warrior-hunters—known as the Fians, or Fianna Eireann—in Ireland. Of the Fianna two clans were pre-eminent: these were the Clan Basna, or Leinster Fians, over whom the hero Cumall was chief; and the Clan Morna, or Connaught Fians, who were under the chieftainship of Goll mac Morna. Often these two clans were at enmity with each other, striving for the

leadership of the Fianna Eireann, and sometimes one would conquer, sometimes the other.

At this time Conn of the Hundred Battles was high king over Ireland and over the provincial kings; but Owen Mor, king of the southern province, rebelled and declared war on him, and Cumall with his Fians fought for Owen against Conn and the Fians of Goll mac Morna. The battle was held at Castle Knock, near Dublin, where the southern king was defeated and Cumall with many of his Fians were slain. The remnant of the Clan Basna fled to the hills and deep forests, but the Clan Morna pursued and destroyed them wherever they were found.

Fionn, the son of Cumall—his real name was Deimne, but I will tell you later how he gained the name of Fionn—was a small baby when his father was killed, and he, too, would have surely fallen a victim to the swords of the Clan Morna had not two Druidesses mysteriously appeared one day, and carried him away with them to the heights and forest fastnesses of the Slieve Bloom mountains.

There, in almost complete solitude, Fionn mac Cumall was reared—he who in future years was to raise the Fianna Eireann to undreamt-of power, and whose great deeds inspired the bards of this and other countries to sing unnumbered songs in his honour.

Six years passed away, then word was sent to Fionn's mother Muireen—who was said to belong to the faery people of the Sidhe (Shee)—that her boy was safe. In great secrecy and haste, over bog and hill and plain, she travelled till she reached the hut that sheltered her little boy and his guardians, and found him lying peacefully asleep on his bed of skins and rushes. She would gladly have taken him home with her, but the Clan Morna still vowed hostility against any of the Clan Basna who might be living, and on account of her little son Muireen held them in fear. When she bade farewell to the Druidesses she asked them to still protect her child, and teach him all that a Fian should know, so that when he grew older he could take vengeance on the Clan Morna for the death of his father Cumall.

Soon after Muireen returned home it came

to the Clan Morna's knowledge that a son of Cumall still lived, and far and near they sought for him to kill him. The wise Druidesses had foreknowledge of this, and long before the Clan Morna searched the Slieve Bloom mountains Fionn had been hurried south and hidden safely away in the Galtees; but when the Clan Morna gave up the search and returned to Tara this small child, who was hunted so relentlessly by his enemies, was carried back again by the Druidesses to his mountain home.

Though very young, Fionn already showed signs of that bravery and undaunted courage for which he became so famous in after years, and fear was unknown to him. As a child he would go hunting by himself through forest and over mountain, and return to the Druidesses laden with hares or wild fowl; when he grew older he would hunt and run down the swift deer on foot, and stand up unafraid before the fiercest boar.

Year after year passed by, and when the Druidesses had taught Fionn all their ancient wisdom—had taught him also to be noble and



THEY FOUND HIM LYING PEACEFULLY ASLEEP ON HIS BED OF
SKINS AND RUSHES

courteous in deed and speech—he left them and wandered hither and thither through the land, serving the kings and chiefs of whatever province he chanced to be in. During this period he had many adventures, and gained great fame as a warrior, though he was still a lad in years, and unknown as the son of Cumall. Finally he came to the old poet Finnegas, to learn the art of poetry and all that was known of the past history of his country.

For seven years Finnegas had lived on the Boyne, watching for an old prophecy to be fulfilled; and this prophecy was that one day there would appear up the Boyne a mysterious fish known as the “Salmon of Knowledge,” and that whoever caught and partook of that fish first would know all things, both past and present. It was furthermore predicted that one named Fionn should capture this fish, and the old poet, believing that to him the prophecy applied, waited patiently year after year for its fulfilment.

So Fionn had his dwelling with Finnegas, but the old poet knew him only by his name of Deimne. Day after day, as the old man

instructed Fionn in the making of verses and other learning, they watched the stream. Then one afternoon, in the spring of the year, with many rushes and leaps a magnificent salmon came up stream, and stopped in the deep and beautiful pool of Feic, which they were sitting by.

“Surely this must be the fish which the prophecy speaks of,” said Finnegas. “It is more beautiful than any I have ever seen before. Catch it for me, Deimne, for you are strong, and when it is caught, roast it by the fire. But I put you under geasa (vow) not to taste any portion of it ; bring it to me when it is cooked.”

Fionn roasted the salmon, and afterwards carried it to Finnegas.

“Have you eaten any of it, Deimne ?” asked the old man.

“No,” said the youth ; “I gave you my word, and never yet have I broken my promise. But in turning the fish before the fire I burnt my thumb on its hot skin and placed it in my mouth to ease the smart.”

“Then by you is the prophecy fulfilled, not

by me," said the old man sorrowfully, "and Fionn must be your name."

Henceforth Deimne was mostly called Fionn, and sometimes the "Golden Salmon of Knowledge," because the story says that from the time he touched the salmon he had knowledge of both the past and the future. When he wished to divine any special thing he would place his thumb in his mouth, and nothing was hidden from him.

The foregoing is a legend which is told in many old books of how Fionn gained his wisdom. You will remember that I have already told you a little about Fintann, the ancient Tuatha de Danann god, who was called the "Salmon of Knowledge," and who is said to have appeared in the guise of a salmon age after age. This legend seems to be the record of his last visible appearance on earth ; afterwards he clothed himself with the Faed Fia—the Veil of Invisibility—and retired to the Land of the Ever-Living Ones.

When Fionn had finished his education by perfecting his knowledge on the banks of the

Boyne he went forth boldly into all parts of Ireland, without fear of the hostile Clan Morna. Though the Clan Basna was supposed to have been exterminated by the Clan Morna at and in the years following the battle of Castle Knock, yet towards the close of the second century—when Conn's son, Art the Lonely, was reigning over Ireland—we find the Clan Basna re-arisen to greater power, under the leadership of Fionn, than it ever held before. So powerful indeed were they, and so great was Fionn's fame throughout Ireland on account of his wisdom and heroic deeds, that Art—some accounts say Conn the Hundred-Fighter—gave him the chieftainship of the Fianna Eireann; and Goll mac Morna with his Fians, putting their ancient enmity with the Clan Basna aside, placed their hands in Fionn's and vowed to serve him and be faithful to him as long as they lived.

Now, too, came the Fianna of other provinces, who took vows of faithfulness also, and the legends tell us that strong and mighty warriors came from Scotland and Britain and far-off countries, craving to be admitted into

Fionn's Fianna. But before Fionn would admit them they had to undergo many severe tests, demanding great courage and endurance and chivalry ; if they failed in any one of these they could not belong to the Fianna.

As the bodily strength and endurance of the Fians had to be greater than other men's so, too, had they to possess certain qualities and virtues. To the Fians a promise was sacred—no matter what its fulfilment involved it could not be set aside or broken. Splendid, too, was their chivalry towards enemies and appreciation of the brave deeds of opponents ; while their immense pride in noble qualities is portrayed, for instance, in these words spoken by Oisín :

We, the Fianna of Eireann, never uttered lies,
Falsehood was never attributed to us :
By courage and the strength of our hands
We used to come out of every difficulty.

To the Fians the telling of a lie would have been as repugnant, and as great an act of cowardice, as turning their backs on an enemy, which they never did.

Nor was there any meanness among the

Fianna—a great generosity was characteristic of them all. Of Fionn especially it is said he was so generous that :

Were but the brown leaf that the wood sheds from
it gold,
Were but the white billow silver,
Fionn would have given it all away.

Though from the legendary accounts Fionn and his Fians appear to have spent a great portion of their time in hunting, yet they had a very definite work to perform, for they were appointed by the high king to be the keepers of peace in the land, and to repel the invaders who often came from over sea to make war on Ireland. It is for that reason they had so many camping-places on the coast, and kept watch and ward both over sea and land.

For six months in the year, from May to November, they lived in camps, hunting and supporting themselves, and moving from one province to another as they chose. From November to May some of the Fianna were quartered on the people throughout Ireland; but there was always a standing army of Fianna at Tara as a guard to the high king—

we find them spoken of as the “Four Pillars of Tara”—and always there appears to have been a great number of Fians at Fionn’s dún on the Hill of Allen.

For many, many years, through the reign of Art the Lonely, his son Cormac and grandson Cairbre, the Fianna Eireann continued their glad and powerful career, light-hearted and joyful alike in time of peace or in war. But Fionn was now very old, and trouble began to brood between the southern king and the high king—the weak and easily-led Cairbre. The king of Munster prepared to make war on Cairbre, and the Clan Morna, their old enmity and jealousy against the Clan Basna re-awakening, chose this period to desert from the Fianna Eireann, and by one means and another gained the favour of King Cairbre for themselves.

Now the remainder of the Fianna Eireann entered into the service of the Munster king, and with him marched to the plain of Gabhra, which lies near Tara, and opened battle on Cairbre and his army. But the star of power for the Fianna Eireann had set, and though

they conquered Cairbre with his multitudes yet were the Fian-heroes nearly all slain. The story says that of all those who went into the battle only Fionn's son Oisín, and Caeilté mac Ronan, with a score or two of warriors, survived. These, so the legends tell us, lived among the Ever-Living Ones until they reappeared to St. Patrick two centuries later, and narrated to him the life and deeds of Fionn and his heroes.

So, at the battle of Gabhra, in the year 283, died the Fianna Eireann, a band of the bravest and most knightly warriors who ever lived.

THE ENCHANTMENT OF TARA

It was the eve of Samhain, and a bitter north wind was shrieking round the Rath of the Kings at Tara, carrying on its icy breath frequent showers of snow and hail. But the cold fury of the storm did not enter the great dún, warm with many fires and bright with the light from a hundred candles, each in its own bronze sconce, and the metal rims of the warriors' shields hanging on the walls reflected the light in a myriad rays. For to-night the solemn feast of Samhain began, and from all the provinces of Ireland the kings, with their chief nobles and warriors, had come to keep it with the high king—Conn the Hundred-Fighter—at Tara.

The night was passing by, and the great company gathered together were eating and drinking, but instead of laughter and the

cheerful sound of voices and music—as was usual at the feast of Samhain—there was silence ; and deep gloom rested over all, from the high king to the serving-men. Suddenly the graven bronze doors of the dún opened, and a boy, taller than the tallest warrior there, entered the hall. His mantle of skins was white with the falling snow, which glittered on his fair hair and flecked his face with water. His blue eyes gazed serenely around him for a moment, then with confident step he walked up the hall, through the host of warriors seated there, and stood at a short distance from the king's table.

Conn looked at him, wondering who this youth, with the form of a hero, and the face of a young untried boy, could be. Then he called the boy nearer, and questioned him :

“I do not think I have seen you before,” said Conn. “Who are you, and have you entered my service ?”

“I am Fionn mac Cumall,” answered the boy, “son of that great chief of the Clan Basna who met his death fighting the Clan

Morna years ago. All the years since then I have been outlawed by the Clan Morna, but now I have come to take service with you and seek your friendship."

"That I willingly give to the son of Cumall," said the king, "for your father was a man of honour, and a noble, courteous enemy, and in all his life I never knew him to perform an ill deed."

Then the king took Fionn by the hand, and placed him next to his own son, who was called Art the Lonely, and they feasted and talked together.

After a time the king stood up, and every eye was turned towards him as he began to speak :

"Kings and men of Ireland," he said, "not for us this night will there be rest or peace. For many years now, as you know, on every Samhain eve Aillen mac Midna, that unconquerable enchanter, has come from the north and destroyed Tara, burning it to the ground, and to-night he will surely come again. Is there one among you all who will take it upon himself to keep guard over Tara,

and kill this enchanter? If there is I will give him lands and wealth, and to the end of his days he shall never know care or want."

All the kings and nobles and warriors looked at each other, but not a word spoke any one of them. For they remembered former years, when Aillen mac Midna had come from his secret home beyond the Boyne to Tara, and his coming had always been heralded by a sweet, slow music, which had stolen their senses from them, and left their eyelids fast closed in a faery sleep. They remembered, too, that though Conn had always on Samhain eve encircled his dún with a treble line of his bravest men, it availed him nothing, for at the sound of that distant melody they sank to the ground in a deep slumber which only the dawn-light dispelled. Now they all remained silent, while a surge of shame and anger swept over them because, for all their acknowledged skill and courage in battle, they were unable to subdue this strange enemy.

The king sighed deeply, then suddenly a clear, youthful voice rang through the hall :

THE ENCHANTMENT OF TARA 27

“ I will guard Tara this night, O king,” said the boy Fionn, “ and I pledge my word that no hurt shall happen to it.”

A ripple of laughter rang through the hall when the boy stood up and spoke so bravely, taking upon himself the defence of Tara, which not even the most courageous man there would do that one particular night of the year.

The king regarded Fionn steadfastly, and some glint in the boy's blue eyes, and a curious light which now and again flashed and shone round his head, brought hope to Conn's heart that this night Tara would not be doomed.

“ I accept your pledge,” said the king, “ for though your years are only those of a boy, your spirit is that of a hero. If you fail—and many great warriors have failed before—to avert from Tara the desolation that has fallen upon it so often, I shall not hold you less heroic. If you succeed I will give you lands and wealth, and in addition I will bestow on you the chieftainship of Ireland's Fianna, which Goll mac Morna holds. But tell me now, by what means will you conquer this powerful enchanter ?”

“I do not know, but something assures me that Aillen mac Midna will devastate Tara no more; so rest in peace, O king,” said Fionn, with a smile.

As he smiled Conn, and his Druids also, saw a mist-like form standing at Fionn’s back. Gradually it grew clearer, then a most wonderful being appeared, shining with a golden light and cloaked with rainbow colours. For a moment it stood there, then faded away; but Conn and his wise men knew that they had looked upon one of the ancient gods—one of those radiant, immortal beings who, clothed in flame and crowned with stars, are sometimes seen on the sacred mountains at twilight.

Absolute silence and a deep feeling of awe—a perception that some divine one of long-past ages had been among them—rested on every one there as Fionn walked down the hall, and with a strange, distant look in his eyes, as though he beheld something unseen by others, passed out into the night. The snow had ceased and the stars were shining now; the wind had dropped, and only occasionally sounded in weird murmurings through the

giant oak-trees on one side of the rath. For a few minutes Fionn stood gazing upwards at the starry sky, wondering at the curious exultation and sense of power which possessed him ; then, as he felt a slight touch on his arm, he started, and looking down saw a man of the Fianna standing by his side, with spear and shield in his hands.

“ Have you come to keep guard with me ? ” asked Fionn. “ I have given my word to the king that I alone will watch this night, and I cannot break my word.”

“ Nay,” answered the man ; “ it is not I who would ask the son of Cumall to break his word. I am Fiacha mac Congha, and your father was foster-father to me in my youth—for his sake I would help his son. Though the Invisible Ones may aid you this night, yet have I here with me a shield and spear of power which may be of some use to you in the coming encounter. The shield was fashioned by Culain, smith of the Tuatha de Danann ; the spear was forged by him also, and a wrong cast never yet was made by it.”

“ I thank you,” said Fionn, “ it was a kindly and courteous deed to bring these to me.”

“ One other thing there is,” said Fiacha, “ when you hear that sweet faery music sounding, strip from the spear-head its sheath and place the weapon to your forehead ; in its blade is concealed a deadly power that will aid you to overcome the trance-like sleep the enchanter’s melody causes. Perhaps the spear may move and struggle in your hand, as though some spirit was imprisoned in it ; but have no fear, it is only a desire for battle that moves it.”

He turned to leave Fionn, then came back and looked into the boy’s face :

“ There is a light in your eyes to-night, boy,” he continued, “ which recalls to my mind all the high thoughts and noble dreams of my youth. Of those dreams and thoughts what fulfilment is there ? Neither in song nor story will my name go down to my children’s children as a doer of noble deeds, or of one who has conquered evil powers ; my days have been spent in the performance of little things.”

“ He who does his day’s work of little

things," said the boy, "is often nobler than he who has wrought great deeds."

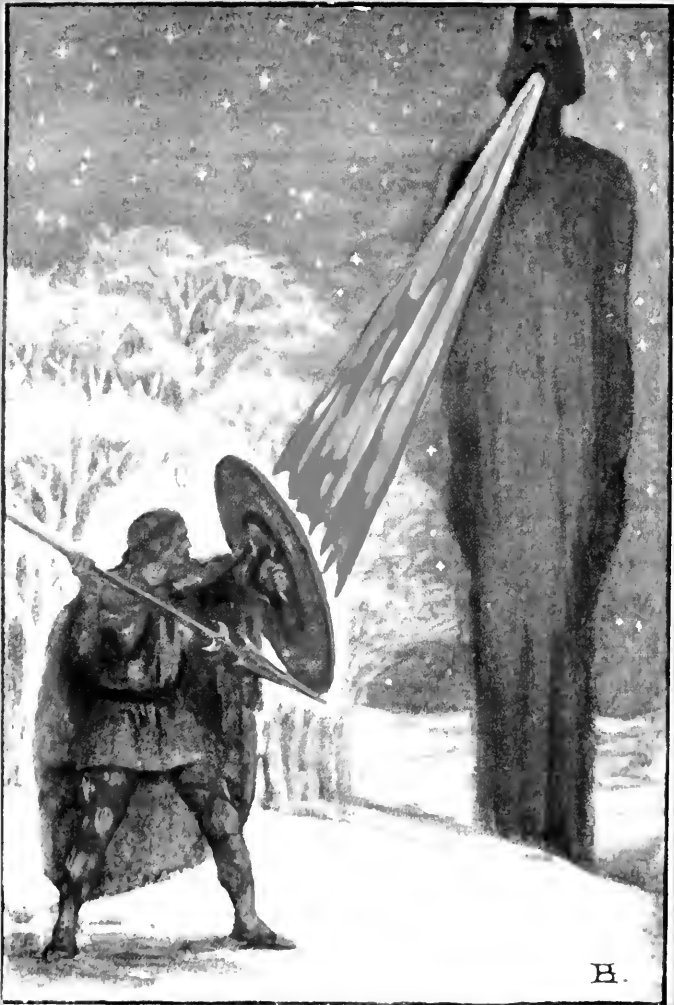
"You speak," said Fiacha, "with a wisdom which I thought only the old possessed; a wisdom taught by much suffering and many failures," then with slow footsteps he left Fionn and returned to the banqueting hall.

In loneliness—except for a huge silver-grey hound which accompanied him—Fionn paced round the rath. Three times he had accomplished its circuit, when the dog by his side lifted its head and howled mournfully, and shivered as though overcome by some dreadful terror. Fionn placed his hand on the hound, and spoke comfortingly to it; then looked intently into the darkness to see what thing of fear was approaching. He could see nothing, and resumed his steady pacing. Soon, however, a faint, low music fell on his ears, and he stood listening to it. So sweet, so wonderful was it, that it placed an enchantment on his senses, and only when he began to feel sleep overpowering him did he realize that this was the music of the enchanter Aillen mac Midna, who was coming to destroy Tara.

Then he stripped the sheath from the spear-head, and held the shining blade to the centre of his forehead ; as he did so the enchantment fell from him, and the strange power hidden in the blade filled him with a new fearlessness and strength.

Now within the dún there was silence ; listening to the soft, delicate music one after another of the warriors and kings had slipped from their seats and lay on the floor, wrapped in a deep slumber. Even the Druids were powerless to resist that sleep-compelling melody. Their symbols of power dropped from their hands as they, too, fell to the floor. In all that great rath there was not one soul awake, except the young champion who kept watch ; even warriors, wounded almost to death and racked with pain, slumbered peacefully.

Nearer and nearer the music came, then ceased ; but Fionn, gazing steadily before him, became aware of a gigantic figure standing some distance away, like a darker blot on the starlit darkness of the night. The boy gripped his spear with his brave right hand, holding his



H.

THE WARRIOR AND THE SHADOWY FIGURE
ILLUSTRATED BY J. H. W. H.



shield firmly with his left. Then through the darkness came a shaft of flame, blown from the enchanter's mouth, and Fionn raised his shield to catch it. But the shield changed to a four-folded impenetrable mantle—woven from the blue of air, the green of earth, the crimson of fire, and the purple of ocean—which caught the magician's fire-blast and scattered it on every side in showers of sparks which did no evil. Again and again Aillen mac Midna blew his venomous shafts, and each time the mantle diverted them and rendered them harmless. At last Aillen knew that some one, who possessed a greater magic than his, was defending Tara that night, and full of baffled fury he turned and fled.

When Fionn saw that the enchanter was put to flight, he descended from the high bank of the rath and pursued him. Many miles he went, and when he splashed through the rippling waters of the Boyne he was close on the heels of the magician. At length Fionn called out: "O Aillen mac Midna, turn your face to me. Let it not be said that death shamefully overtook you in the back, as you

fled from a boy"; but Aillen still continued his flight. Then Fionn poised his spear—which for a long time had struggled in his hand, striving to free itself—and with all the strength of his arm threw it; and so great was the force with which he sent it hurtling through the air that it pierced straight through the magician and into a tree beyond. A few yards further Aillen ran, then on the verge of a pine forest stumbled and fell, and when Fionn reached him he was dead.

A wave of exhaustion and weariness swept over the boy as he looked on the dead body of the enchanter, and gathering a quantity of fragrant pine-needles together to make a couch he sank down on it, and was soon fast asleep, lulled by the music of the wind murmuring through the trees.

In the morning, as the cold grey dawn lightened the eastern sky, Fionn woke and sat up, wondering where he was. Sleep had erased from his memory all the events of the preceding night, but as he rose to his feet his eyes fell on Aillen mac Midna, lying face downwards in the long grass; then remembrance returned to

him, and with it the thought that he must hasten and tell the king that henceforth Tara would never again be destroyed by the magician.

He washed his face at the little stream flowing through the forest, and made a scanty breakfast from some nuts and late blackberries he found in a sheltered hollow, then he began to retrace his way to Tara, taking the head of Aillen in a satchel as proof to Conn that he was really dead.

By noon he had come within sight of the rath of Tara, and saw many people moving about on its green rampart. As he drew nearer Conn, with a great number of his warriors, came out and greeted him with joy, asking him many questions concerning the magician.

“He will trouble you no more,” said Fionn, “and in proof of that I have brought his head to Tara,” and drawing the head by its long black hair out of the bag, he placed it on the ground at the king’s feet.

“Indeed throughout Ireland there is none to equal you, son of Cumall,” said Conn, “and in the presence of all her kings and champions

I will confer the chieftainship of the Fianna on you, as I have promised, and whatever wish or desire you have I will fulfil it. I name you also the chief champion of Ireland, and wherever you go honour shall be given to you as such."

They returned to the dún, and Conn gave orders that a banquet should be prepared, to celebrate Fionn's great feat. When the feast was ready he commanded his trumpeters to sound their trumpets, and as soon as every one was assembled in the great banqueting hall of the dún the king placed Fionn in the seat belonging to the chief of Ireland's Fianna, and all the Fians, even the deposed chief, Goll mac Morna, placed their hands in Fionn's, and vowed to be faithful and true to him as long as they lived.

So, to the day of his death, which was not till many, many years later, Fionn mac Cumall remained in command of the Fianna, and was the greatest and wisest chief the Fians ever had.

THE FAERY HARPER

EARLY one April morning Fionn stood at the door of his dún on the Hill of Allen, and looked over the sunlit orchards and meadows stretching far away before him. The apple-trees were already covered with a pink and white surge of blossom, and everywhere birds were singing joyous songs to the sun. A great gladness rose in Fionn's heart as he listened, and he too was beginning to sing when a robin flew down before him, and chirped merrily up into his face.

“What is the word you are saying, little bird?” asked Fionn, stretching out his hand.

The robin hopped up and perched fearlessly on Fionn's hand, chirping again. And Fionn, who, from the time he had touched the Salmon of Wisdom, had the power—when he chose to exercise it—of understanding the minds of all

creatures, from the bird flying in the air to the wild beast creeping stealthily through the forest, knew that the robin said :

“Follow me, follow me, over hill and through wood, to a place where the Bright Ones dwell.”

“Surely I will, little red-breast,” said Fionn, stroking its feathers gently with one finger. “Wait for me in yonder apple-tree.”

He watched the robin fly to a branch, then blew a call on his silver hunting-horn. At the sound some Fians came running from the dún, but Fionn chose only Oscur, Caeilté, and two other Fians to accompany him.

Through the day they followed the robin southward, and the sun was near its setting when they found themselves on the side of Slieve-na-man, and there the robin disappeared.

“What purpose we had in running after that bird all day I do not know,” complained Caeilté. “Now it has deserted us, and we are likely to be not only houseless, but supperless, to-night.”

“It would not be the first time we lacked

food and shelter," Fionn replied. "But do not be uneasy, Caeilté; Flann and Conal will soon build a hut, and wild fowl is plentiful among the reeds in the pool down there. In the meantime we will rest ourselves on this pleasant hillside."

He sat down on the grass, and Oseur and Caeilté willingly lay down a little distance away. They were silent, half listening to the songs the blackbirds and thrushes sang, half dreaming of the Ever-Living Ones who dwell in a beautiful home in the heart of the hills. Fionn remembered he too was akin to them, for his mother belonged to the ancient Tuatha de Danann race. Then suddenly a most sweet and perfect music sounded through the air, and almost lulled them to sleep. But Fionn roused himself, and looked round.

"Do you hear that, Caeilté?" said Fionn. "Seek the minstrel and bring him to me, for certainly we have none who can play the harp like that."

Caeilté rose to his feet, and gazed down the hill and up the hill.

"The music must be made by invisible

hands, O Fionn," he said. "Now it sounds here, and now it sounds there, and again it encircles us, but still I do not see the minstrel. Perhaps it is Angus Oge playing on his lyre in the heart of the mountain, or some other great harper of the Sidhe."

A little laugh echoed from behind Fionn's back, and he turned sharply round. There, standing a short distance from him, was a very small man, so small that he reached only half-way to Fionn's knee. He stood leaning on his little harp, which was almost as big as himself, and smiled up into Fionn's face. Long bright yellow hair he had, and his eyes were blue as a cloudless summer sky.

"Who are you, little man," asked Fionn, "and where did you come from?"

"Cnu Deireoil, or the Little Nut of Melody, is my name," he answered, "and out of Slieve-na-man I come. From the place of the Sidhe I come to you; a place where there is abundance of ale and mead and food, for what is eaten one day is there the next, as though it had never been touched."

"A fair and wonderful place you come

from," said Fionn; "but if you will leave it and stay with me many precious things shall be yours, and my friendship too, for well I like your playing. It brings back to my mind many dreams and thoughts of noble deeds I had as a boy; dreams and thoughts which the hurrying years have somewhat clouded."

"For the sake of your friendship alone I will stay with you to the end of your days," said Cnu Deireoil, placing his little hand in Fionn's.

"Tell me now," said Fionn, "what ancient harper of the Deathless Ones instructed you in your art, and whose son are you?"

"I am the son of Lu Lam-Fada," said the little man. "After the battle of Moytura, when Balor of the Evil Eye and his people were conquered by the Tuatha de Danann, Lu played to his people—a most marvellous strain of joy and beauty and gladness—and out of the music he played I was born. Whoever listens to my harping too will have gladness and beauty around them, and no evil will come near them."

Fionn listened to his words and wondered;

then suddenly he sprang to his feet, for it seemed to him that the little man had become transformed into a very beautiful and gigantic figure, with a face that shone like the sun, and opalescent colours gleamed round him. Then music sounded again through the quiet evening air, and Fionn saw that Cnu Deireoil was still before him. But ever after that Fionn believed that the little harper was one of the children of Dana, and that for some purpose of his own he had chosen to show himself to Fionn, and become one of his men.

The next day the Fians returned to their home on the Hill of Allen, and Cnu Deireoil accompanied them. Nor would Fionn ever make any journey afterwards without his little harper, and in stormy weather, or when Cnu Deireoil grew tired, Fionn would pick him up and carry him under his mantle; for the chief of the Fians possessed a very noble and kindly heart, and always showed a great gentleness and courtesy to any one smaller and weaker than himself.

Cnu Deireoil was a great wonder to the giant warriors of Fionn, who had never seen



THE LITTLE MAN HAD BECOME TRANSFORMED INTO A VERY
BEAUTIFUL AND GIGANTIC FIGURE

any one so small before ; but when he played they did not remember his smallness, they listened only to his music, for such sweet harping had never been heard by them hitherto. From every part of Ireland the musicians of the Fianna came to him to be instructed, and he taught them gentle faery melodies, and in the whole of Ireland there were no minstrels, except those of the Fianna, who could play such music.

“Little Nut of Melody,” said Fionn to him one day, “you are far from your own people, and must often be very lonely. All my men have wives but you, and my wish is to find a fair and gentle woman for you.”

“I do not want any wife at all,” said the little man hastily. He was greatly alarmed lest Fionn should bestow on him one of the big tall women of the Fianna.

“I can tell you where there is a woman of his own race who would keep loneliness away from him,” said one of the Fians. “She lives in a house of the Sidhe in Munster, and her name is Blaithnait. She is wise too, and is a revealer of the future.”

Fionn was delighted when he heard this, and said he would go to find her at once. So he gathered a good company of his men together, and travelled straightway to the home of the Sidhe where Blaithnait lived. Cnu Deireoil went with him also—he did not object to a wife belonging to his own people—for Fionn said that by his music he could weave spells round Blaithnait, and bring her forth. So one moonlit night, when everything was sleeping except the owls and bats, Cnu Deireoil sat on the faery mound and played a melody which had never been heard on earth before, and as the music sounded over the mountains and through the valleys a hidden door in the hillside opened, and a beautiful little faery maiden came forth and walked over the grass to Cnu Deireoil. Then she and the little man went down to the tents in the valley where the Fians were resting, and until the end of Fionn's days they were both with him. When good was coming to the Fianna they would know and tell it, and when evil was coming they would not conceal it. But at the death of Fionn, Blaithnait and Cnu

Deireoil returned to their own people; and even now, all these centuries afterwards, if you are sitting on the side of Slieve-na-man in the twilight, you will hear a sweet and sorrowful strain coming from the hillside, where Cnu Deireoil still laments on his harp for the death of the most noble and generous chief of the Fianna.

THE CHASE OF GLEANN-NA-SMOL

I

A THICK white sea-mist lay like a woolly fleece over Dublin and had drifted inland as far as Gleann-na-smol—the Glen of the Thrushes—and Fionn, glancing outside the door of his hunting-cabin, thought regretfully of the plan he had formed overnight for a deer-hunt, and how little prospect there seemed of its fulfilment this morning, when objects only a few yards distant were completely hidden by the mist. Still, he remembered many a good day that had begun with a misty morning, and calling Oisín, he told him to waken the rest of the hunting-party and leash the hounds, he himself taking his two favourite hounds, Bran and Sgeolan.

They climbed the hill above the glen, stumbling over the rough, narrow paths made

by mountain cattle ; for, between the darkness of the early autumn morning and the fog they could not see plainly where they were going. Then, as the mist lifted a little, Fionn bade them unleash the hounds, and soon the Fians knew, by the excited yelping and barking of their dogs, that they had started something from its lair in the tall bracken and hazel-bushes growing near.

Soon a curiously marked deer, with one side all white, and the other all black, flashed by them, and the Fians followed on its track. For many hours they continued the chase, but even Bran, the swiftest of all the Fians' hounds, could not overtake the deer, and when the darkness of night came on the Fians lost all trace of their dogs and the hunted animal, nor did they quite know in what part of the country they were.

They were very perplexed, not knowing which way to go in order to find their hounds, and Conan mac Morna, who was very cross, began to abuse Fionn.

“It would have been better for me to have stopped in my bed this day,” said Conan,

“instead of trailing through the country at your heels, who haven't as much sense as would enable you to keep your dogs with you. Although people talk of your wisdom and foreknowledge, it's little enough I see of it, and I think I've twice as much myself. Indeed I think, too, that I should make a much better chief of the Fianna than you do, and it is a perpetual wonder to me that the Fians do not depose you, and elect me in your place.”

Fionn and all his party were tired and hungry, but they shouted with laughter at Conan. He was regarded as the jester of the Fianna Eireann, and no matter how rude and scoffing his speeches were, no one heeded them. Then, as there was still no sign of the dogs returning, Oisín said to Fionn :

“Can you not divine for us, father, where they have gone or what has happened to them?”

Fionn placed his thumb of knowledge to his mouth, and after a short time answered :

“Alas, of all our brave and sweet-tongued dogs who followed the deer only Bran will return to us !”

The Fians were in deep and silent despair

when they heard Fionn speak with such certainty. The loss of their hounds would be a great calamity, for they had brought with them only the best trained and the swiftest. Even Conan was silent, then he burst out :

“Never yet, O Fionn, have I been out with you that you did not get me into some trouble or scrape. Now, following after that animal which hasn't its like in any country under the sun, my best hounds are gone, and I swear I will give you neither rest nor peace until you have found me two equally good.”

As he finished speaking Fionn heard a distant, piteous cry, and soon after Bran appeared, tired and wet, and covered with bog-mire from head to tail. She lay down before Fionn, and howled long and sorrowfully.

“I think,” said Fionn, “she has a knowledge of some unknown danger which threatens us.”

“And what worse can happen to us than the loss of our swift and gentle hounds?” asked Diarmuid. “I would rather have been covered with wounds in battle than have this thing happen.”

There was a little rustling in the bracken near them, and Bran, tired as she was, pricked up her ears to listen. Then, in the misty moonlight, a beautiful woman, with long fair hair flowing down to the hem of her dress, stood before them. They were astonished at her sudden appearance, but before Fionn could speak to her she said, looking at him :

“Surely you are Fionn, lord of the Fianna. If so, there is a woman not far from here who wishes to meet you, and has already prepared a great feast in your honour.”

“That is good news,” said Conan hurriedly, before Fionn could speak. “I should like to be with her now.”

The woman smiled, and courteously included Fionn’s companions in the invitation. Then she led the way to a house built on the summit of a little hill overlooking an inlet of the sea, and the Fians followed her into the house. When supper was ended Fionn said to the woman who had conducted them hither :

“Where is the woman who wishes to meet me? I should like to thank her for her hospitality.”

Just then a woman entered the room. Fionn thought she was the ugliest woman the world had ever seen, for one side of her face was white, and one black, and her hair was like red fire-flames waving round her head. She reminded him vaguely of the curious black and white animal they had chased so unsuccessfully that day.

“I give you greeting,” she said to Fionn, “your name is well known to me as that of the greatest hero in Ireland; for that reason I sent for you to say that if your appearance pleased me I would take you for my husband, and all the treasure I have shall be yours.”

“Not all the treasure in the world would induce me to take you for my wife,” said Fionn quickly, horrified at the proposal, and startled out of his usual kindliness of speech. “I cannot help thinking you have some relationship with that strange animal we hunted to-day, and through which we have lost our precious hounds. Tell me what became of them?”

“Dead; they are all dead,” she cried, and her face gleamed with a mad delight as she

spoke. "Many brave heroes have fallen by my hand too, and if you oppose my wishes not all your courage and strength will hinder me from destroying you and your Fians."

Fionn and his heroes laughed scornfully; they were amused that this magpie-coloured woman should imagine she could so easily overcome them, whom so many famous champions had failed to conquer.

"You laugh now," she said in a quiet voice; "I think in a little while you will laugh no more. But before you sleep for ever I will play and sing to you if you like."

She took a small harp and played, and the music was like the rippling of a rock-strewn mountain stream, or the murmur of the night-wind when it plays through tall pines in summer. Then she chanted a little song to them in an unknown tongue, and a strange helplessness relaxed their limbs; although they felt that some great disaster was about to overtake them they had no strength to avert it.

When the woman saw that her spells had conquered the Fians, she fetched a two-edged

sword and began to slay the warriors as quickly as she could, taunting them with their lethargy. Fionn could not witness this horrible deed in silence; he reproached himself bitterly for having taken them to that house, and implored the witch to listen to him.

“Spare my men,” he said, “but kill me if you choose, for I alone have refused to accede to your wishes.”

The woman would not listen to him, but continued her deadly work until only a few of the Fians were left. Then Fionn spoke again :

“How can I take you for my wife, when the daughter of Goll mac Morna has shared my house for years? If I put her away Goll will surely kill me, and that would be no benefit to you.”

The witch considered for a moment, then she said cheerfully :

“I will go and kill Goll. In the meantime I will restore to you and your men freedom to move about; but do not think to escape, for I have placed a spell upon you that holds you to this place.”

II

It was early morning, and Goll mac Morna stood at the doorway of his house at Ben Edar—the place we now call the Hill of Howth—and looked over the sea. He was surprised to see a number of ships in the harbour, for overnight there had been none.

“It is unlucky so many of the Fianna are away at the present time,” he said to Caeilté, “for I think these ships do not belong to any friends of ours. Will you send some one to discover whether they come in peace or in war?”

“I’ll go myself,” said Caeilté at once, and taking a curragh rowed out to the ships.

When he saw the ugly black and white woman, with a fierce red light shining in her eyes, a feeling of horror came upon him, though he spoke courteously to her.

“Goll mac Morna sends you greetings, and wishes to know what purpose has brought you hither, and whether he can render you any service,” he said.

“Go back and tell Goll I have come to kill

him and all his Fians, as I have killed those with Fionn," said the woman, and she glared at Caeilté so venomously, and looked so dreadful, that he slipped down the side of the ship into his boat and hurried away.

"And indeed," said Caeilté, after telling Goll what the woman had threatened, "never before have I fled from anyone, and for shame I cannot hold up my head again among the men of Ireland until I have put an end to that woman."

Then Caeilté and Goll, remembering what the woman had said about killing their comrades, grieved together, for they thought that never again would they see their noble and generous chief Fionn. The Fians crowded around them, and, hearing the cause of their grief, vowed they would exact a vengeance that should not be easily forgotten.

The morning hours had almost passed when the watchmen called out that a great number of armed men, with the red-haired woman leading them, were putting off from the ship in boats. Goll ordered Caeilté to take his Fians to the strand and prevent the enemy

from landing ; but though Caeilté and his men fought most valiantly they were overpowered by the strangers, and a great number of the Fians were killed.

When Goll saw how the battle was going against them, he said to the woman :

“ Let there be peace between us this night, and in the morning, though few of us remain, we will fight again.”

“ I will let the remnant of your Fians go free, Goll mac Morna,” answered the woman, “ if you will agree to meet me in single combat. If you will not, I will carry on the fight until you are all dead.”

Goll arranged to meet her, and the only condition the combatants made was that the fight must be carried on until one or the other was killed ; and though Caeilté and the warriors tried to dissuade him from doing so, the next morning he armed himself and went down to the strand. The whole of that day he and the woman fought together, neither gaining the victory, and for two succeeding days they met again, striking many hard blows ; but on the eve of the third day,



THE WHOLE DAY HE AND THE WOMAN FOUGHT TOGETHER

when Goll lay down to sleep, he was so covered with wounds that he feared he would be easily conquered on the morrow.

But help was nearer to him than he imagined; even then Fionn and his comrades were hurrying to his aid from the place where the woman of the spells thought they were still in safe keeping. And this is how the spell that bound them was broken.

Among the men guarding the Fians was one who had a beautiful daughter, called Ethne, and often at night she would sit near the Fians and listen as they spoke of past wars and adventures. She seemed so gentle and sweet, so unlike the witch and her companions, that each time Diarmuid O'Duibhne saw her he loved her more deeply; and one evening, as they were pacing up and down the sands, he said:

“Were I free from these evil bonds, Ethne, I would ask you to leave your people, and come to my home with me, for I love you, and had I the choice of all the women in the world it is you I would choose for my wife. But, much as I and my companions try, we

cannot break the spell that binds us to this place.”

“How can I be sure that you love me?” asked Ethne doubtfully. “Do you forget that I am one of your enemy’s companions?”

“I swear by the sun and the wind,” answered Diarmuid, “that I have spoken the truth. Tell me that you will accompany me when I leave this place.”

Then Ethne knew that he did indeed love her; for he had called on two eternal powers to witness his vow, and did he break that vow the powers of the sun and wind would punish him.

“I have given you my love, and wherever you choose to take me I will go,” said Ethne softly. “This night you shall all be free, for, unknown to the enchantress, I have a word of might which will release your bonds.”

All the people in the camp slept except the Fians, for Diarmuid had whispered to them that before dawn they would be free. At midnight Ethne came, dressed ready for the journey, and standing over the Fians lifted her hands above their heads, and chanted in a curiously even tone these words:

By the light of suns afar
And the guiding, distant star ;
By the mystic new-born moon
And the lilt of magic rune,
You are freed from the ill spell.

Take your swords and let us go,
From this place of death and woe ;
Leave this shadowy land behind
And the words that hold and bind :
Now my bidding breaks the spell.

The Fians rose, and with great gladness found that their strength had returned to them. They surrounded Ethne, and with deep gratitude thanked her for the service she had rendered them. Then, taking swords and shields in hand, they were preparing to leave that house of ill-omen, when, to the unutterable horror of Fionn and the other men, and before they could prevent him, Conan mac Morna suddenly raised his sword and with one blow severed beautiful Ethne's head from her body.

For a moment the Fians stood aghast. They knew Conan to be a boaster and sometimes they had even thought him lacking in courage, but they never deemed him capable

of such an ungenerous and horrible deed as this. The next moment Diarmuid lifted his sword, and cried :

“Had you a hundred heads, nay, a thousand, I would hew them all from your cowardly body in revenge for this ever-hateful deed.”

As Diarmuid spoke Conan knew what fear was. He thought the next breath he drew would be his last, and it would have been had not Oscur stepped between them.

“Let us not linger here,” said Oscur. “Every minute is precious, for I am sure that Goll is hard pressed by the witch who went to attack him. As for this coward,” and he pointed at Conan, “he shall be dealt with later, and through the whole of the land his name shall be a name of scorn for ever after ; but now the welfare of the Fianna must precede all personal affairs.”

Very reluctantly Diarmuid let the matter rest there, and they proceeded on their journey. Through the hours of the night they travelled quickly eastward, and at last reached Ben Edar. They found Goll arming

himself for the fourth day's fight, and so weak from his many wounds that he could hardly stand.

Fionn and his companions clamoured to stand before the witch and fight her both on their own account and Goll's. But Goll refused, and only when Fionn used his authority and forbade him to go out that day—saying he did not want to altogether lose his best captain—did Goll relent, and unwillingly agreed that Oscur should take his place.

The witch stared in amazement when she saw that those whom she still believed to be spell-bound were arrayed against her; but a furious anger possessed her when she realized they had escaped from her power. With all her strength she attacked Oscur, and until the day was drawing to its close they fought together, when Oscur began to show signs of weakness because of the hurts he had received. Seeing this, Fergus, the bard of the Fianna, called out to him :

“O Oscur, son of Oisín, you who have never before been conquered, let it not be

said that an evil enchantress vanquished you. Remember, Oscan, that hour when we lay fettered by evil bonds in the Bay of Inch, and forget not the death of thy comrades."

The bard's words strengthened Oscan's failing arm, and with a swift leap forward he struck the witch with his spear. She wavered on her feet for a minute, then with a great cry fell forward on the sand and died.

So ends Fionn's adventure and enchantment when following the chase at Gleanna-smol.

SCATHACH OF THE SHADOWS

ONE day, when the heat of summer lay like a golden shimmering mist over the land, Fionn, with a few Fians, slowly mounted the slopes of Bearnas Mor, and when they reached the top sat down to rest in the shade of a big rock, while their hounds ranged over the hillside as they chose. They had left the Hill of Allen a few days before, thinking how much pleasanter the sea and mountains of Donegal would be than the sun-baked bog-country of the midlands.

They had been resting only a short time when they heard a furious barking from the hounds, mingled with the shrill squeals of some animal. The Fians rose and looked round them, then saw that the hounds had started from its lair an immense wild boar, which, instead of running from the dogs,

turned round and attacked them. The Fians cheered their hounds on, thinking they would soon conquer the boar, but, to their grief and anger, it killed one after another of the hounds, until there was left only Bran, the wise and beautiful hound that was Fionn's joy and delight, and one of the greatest treasures he ever possessed.

Bran circled round and round the boar, waiting for an opportunity to spring on it. At last she made a leap, and fastened her teeth in the boar's shoulder, and though the boar shook himself and ran to and fro, he could not free himself from Bran. Then he screamed horribly with rage and pain, and at that moment a man, grotesquely ugly and gigantic, appeared suddenly on the hillside. Where he came from the Fians did not know, and they looked at him in astonishment.

“Call your hound from my boar at once, Fionn,” he said, “or I will kill her.”

Hearing him speak like that the Fians grew very angry. A number of their best dogs had been slain by this fierce boar; now the strange man spoke of killing Bran, who was the very

best hound the Fians ever had, or ever would have. So they rushed at the man, intending to capture him; afterwards they would kill his wild beast, and cook it for their supper. But no sooner did the Fians lay their hands upon him than all the strength ebbed from their bodies. They could neither speak nor move. Fionn alone, who had not touched him, was free from the enchantment. The man spoke again :

“Call off your hound, Fionn. Do you not see she has conquered the boar, and it has not strength to escape?”

Fionn called Bran to him, and the man walked over to where the boar lay panting on the ground. He struck it lightly with a hazel wand, and to the wonder of the Fians the fierce, ungainly beast changed instantly into a beautiful girl. He then touched himself, and from an ugly giant he became a tall, handsome man.

On seeing this Fionn drew back a step or two. He thought that perhaps the man might touch him with his magic stick, and he had no mind to be transformed into a pig, or a fly,

or whatever else the enchanter might choose to make him. The man seemed to know what Fionn was thinking, and laughed as he said :

“I shall do you no harm. On the contrary, if I can serve you at any time I will gladly do so, in return for the service you have unknowingly rendered me.”

“Indeed, then,” said Fionn, “it would please me if you would take that enchantment from my men. They are of no use to me as they are. Afterwards, perhaps, you will tell me who you and that young girl are, and why you appeared in forms not your own.”

He glanced at his men, and laughed out loud as he saw them standing stiffly there, unable to put one foot before the other or even raise a finger. The enchanter laughed also, then he waved his hand upward, and power returned to the Fians.

“Now,” said the man to Fionn, “it will give me much pleasure if you and your comrades will take supper with me ; afterwards I will relate to you our story. It will not take us long to reach my dún, which is just on the other side of the hill.”



THE BEAST CHANGED INSTANTLY INTO A BEAUTIFUL GIRL



Fionn and his men walked over the hill with the strangers, and soon they came to a house which the Fians thought even more beautiful than the kingly dún at Tara. The roof and door-posts were fashioned of silver, and glittered in the sunset; the door was made of bronze, inset with crystals and amethysts. But the interior was still more beautiful, the walls were hung with silks of many colours, and couches of carved red yew and gold were placed on every side. In the middle of the dún a glimmering pool of water shone like silver in the dusk; not a ripple disturbed its quietness, and as the Fians looked they imagined that pictures came and went in it. Before they had time to observe more their host struck a bronze gong, and men came in bearing great bowls of ale, and dishes of meat and fruit.

When supper was ended Fionn said:

“Perhaps you will tell us your story now, for with the rising of the moon we must go on our way.”

“I am a son of Bove Derg, king of the southern Sidhe,” began the man, “and the maiden here is my daughter, Scathach of the

Shadows. When the Tuatha de Danann first became invisible to men, the Dagda gave me this pleasant hillside to dwell in, and many years we lived here in peace. But one day when I was away from home, there came a giant Fomorian from the Island of Torach, who seized my daughter, and would have carried her away with him to his island of rocks. When I returned I sought for her, but could find her nowhere. I looked then in the quiet pool of water there, which holds pictures of all that has been or will be, and saw what had happened. Quickly I followed in their footsteps, and on the seashore came up to them. Before the Fomorian could speak a word I cast my spear, which passed through him from one side to the other; but as he fell to the ground he placed a spell on my daughter, and she changed instantly to the fierce boar your dogs hunted. Not for myself would I ask a favour from an enemy, but for the sake of my beautiful daughter I implored him to remove the spell from her before he died. Though he lay dying on the ground he laughed at me, and said that he had doomed her to

roam the earth in that shape for hundreds of years, until she was conquered by an enchanted hound. Many, many times she has been hunted, and a great number of hounds she has killed, but never until to-day was she conquered." He paused for a moment, then continued: "Whatever you ask of me, O Fionn, that I will do, for you have been the means by which the wicked spell is taken from my daughter."

"It is a grief to me that I did not meet that Fomorian," said Fionn, and his blue eyes gleamed with the battle-light. "It would have pleased me greatly to kill him myself. Now I see the moonbeams shining over the bog below, and before I leave you I would ask one other question. Why do you call your daughter 'Scathach of the Shadows'?"

"Through her men see the shadows of many things," said the son of Derg. "If you will stay with us a little longer she shall play to you, and you will understand."

Scathach took her harp, which had a golden frame carved with birds and beasts and serpents, that moved as she played. Only

three strings were on that harp, one of silver, one of bronze, and one of iron, but in the music of those strings all the peace and joy and sorrow of the world seemed to lie. She played on the thin iron string, and tears came into the Fians' eyes; they felt that sorrow and pain and unnumbered shadows of woe pressed round them on every side, till at last Fionn cried: "Oh, Scathach, cease, or our hearts will break with grief."

She played then on the fine bronze wire, and in a moment the Fians were filled with joy. Beautiful shadowy forms danced round them and sang glad songs, the laughter of little children and grey old people echoed in their ears, and in all the world there was no grief or pain. Then, out of boundless joy, Fionn implored Scathach to stop, for he said such gladness mortals could not bear.

Now Scathach touched the silver wire, and a gentle melody floated over the moonlit hills and bogland. So soft, so gentle it was, that the Fians felt neither sorrow nor joy, only an infinite peace wrapped them round. Forms of the ancient gods appeared to them then:

SCATHACH OF THE SHADOWS 71

Manannan mac Lir, the friend of ocean-wanderers; Angus Oge, guardian of little children and lord of all that is beautiful; Lu Lam-Fada, knower of all knowledge; the Mor Riga, divine mother of wisdom and unfolders of mysteries,—these and many others of the undying gods came in that hour of peace. Still Scathach played, until a deep slumber fell on the heroes, and they knew no more.

A fair and sun-bright morning dawned over the high hills of Donegal, and Fionn and his men woke from their sleep to find themselves lying on the side of Bearnas Mor. There was no trace of the house, or of Mac Derg and his daughter Scathach, nor do I think Fionn ever saw them again, though the memory of that night, when he had known unbounded sorrow and joy and peace, remained with him ever after.

THE LAKE OF SORROW

FOR three days Fionn had held a big feast at the Hill of Allen, but now the last of his guests had departed ; and on this hot June night, as he lay on the cool grass under the wide-spreading chestnut tree, he thought how good and sweet the earth was after the heat and gaiety of the day. In quiet contentment he stretched his arms out over the grass, and turned his face upwards, so that he could see, through the trembling leaves above him, occasional glimpses of a brilliant moon circling through the heavens ; and could feel, as the little breezes swept through the trees, the fading chestnut blooms fall softly on his face.

His famous hound, Bran, lay by his side, but suddenly she lifted her head slightly from her paws, and growled. Fionn lazily raised himself on one elbow, and looked round ; but

seeing nothing, resumed his former position. After a minute Bran growled again, a low, vicious growl, which caused Fionn to sit upright, for he knew she would not growl in such a manner unless some one or something strange was near. Then, where the moonbeams made a pathway on the grass, Fionn saw coming towards him two fair young girls, their dresses shimmering like rainbow mist in the silver moonlight, and as they came nearer he rose to receive and welcome them. They were strange to him, and he thought they had either wandered from their road, or were looking for some of his people.

“Are you seeking some one, fair maidens?” he inquired, after greeting them. “If it is any of the women of my household, I will have them roused; for, the hour being late, they have retired.”

“It is not your women we seek, but you, Fionn,” said one of them, a fair-haired, blue-eyed girl, who appeared to be the elder of the two, “and we have travelled a long way to find you.”

“In what way can I serve you?” asked

Fionn. "Is there any injustice you wish me to set right, or have you a wrong to be avenged?"

"For neither of these things have we sought you," answered the girl who had spoken before. "In our distant home we heard that in everything you were the best of all men in Ireland, and leaving our kinsfolk we have come to offer you our love." Then, turning to the girl at her side, who had brown hair, and eyes, Fionn thought, like the gentle and faithful eyes of Bran, she continued: "This is my sister Aina, and I am Miluchra, both of us daughters to Cuilleán of Coalney, who is a prince of the Tuatha de Danann. Choose now whether you will accept the love of myself or my sister."

Fionn was naturally embarrassed. He did not particularly want a wife just then; but if he had to choose he preferred Aina, the brown-haired, quiet girl who had not yet spoken to him. Miluchra, he thought, had a tongue which moved a trifle too readily, and he did not care for women who were always talking. He hesitated, wondering how

he could frame his refusal in words least discourteous. At length he said :

“It is not customary for we of the Fianna to take women of the Tuatha de Danann for wives, nor do I think you would be happy separated from your kinsfolk. When I wed it must be among my own people.”

“Think again, Fionn, before you reject our love,” said Miluchra ; “and remember it is better for you to have the friendship of the Sidhe than their enmity. I can offer you, too, unbounded wealth and power.”

“Power I have already, and riches enough for my needs,” Fionn answered.

Then for the first time Aina spoke to him :

“I will give you strong sons to bear your name, and as long as I am with you grey old age shall never touch you,” she promised, not knowing the wicked depths of her sister’s mind.

Fionn’s determination not to marry one of the faery race wavered as he looked in Aina’s soft brown eyes, and, though he felt that by choosing Aina he would probably rouse her sister’s enmity, he said :

“For your sake I will break through old customs, and I choose you, Aina, to be my wife.”

When Miluchra heard his decision her blue eyes grew hard and steel-like with jealous rage, and she went away, vowing vengeance on Fionn for his refusal of her love. For a long time she meditated on the form her revenge should take, then one day she called her kinsfolk together, and asked them to make her a magic lake on the mountain called Slieve Gullion—a lake that would take youth and strength from whoever entered its water.

The weeks passed by, and one autumn day it happened that Fionn was alone on the plain of Allen. Suddenly a fawn darted out from the wood a short distance away, and Fionn, calling Bran and Sgeolan to him, started in pursuit. Northwards the fawn fled, but all through the long chase Fionn and his dogs kept it in sight. At length they came to Slieve Gullion, and the fawn, with its pursuers close on it now, steadily mounted the hillside; but, as they were passing through a dense

thicket of tall-growing bracken, the fawn disappeared, nor could the dogs pick up its trail or scent it in any direction.

While his hounds nosed round, Fionn walked to the top of the mountain, and came to a lovely little lake, on the brink of which sat a young girl who wept and looked sorrowfully into the water.

“What ails you, maiden,” asked Fionn, “that you weep and are sorrowful?”

“A most beautiful ring I had,” she answered, “a ring with shining purple stones in it, and as I bathed in the lake it slipped from my finger. I put you under geasa, O Fian-chief—for I know well you are Fionn—to recover it for me.”

“If it is only a ring you sorrow for,” said Fionn, “I will give you several to make up for its loss.” He did not like being put under geasa for such a trivial thing as this seemed to him; for being under “geasa” meant that he could not refuse this request without his fame and honour suffering.

“If you gave me the hundred best rings in the world they would not be dear to me as

my own ring is," the girl answered; "and if you refuse my request I will proclaim throughout Ireland that the Fian-chief has neither honour nor chivalry."

Without saying another word, Fionn placed his weapons carefully on the shore, and slipping out of his clothes dived into the lake and searched until he discovered the ring lying on some sand. He held it out to the girl who, laughing maliciously, snatched it from him, and springing into the lake disappeared without even giving Fionn a word of thanks.

Fionn was astonished at this proceeding, but he thought to himself, "Well, there's no accounting for the ways of women," and waded to the shore. He began to walk towards his clothes, but suddenly felt so weak and weary and old that he had to sit down. When he tried to rise he found he could not, for crooked old age had come swiftly upon him; so on his hands and knees he crawled to his clothes, and wrapping his cloak round him lay down on the grass, wondering what evil thing had befallen him.

Bran and Sgeolan ran up then, panting and

thirsty, and after drinking from the lake sniffed round Fionn, but, not recognizing either him or his voice, ran off again.

Some time afterwards Caeilté mac Ronan, with a number of Fians, arrived at the lake-side. On hearing that Fionn had started out by himself, they followed and had tracked him as far as the lake. There all trace of him ceased, but seeing the feeble old man lying there, Caeilté questioned him.

“Have you seen a fawn pass along here,” he asked, “followed by a hunter of very noble and warlike appearance, and two swift hounds?”

“I saw them, O warrior, and it is but a short time since the hounds drank at the water there and ran down the hillside,” answered the old man in a quavering voice.

On hearing this, Caeilté with his companions departed, and Fionn sorrowed exceedingly as the sound of their voices died away. It was inconceivable to him that his dearest friends did not know him, nor did he like to reveal to them that he was Fionn, the foremost champion of Ireland.

The dark hours of the night passed on, and Fionn shivered as the chill autumnal dews dropped on his weak and helpless limbs. He thought how the poor and the old must suffer, without warmth or comfort, and welcomed the dawn and sunrise more eagerly than he ever had before; then on his ears fell the sound of men's voices shouting and calling, and the barking of many dogs. Nearer and nearer the sound came; a minute or two later his son Oisin, and Oscur the son of Oisin, with Caeilté and Conan mac Morna and a great band of the Fianna Eireann, came over the hill-top to him.

“Old man,” said Caeilté, “has the warrior that I questioned you about yesterday passed by here since?”

“That is my father's cloak you are wrapped in,” cried Oisin hastily, before the old man could speak. “How did you get it? And tell us the truth about it, or death will soon be your portion.”

“Alas!” exclaimed Fionn, “that my own son should not know me.”

They all stared at the old man in amaze-

ment, and Fionn then began to relate the story of his adventures to the Fians. When he had ended they cried three loud cries of woe, and at the sound the fox hurried back to his earth, the badger to his hole, and the affrighted birds flew to their nests, and to this day the lake is called the Lake of Sorrow.

Fat, bald Conan mac Morna, when he saw Fionn lying there helpless, thought that now he would take vengeance on Fionn for all the gibes and sneers the Fians had treated him to. So stepping up to Fionn he began to abuse him.

“All the time I have been with the Fianna you never praised me or my brave deeds,” he said, “and much it pleases me to see you lying there, for now I can cut off your head. The only grief I have is that all your Fians are not in the same state you are; if they were, my sword should run red in their blood.”

In great indignation Oscur turned on Conan.

“Long have I known that there is neither sense nor shame in that bald head of yours,” he said; “but not till now did I believe that

one of the Clan Morna possessed the cowardice and meanness you have shown. For your threats to our chief I will deal with you so hardly that from now till the day of your death you shall speak no more evil words," and clenching his fists tightly he rushed at Conan.

But Conan, hearing Oscur speak in such a furious manner, sheltered himself at the back of the Fians, crying :

"Oh, save me from that terrible man, for he has a woeful temper and a very strong arm!" So, because his high-sounding speeches and queer deeds provided them with a good deal of amusement, they laughingly protected him from Oscur's wrath ; for they knew that Conan had no power to ever injure Fionn.

Oisín now asked his father what they could do to free him from this dreadful enchantment of old age which had come upon him.

"Take me," said Fionn, "to the hill of Cuilleán of Coalney. It was his daughter Miluchra, sister to my own wife, who put this spell on me, and only Cuilleán can remove it."

The Fians made a litter of pine branches

and soft leaves, and carried Fionn gently to the hill of the Sidhe, where Cuilleán lived; but though they waited there some time no one came out to welcome them. Then, from all parts of Ireland, Oisín summoned seven battalions of the Fianna to him, and for three days and nights they laboured unceasingly at the hill, digging it away and tunnelling to the very heart of it. Then Cuilleán, fearing lest they would level his hill-palace straight to the ground, came out to them, bearing in his hand a cup of gold, and going up to Fionn he asked him to drink of its contents. Fionn obeyed, and immediately his own shape returned to him, and his strength was greater than it had ever been before; the only thing which remained unchanged was his hair, which shone like white silver.

There were some of the Fianna who would have liked to drink from the cup also, for Cuilleán said that whoever drank from it would have knowledge of the future. But as Fionn was passing the cup to one of them it slipped from his hand and sank deep into the earth, and was never found again; only where

it sank a many-branched tree sprang up, and it is said that whoever gazed on that tree in the morning, before breaking his fast, would most surely know all that would happen to him from that time until nightfall.

As for Miluchra, who because of her jealous hatred tried to wreak such great evil on Fionn, neither he nor Aina ever saw her again ; but the Lake of Sorrow still remains, and even to-day people say that its waters have power to change one's hair to silver-grey.

THE MYSTERIOUS HOUND

ONE sunny April morning Fionn woke up, troubled by a vague uneasiness, and think as he would he could find no reason for it. At last he suddenly remembered one of his geasa—one, indeed, that he had forgotten for the time being—that he was not to sleep for more than nine nights in succession at the Hill of Allen, and this was the ninth night he had spent there. All the old kings and heroes had geasa, or prohibitions; that is, certain things which the Druids foretold as being unlucky or fatal for them to do. Some other of Fionn's geasa were that he must never look on a dead man, unless he had been killed by weapons; that he must never refuse a request; and a wise woman, a prophetess, put a prohibition on him never to drink out

of a horn, foretelling that if he ever forgot that prohibition and did so drink the day of his death would be near.

He quickly dressed himself, and going to the door called Oisín, who was watching a number of long-legged young lambs gambolling in the meadows below.

“Only this moment have I remembered something that it would have been ill indeed for me to forget,” said Fionn. “Nine nights I have slumbered here, and, as you know, I am forbidden to stay beyond that time. Now gather together a battalion of the Fianna, and we will visit the King of Munster. If we start at midday we can easily reach a good camping-ground before dusk.”

At noon Fionn and his men, with a number of hounds, set out on their journey, but as they were passing a rath near the level plain of Femen they saw, sitting on its grassy slope, three young men, accompanied by an immense dog whose skin had all the colours of the rainbow over it.

“What a strange-looking hound!” said Fionn to Oisín; “never before have I seen one

of that size and colour." Then he spoke to the men: "Who are you, young men, and where do you come from?"

"We are princes, sons of the King of Norway, and have travelled across the sea from the east to meet you, lord of the Fians," they answered.

"What do you seek, or what is your need?" asked Fionn.

"We have heard of your fame as a warrior, and we wish to take service with you," they replied.

"Are you good fighters?" questioned Fionn. "No one can enter the Fianna who has not strength in his arm and unfailing courage in his heart. He must be courteous to his enemies, and loyal to his friends, and truth must be on his tongue always. If a man enters the Fianna Eireann, and after entering fails in either of these things, then the Fians cast him out, and disgrace rests on him wherever he goes."

"We pledge you our word," said they, "that in neither of these things shall we ever fail. Nor are we without knowledge, for certain

gifts are ours that may be of use to you some time or other."

"What are they?" asked Fionn.

"I will watch over and guard the Fianna of Ireland, both night and day," said one.

"That is a good thing for one man to be able to do," remarked Fionn; "though indeed it is not my Fians that need guarding, but their enemies."

"Well," said the second, "when they are in danger in any battle or fight I will promise that they are not overcome."

"That is a great thing for one man to promise; but each man of my Fianna is a hero, and has proved himself in many fights," said Fionn proudly. "Moreover, they are always the conquerors in any fight in which they take part."

"If anything should trouble you," said the third, "I will smooth the trouble away; and anything you ask of me I will do. I can promise that if you take us for your men the Fianna will never go hungry, for the hound we have with us is a great hunter, and as long as there are deer in Ireland he will hunt for

you one night, and I will hunt the following night, for whatever time we are with you."

"Hitherto the Fianna have been able to hunt for themselves; and if they were not, I do not imagine that fat dog with you could overtake and kill our swift deer or the fierce boar." The brothers frowned, and Fionn added courteously: "However, do not think that I speak disparagingly of either your gifts or your dog; without doubt they will be very useful to us at some future time. Tell me now, before I admit you into the Fianna, whether you have any special conditions or vows to keep?"

"Three things we ask of you," they replied. "One is, that after twilight none must be allowed to come near our camp. Another is, that we do not wish you to give us food and drink; we are under a vow to provide everything for ourselves. Our third request is, that you give us that part of the country to hunt which contains the least game."

"Those are very curious demands," said Fionn. "I should like to know what reason you have for wishing to remain isolated after

nightfall? It is a custom of the Fianna to be merry at night after the day's work, and if you hold to this condition you will be lonely while your comrades are feasting."

"We may not tell you our reasons," they answered, "and whether we travel together for a week or for years we must ask you to question us no more. One thing, however, we may tell you: every third night one of us seems to die, and the other two watch him till the dawn comes, for he must not be disturbed. Therefore we would have our camp at a distance from yours."

"I give you my word," said Fionn, "that I and my Fians will never seek to visit you at night-time. Besides, I am forbidden to see a dead man unless he has been killed by weapons."

So the three men entered the Fianna of Ireland; but Fionn, instead of proceeding on his journey, gave instructions to his men to camp by the side of the rath, saying they would stop there for some time and hunt through the country round them.

When they had been there a few days

seven men of learning came to Fionn to recite a poem to him, and the fee they demanded afterwards was a hundred and fifty ounces of gold and the same weight of silver, which they wished to take to the king at Tara.

“I have not that amount of gold and silver with me,” said Fionn; “and though your poem is good, I am making as good a one myself, and do not want the wealth of the world for it either. I have listened to yours, now I will recite mine to you”; and he began :

The may blooms fair on the high green hedges,
 The moor-fowls nest in the reeds and sedges;
 On chestnut trees the blackbirds are singing,
 And over hills where the wild geese are winging
 The furze blows golden and gay.

When the poets heard Fionn speak so contemptuously, as they thought, of their poem they were very indignant and would not listen to him, and said they certainly would not go away without their fee. One of the Norwegian princes, on hearing this, said :

“Well, makers of poems, must you have your fee this evening or will you wait until the morning?”

“If it is forthcoming in the morning we shall be content to wait,” they replied.

The three men went away to their lonely camp, and called the hound, saying to it :

“Hound of wonder and magic, help us now.”

Then the hound opened its mouth and breathed hard, and with each breath pieces of gold and silver rolled out more quickly than the princes could pick them up, and in the morning the poets received their fee and departed. But Fionn was amazed that the money was forthcoming, and said that the men of Norway were workers of wonders, and that henceforth the rath should be known as “the little rath of wonders.”

This was not the only time the princes astonished the Fians by their deeds, for one very hot evening Fionn and his men, returning from a hunting expedition, found that the spring on which they relied for water had almost dried up, and they were far from any other stream or spring.

“What shall we do for water?” asked Fionn. “We could manage well enough if

there was a house near that could give us ale ; but even if there was we are so thirsty to-night that I think no house—except that of a king—could provide sufficient to quench our thirst.”

“How many drinking-cups have you, chief?” asked one of the men of Norway.

“Three hundred and twelve altogether,” answered Fionn.

“Pass the cups to me and I will see to the filling of them,” said the man ; “and do you all drink whatever is found in them.”

Three times the cups were filled and emptied, and at the end of the third drinking a mist of enchantment covered the minds of the Fians. Each man beheld his comrade as some one most wonderful and noble, and it seemed to each man there that he was following a path which led to strange adventures—perchance to the hidden Land of the Ever-Young, where the apple-blossoms chimed and rang together like delicate silver bells ; and where, whatever a man wished, his wish was fulfilled on the instant ; or, if he thought of anything beautiful, his thought took form and

shaped itself before his eyes. But in the morning the mist cleared from their minds, and only Fionn and Oisín and Caeilté, and one or two others, remembered that during the night they had been taken away to Tir-nanoge, the happy land where neither sorrow nor death nor anything unlovely has place.

For a year, or perhaps a little more, the three wonder-working princes of Norway were with Fionn wherever he went, and no man sought to intrude upon their solitude at night. They always camped apart, and at the dark of every day would surround their camp with a magic wall of fire, which flamed up high from the ground, hiding them from the sight of every one. Then one night it fell to Donn and Dubhan, the King of Ulster's sons, to keep guard while the Fians slept. Three times they encircled the camp, and at the end of the third round they stood watching the fiery wall that guarded the camp of the three men.

“It is a curious thing,” said Donn, “that for a year or more these young men with their hound have been with us, and no one has ever

seen them after nightfall. I have a strong desire this night to pass that fire-wall and see what is happening inside. Will you come with me?"

An indefinable feeling of danger swept over Dubhan, and he was silent for a moment. At last he said :

"If you insist on going, surely I will accompany you ; but my mind misgives me about this adventure. I fear it will bring evil to us."

Grasping their shields and spears firmly, they passed through the circle of leaping flames. Then a strange sight met their eyes : one of the three men lay stretched at full length on the ground, motionless and seemingly dead, while another stood beside him, leaning on a long bright sword ; the third sat beside the hound, which, to the astonishment of Donn and Dubhan, had shrunk to the size of a small dog one could carry under one's arm. On the ground by its side were silver cups and dishes, and whenever either of the two princes wished for wine or ale, or any other refreshment, he spoke to the little animal,

which immediately turned its head and breathed an encircling mist about it, and when it cleared away Donn and Dubhan saw that the cups and dishes contained whatever had been asked for.

The King of Ulster's sons looked and looked again, and forgot their danger in remaining in this place of magic. They forgot, also, that they had broken the promise of solitude Fionn had given on behalf of the Fians to the three men of Norway. In a moment or two, without turning round to look at them, the man sitting by the side of the dog said :

“O hound of wonder and power, the word given by Fionn has been set aside, and those who have broken it are near.”

The hound rose, and suddenly assuming its gigantic size breathed hard in the direction of the brothers. Each breath was like a strong rushing wind ; with one breath their shields were blown from their shoulders into the rampart of fire, with another their weapons were wrenched from their hands and destroyed also. Then the man who appeared to be



ONE OF THE THREE MEN LAY MOTIONLESS ON THE GROUND

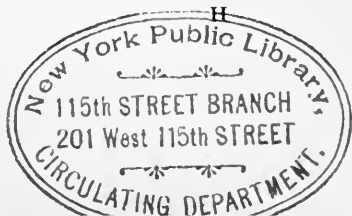
dead rose from the ground, and the three brothers attacked Donn and Dubhan, who having no arms to defend themselves with, were killed.

“Breathe on them, hound, and make them as though they had never lived,” said the men.

The hound blew a fiery breath on the bodies of Donn and Dubhan, and immediately they were burned into little heaps of ashes, which were blown hither and thither by the wind.

In the morning it was told to Fionn that Donn and his brother had disappeared, and he sent his men all through Ireland searching for them; but the Fians returned, saying there was no trace anywhere of the King of Ulster’s sons. When Fionn heard that he placed his thumb of knowledge in his mouth, and divined instantly the dreadful death that had happened to Donn and Dubhan. Terrible then was the wrath that filled him against the King of Norway’s sons—for Fionn alone had power to judge any misdeed or broken word of the Fianna—and taking his spear in his hand he

36153



went out to the camp of the men of Norway ;
but they and their hound had disappeared, nor
were they ever seen or heard of in Ireland
again.

THE PURSUIT OF THE GILLA DECAIR

I

THE beech leaves were turning brown and crimson and gold when Fionn mac Cumall, with some of the Fianna, left the Hill of Allen to hunt through the forests of Munster. One day, however, Fionn, instead of following the chase, sat on a sunny hillside with a few of his men, and among them was Conan mac Morna, who had a more bitter and abusive tongue than all the rest of the Fianna together.

After resting there quietly for a time, listening to the pleasant baying of the hounds and the calling of his men, Fionn said :

“No guard has yet been set on the hill to tell us when friend or enemy approaches. Finnbane, son of Bresal, will you keep watch

and ward so that none can come upon us unawares?"

"I will, chief," answered Finnbane, and rising he ascended to the hill-top, from whence he could watch the paths leading north and south, east and west. He had not been long there, when he saw, coming from the east towards him, a very tall man, more ugly and misshapen than any one he had ever seen before. His two arms were not the same length, and one leg was shorter than the other; even his eyes looked different ways, and, to make his appearance worse, he was as black-looking as though he had been dipped in bog-mud. He was dragging a feeble, miserable-looking grey horse along by a thick, rough rope, and when Finnbane saw the thinness of the animal he felt very sorry for it. Sometimes the horse would stop, then the man would tug at its head and hit its ribs—which were nearly sticking out through its skin—with a big stick, and each time that he struck the horse it sounded like the beating of a drum.

Finnbane watched this strange couple till

they came nearer, then he hurried down the hillside to tell Fionn about them. Before he could speak Fionn said :

“What is that noise I hear ? It is like the sound of sticks on a stretched skin.”

“It is that indeed,” said Finnbane angrily, “and I wish I had the maker of that noise under my hands for a few minutes.”

Just then the big man, still tugging at his slow-moving horse, came into sight, and the Fians watched him with great amusement as he approached. When at last he reached them he bent his knee before Fionn in greeting, and Fionn, after regarding him in silent astonishment for a moment, said :

“Surely you do not belong to this country, for in all our years of wandering we have never seen one like you before. Tell us, what is the name of your clan ?”

“I do not know much of my clan,” the stranger replied gruffly, “nor do I want to ; it is quite enough for me to mind myself and this sulky old horse, without troubling about any clan at all.”

“Truly that horse is a wonder to look

upon," interrupted Conan mac Morna, "and care should be taken that nothing evil happens to it. It must be a queer country that produced both you and that extraordinary animal at the same time."

The big man glared with one eye at Conan, at the same time turning the other eye round to look at his horse, which was snapping away with its long teeth at his back. Then he continued :

"I am a descendant of the Fomorians, and I have come to you for employment, Fionn mac Cumall, because I have heard that in the matter of payment you are not at all mean, and never yet denied to any man what he was worth."

"I have not," said Fionn, "nor will I now. But I wonder you travel without a boy to attend to your horse, which seems rather troublesome."

"Nothing would worry me more than to have a boy with me," said the man. "Every day I need as much food as would serve a hundred men, and even that I count very little for myself. If I had a boy he would

only be meddling with it, and eating it himself, and that would cause me much vexation."

All the Fians laughed out loud ; but Fionn continued :

"By what name are you known ?"

"You can call me the Gilla Decair," the man replied.

"But that means the Unwilling Servant!" exclaimed Fionn, in a surprised manner. "Why have you chosen such an unpleasant name ?"

"I chose it," the man answered, "because any work I have to do for whoever is my master for the time being comes harder to me than anything else in the whole world. But tell me," he said, turning to Conan mac Morna, "among the Fianna do the horsemen or the footmen have the greater wage ?"

"The horsemen have twice as much as the footmen," said Conan.

"Then I shall be a horseman, Conan, and if any one doubts my word I shall expect you to testify that I came among you with a horse——"

“A horse!” repeated Conan scornfully. “I wonder you are not ashamed to be seen with it, though indeed you are just as bad-looking yourself. I hope,” he said, turning to Fionn, “you are not going to disgrace the Fianna by taking that ill-favoured wretch there into it, and putting his bag of bones—calls it a horse, indeed!—among our horses.”

“As a horseman I come to you, Fionn mac Cumall, and a horseman’s wages I expect,” said the Gilla Decair. “If you can pledge your word that nothing shall happen to my horse, I will turn him out among yours, and not heed what that abusive man there says.”

“Turn him out by all means, and let him eat something,” said Fionn.

“I take you at your word,” said the Gilla Decair, and he took the halter from the horse’s head. The animal immediately galloped away as fast as he could, until it came to where the Fians’ horses were grazing; then it began to work the most tremendous havoc among them. It bit their eyes out with its long vicious teeth, and snapped off their ears, and broke their legs with its hard kicks, until

the frightened creatures that still had power to move fled away from it in terror.

“Take your vicious beast away from our horses,” cried Conan; “take that demon away, I say. By the heaven above and the earth beneath I swear, had not Fionn told you to put him there, that nothing would prevent me from splitting his head with my sword and letting his wicked brains loose on the ground. As for you, Fionn,” he said, turning to the chief, “out of all the bad people you have picked up at one time and another, you never had, and you never will have, a worse man than this.”

“By the heaven above and the earth beneath I swear too,” said the Gilla Decair, “that not one hand will I lift to take him away. I am a Fian now, and it would be undignified for me to lead my horse by hand.”

Conan mac Morna rose in terrible wrath, and going over to the horse put its halter on, and brought it away from the other horses. All the Fians laughed when they saw Conan holding this animal—which looked so feeble and spiritless, and yet possessed the temper

of a demon—not daring to let it loose again because of further mischief it might do.

“Oh, Conan, never have I seen you do horse-boy’s work before for any of the Fianna,” said Fionn, “yet now you are doing it for this miserable Fomorian, who is far inferior in every way to your companions. Now, if you’ll heed my words, you will mount that horse, and gallop him up the hills, and down the valleys, and over the fields and streams until his heart is broken in his body and he dies. In that way we shall exact payment from the Fomorian for the destruction his horse has wrought on ours.”

“For once you have given good advice,” said Conan, as he vaulted on the horse’s back, with great fury striking it and digging his heels into its ribs, but it never stirred.

“I know what is the matter with him,” said Fionn. “He is accustomed to carry the great weight of his Fomorian master, and he won’t move unless he has on his back an equal weight.”

One Fian after another went over to the horse and mounted, until there were thirteen

at the back of Conan. At that the horse lay down on the ground, then suddenly jerked up again, and all the Fians, both on the horse and off, laughed so much and so loud that you could have heard them miles away.

“You are treating my horse with ridicule,” said the Gilla Decair, “and putting scorn on me. As for you, Fiomn, when I see your great frivolity, I should pity myself if I stopped with you. Moreover, I perceive that all the good reports I have heard of you are false, and I shall think all the better of myself when I have parted company with you.”

The Gilla Decair turned away, and in a very weak and weary manner proceeded to ascend a little hill before him. But no sooner was he on the other side, out of sight of the Fians, than he fastened his coat up round his waist, and ran as quickly as the stars shooting through the sky on a frosty night, or as an arrow flies from the bow that is drawn by a strong arm.

When the horse saw that his master had forsaken him, he took to galloping after him as hard as he could, and would not be stopped.

Fionn and the Fians laughed and shouted with delight at sight of those thirteen men hanging closely on behind Conan ; but he, perceiving that he could not dismount, screamed and called to the Fians to stop that demon of a horse, and not let them be carried away by that hideous and terrible man, of whom they had no knowledge.

“O Fionn,” he cried, “may all ill happen to you by sea and by land ; may some one who is worse than you—if that be possible—deprive you of life and cut off your head, if you do not follow us to whatever part of the world that man shall take us, and bring us safely back to Ireland again.”

“I will do that,” said Fionn, and he and his men immediately set out, following the Gilla Decair and his horse over hills, through valleys, and across rivers until they came to the sea ; then just as the horse was dashing into the water after its master one of the Fians, called Liagan Luath, caught up to it and held it by the tail, thinking that would stop its flight. Still the horse continued its journey into the sea, pulling Liagan after it ;

and always as they went the sea divided before them, showing a clean dry path ahead, but rolled its foaming waves behind them, and both horse and men vanished from the Fians' sight.

Fionn was greatly concerned that so many of his men were taken away from him in such a manner, though Conan had put him under promise to recover them.

“What are we to do now?” asked Oisin.

“What shall we do,” Fionn answered, “except follow them to wherever the Fomorian has taken them, and by some means or other contrive to set them free?”

“But we have neither ship nor boat,” said Oisin, “and even if we had, how could we trace them across the shifting water?”

“I remember,” said Fionn, “that the Tuatha de Danann at one time gave to the Gacl a faery ship, that would carry all who used it wherever they wished to journey. We will go straight to Ben Edar, where we shall find this ship.”

The Fians turned to go, but as Fionn gave a last look over the sea he saw, coming

towards him over the wet grey sands, two very tall men, with bright-bladed swords and shields wonderfully engraved with lions and leopards and other fierce beasts. They bowed their heads and bent their knees in greeting to the Fian chief, and in answer to Fionn's questions one of them said he was Feradach the Champion, and he and his companion had come from a far Eastern land to proffer their services to him.

“What can you do?” asked Fionn.

“Two things of power I possess—an axe and a sling,” said Feradach. “If there were as many as three thousand of your men waiting to sail over the sea, yet with three blows of my axe upon the sling-holder I could produce enough ships to hold them all. The only request I would make is that they should not look upon me while I strike those blows.”

“That is a marvellous feat,” said Fionn. “Is your companion able to perform wonders also?”

“My art is this,” said the other man, “that I can follow the trail of any living creature

over mountains and bogs and through forests, and discover where it hides itself, and it is as easy for me to do this on water as on land."

"I think," said Fionn, "that beyond all others you are the men we stand most in need of at the present moment," and he told them how the Gilla Decair had captured fifteen of his people.

Feradach said he would gladly help Fionn, and the Fians covered their eyes with their cloaks while he struck his sling-stick three times with his axe; when the Fians uncovered their eyes they saw in the water before them a large ship, with masts and sails ready set for a voyage.

Caeilté rose then and shouted loudly, so that wherever in Ireland the Fianna were they heard those shouts, and hastened to Fionn, for they feared some great danger or peril threatened him.

When the Fianna had all gathered they held counsel together, and it was agreed that Fionn, with fifteen of his men, should go in pursuit of the Gilla Decair; and during his absence Oisín should have command of the

Fianna and keep guard over Ireland. As soon as Fionn had given all his instructions to Oisín, he and his men boarded the ship, which passed over the high waves as swiftly as a sea-gull flies.

Three days and three nights they journeyed without seeing land, but on the morning of the fourth day one of the Fians climbed a mast, and far over the tossing sea descried an island, with huge cliffs rising sheer from the ocean. Soon the ship drew near to the island, and stopped of its own accord; but the Fians, seeing how little foothold the high slippery rocks afforded, wondered how they would ever climb them. Then Fergus Truelips, one of the Fians' Druids, spoke and said to Diarmuid, grandson of Duibhne :

“Though in your youth you were the companion of Angus Oge, and the wise and kingly Manannan brought you up in his Land of Promise, there teaching you many druidical and magic arts, yet you seem impotent to help in the hour of need, and lack that skill and courage one would expect from you, who have had the immortal gods for your friends

and teachers. Is it not possible for you to devise some way whereby we can land on this rock-encircled island, and search for our lost comrades ?”

Diarmuid's face grew red with indignation at being spoken to so scornfully, but he said nothing. He looked from the ship to the cliff, and considered for a moment, then he made a sudden mighty leap, and landed on a jutting ledge of rock far above his head. His comrades, however, could not accomplish that leap, so Diarmuid called to them that he would explore the island, and bring them word if the Fians were there.

He walked away from the rock and through a thick wood full of blossoming trees, until he came to a wide plain. He stood on the edge of the wood and surveyed the plain for some sign of life, but in all the space before him there was not one being to be seen. Only in the midst of the plain stood an immense leafy tree, and under the tree a deep clear spring of running water bubbled, and by the side of it an amber-coloured drinking-cup was lying on a big stone. Diarmuid walked over to it and

picked up the cup, but as he was filling it there came a loud murmuring from the well, and he knew then that some magician had placed spells on it.

“All the same,” he said aloud, “I will drink as much as I want of it,” and he drank one cupful after another.

He bent down to replace the cup on the stone, and when he stood up again he saw before him a stern-looking man with a drawn sword in his hand.

“You have no right here,” said the man, “walking on my land and drinking my water without permission.” With that he slashed at Diarmuid’s head, but did not touch him.

“It is an unchivalrous act, and one that the Fians have never done, to attack a man before he is ready,” said Diarmuid as he drew his sword.

All through the day they fought, and many hard blows they exchanged, but when dusk began to fall the magician—as Diarmuid imagined him to be—dived into the well and disappeared, and to Diarmuid this was a grief, for his fighting madness was just coming on



A DEEP CLEAR SPRING OF RUNNING WATER BUBBLED. DIARMUID
WALKED OVER TO IT

him. The next morning, however, the magician appeared again, and the fight was continued till evening, when he again disappeared. The same thing occurred on the following day, but when the magician would have dived into the well as before, Diarmuid seized him round the neck, and they both fell in together.

Down they dropped through the clear water, and when the bottom was reached Diarmuid was so astonished at the sight before his eyes that he loosened his grip on the magician, who escaped as quickly as he could.

The well had widened out into a broad lake, with little waves breaking on golden sands, and rippling over Diarmuid's feet. He stood there, wondering what country of the Sidhe he had reached, for before him stretched a wide green plain, with beautiful flowers growing over it, and shining white palaces standing in its midst, and before the largest of the palaces a multitude of armed men were gathered. Then Diarmuid saw the magician passing through this warlike host, and raising the battle shout of the Fianna he ran quickly

after him. But the magician escaped through the gates into the palace, and the whole army turned to do battle with the Fian.

Though Diarmuid was so greatly outnumbered he felt no fear, for his battle-fury rose in him stronger than ever. Again and again, sword in hand, he went through the host, and wherever he passed he left a laneway of dead and dying warriors. At last his enemies fled from him in terror, leaving him alone on the battle-field; and he, exhausted and full of wounds, sank down on the ground and fell asleep.

After a time he was awakened by a touch on the shoulder, and grasping his weapons in his hands, he rose to his feet.

“I can still fight,” he cried, facing the big man who had disturbed him.

“Not so quick, Diarmuid ua Duibhne,” said the man. “I have not come to harm you, but to warn you that your enemies’ ground is an ill place for you to rest upon. Come with me, and I will show you a safer place to sleep in, and one where you can be healed of your wounds.”

The Druid, for such he was, conducted Diarmuid a long distance through the country until at last they came to a high castle surrounded by woods, and tended him so well that at the end of three days he was completely healed. Diarmuid then inquired what country he had come to, and who was the head of it. The man replied :

“ This is Tir-fa-tonn—the Land under the Waves—and he whom you fought with is its king, and an ancient enemy of mine ; for that reason, also because from your manner of fighting I knew you to be one of Fionn’s champions, I determined to aid you. I myself was with Fionn for a year long ago, and a better master and a nobler man than he never lived. Now tell me what brought you here ? ”

Diarmuid then related to the Druid the story of the Gilla Decair and the Fians, and of the search that was being made for them.

II

In the meantime Fionn had grown very uneasy at the prolonged absence of Diarmuid.

At last he told his men to cut down the masts of the ship and make ladders from them and the ropes of the sails, and with the aid of the ladders they climbed the precipitous cliff. When the Fians came to the edge of the wood they knew that Diarmuid had been there, for they saw the bed of green leaves he had made for himself, but beyond that they found no trace of him.

Presently, as Fionn was looking over the plain, considering what next he should do, he heard the muffled sound of a horse's hoofs beating on the grass, and soon a horseman came into sight; when he drew near to Fionn they welcomed each other, and the man invited Fionn and his warriors to his dún, offering them hospitality for as long as they would stay.

That evening, when supper was over, Fionn said to his host:

“Tell me now what country this is, and who is its king?”

“This is the country called Sorcha, and I am its king. But, alas! a foreign ruler has cast a covetous eye upon my little kingdom,

and I hear that he has set forth with a great number of warriors to conquer my small army."

Just then a messenger came hastily to the king, saying :

"O King, the sea is covered with ships as thickly as the grass is flecked with blown apple blossoms in spring-time, and armed men are ravaging the country-side and plundering the people."

The King of Sorcha sighed, and said despondently :

"How can I hope to withstand this invader? Almost every country in the world is under tribute to him, and I fear that my small kingdom too must fall."

Fionn laughed in a cheerful manner, and said :

"Have no fear, king. When I was a boy I vowed that wherever I found an oppressed people, or one unjustly treated, I would fight for them, and never yet have I broken my word. I will hold your country for you as long as I am here." Then he turned to his little band of Fians: "Are you willing to fight on behalf of this king?"

Their eyes gleamed, and they shouted with joy at thought of the coming battle; they would follow their chief gladly, even though he led them to death.

The next morning the Fians, and the King of Sorcha with his army, sought the invaders, and on the wide open plain gave them battle. That day the Fians were like destroying eagles among a flock of delicate lambs, and by sunset the destruction of the foreigners was so great that only a few escaped to tell their king they were defeated.

“But who are these fighters?” asked the foreign king angrily. “Never before have I heard of the valiant deeds of these Irishmen—no, not even in tradition—nor do I believe it now. Buckle on my armour, for I will go against them myself, and destroy them so that there shall not be one left.”

When this speech came to Fionn’s ears he laughed, though he was very angry, and gathering his Fians together he made a terrible onslaught on his enemies, driving all that were left alive to the shore, where they hurriedly embarked on their ships and sailed away: nor

did they ever seek to wage war on the King of Sorcha again.

After the battle was over Fionn said to the king :

“I have helped you against your enemies, now I must depart on my own affairs, for the Fians would cry shame on me did I not continue my search for their comrades.”

The king inquired whom Fionn was searching for, and on hearing the tale of the Gilla Decair and of Diarmuid's long absence, said :

“Delay your departure a little while, O Fionn, for to-morrow a great feast will take place, and all my people will gather to thank you for your help, and give you homage. When that is over, I and my men will help you in your search for Diarmuid, nor will I leave you till he is found.”

So Fionn waited, and on the morrow, as they were all feasting outside the dún, a great company of warriors, armed with keen battle-swords and tall sharp spears, came marching across the plain, and Fionn gave a shout of welcome when he saw that, foremost of all, walked Diarmuid with a Druid by his side.

“You have come at the right time, Diarmuid,” said Fionn; “in another few hours we should all have been searching for you. But who are the people with you, and tell me have you any news of your comrades?”

“I have news, O chief, and it was told me by this Druid, who by his magic art has discovered where the Fians are. The man who carried them off—he who called himself the Gilla Decair—is Abartach, a prince in the Land of Promise; and how you will get them away from that country I do not know,” said Diarmuid.

Fionn sat still, pondering what course to pursue now, then suddenly he rose up from the banquet, and went to a lonely place in a wood near by, where in secrecy and with words of power he invoked the aid of Manannan, supreme lord of the Hidden Lands in the western sea. When he had ended his invocation he heard a sound like the rumbling of sea-waves in hollow places, and a shimmering many-coloured mist gathered about him; then in the midst of this mist the sea-god, covered with a blue mantle, in which glittered a myriad

star-like lights, appeared and promised his aid to Fionn.

When the morning dawned Fionn and his warriors bade farewell to the King of Sorcha, who gave them many rare and precious gifts in token of his friendship and gratitude, and set forth for the sea-coast. As they approached the sea they saw a wonderful ship with a shining white hull and sails of gold, rocking gently to and fro on the sunlit waves. In all the world there was no other ship like it; for this was the Ocean-Sweeper of Manannan, the magic ship which needed no hand to guide it, but of its own accord sought and found the desired haven, and was not hindered by any tempest or storm-tossed sea.

The Fians boarded the ship, and just as a swallow spreads its wings and sweeps through the air, so the golden sails unfurled and the ship skimmed over the water. Then, when the sun had set, and the blue shadows of twilight were falling, the ship slackened speed; and it seemed to the Fians that, as they looked before them, a beautiful island rose out of the sea almost under the ship's prow. Silently they

disembarked, and stood looking around them in wonder, for even in their dreams they had never beheld such an enchanted land as this. A golden light was over everything, and faery towers and palaces of crystal brightness lifted themselves above the groves of flowering trees which surrounded them. The spreading green lawns were covered with flowers, which shone like amethysts and sapphires and all manner of precious stones; and sweet singing-birds flew about, fearlessly perching on the heroes' shoulders or hands as they stood there—for this was the Land of Promise, the land of everlasting youth, where death and sorrow and evil were unknown.

After a time Fionn and his men began to walk towards a house showing between the trees, but at that moment a tall, handsome man, with long fair hair falling over his shoulders, and wearing a cloak of purple silk, fastened at the shoulder with a gold brooch, came towards them. He was followed by a number of warriors who, when they saw Fionn and his heroes, shouted with joy; for these were the Fians who had been carried

away on the demon horse, and often they had feared they would never see their country or their friends again.

“I bring you your men, Fionn,” said the man, “and of them all there isn’t a man I wouldn’t like for my own, except Conan mac Morna, who night and day unceasingly abuses and reviles every one near him. And sorry I am, Fionn, that a gentle and generous man like you should have such a scurrilous and loud-voiced person as that son of Morna in your Fianna, for his tongue is like the clapper of a bell that is constantly blown by the wind.”

The Fians laughed, and Fionn looked intently at the speaker, but failed to recognise him. Then he said :

“Tell me now who you are, for surely if I had met you before I should remember that meeting?”

Before the stranger could speak Conan said, scornfully :

“He was the Gilla Decair once, and well was he named that. Now he calls himself the Prince Abartach. Prince indeed! In that

long lanky body of his he hasn't the soul or the wit of a fly, and truly I shall be glad to get away from him ; for bad as you are, Fionn, he is worse, and little of generosity or princeliness is there in his nature."

"If you are the Gilla Decair," said Fionn, "you must make amends to me for the trouble I have had in searching for my Fians."

"Whatever trouble you have had, Fionn," said Abartach, "is nothing compared to the annoyance I have undergone at the tongue of that man Conan." Then, as Conan began to abuse him again, he continued : "Take him away quickly, I implore you, for I am weary of the sound of his voice."

Even as he spoke the last word he disappeared, and whether he went up into the air, or down into the ground, neither Fionn nor his Fians ever knew, for they never saw him again.

Then the Ocean-Sweeper carried them back to their own country, and this is how the pursuit of the Gilla Decair ended, and how Fionn recovered his men from the Land of Promise.

THE FAERY WOMAN

FIONN had two wise and swift hounds, called Bran and Sgeolan, that he loved beyond all else, and this is how he gained possession of them.

One summer when he was at his dún on the Hill of Allen, his mother Muireen, accompanied by her young and beautiful sister Tuirenn, came to visit them. At this time some captains of the Ulster Fianna were also visiting Fionn, and among them was one named Illan Echa. Illan thought that never before had he seen any one so fair as Tuirenn, with her eyes blue as the speedwell, and hair the colour of ripe corn, and before all things in the world he loved her and wished to marry her, so that she might be always with him. After some days he went to Fionn, and said to him :

“Soon, O Fionn, I must return to Ulster, and before I go I would ask you to give me Tuirenn in marriage, for I love her, and desire above all things to take her back with me to my home.”

Fionn, as head of his clan, had power to bestow or withhold his consent in such matters, so he said to Illan :

“Do you know that Tuirenn belongs to the folk of the Sidhe, and I can only give her to you on certain conditions—namely, that she shall be restored safely to me whenever I may send for her, and that you shall go surety for her safety ?”

“Do you think she will not be safe with me ?” inquired Illan indignantly. “Yet, because she is dearer to me than everything I possess, I will willingly agree to your conditions.” Then, with an anxious note in his voice, he asked : “Have you any reason to think that through me, or any of my kinsfolk, harm will come to Tuirenn ?”

“I have heard that Uchtdealb, who is also a woman of the Sidhe, has given you her love,” Fionn answered, “and perhaps through

her jealousy some harmful thing may happen to Tuirenn."

"Do not fear for Tuirenn; I will always guard her with the greatest care and love, remembering that if anything evil happens to her my life will be forfeit to you," said Illan boldly; yet secretly he felt some misgivings when he thought of Uchtdealb, for she belonged to the faery race, and, if she chose, had power for either good or evil over human life.

On that understanding Fionn gave Tuirenn to Illan, though he would not let her accompany her husband when he returned to Ulster, but arranged to send her afterwards with a guard of his most trusted Fian chiefs.

A little time elapsed after the departure of Illan, then Fionn called his son Oisin, and Caeilté and Goll mac Morna, and gave them orders to take Tuirenn to her husband's home. They found Illan anxiously watching for them, but before Goll gave Tuirenn into his hands he reminded Illan of the conditions Fionn had imposed on him, and Illan swore by the sun

and the wind that he would guard her as his greatest treasure.

Autumn and winter passed, and the green spring-time was over everything. In every wood and coppice the songs of blackbirds and thrushes were heard, and all the little creatures of air and earth rejoiced in the sunlight and warm breezes. Tuirenn, too, sang as she sat in the wide sunny window of her room, stitching at her embroidery, and looking sometimes over the plain before her.

She was alone with her maids just now, for a few days before Illan had received a message calling him away ; but any hour now he might return. Very reluctantly he had left Tuirenn, for in his heart of hearts he feared that Uchtdealb, the faery woman who loved him, would at some time or other put an enchantment on the woman he loved and had made his wife ; so before leaving he charged her maids to watch her well, and allow no stranger near her.

A shadow fell across Tuirenn's work, and looking up she saw, standing by her side, a tall fair girl, with a strange look in her eyes

which, to Tuirenn, seemed to betoken some hidden enmity. Tuirenn looked at her closely, wondering who she could be ; then she glanced at her maids, but they seemed unconscious of the stranger's presence among them, and did not even hear her when she spoke.

“Fair princess,” said the girl, “I am a messenger from Fionn, who sends you greetings, and desires to speak with you in the wood yonder. Come with me and I will lead you to him.”

Tuirenn wondered as she listened to the girl. It was not like Fionn to send such a message, but she thought that perhaps, for reasons unknown to her, he could not come to the house. She followed the girl from the room, and her women looked up as she passed, but still did not see the stranger.

When they came to the edge of the wood Tuirenn said :

“I do not remember having seen you before. What is your name, and do you belong to the Clan Basna ?”

The girl looked at Tuirenn, and there was a wicked light in her eyes as she answered :

“Have you not heard of me? I am Uchtdealb the Fair. Illan was my husband before he was yours, but when he saw you he put me away from him, and gave you my place. All these months I have been planning vengeance, and now the time has come to take it. Shall I tell you what it is? I am going to put a spell on you, and change you into the form of a hound, and your life shall be spent in chasing wild animals. You shall suffer, too, for your mind I will not change, and your thoughts will be as before—of Illan and Fionn and all your lost friends.”

Tuirenn shrank away in fear from the girl; then she thought of Fionn and his heroes, and her courage returned.

“If you do this thing to me,” she said, “Fionn will know, and will be revenged on you, even though he has to hunt through the whole world to find you. Remember that through his mother he too belongs to the faery race, and has power, and whatever spell you place on me he will surely make you remove. So I have no fear of you.”

Uchtdealb was furious with Tuirenn for speaking in such a fearless manner, and could not restrain her anger. With a little carved yew stick she carried in her hand she struck Tuirenn, and cried :

“Hound you shall be, and hound you shall remain.”

Instantly Tuirenn was transformed into a beautiful white hound, with black markings on her sides and back, and soft brown eyes that looked up piteously in Uchtdealb’s face. But the enchantress, slipping a golden collar on her neck, held her in leash, and in that manner led her to the house of a man named Fergus Fionnlia. Of all houses it was the worst to take her to, for in the whole of Ireland there was not another man like Fergus, who hated dogs, and would never keep one with him.

When Uchtdealb saw him she said :

“At last Fionn has sent you one of his hounds to mind, Fergus Fionnlia. And he charges you to maintain her well, and not let her scour the whole country hunting game for your pot.”

Fergus was very angry when he heard this message.

“Doesn't Fionn know very well that the one thing in this world I dislike more than another is a dog?” he said. “I am surprised that he should send one to me. However, as he has never quartered any on me before I will take care of her, and guard her as well as I can.”

Uchtdealb departed, thinking that poor enchanted Tuirenn would not have much comfort or happiness with Fergus. But Fergus grew to love the hound very much; she was so swift that no animal, however fleet it was, escaped her when she went hunting, and her intelligence was so great that Fergus was often astonished at the manner in which she seemed to understand every word he uttered.

The weeks passed by, and when the hound had been with Fergus for about two months she gave birth to two puppies; little white and black things, that rolled and tumbled over each other in a quaint, helpless manner, which Fergus was never tired of watching.

In the meantime it came to Fionn's know-



THE ENCHANTRESS, SLIPPING A GOLDEN COLLAR ON HER NECK,
HELD HER IN LEASH

ledge that Tuirenn was not with Illan, and no one knew what had become of her. So Fionn sent a swift messenger to Illan, bidding him come to the Hill of Allen at once.

“Where is Tuirenn, your wife?” asked Fionn sternly when Illan arrived.

“She has disappeared,” answered Illan, “and no man or woman of my house knows where she has gone.”

“You have not guarded her as you promised to do,” said Fionn. “You must search for her, and when she is found bring her immediately to me; she shall not return to your house again. If she is not discovered within a week you will lose your life.”

“Give me more time,” Illan pleaded. “Already my trackers have been up and down through Ireland, and have found no trace of her, but I will try other means now.”

He went from Fionn and journeyed northward to the house of the Sidhe where Uchtdealb lived, on the borders of Ulster.

“Tuirenn has gone from me, and Fionn has demanded her back,” Illan said to the faery woman, “and unless you can help me

by your art, and tell me where she is hidden, my head will not be on my shoulders much longer."

"I can help you," said Uchtdealb, "but I wish you to make me a promise first."

"I will promise anything," said Illan, after a moment's hesitation, "if you will help me to find Tuirenn. What is it you wish?"

"Well," said the woman of the Sidhe, "I will take you to Tuirenn on condition that you make me your wife again when she has returned to the Clan Basna."

"I give you my promise I will," Illan answered. "Now take me straightway to Tuirenn."

Uchtdealb conducted Illan to the house where Fergus lived, and said that Fionn had sent for the hound she had left with him. Very unwillingly Fergus brought both the hound and her puppies; he had become so attached to them that he would have liked to keep them always.

Then Uchtdealb spoke to the hound, saying:

"For the sake of Illan, whom I love, I forgo my vengeance on you, and I bid you

resume your form. But over your children I have no power, and they will always remain hounds."

She touched the enchanted animal with her little yew rod; and immediately it changed into Tuirenn, to the unbounded amazement of Fergus and Illan. But Illan was very glad that Tuirenn was found, for now his life would not be forfeit to Fionn; and the next day he took her and the puppies to Fionn, and told him how they were born while their mother was under an enchantment.

Great anger came on Fionn as he listened.

"Were it not for my word that you should go safely when Tuirenn was found, I would kill you where you stand," he said; "but from henceforth, until the day of your death, there shall be enmity between your house and mine. Go now, and remember that it will be an evil day for you should we ever stand opposed to each other on the battlefield."

Illan was glad to go, for no one cared to face Fionn's terrible wrath. I think that Fionn killed Illan in after years, for though he might forgive a wrong to himself, he

would certainly not forgive a wrong to a woman.

When the puppies grew up, Bran and Sgeolan, as Fionn named them, proved to be the wisest and swiftest of all the hounds of the Fianna, and two of the greatest treasures Fionn ever possessed. His third great treasure was Cnu Deireoil, the faery musician who came to him at Slieve-na-man.

THE ENCHANTED CAVE

CONARAN MAC IMIDEL, one of the Tuatha de Danann chiefs, was lord of Keshcorran in the north at the time when Fionn, with a great number of his Fians, went up there to hunt. It did not please Conaran that Fionn should hunt over his country then ; so he called his three daughters, who were skilled in every kind of sorcery and witchcraft, and could assume any form they chose, and said to them :

“ Weave spells over Fionn and his men that will hold them in bondage, for I do not want them roaming and hunting through all my country at this time.”

The daughters of Conaran talked together, then the eldest of them, who was called Iarran, said to her father :

“ It shall be done ; but do you go to the

crooked holly-tree and bring us three forked sticks from it. We will place a spell on the Fians from which they shall never recover.”

Conaran brought the holly-sticks to his daughters, and they, taking three bundles of yarn and the forked twigs, sought the cave that penetrates far into the mound of Keshcorran. They seated themselves just inside it, and planting their sticks firmly in the sandy floor, stretched the wool on them, and began to wind and twist it into ropes.

Now Fionn was sitting on the hill-top, with only his two dogs, Bran and Sgeolan, and Conan mac Morna to keep him company. When the hounds heard the other dogs barking as they followed the chase through the woods below, they strained at their leash, and whined to get away also. Fionn set them free, and watched them racing down the hill-side, and after a time he and Conan followed them.

When they had walked a little distance a faint sound of singing fell on their ears, and they stopped to listen :

In the Dún of Darkness
With soft wool we weave
Chains for the heroes.
Death and Despair
In the threads are woven.
Stronger than white bronze
Is the thread from the fleeces
Of the flocks of Darkness.

Fionn and Conan looked at each other. "It seems to me," said Fionn, "that this is a matter touching us. We will see who are the singers of that little song."

"It's a song that is not to my liking," said Conan, "and I think I will stop where I am."

"Never yet," Fionn said, "has any one of the Fianna lacked courage in any adventure, and surely it shall not be said that Conan mac Morna showed fear because of a song he heard sung!"

"By my spear, it shall not," Conan replied, and his face flushed redly. "Let us go now," and he walked onward.

As they rounded a huge ledge of rock they came in sight of the cave, and saw three maidens sitting at the entrance. Young and fair they seemed to be, but when Fionn looked

at them more closely he observed that their eyes had a strange red glare in them, like the eyes of an animal when it is waiting to pounce on its prey.

“I think there is something evil about them,” said Fionn, “though they look fair and gentle. Perhaps it will be wiser for us not to go nearer.”

“Surely such a great hero as Fionn mac Cumall does not fear three gentle maidens?” taunted Conan, and laughed loudly.

“I am not afraid of the greatest champion on earth, so why should I fear women?” answered Fionn. “But there are powers belonging to an unseen world which even the most courageous man may fear, without having his courage questioned, and a presentiment that such powers are near is on me now. However, we will speak to these girls,” and he walked up to the mouth of the cave and stood before them.

“What are you doing,” he asked, “and why do you sing such a weird song as you work?”

“We are making a rope to amuse ourselves

with," answered Iarran, "and while we work we sing the thoughts that enter our minds. But will you not come into the cave and talk to us for a time? Our father, Conaran mac Imidel, is away, and during his absence we are lonely."

Fionn hesitated—he remembered the song he had heard them sing; then he thought how foolish it was to imagine that these girls could work harm to him or his Fians, so he and Conan stepped over the rope, which was woven from one side of the cave's mouth to the other. No sooner were they inside the cave than a trembling came over all their limbs, and the strength left their bodies. Then, before their eyes, the maidens transformed themselves into terrible, fierce-looking hags, more deformed and ugly than any one the Fians had ever seen before. They seized the heroes, and bound them fast with a portion of the enchanted woollen rope, then threw them into a corner of the cave, scoffing at them as they lay there helpless.

When the hags returned to the entrance, Conan began to taunt and revile Fionn.

“Is it not enough for you, O Fionn,” he said, “that you have put my life in danger many times before? And now you have done it again. Though the poets sing of you as a doer of great deeds, and say you know what has happened in the past and will happen in the future, I think they lie, for surely one who had so much wisdom would not get into the trouble you do. But if you’ll take off these old witches’ enchanted bonds, and let me escape from them, I shall believe there is some truth in what the bards say about you.”

“Be silent, Conan,” said Fionn, “and if your last hour is near, as possibly it is, do not spend it in reviling, but in thinking noble thoughts, as befits one of the Fianna Eireann. Why struggle against Fate, or rebel because Death draws near? When this life is over we shall go to the Happy Isles, where the Ever-Living Ones dwell, and where only the noble and wise have place.”

Conan continued muttering to himself, but Fionn, wrapped in his own thoughts, paid no heed to him.

It was not long till some of the Fians came



THEY SEIZED THE HEROES AND BOUND THEM FAST

up the hillside looking for their chief. When they saw the dreadful-looking hags inside the cave they stopped, and viewed them with astonishment; then they caught sight of Fionn and Conan, bound and powerless, and wild with indignation and anger stepped over the barrier to free them. But helplessness fell on them too, and though they struggled with what remnant of strength they still possessed, the witches easily overcame them.

The day passed on, and one group after another of the Fians came up the hillside, and seeing the plight their comrades were in attempted to rescue them; but the same fate befell them as the others. At last, late in the afternoon, Oscr and Caeilté and mac Lugach, with a great number of the Clan Basna and Clan Morna, attracted by the baying of hounds at the cave mouth—for they would not follow their masters into the cave—ascended the hill to see what was happening. They too were overcome by the magic spells the demon hags had woven about the cave, and were easily bound and thrown into dark corners with the other Fians.

The witches looked at each other, well satisfied with the way they had captured the Fians, whose brave deeds and unfailing courage were sung all over the country.

“I think we have them all,” said Iarran to her sisters, “and now, if you will fetch the two-edged swords from the dún, we will kill them.” Then, addressing the Fians: “Great heroes you are indeed, to be so easily conquered by three women. Among you all there is not one who has strength to lift a weapon, nor will you ever again hunt or trespass in our province, for before the night passes there will be no Fians alive in the land of Imidel.”

The sisters, Caemog and Cullen of the Red Hair, returned with the swords to Iarran, but before they began to slay the heroes they went outside the cave, and looked round on every side, thinking that perhaps some of the Fians might have escaped their enchantments.

They were on the point of returning to perform their dreadful work when, emerging from the wood clothing the lower slopes of the hillside, they observed a man of very noble and warlike appearance striding towards them.

The setting sun shone on the long unsheathed sword he carried in his hand, and by the device on his shield the witches knew that he who approached them was Goll mac Morna, one of the most unconquerable of the Fian chiefs. As he came near to them they raised their swords and rushed at him, uttering horrid cries, and taken unawares, for a moment he stood in danger of death. But he soon recovered himself, and a fierce rage rose in him at the discourteous manner in which the wicked witches had attacked him, so that he determined to kill them ; and, using all the battle-skill that he possessed, with one mighty stroke he gave Caemog and Cullen their death-wounds.

Iarran, seeing that her sisters were dead, pretended to give up the battle, and dropped her sword on the ground. But deceit was in her heart, and the first time that Goll mac Morna turned his eyes from her to the hideous beings stretched on the grass, she swiftly passed to his back, and clasped her strong arms about him, so that only with the utmost difficulty could he twist himself round to face her. For a long time they struggled together,

then, as Goll felt his strength failing him, he made a tremendous effort, and throwing the hag to the ground bound her feet and hands with the straps of his shield. So great was his anger at her treachery that he would have killed her instantly, but she implored him to spare her.

“O warrior that never yet was conquered, and whose courage has never faltered in any battle, surely it were better for you to spare my life, and in return I will liberate the Fians from their enchanted bonds, which I only am able to do. Release me, I pray you, and by all the gods I worship I swear that what I have promised I will perform.”

Goll mac Morna released her and said :

“For the present your life is safe from me ; but if you do not fulfil your promise to the uttermost, I vow you shall be tied to a stake and burnt to ashes. Come now to the Fianna, and loose them from the wicked enchantment you have placed on them.”

Together they walked to the cave, and going over to the Fians the witch waved her hands and chanted over them :

Back to your underworld, all my demon helpers,
 Fly to your caverns where no sunlight falls :
 Hither comes a warrior born of the Immortals,
 Hurry from his presence to your moonless halls.

Loose the chains that bind these Fians brave and noble,
 Loose the strong enchantment wrought by Fomor art ;
 Hasten now, dark spirits, to the hidden portal,
 All our wiles availed naught, conquered we depart.

There was a strange rustling sound in the cave as she chanted, and the Fians saw a host of shadowy beings—huge and monstrous, and hideous beyond words—rise up from about them and melt and disappear into the darkness of the cave beyond. At the same moment the oppression left their limbs, and when they stood up, hardly daring to believe that the witches' enchantment was so quickly dispelled, they found that all their strength and energy had returned to them.

At supper that evening the Fians made great rejoicing, while the Druids and poets of the Fianna composed and sang songs of praise in honour of Goll mac Morna, who had delivered them when they were in a more deadly peril than had ever befallen them before.

THE HOUSE OF THE PHANTOMS

MANY strong bands of sea-robbers had landed in different places on the shores of Munster, and were plundering, and sometimes slaying, the inhabitants of the villages they came to. Eoghan, the King of Munster, finding that his own soldiers were unable to cope successfully with the hardy sea-pirates, sent an urgent message to Fionn, imploring him to go with some of his Fians and drive the foreigners out of Munster.

This message pleased Fionn, for he was never happier than when defending his country, or putting an end to injustice and wrong. Without delay he called together a number of his warriors and started off, and before many days had passed they had driven the marauders away. When the fighting was all over the

king entertained Fionn and his men with hunting and horse-racing, and the evening of each day closed with a great banquet. At the conclusion of the Fians' visit the king gave them presents of gold and silver cups, inset with precious stones, and much gold and silver too; but to Fionn he gave a stately black horse, with bridle and head-piece of golden chain-work, from which hung little musical golden bells.

"There is no horse in Ireland so swift as Black Flame," said the king, stroking the proudly arched neck; "indeed in the whole world, except the wave-stepping steed of Manannan, there is none to surpass him, for he is descended from the horses of the Sidhe. I prize him more than all else I possess, but because of the service you have rendered me, O Fionn, I would not give you less than the best I have."

"The care and love you have given him he shall not lack from me," said Fionn simply. "Will you come with me, Black Flame?" he asked, taking the bridle in his hand, and the horse, as though it understood Fionn's words,

looked at him for a moment, then rested its head on his shoulder.

But Oisín and Caeilté, who were very proud of their own horses, that were swift as the wind that blew from the Island of Youth and swept down from the mountain heights, doubted whether the black horse would prove himself swifter than theirs. So Fionn said :

“Come now with me to the sands of Berramain on the western coast, and we will race our horses against each other, and decide which is the best.”

The Fians went quickly through the woods and plains and over the mountain passes till they came to the strand, and Black Flame won all the races which were run, and at the close still remained untired. Afterwards the Fians broke up into small parties and went hunting in different directions. But Fionn and Caeilté and Oisín proceeded southwards, galloping onwards on their tireless horses, until they were many miles distant from their comrades. Finally they reached a valley near Loch Lein, dark with yew trees and encircled by high mountains. The night was falling,

they were hungry and tired, and heavy thunder-clouds began to gather on the hill-tops, while vivid flashes of lightning illumined the darkening valley they were in.

“We should seek shelter, father,” said Oisín. “Our horses are tired and need rest. For my part, I should like some supper and to be out of the storm when it breaks.”

Fionn looked round him and said :

“I know this place well, and we shall find no shelter here. But if we cross the hills to the south we shall come to a house, and the man who lives in it will give a hearty welcome to both us and our horses.”

As Fionn spoke the valley was filled with light for a moment, and Caeilté exclaimed :

“There is a house at the end of the valley. I saw the light gleam on it just now. It looks a poor place, but the owner will doubtless be glad to give shelter and food to the great chief of the Fianna. Let us hurry, for our horses do not like the crashes of thunder or the lightning flashes.”

They galloped their horses across the glade to the house, and dismounting, opened the

door without ceremony. As they entered the room—which was dimly lit by a single torch and appeared to be empty—the most dreadful howls and screeches seemed to rise from the floor and fill every corner. Caeilté said :

“Surely this is the abode of demons. Let us go hence. It will be no new thing for us to sleep under the shade of the trees, or go supperless to our rest.”

But Fionn turned to Caeilté and said :

“The Fians never yet turned their backs on demons or men, and not now will they begin. It is not like you, son of Ronan, to have fear because of a few little howls.”

“It is not the seen I fear to grapple with, but the unseen,” said Caeilté. “By my spear, here is something visible at last.”

Both he and Oisín pointed with their spears to the middle of the floor, and Fionn turned to look. There, before him, stood three figures: one a tall man, with tangled grey hair and beard—the ugliest man he had ever seen; and by his side stood a grim old woman with three heads, and each of the heads was yelling most horribly. But the third figure



THERE BEFORE HIM STOOD THREE FIGURES

was more appalling than the other two, for it was the body of a man without a head, and in the middle of his breast a single eye rolled and turned about, and shone with a dull green glare.

Fionn, however, was in no way frightened by these dreadful looking beings, and inquired :

“What manner of people are you who show no pleasure when the chiefs of the Fianna visit you? It is the custom of the houses throughout Ireland to receive us with songs of greeting; with tables laden with venison and the flesh of the wild boar, and great flowing bowls of ale. But you have only howls and wails for us, and an empty board.”

The old grey man laughed, and said, as he locked and barred the door :

“It is not sweet songs and feastings you will get here, O Fionn. Many a day we have waited for you, and woven enchantments to get you in our power, and take vengeance for a wrong you, though perhaps unknowingly, did to one of our race. But I remember now one little song we can give you before you die, for we shall certainly kill

you and your companions before the morning breaks." He stopped for a moment, and then called out: "Ho, my little children of the underworld, rise from your dark places and give greetings to the kingly heroes of the Fianna."

The torch flickered and died out, but the room was filled with strange coloured lights that danced and moved about as though held by invisible hands; and by the aid of this light the astonished Fians beheld nine bodies without heads rise up through the floor on one side of the cottage, and on the other side nine heads without bodies appeared, and vague shadowy forms moved in the air about them. When Fionn saw all these dreadful phantoms he held his shield firmly before him, and drew his magic spear—a weapon forged long ages before by some ancient armourer of the Sidhe, who put a song of war and unfailing death in its shining blade.

"Sing now, my little ones, and put the enchantment of your song on these chiefs of the Fianna," muttered the grey old man.

At his bidding the phantoms began to howl

and wail and scream, and all the wild animals of the woods and hills hid where the sound could not reach them. The horses broke loose and ran away in terror—all but Black Flame, who, knowing that his master was in peril, beat on the heavily-barred door with his hoofs, splintering it into fragments, and screaming with rage rushed over the threshold to stand by Fionn's side. Fear touched even the heroes' hearts, but they called on their gods to strengthen them, and held their spears and shields ready for the attack of the demons.

Now in the darkness of that enchanted house a fierce fight began. The grey old man wove spells to weaken the heroes' limbs, while the phantoms attacked them on every side with weapons cast in that dark underworld from whence they came. Sometimes the battle would go hardly with the Fians, and then they would call on Lugh Lam-Fada and the Mor Riga, who would strengthen their weary arms, and make their hearts glow with a new courage.

All through the night the battle raged, and the howls of the phantoms, when they were

struck by Fionn's magic spear, and the screaming of Black Flame, as with teeth and hoofs he tried to tear and trample the weird spirits to death in his endeavours to defend his master, echoed wildly over the hills. Then, to the joy of the Fians, the pale light of dawn shone through the broken door, dispersing the darkness of the hut, and at that moment both house and phantoms disappeared from sight. But over Fionn and his comrades, exhausted and weary, a dense cloud of sleep fell, and they woke only when the sun was high in the heavens, and they heard the birds singing and their horses neighing round them.

THE COMING OF THE CARLE

EARLY in the autumn following the fight at the House of the Phantoms Fionn went to Ben Edar—which, you remember, is now called Howth—and there he gathered round him many hundreds of the Fianna, for he wished to discuss with them the plans he had made for their disposal during the coming winter.

They had been a few days at Ben Edar when Fionn, with some of his chief captains in attendance, one morning walked across the hill to the edge of the cliff and looked over the eastern sea. As they gazed, there came into sight a fine big ship, with full-set sails that gleamed like a sea-gull's wings as it flies in the sunlight. Swiftly it sailed along, and when it drew near to the shore a handsome young man appeared on deck. A shining

tunic of white metal covered him from the neck to the knees, and on his left shoulder was slung a round shield of red yew, studded and encircled with bronze. A straight keen-edged sword hung by his side, and in his hands were two tall slender spears; resting these on the deck before him he took a high, wide leap, and landed on the sandy shore.

“What youth is this who comes so daringly into the presence of the Fian chiefs?” Conan asked Fionn.

“He has probably heard of your warlike deeds, Conan, and has come to challenge you to battle,” Fionn replied.

“Indeed he has not,” said Conan. “Oisín and Oscur, place your broad shoulders together, so that I may stand unobserved at the back of you. I am not inclined to fight just now.”

The Fians laughed heartily at this; and hearing the sound the warrior on the beach looked up, then made his way by a narrow path up the rugged cliff until he stood before Fionn.

“I seek a man called Fionn,” the stranger

said, addressing himself to the great hero-chief. "Do you know in what part of this land he at present abides?"

"Your search ends here," Fionn answered; "I am the man you seek. But tell me who you are and what country you come from, and for what reason you have sought me? Do you need my help, or that of my noble Fians, for any adventurous quest you are bound on?"

"My name is Cael, and I am son of the King of Thessaly. Well I know you by name, O Fionn, and have heard of you as a very brave and valiant fighter; but I have not come to seek aid from you or any of your men—I have come to subdue you and place you under tribute. Many countries I have visited since I first took arms, and not one have I left without first placing it under terror of my sword and exacting from it a yearly tribute. Now I have come to do likewise to Ireland and the Fianna, and the sooner the combat is arranged the better pleased I shall be."

Conan mac Morna, hiding still behind Oisín

and Oseur, could not restrain his tongue when he heard Cael's speech.

“Undoubtedly you have heard of us—who has not?” he proudly asked. “But in all our forays and wanderings we have never heard any man speak of you, nor do I, for one, believe a word of what you have said. The warrior has not yet lived who would not be easily conquered by even the youngest and most inexperienced of the Fians. I think too, young man, it will be better for your health if you remove yourself from this place immediately, and cease tempting the Fians with your idle and boasting words.”

“There is only one man among the Fianna who would speak in such a foolish manner,” Cael responded, “and that is Conan the Bald. But I tell you, Conan, that could all those Fians who have died during the past seven years come to life again, and be added to those who still live, between the rising of the sun and its setting I would make you all feel the pain and sorrow of death, so that not one Fian would be left alive to enjoy either battle or feast again.” Then he turned to Fionn:

“Perhaps it would be easier for you, Fionn, if we chose a more peaceful method of deciding who is the best man among us, and if you can find among your Fians one who can get the better of me in running, or in single fight, or in wrestling, then I will return to my own country and never trouble you again.”

“I assure you that we are not at all troubled by your presence,” said Fionn, “and if, of the three things you mention, you prefer to run a race, I will fetch Caeilté mac Ronan, whose running is swift as the movement of a star when it falls from its place in the heavens. Do you abide here in friendliness with my Fians until I return with Caeilté, whom I shall probably find at Tara; if not there, he will surely be with some of his kindred at Keshcorran in the north.”

Cael agreed to this, and soon after noonday Fionn commenced his journey. He had not gone very far when the sun disappeared behind a bank of dark clouds, and the rain descended in torrents, but he still walked on, and the miles slipped away under his quick feet. Soon he came to a dark and gloomy valley, with

hills covered by thick woods rising on either side, and the boughs of the trees met and formed an archway over the road he was travelling. Now he began to consider how much truth there might be in what Cael had said of himself. Fionn had never heard of Cael before, but if he had placed so many countries and people under tribute as he claimed to have done, then he must possess some great magical power unknown to Fionn, and there was small hope that Ireland and the Fianna would escape, unconquered as they had hitherto been.

It was unusual for Fionn to feel despondent, or to have doubts as to the result of anything in which he and his Fians might engage ; but with each step that he took along the gloomy road he felt an increasing certainty that Cael would overcome Caeilté in the forthcoming contest of speed, unless some one or something unforeseen came to the aid of the Fians. Then a strange thumping sound in the distance attracted his attention, and raising his head he saw a man of most extraordinary appearance striding along the road towards

him. Never before, in all his wanderings and adventures, Fionn thought to himself, had he seen such a terrifying ugly fellow. The Gilla Decair was bad-looking enough, but he was beautiful compared to this strange being, who was gigantic in size.

The nearer he came the more astonished Fionn was that a giant of such surpassing ugliness should be in the country without his knowledge. For the skin of the giant's face was the colour of yellow leather; his legs were as thick as the trunks of big pine-trees, but not straight as they are; and on his huge misshapen feet were shoes as big as currachs. A tunic of a dirty grey-brown colour covered him to the middle of his legs, and the tails of this were ornamented up to his waist with a thick layer of mud. As he moved these tails knocked and flapped against his legs with such force that the noise they made could be heard fully half-a-mile away, and with each step that he took Fionn could hear the mud and water squelching in his shoes, and could see how it squirted up and over him. Yet in the midst of all this mass of ugliness and dirt Fionn was

surprised to observe, as the giant drew nearer, how beautiful were his eyes, which shone like two clear, deep-blue stars in his yellow face.

Soon they came opposite each other, but Fionn, being in a hurry to find Caeilté, was passing on his way without speaking, when the giant hailed him.

“Is it you, Fionn mac Cumall, that I see walking along the road without either Fians or hounds to attend you? Is there any trouble or anxiety on you, that you wander about the country by yourself?”

“I am indeed troubled,” Fionn answered; “but even did I tell you the cause of my perplexity it would not bring me one bit nearer to getting rid of it.”

“Do not be certain of that, Fionn. This I know, that unless you confide in me, and tell me exactly what the matter is that perplexes and annoys you, you will regret it for the rest of your life.”

“If that be so,” said Fionn, “I will tell you, though I have no knowledge of who or what you are. Know then, that this morning

there came to me at Ben Edar a young man, who said he was Cael, the King of Thessaly's son; and that he would conquer and put under tribute the whole of Ireland—as he had other countries—unless I found some one who, at running or wrestling or fighting, was better than himself.”

“I have some acquaintance with Cael,” said the big man, “and I assure you he is not boasting. There will be desolation and grief among the Fianna unless you find some one to overcome him. What do you intend doing?”

“I have said that Caeilté shall run a race with him, and I go now to search for Caeilté, who is either at Tara or Keshcorran.”

The big man laughed scornfully. “Indeed if Caeilté is the only man among the Fianna on whom you rely, you are already conquered; for although Caeilté has the swiftness of a frightened deer, Cael is twice as quick.”

“May I die before I see Ireland paying tribute to the foreigner!” exclaimed Fionn vehemently. “I will invoke the aid of the hidden gods and the folk of the hills; they have never yet failed me in my need, and

they will not now refuse their help," and he began to hurry along the forest road.

The giant made a couple of strides after him and held him by the shoulder. "Curb your hastiness, Fionn, and listen to me. I offer myself as the champion of Ireland and the opponent of Cael in the race, and I will wager you anything you like that I shall win."

"You have said that Cael is almost unconquerable," said Fionn, "so why should you seek to endanger your life in my affairs? Though indeed I think that, between the weight of your coat and those ill-fitting brogues, you must find it difficult enough to walk, and running would be an impossible feat."

"You are unwise, Fionn, to judge a person by his outward appearance. I tell you now that in the whole of Ireland there is no man but myself can outrace Cael."

"If that be so," replied Fionn, "let us straightway return to Ben Edar, and if you deliver Ireland and the Fianna from the burden Cael would impose upon us, I, for one, will swear to render you service any time you

demand it—even my life shall be yours if you ask it. And now tell me by what name you are known.”

“For the present you can call me ‘The Carle of the Brown Coat,’” the stranger replied.

So Fionn turned his face and steps again in the direction of Ben Edar, but as he walked along the dark road, under the arching trees, he looked wonderingly at the big uncouth man who strode silently along at his side; for now and then Fionn caught the gleam of little many-coloured flames which flitted and danced around the stranger, and heard a sweet, clear ringing in the air about him, like the chiming of those silver bells which make music in Manannan’s Isle of Promise.

It was night-time at Ben Edar, and the Fians, though they treated Cael quite courteously, were beginning to hate him intensely, for he moved among them and spoke to them as though he had already proved himself to be the conqueror of both them and their land. They did not pay much attention to his

speeches, however, but occupied themselves in preparing supper, and the hillsides and hollows of Ben Edar were cheerful with the light of many fires and torches, the laughter of men, and impatient barking of hounds—who scented their supper—when Fionn and the big man unexpectedly appeared in their midst. In a minute the Fians had all gathered round the stranger, for never before, in the length or breadth of Ireland, had they seen his like. Hearing the commotion Cael strolled up also, and seeing Fionn inquired :

“Well, Fionn, have you brought Caeilté to compete with me ?”

“I have not,” said Fionn curtly ; “but I have brought another man, who is known as the ‘Carle of the Brown Coat,’ and he will try his skill in running against yours.”

Cael looked at the Carle, and observing his ugliness and dirty condition with deep disgust and contempt, said :

“If that is the only man you can find, Fionn, you may take him away and leave him in the place you got him from, for never, though I lived to all eternity, would I run with

the like of that. Moreover, Fionn, I regard it as a great indignity that you should bring into my presence such an object as that, and when you are under my commands I will not forget this insult you have placed on me."

The Carle gave a sudden burst of laughter, which, like the flapping of his coat-tails, could have been heard half a mile away; then he turned to Cael and said, in a quiet voice :

"You may not like my appearance, young man, but perhaps I have more attainments than you imagine. And as I have come here solely for the purpose of competing in speed with you, it will seem very like cowardice on your part if you refuse to do that which you yourself suggested. So tell me now what length of course you are accustomed to run, and if I fail to run the distance you name then you may consider yourself better than any man in Ireland."

"It is not my habit," Cael retorted scornfully, "to attempt any course measuring less than sixty miles; and I imagine, great as your size is, you are quite unequal for that distance."

"The end of the race will tell," said the

Carle. "I think the best course for us will be that from Slieve Luachra, in Munster, back here to Ben Edar. It may be a trifle over the sixty miles you insist on, but that will not matter to the champion you are. To-morrow we will walk sociably together to Slieve Luachra, and the day afterwards begin our little race back."

"Very well," Cael muttered, and turning his back contemptuously on the Carle, marched away.

The next day Cael and the Carle set out together to walk to Slieve Luachra, and it could not have been a very pleasant journey thither for the Carle, because, though he was friendly enough, Cael treated him with the utmost scorn on account of his appearance. Towards sunset they reached their destination, and then the Carle said :

"I'm thinking, Cael, it would be wise to put up some kind of covering to shelter us this night."

"You can do as you like," Cael replied, "but don't imagine for a minute that I'm going to help you build either house or hut

on Slieve Luachra for the one night I intend to be here, especially as I have no intention of ever coming here again.”

“Now don’t give yourself any annoyance, Cael. I can easily manage to put up a little hut myself. But don’t imagine either that you are going to share it when it is built ; you just keep a far distance outside it.”

With that the Carle sauntered away to where a wood clothed the mountain-side, and began to fell a number of young pine-trees, and cut a quantity of rushes. When he had finished he gathered them all together in one vast load, and carrying them down the mountain to where Cael still stood, scornfully watching his proceedings, he soon built himself a house, and had a warm, bright fire blazing in the centre of it. Then he turned to Cael again and said :

“Though you have no desire for a roof to cover your head, perhaps you want some supper. It may be more to your liking to come into the wood yonder with me and hunt the deer or wild boar before the darkness——”

“Whatever I want or don’t want,” inter-

rupted Cael angrily, "it's not with the like of you I'd be seen hunting."

"Indeed you're more foolish than I thought any man could be," said the Carle, and laughed loudly as Cael walked sulkily away.

So the Carle again went up the hillside into the wood, and after a little time he roused an enormous wild boar. Up and down the wood it ran, seeking a hiding-place in the brambles and dense undergrowth, and the Carle steadily followed it. Finally it tried to escape through the thick heather which grew higher up the mountain, but here the Carle overtook it and with a stout, sharp stake pinned it to the ground. Then slinging it across his shoulders he brought it back to his house, and when he had prepared it placed it on spits before the fire to roast.

"It's very certain now," said the Carle to himself, "that I'll have to beg, borrow, or steal some drink from somebody."

He considered for a moment, then thought of a house about thirty miles away, where a rich man lived, and where there would surely be plenty of ale and wine. He put more logs

on the fire and gave the boar a turn, and remarking to himself that he would be back by the time it was cooked, hurried away. Indeed it was fortunate for Cael's peace of mind that he did not see the way the big man travelled over hills and bogs and rivers; if he had, he would not have given much for his own chance of winning the race.

At length the Carle reached the house he was thinking about, but it was in utter darkness. Not a single person was to be seen; not even a dog barked. Then, being a very sociable individual, and not having any one else to speak to, he began to talk to himself.

“Having come all this way I'm certainly not going back with empty hands,” he said. “I'll have to break into the store-house, and obtain a little sup of wine and a bite of bread, at least.”

He walked about and investigated the different offices and out-buildings, and at last found the store-house. Entering it he took two barrels of wine, a heap of newly-baked bread that was placed ready for the morrow's use, some dishes, a table and a chair, and

putting them all together in one load returned to his own place.

He found the boar roasted exactly as he liked it, crisp on the outside and juicy within, so cutting it in two he placed half on the table for his supper and saved the other portion for his breakfast next morning. Half the bread he put on the table also, and rolling a barrel of wine to his side he sat down comfortably to his meal. Then, having eaten the half boar and bread, and taken a barrel of wine, he began to feel drowsy, and spreading out some rushes on the floor he lay down and was soon wrapped in a deep slumber.

In the morning the sun had been shining brilliantly for some time when Cael, who had been on the mountain-side the whole night without food or drink, and consequently was in a fearful rage, came down to the Carle's house and shouted through the doorway :

“ Well I know you are big and ugly, now I find you are lazy also. Rise at once and let us commence our journey.”

“ Considering your small size you've a terrible big tongue on you,” said the Carle,

turning round on his rushes and sleepily rubbing his eyes. "If you are so anxious to take to the road start now, by all means, and leave me in peace to finish my sleep. I shall, no doubt, catch you up somewhere between here and Ben Edar."

When Cael heard the Carle speak so confidently he began to have some misgivings as to whether the race would belong to him after all, and took to the road at once. But the Carle turned round on his couch again and slept for another while; when his sleep was ended he leisurely rose and washed himself, then sat down to the table and breakfasted off the remaining half of the boar and pile of bread, and drank the other barrel of wine.

"I'd better take these bones with me; they may happen in handy," he said to himself, as his glance rested on the pig's rib and leg bones, so he packed them up in the tails of his coat before starting on his journey. Then away he went, with the speed of an arrow flying from the bow, or a swallow skimming through the clear air; and though Cael had two or three hours' start it was not long till the Carle over-

took him, and unfastening his coat-tails pitched the bones on the road before him.

“Here you are, Cael,” he said cheerfully. “Maybe you’ll find a good picking on these bones, for sure you must be weak and starving after passing the whole night on the mountain-side, without food or drink or shelter.”

“May the sun cease to shine, and the whole world change to ice, before I touch the bones—or anything else—your gluttonous teeth have gone over,” Cael angrily replied.

“Just as you choose,” said the Carle with a laugh; “but in any case, whether you eat or don’t eat, I should advise you to put on a better gait of going than you have yet done,” and before Cael could make any answer the big man moved on at a tremendous speed, and was soon out of sight.

Thirty or forty miles he went without stopping, until he came to a road edged with high blackberry bushes, and here and there clumps of tall pink foxgloves growing in the hollows. The wild bees were busy gathering honey from the blooms, and for some time the Carle, smiling gently to himself, stood watch-

ing them as they crawled in and out of the hooded flowers, and observed how their little legs were heavy with balls of the golden honey-dust. Then he picked a huge heap of blackberries, warm with the sun, and sat down on a grassy bank to eat them. He was still eating when Cael came along and said to him :

“That mud-covered coat of yours is tailless now, Carle. Twenty or thirty miles back I noticed one piece tangled in a bush, and some miles beyond that again I saw another piece hanging from an oak-branch.”

“Is it my coat-tails gone?” the Carle inquired, jumping up and examining his coat. “Now surely I must go back to find them ; it would not be decent for me to enter Fionn’s presence with only half a coat on. The proper and just thing for you to do in this case will be to wait here for me until I return with them. You will still find a few blackberries left, I believe.”

“You must think me very foolish indeed if you imagine I will do anything of the kind,” Cael replied, with the utmost scorn. “Let me tell you, Carle, that it wasn’t in the last

shower of rain I came down," and he continued his journey.

The Carle hurriedly retraced his steps along the road, and at length found his coat-tails—one here and one there, as Cael had said. Then sitting down on a fallen tree he took his coat off, and pulling out a needle and thread stitched the tails neatly on in their proper places again. "Now I'll make another start," he said, putting his coat on, and quicker than the wind blows in March, when gales sweep in from the sea and over high mountain-peaks, he flashed down the road.

In a little while he overtook Cael for the second time, and said to him :

"Is it only this far you have reached? I tell you again, Cael, if you desire to win this race and carry off treasure from Ireland and the Fians, your gait of going will have to be considerably better than it has hitherto been, for, whatever happens, I shall turn back no more."

With that the Carle commenced running again as though some demon possessed him, and never slackened speed until he came to a

hill a few miles from Ben Edar. Then, feeling hot and thirsty, he plucked and ate blackberries until his thirst was assuaged. Afterwards he took off his coat once more, and producing his needle and thread again, sat down and began to stitch it together in such a manner that it formed a deep, wide bag, which he filled with big juicy berries. Slinging this over his shoulder he began to stroll slowly towards Ben Edar.

In the meantime Fionn and the Fianna were waiting in great anxiety at Ben Edar, fearing lest Cael should reach there before the stranger, who had so unexpectedly offered himself as their champion. As the evening wore on Fionn sent one of his men to the hill-top to watch for the approach of either Cael or Carle, and he soon returned with the news that Cael was walking unconcernedly along the road, with what appeared to be the dead body of the Carle slung upon his shoulders.

“Worse tidings than that it would be impossible to hear,” cried Fionn. “To any one who will bring me better news I will give the most perfect spear and sword that can be

made by our armourers, and a shield that will resist the strongest blows."

Another Fian hurried away to the hill-top, and soon recognized the approaching figure as that of the Carle. The Fians hailed his arrival with shouts and exclamations of relief and delight, asking for news of Cael, but the Carle placed his load of blackberries on the ground and sat down beside it, saying :

"Whatever information I possess I will impart to you when I have satisfied my hunger. Coming along the road I picked a quantity of bramble-berries, and now I should like a good-sized pot of porridge so that I may mix the two together, and have a plentiful supper."

He was in the midst of the meal when Cael appeared, charging furiously along the hill-road, his sword bare in his hand and his eyes blazing red, like the eyes of an angry dog.

"Surely he will do some one a damage if he comes nearer," said the Carle, and seizing a mass of the mixed corn and berries in his enormous hands quickly kneaded it up into a hard ball, and threw it with such precision of aim that it struck Cael on the head, hitting

him with so great a force that his head was twisted sideways on his body, and he could not straighten it again.

“Now, Cael,” said the Carle, “was it not a great mistake for you to come here, thinking that you would be allowed to tax Ireland and the Fianna in any manner you chose, and that none would be able to stand against you? The Fianna would be within their rights in putting you to death, but neither Fionn nor the Fians would have it said that they were so unchivalrous as to bring death on a man who had adventured solitary among them. If you will swear by the three powers of sun and moon and wind to send tribute every year from your country to the Fianna, as long as you live, you will be allowed to return to your own land in the condition you are now in.”

Cael's spirit was broken by his defeat and the humiliation of his twisted neck, but he was glad enough to escape with his life, when he fully expected death would be his portion. So he solemnly vowed by the three powers that every year, as long as he remained alive, tribute should come from his kingdom to Fionn.

“And it is my grief,” he said, “that ever I came to Ireland, for now I am as a tree blasted and distorted by lightning; henceforth I shall be the mock and scorn of people wherever I go.”

“I think, Cael, it will be better for you to board your ship and cease lamenting over the trouble you have brought on yourself,” the Carle said, taking Cael by the arm, and beginning to lead him to the shore. Then he turned round to Fionn, and continued: “Let neither you nor your men come with me, Fionn: I will return in a little while.”

He walked over the hill-top and down the winding path to the shore with Cael, and wading into deep water placed Cael on the deck. Then a little wind blew from the land, the vessel began to move and the sails filled out, gleaming like dim silver in the gathering twilight. The Carle watched it until it disappeared in the darkness, then he sighed a little, as one sighs over the foolishness or ignorance of others—and sometimes over one’s own—and turned away from the shore.

During the Carle’s absence the Fians made

preparations for a great banquet, to celebrate his victory over the Prince of Thessaly. Their arrangements were almost completed when the sound of a sweet, far-off music came floating over the hill-top towards them. So entrancing was the melody that the Fians ceased their occupations; ceased, too, their laughter and conversation, and gazed at the hillside, wondering if the folk of the Tuatha de Danann who had chosen it for a home in ancient days were coming forth again.

The music drew nearer, and still they listened, while the deer and wild boar roasted untended by the fires. Then on the hill-top a strange and wonderful man appeared, with many-coloured lights shining around him, and over his head two waving rays of light, like the wings of a golden bird. In his hand he held a branch covered with blossoms like silver bells, and as he moved these swayed and touched each other, filling the air with a sweet, delicate music, and, so it seemed to the Fians, with singing also.

Nearer and nearer the man came, moving steadily towards them through the darkness,

until at last he stood within a few paces of the silent Fians. For a moment or two he looked at them with a tender smile on his face, then he said :

“Did I not speak truly, O Fian-chief, when I said there was no man in Ireland but myself who could vanquish Cael? From my home in Rath Croghan I foresaw your need, and came hither to help you in your trouble; now my service is ended I must leave you again.”

He shook the branch of bell-blossoms, and a sleepy music issued from it which caused the Fians' eyes to close. When they opened them again there was nothing unusual to be seen or heard, except a distant sound like the lingering echo of some wonderfully beautiful music; but Fionn and his warriors knew then that he who had been among them in the guise of the Carle was none other than Midir the Sun-Bright, the Ever-Living, one of the greatest chiefs of the Tuatha de Danann.

THE HOSTING OF SLIEVE-NA-MAN

It was a bitterly cold day in the beginning of winter, and Fionn, who with his son Oisín, Oscar, Caeilté, Diarmuid, and the son of Lugach had been travelling from early in the morning, soon after midday found themselves in a desolate part of the country lying a little to the south of Loch Erne. Heavy hailstorms frequently swept down upon them, and they were looking for a house to shelter in when they started a shy, beautiful fawn from its lair in a hazel-wood. It ran swiftly away from them, and, forgetting all their discomfort, they followed it from one place to another till they came to Slieve-na-man. Suddenly the fawn disappeared from their sight and they could not tell in which direction it went. Indeed, it seemed to them to disappear into the ground.

The night began to grow very dark, and thick flakes of snow fell softly over everything, while now and again a little, shrill wind sounded weirdly through the leafless branches of the trees. Fionn and his men were very tired, and the bitter cold and storm robbed them of all their energy and strength. They longed earnestly for a house where they could rest and stretch their limbs in warm comfort before a blazing fire.

“Go, Caeilté,” said Fionn, “and see if there is any house near where we can find protection from this night’s tempest.”

Though Caeilté was weary and numb with cold, he willingly obeyed his chief’s command, and hurried away as quickly as he could down the road leading to the southward of the mountain, and there, in a curve of the hillside, he saw a great house, with bright shafts of light streaming from its windows and wide-open door across the snowy ground. For some time he stood looking at it, wondering whether he should go and inquire of the owner if he would give hospitality to Fionn and his Fians, or whether he should go back to Fionn and

tell him of his discovery. Finally he determined to go straight up to the house, and walking in through the door, sat down on a curiously-fashioned chair of amethyst crystal just inside. No one appeared to notice him, so he sat still and observed the house and the people in it, the like of whom he had never seen before. On one side of the house he saw a number of men with shining spears and shields, and by each man stood a beautiful woman; on the other side stood a group of gentle-eyed, yellow-haired girls, with fur cloaks reaching from their shoulders to their heels. In the centre of the floor was another crystal chair, like the one he sat on, and sitting on this was a tall, beautiful girl, who played a harp and sang as she played. In the midst of a song she glanced round, and looked at the Fian.

“Caeilté,” she said, and he wondered how she knew his name, “your long journey to-day and the storm has wearied you. Come near to the fire, and good meat and strong ale shall be placed before you.”

“That I cannot do,” Caeilté replied, “while

my comrades are waiting cold and hungry in the snow outside. Fionn mac Cumall, with some of the Fians, are out there, and he sent me to look for a house that would shelter him from this night's storm."

"There is no man in Ireland we would sooner welcome this night than the chief of the Fianna," said one of the men. "So hurry, Caeilté, and bring Fionn and his warriors in. In his own place Fionn has never been known to refuse hospitality to man or beast, and not one of us would refuse it to him."

Caeilté quickly returned to Fionn, who said:

"You have been a long time away, it seems to me. Never before in my life have I been so distressed as I am now by the biting wind and storm of this night; no, not even by all the wounds I have received in battle."

Caeilté spoke gently to him, for the great hero-chief was growing old, and told him of the house that lay hidden on the hillside, and through the blinding snow and darkness the Fians made their way thither. The man who had spoken to Caeilté before came forward and conducted them to the end of the room,

where there was a warm fire of logs, and called a young girl to wait on them.

“Give these heroes,” he said, “the best there is in the house. Let them have the freshest of meat and the strongest of old ale, so that their weariness will fall from them like a cloak.”

When the Fians had finished their supper Fionn rose from his seat and stretched his mighty limbs.

“Surely there is some magic in the food and drink you have given us,” he said to his host, “for rarely, except when the battle-fury has been on me, have I felt the strength I do this night.”

“It is a true word you have spoken,” said the man, who seemed to be the chief of the house. “The meat you have eaten is that of one of Angus Oge’s enchanted swine, which, though it was killed to-day, will be living again to-morrow. The golden-shining apples came from Manannan’s Isle of Youth hidden in the distant sea; and from the hazel-trees of wisdom, which overhang the sacred well, the nuts are gathered. He who has once

eaten of these things will have strength and valour and wisdom as long as his life endures."

When Fionn heard this he began to wonder what manner of people he had come among—whether they were magicians or people of the Sidhe.

"Who are you, warrior, and who are your companions?" he questioned. "Many years I have been up and down through Ireland, going from north to south, from east to west, and I do not remember meeting you before."

"We are of the race of those who see, but are not seen," answered the man, "for I am Donn mac Midir, and the twenty-seven men yonder are my brothers, sons of Midir the Sun-Bright also. We, and others of our kin, were happy together until Bove Derg obtained the kingship of the Tuatha de Danann, and claimed hostages from us. But we rebelled, and would not accede to Bove Derg's demands unless all the Tuatha de Danann gave hostages too. Because of this Bove Derg threatened my father, and to save him much trouble and warfare we left him, and with many hundreds of our followers hid ourselves in this quiet,

secret spot. In time Bove Derg discovered us, and even now will not let us abide in peace, but wages war on us continually. Many hundreds we were, I say, for I and my brothers had ten hundred men each; now we alone remain to carry on the fight."

"What caused so many of your people to die?" asked Fionn.

"Every year the Tuatha de Danann come in battle against us on the plain outside, and I fear that the next time they come we shall not be able to withstand them. But if our losses have been great, theirs have been great also," said Donn mac Midir proudly, "and it is better for us to fall fighting than to live in unjust subjection."

Fionn held out his hand to Donn, and exclaimed:

"By my spear, I would that you and your brothers belonged to the Fianna, for we too have always waged war on the unjust, and if we can give you help in your fighting we will. But tell me now, O son of Midir, in your battles with the Tuatha de Danann what losses have they sustained?"

“You see the long green mound in the field outside—that is where Diangala, their most powerful enchanter, is buried,” Donn replied. “He came to the battle, thinking that his spells would be stronger than our magic arts and keen bright blades. But he was overcome, and death met him on the green grass under which he now lies.”

“That was a great loss indeed,” said Fionn. “Had they others to equal that?”

“Another time we captured from them all the treasure they valued most; cups and vessels of shining gold, and many jewels of great price, but the loss of this treasure caused them less grief than the death of Diangala. Another loss they had was Fethna, their woman-minstrel, who made music of most surpassing sweetness and power, that brought joy and peace and dreams of high deeds into their hearts, and when we killed her they mourned exceedingly.”

“It is not right to make war on women,” said Fionn sternly.

“She came in the guise of a man,” Donn explained, “and in the stress of the fight a

spear passed through her, and she died. Now, to-morrow is the time appointed for the Tuatha de Danann to appear again, and, because we knew ourselves to be in great danger of defeat, we changed one of our women into the semblance of a shy fawn, and bade her seek you out and entice you to our house. It is our hope that you, the most famous warrior in Ireland, will fight with us when we encounter the Tuatha de Danann again."

"I give you my word," said Fionn, "that the one thing I am longing for more than another is the crash of meeting shields, and the sound of spears clashing together."

They all passed the night in feasting and making merry, and rested during the morning hours; but when the evening was near Donn mac Midir said to Fionn:

"Come; I will show you where we meet our enemies in battle," and he led Fionn out to the broad green field before the house.

"How many will stand up against you?" asked Fionn.

"There will be a great number," answered

Donn. "Bove Derg himself, with many hundreds of warriors, will be here; Angus Oge, from Brugh-na-Boinne, with his people; and Lir, from Slieve Fuad, with all his followers, and probably many others."

"It will indeed be a great fight," said Fionn joyfully, "and many noble deeds will be wrought before the sun rises again." Then he turned to the Fians: "My comrades, we must fight as we have never fought before, if we wish to see our homes and any of the Fianna again."

"O Fionn," they cried indignantly, "have you ever known us to lack courage or show faintness in the time of danger?"

"If I travelled all the quarters of the earth," Fionn answered, "I could find none more fearless than you; and having you with me I would go forth cheerfully against unnumbered enemies." Then, addressing Donn: "When do you think the Tuatha de Danann will attack you?"

"When the day is merging into the darkness of night, for that is their hour of power," Donn replied.

HOSTING OF SLIEVE-NA-MAN 197

At this moment one of Donn's brothers came running swiftly from the house, and great astonishment was in his face and his voice.

"There is a Fian's shield on the wall, and a noise like a rushing wind is issuing from it," he cried, "and the spear hanging beneath it is struggling and writhing, though no hand is near it, and a strange, weird music sounds from it."

"It is mine," said Fionn, "and the demons imprisoned in it make a deadly song of war."

They hurried into the house, and Fionn took his murmuring, twisting spear into his hand.

"Oh, my treasure," he said to it lovingly, "now I hear your voice I know there will be a fight which even the high gods will leave their thrones to witness."

As he spoke flames ran up and down the blue-black spear, like venomous lightning gleams, and the low murmuring changed to a clear, triumphant war-song :

Carry me forth in thy hand, O Fionn,
I would battle and slay
Host upon host of the fighters who come
When the night follows day.



Forged was I by Culain the Smith
 In an isle of the sea ;
 Spells were woven and demons called
 To the making of me.

Lord of a myriad deaths am I,
 The Taker of Life ;
 I the invincible, I the brave,
 The lover of strife.

Hold me fast in thy hand, O Fionn,
 For I hear with glee,
 Feet of a multitude moving swift,
 To be slain by me.

The spear writhed and twisted in Fionn's hand, and pointed to the doorway, and so great was the strength in it that Fionn's mighty arm was stretched to the uttermost.

“Oh, my bright treasure,” he cried again to it, “the song you sing is indeed to my mind, and I think that the slaughter you will do this night will be such that men will remember you in ages yet to come. But listen, what is that noise?” he said to Donn, as a sound like sea-waves rolling over shingle, or like innumerable spears clashing on shields, fell on his ear.

“The warriors of the Tuatha de Danann are coming,” said one of the sons of Midir, rushing in.

Fionn took his shield from the wall, and followed by the little band of brothers and his own men, walked to the door and looked out.

“Most worthy opponents they seem to be,” he said, “and much I like their appearance, with their strong, keen-pointed spears. *Oscur*,” he called.

“Here I am, chief of the *Fians*,” he answered.

“Fight more bravely than ever before in the coming battle; you also, *Diarmuid*, and the son of *Lugach*. And in the battle pay no heed to *Caeilté* or *Oisin* or myself, but watch over the safety of the sons of *Midir*, for it would be an unending reproach to our honour and loyalty were any harm to befall them, since they have sought our aid. Take your weapons and your shields now, and come with me, for the last gleam of sunset has faded away, and the hour of battle is near.”

Then from the setting in of darkness to the dawning of light a very valiant fight was fought; but above all the din and noise of the ringing spears could be heard the fierce song of the demons in *Fionn*'s magic blade, as it thrust

and hacked its way through whoever chanced before it. Wherever the press was thickest it made an open path ; backwards and forwards like lightning flashes it darted, and no man could withstand it, or the strong hand that grasped it. And as the foemen gazed on Fionn dread filled their hearts, for round his head shone the red light of battle, and now and again a form like a fiery serpent reared and twisted about him ; while the flames that ran from haft to point of his spear lengthened themselves out and fashioned a shape of fear, from which the Tuatha de Danann recoiled in terror.

So they fought through the long winter night, until a grey dawn lightened the eastern sky, when the Tuatha de Danann, finally repulsed, withdrew from the battle, mourning their heaps of slain. But only one of Midir's sons was killed, though all the other brothers were sorely wounded. As for the Fians, there was not one single inch of their bodies which had not its spear-thrust, and for days after Fionn could not lift his spear-arm, so stiff and sore it was from the work of that night. But



ROUND HIS HEAD SHONE THE RED LIGHT OF BATTLE

Oscur and Diarmuid were in the worst plight ; and the life would have gone from them altogether had not Donn mac Midir travelled far to find Fingin, the ancient faery physician of Slieve Fuad, who had more knowledge of healing herbs than all other doctors in Ireland.

When the Fians had fully recovered from their wounds Fionn called a council of the sons of Midir and the Tuatha de Danann, and they agreed there should be peace for evermore between them. Afterwards Fionn and his men returned to their home on the Hill of Allen, and found the Fianna mourning them as dead ; for though it seemed to Fionn and his comrades that they had been absent only a few days, to their amazement the Fianna said their absence had lasted for nearly a year and a half. And among all the Fianna that night there was feasting and joy, because their great hero and chief had returned to them.

THE DEATH OF OSCUR

FIONN had grown very old ; he had watched three kings reign and die—Conn the Hundred-Fighter ; Art the Lonely, son of Conn ; and Cormac mac Art. Cairbre, son of Cormac, now ruled over Ireland, and at the beginning of his reign the old blood-feuds and jealousies between the Clan Basna and Clan Morna re-awakened, for Fionn and his men never forgot that Goll mac Morna had slain Cumall, the father of Fionn. Cairbre, too, was jealous of the power that Fionn and his heroes had attained to, so it was an easy matter for the Clan Morna to persuade him to depose Fionn and the Clan Basna from the headship of the Fianna Eireann, and appoint them instead.

At this time there was discontent between Fercorb, King of Munster, and Cairbre ; and when Fionn was deposed from power seven

battalions of the Fianna Eireann gathered to him, and marching straightway to Fercorb, who was related to Fionn, they took service with him.

Cairbre's anger against Fionn and the southern king grew still greater when he heard this. He called his followers together and said :

“I have taken the headship of the Fianna Eireann from Fionn and his clan, and commanded them to lay down their arms, but they have joined the rebellious King of Munster, and paid no heed to my words. Long years the people of Ireland have suffered silently under their powerful sway and the great tributes they imposed, and if Fionn still gathers these tributes, and imposes his will on you as he has hitherto done, you will have no peace nor will you gather wealth for your children. Men of Ireland, will you still continue to pay tribute to Fionn and allow him to quarter his Fianna and his hounds upon you as he chooses, or will you band yourselves together and fight him till he and his proud clan are subdued ?”

Most of the people were delighted with the king's words, and shouted loudly that they would give no more tribute to Fionn, nor own his authority. They were not chivalrous as their forefathers had been, nor did they appreciate the noble and generous deeds and the watchful care of Fionn and his companions. But among those listening to Cairbre were some whose sympathies were altogether with the aged Fian-chief, and these sent swift messengers to Fionn, saying how the people were gathering in rebellion against him.

Fionn took counsel with Fercorb, and they sent heralds to Cairbre with a challenge of war. They then called all their fighting men together; but Cairbre called on the other kings and their nobles, and for each man that Fionn had Cairbre had ten times as many.

Notwithstanding the weight of years that lay upon him, Fionn rejoiced when he heard how his enemies outnumbered him.

“It will be a great fight,” he said to the Fians, “and when it is ended many of us who are now living will be with the gods in the Land

of the Ever-Young. As for myself, I am old in years, and of waning strength, and care not how soon I hear the call of the Immortal Ones.”

“Do not speak like that,” said Caeilté mac Ronan, “for with your death I think the glory of the Fianna would depart. And it is the wish of the Fianna that you let your son Oisín command them in the forthcoming battle, for they fear lest harm should befall you.”

But Fionn would not listen to that—he would lead his army himself, he said. It did not take him long to complete his preparations, then he marched up to Leinster with his army, and not far from Dublin, on the plain of Gabhra—which is now called Garristown—he saw the tents and banners of Cairbre and his fighters, and foremost among them were the ancient enemies of Fionn, the warriors of the Clan Morna.

Three nights Fionn lay encamped on the plain of Gabhra, within sight of his enemy; and what those nights were to Cairbre and his followers I do not know, but to the Fians

they were nights of ill-omen. Each morning when they rose Oscur's banner of white silk, embroidered with a slender rowan-tree and clusters of flaming berries, had fallen to the ground, and each night the camp was surrounded by a sorrowful moaning sound, as though hosts of unseen beings were lamenting the fall of noble heroes. On the morning of the third day Fionn sent heralds to Cairbre, announcing his intention to open the battle, and the armies arrayed themselves against each other.

But before they entered the battle the Fians knelt on the ground and kissed it; then raised the warrior cry. Afterwards they flung themselves against the great army of King Cairbre, and the bards say that so fierce was the fight that three showers rose over their heads in the strife: a shower of fire from their spears, a shower of sparks from their clashing shields, and a shower of blood from their wounds.

Oscur and his Fians went backwards and forwards through the hosts of Cairbre, searching for the Clan Morna, determined to end now

and for ever the old bitterness and enmity which, though smothered and hidden, had existed since Cumall had died by the hand of Goll mac Morna. At length they found them, and for hours a hard fight raged round Oscur's banner; but in the end all who remained of the Clan Morna fled before the battle-fury of the Fians.

The plain of Gabhra was covered with the dead and dying of both armies when Oscur, panting, wounded, and weary almost to death, saw Cairbre riding towards him, surrounded by a band of chosen warriors. Then the poets sang to Oscur, chanting the deeds of bygone heroes of the Clan Basna; and Oscur, filled with pride in his race and name, clashed his spear and shield together and rushed forward to meet the king. Cairbre watched him coming, and made a swift cast of his spear, which passed through Oscur's body and brought him to the ground. A cry of grief went up from the Fians, and a shout of victory rose from the king's fighters; but too soon they shouted, for Oscur, rising on one knee, threw his spear with such unerring aim that

the king, struck through the heart, fell off his horse and died. With the death of Cairbre his men broke and fled, and the few Fians who survived, even the wounded Oscur, raised a cry of triumph.

Night fell, but a bright moon shone over the plain of death, and by its light those who were living searched for their dead. Hither came Caeilté, looking for his six sons, and found them all lying dead. Hither, too, wandered Oisín, searching for his brave and chivalrous son—"Oscur, who never lied," for so the bards sang of him. At last he found Oscur, leaning on his left arm, his battered shield by his side, his broken spear still in his right hand, and the life-blood streaming from his wounds.

Oisín stood over him in unutterable woe. Then Oscur stretched out his hand to his father and said:

"My father, I thank the gods that you are safe."

But Oisín, because of sorrow and exceeding grief, could speak no word.

Then Caeilté, grieving over his dead sons,



AT LAST HE FOUND OSCUR, LEANING ON HIS LEFT ARM

came to where Oscur was lying, and seeing Oisin's grief and Oscur's distress, put his own trouble on one side. He spoke cheerfully to Oscur :

“Remember other battles, Oscur, when we could see the sunlight shine through the spear-thrusts in your body, and yet you were healed.”

“There is no healing for me now,” said Oscur. “Never again shall I see the sun rise over Ben Edar, or hear the thrushes sing in Gleann-na-smol. I have fought my last battle and run my last chase,” and the broken spear slipped out of his hand.

The Fians gathered together and watched by Oscur through the night. Silently they sat, saying no word ; nor, with all his pain, would Oscur add to their grief by making any moan. In the cold grey dawn the aged Fionn came swiftly towards them and knelt down by his dying grandson's side.

“O Oscur, light of my eyes, child of my heart, would that I were lying in your place,” lamented Fionn.

Hearing his beloved chief's voice Oscur

opened his dim eyes and raised himself a little from the ground.

“Grieve not for me,” he whispered. “See, already the hosts of the Ever-Living Ones wait to guard me on my way to the Land of the Living Heart.”

He tried to stretch out his hand to Fionn, but it dropped powerless to his side, and listening to Fionn’s grief the life went from him.

Fionn turned away, and covering his face with his hands wept heavy, unavailing tears. Only twice during his life did he weep: once for the death of his wise hound Bran, and now over Oscur, his heart’s delight.

The handful of Fians who survived raised the three cries of sorrow over the dead hero; afterwards they prepared him for the grave. From his shoulders to his feet he was covered with wounds, only his face remained calm and beautiful, unmarked by any hurt.

They covered Oscur’s breast with his banner—the white silken banner embroidered with the slender rowan-tree and drooping clusters of blood-red berries—then they carried him

on their spears to his grave. At Gabhra are the graves of many great kings and heroes ; but the grave of the brave and chivalrous Oseur is the greatest of all, for the whole rath of Gabhra belongs to him alone.

OISIN GOES TO TIR-NA-NOGE

AFTER the sorrowful battle of Gabhra, Fionn and Oisín and Caeilté, with the few Fians left to them, went southward to Kerry. They lingered for a while by the waters of Loch Lein, resting there until their wounds had healed a little; then they journeyed to the west, and at last reached the smooth shining stretches of sand at Berramain.

“Here will we stay for a time,” said Fionn. “Old age presses upon me, and my heart is heavy with sorrow for the loss of my noble Oscar and my brave Fians.”

They had not been long at Berramain when one evening, as they were gathered together on the strand, they saw, riding out of the sunset over the sea towards them, a beautiful young girl on a white horse. Golden shoes were on the horse's feet, bit and bridle and



THEY SAW, RIDING OUT OF THE MOUNT, A BEAUTIFUL YOUNG GIRL

saddle were of gold too, and round its neck a wreath of silver apple blossoms shone. The rider came nearer, and the Fians thought that never before had they seen such a delicate and wonderful beauty as this girl possessed. More beautiful she was than any queen of the world who had ever lived. Her eyes were blue as the hills when a summer twilight lies over them, and the red-gold crown upon her head was not more golden than her hair, partly hidden by an opalescent veil hanging in soft folds over a gleaming silken cloak.

At last she came to the edge of the sea, where the Fians stood watching her, and her voice sounded like sweet music as she spoke to Fionn :

“It is a long road from my country to yours, O Fionn, but I have taken it in search of you.”

“Beautiful queen,” said Fionn, “I am old and my men are nearly all killed, but few and sorrowful as we are, we will not refuse any service you may ask of us. Tell us now, O fairest of women, your name and your country, and what your desire is.”

“My father calls me Niav of the Red-gold Hair, and he is lord of the Island of Youth,” she answered.

“Why did you leave it to come to this place of sorrow and death?” asked Fionn. “Surely you would not leave your happy country for this land?”

“For love of your son Oisín I came hither,” said Niav. “Many kings and princes have loved me, but to none did I give my love till I heard of the deeds of your brave and gentle son Oisín; and if he does not give me his love now, and come with me to the Land of Youth, I shall never have happiness again.”

When Oisín heard Niav speak a great wave of love swept over him. He came near to her, and looking into her face, said:

“Beautiful woman, to whatever country you go I will follow you, whether it is near or far. And had I the choice of all the wisest and loveliest women of the world, it is you, O fair and gentle Niav, I would choose to be my wife.”

“If that is true,” said Niav, bending down to Oisín from her saddle, “come with me now to Tir-na-noge—the Land of the Ever-Young.”

“Heed not her words, my son,” cried Fionn. “Well I know that if you follow her to the land she speaks of—a land where a hundred years seem no longer than a day—we shall never see you again.”

“Come with me, Oisín,” Niav repeated. “Whatever you wish for you will find in my country; every delightful thing you can imagine will be yours. In all the world there is no other country like mine. There you will feel neither cold nor the storms of winter; old age and sorrow will never touch you, but unending youth and joyousness shall be your portion. My father will encircle your head with a crown of light, which will safeguard you through the darkest night and the brightest day, and bring you through any storm of battle or danger that may threaten you. Never before has he given that crown to any man, though many have sought it. He will give you a strong shield also, and the spear that could pierce it is not yet forged; a sword, too, shall be yours, which has never failed to bring death to any enemy it has touched.

“You will get hounds as swift and beautiful

as Bran, and horses that can outrace the tumultuous wind. Unnumbered warriors are there, waiting for you to lead them; and the soft music of many harps shall bring sleep to your eyes after the delights of the day.

“In my land the trees are green from the beginning of the year to its close, and their branches bear blossom and fruit continually. You will find there no lack of food or wine, or gold or jewels, or anything beautiful that you may desire. All these treasures will be yours, Oisín, with many others that I have not mentioned, and every wish that lies hidden in your heart will be fulfilled if you come with me to Tir-na-noge.”

“O Oisín, my son, the years lie heavy upon me; leave me not alone in the darkness of age,” Fionn implored before Oisín could speak.

But Niav, still bending from the saddle, laid her hand on Oisín's shoulder, and sang to him:

Tarry not here, Oisín, the sea-marcher waits you,
Waits to carry you o'er the waves and dancing foam,
Far to a land whose gates will open in glory,
'Tis the Land of the Ever-Living will be your home.

OISIN GOES TO TIR-NA-NOGE 217

Linger not here, Oisín, the twilight is flowering
Over the hilly seas enfolding Manannan's world ;
Heed not the earth-born words, O list to me calling,
Come to a life that will last till the stars are hurled
From their whirling thrones in the distant heaven spaces,
Growing dim with mist and the dust of old dead suns ;
Ride with me now, Oisín ; oh, must I longer call you,
To the Land of the Living Heart and the Ever-Living
Ones ?

“ O Niav, most beautiful of women,” said Oisín, taking her hand in his, “ I will follow you through the whole world, and to the end of time, for love of yourself alone. It is of you I am thinking, it is you I love, and not the treasures you can give me.”

Fionn, when he heard his son's words, uttered a sorrowful cry, for he knew that Oisín would go from him ; in his old age he would be bereft of the last of his children. The Fians gave three loud cries of lamentation too, fearing they would never see Oisín again ; but he smiled on them and said to his father :

“ It is not like you to grieve over such a small matter. I shall soon return ; in a few weeks I will come back to you here.”

He kissed his father and Caeilté, and bade

his comrades farewell, then sprang on to the white horse's back. Niav shook the golden bridle, and the horse entered the sea and began to walk over the white-crested waves. Oisín turned round, and waving his hand to his father and friends, said again: "I shall soon return."

Niav spoke to the milk-white horse, and it raced over the high, swift waves, following the path of light made by the setting sun on the sea. Fionn and the Fians watched it grow smaller and smaller in the distance, then, when they could discern it and its riders no longer, they knelt on the sand and keened over Oisín as though he was already dead.

THE PASSING OF THE FIANNA

AFTER the departure of Oisín with Niav, Fionn and his men remained many months at Berramain. Every morning at sunrise Fionn would shade his eyes with his hands and gaze steadily over the sea, longing and watching for the return of his son. Every sunset, too, he would keep watch, but Oisín did not return.

A year passed by, then Fionn and Caeilté, with their Fians, travelled eastward to settle a dispute they had with some of the dwellers on the Boyne; and it was in the fighting there, so one legend says, that Fionn met with his death. Another old story says that Fionn did not meet his death in such a manner, but that, when quite a boy, he was put under geasa (vow) to make a certain mighty leap once every year; and this year, owing to old age, and the feebleness caused by grief and the

hurts he had received at the battle of Gabhra, he failed to make the leap and was killed. You remember, however, that Fionn's mother, Muireen, belonged to the Tuatha de Danann—or Sidhe (Shee) as they are now called—and it is more likely that Fionn was not killed at all, but went away to join his kindred in one of their pleasant invisible dwelling-places. Indeed it is recorded that Mongan, a king of Ulster who lived at the beginning of the seventh century, was in reality Fionn, who had returned to earth in a different body.

Now for Caeilté the homes of men became unendurable. He, too, had suffered many griefs and losses during the past year : at the battle of Gabhra his sons were all killed, Oscur the brave was dead, Oisín had gone with a faery maiden to an enchanted land, and now Fionn had passed from him, and he was left alone and desolate.

He called the Fians to him, and said :

“ My comrades, the power of the Fianna is broken, nor do I think it will evermore attain to its former might. We have still many powerful friends scattered throughout Ireland,

who will be glad to number you among their fighters if you choose. As for myself, the joy of our roving and adventurous life has gone from me, and I intend to go to the house of the Sidhe at Assaroe, and there seek forgetfulness of my sorrows. If I thought Oisín would return I would remain with you ; but it is not likely he will ever leave the pleasant Land of Youth."

The Fians were silent for a time, then eighteen of them, one after another, said they would accompany Caeilté if he would give them permission, and the others said they would travel back to Berramain, for Oisín might return some day. What happened to those who vainly waited for Oisín I do not know—with their departure from Caeilté they seem to have passed out of the knowledge of the ancient chroniclers.

We know, however, that Caeilté and his eighteen followers went to the enchanted house of the Sidhe at Assaroe, for when St. Patrick preached a strange and new doctrine in Ireland, two hundred years later, the old scribes wrote that Caeilté and his men came

forth from Assaroe and appeared to Patrick, telling him the history and adventures of Fionn and the Fianna Eireann.

In the old books it is also written that, early in the seventh century, Caeilté again appeared—this time to Mongan, King of Ulster. Mongan had a dispute with his chief bard Forgall as to the death-place of a king, Fothad Airttech, whom Caeilté had slain. Forgall said the king was killed at some place in Leinster, but Mongan said he got his death-blow near the Larne Water, in Ulster. The bard was so angry with Mongan for daring to contradict him that he threatened to place spells upon the king and all his household, and insisted that Mongan should prove the truth of the statement he had made; if he failed to prove it within three days all his possessions, and even himself, were to become the bard's property.

Knowing that he had made a true statement, and that its truth would be proved in some manner or other, Mongan cheerfully agreed to this condition. Two days passed, and part of the third day also; then Forgall

came to Mongan, and said that he had come to take possession of both him and his property. Mongan only replied: "Wait until the close of day."

Evening came, and Mongan was in his palace, surrounded by the warriors and nobles of Ulster. His queen sat beside him, weeping and full of sorrow, for in little more than an hour the three days would expire, and still Mongan had made no effort to prove his word.

"Why do you weep?" said Mongan; "do you not know that aid is drawing nearer and nearer to us? Even now I hear the feet of our helper as he strides over the hills and rivers on his way here." He knew that Caeilté was coming to his assistance, though none of the others seemed to see or hear anything unusual.

He had scarcely finished speaking when an extremely tall and handsome warrior, carrying a long spear-shaft in his hand, suddenly appeared in the great hall of the palace, and corroborated the assertion Mongan had made to Forgall.

"I remember it well," said the warrior, "see-

ing that I killed him myself. The spear-head from this shaft in my hand passed through his body, and buried itself in the earth beyond him. I was with you at the time," he said to Mongan. Then turning round to the people assembled in the hall, he said to them: "I was with Fionn."

"Be silent, Caeilté," said Mongan; "these secrets should not be spoken."

Caeilté then turned to Forgall, and said to him:

"Come with me; I will show you where Fothad is buried, and at the head of his tomb you will find a pillar, and on it is written in Ogham: 'Here is Fothad Airgtech. He was fighting against Fionn when Caeilté slew him.'"

Every one in the dún followed Caeilté, who pointed out to them the place where the spear-head was sunk deep in the ground, and the burial-place of the king with its Ogham inscription. Then, when the truth of Mongan's word was proved, Caeilté left them and returned again to his invisible home.

Another time a king of Ireland was travelling through a dense forest, and the night was



‘I AM THE CANDLE-HOLDER OF THE KING,’ THE STRANGER REPLIED

so dark that he could not tell how he was going. Suddenly he was confronted by a tall warrior, with shining star-like eyes, and holding a lighted torch in his hand. He took the bridle of the king's horse, and led it through the wood on to the road. Then the king said to him :

“Who and what are you ?”

“I am the candle-holder of the king,” the stranger replied.

“I think,” said the king, “the two gentle eyes of Caeilté shine in the holder.”

“It is a true word you have spoken,” said the warrior, smiling, and disappeared.

The old stories do not say that Caeilté appeared any more among men. But perhaps, some summer evening when the late dusk is falling over hill and plain and the cockchafers are beginning their curious droning flight, if you or I, or others who love these ancient heroic stories, happen to be in that part of Donegal where the Hill of Assaroe is, Caeilté may come forth from his secret home of enchantment, his tall spear in his hand, and his eyes shining with a gentle and chivalrous

light. Perhaps, too, he would himself tell us many stories and adventures—relating to himself and the great Fian-chief and his heroes—which the passing centuries have not preserved to us.

THE RETURN OF OISIN

WE have followed the wanderings of Caeilté through many years ; we must now go back to Oisín, whom we left journeying with Níav on the white horse to the Land of the Ever-Young. And this is the story which Oisín related to St. Patrick, two hundred years later, when he returned to Ireland from Tír-na-nóge.

“ Over unnumbered leagues of sea the white horse sped, outracing the swift sea-birds and the rushing wind. Many curious and startling sights I beheld, and often I asked Níav to check the horse’s speed, so that I could observe them more closely.

“ How far we had travelled I do not know, when we came to a region of islands, inhabited by strange and terrible beings and animals.

As we neared the first island a sound of hammering fell on my ears, and looking before me I saw that the island was peopled by dark and mighty men, cat-headed and dog-headed, who moved immense red-hot masses of metal about as easily as though they were small balls. I requested Niav to hurry by this place, but before we had passed it one of the smiths, seeing that we were hurrying onward, seized a huge mass of the glowing metal in his hands and hurled it after us. The iron fell into the sea, which hissed and boiled and sent up a high column of steam, but we were unhurt.

“The next island we came to was surrounded by a rampart of fire. A terrible bellowing smote our ears as we approached, and on the shore we saw a weird, gigantic animal—like nothing I, at least, had ever seen before—which rushed madly to and fro. It had a head like a lion, and its body resembled that of a horse, and when it caught sight of us it stood upright on its hind legs and pawed the air; then the bones and flesh inside the skin began to turn and twist about, first one way,

then another, but the skin did not move at all, and its eyes glared steadily and horribly at me the whole time. In all the years of my life before I had never known fear, but now a trembling and faintness came over me.

“‘Is there no other way to your land except by these islands filled with evil beings?’ I asked Niav.

“‘They are but shadows of things which have been,’ she replied, ‘and if your courage does not falter they cannot harm you. All who go to my country must pass by the Islands of Shades.’

“We rode on, passing many other islands. From one, overhung by dark mists, came the sound of weeping and lamentation; from another came the sound of laughter, and I saw that its inhabitants were wandering aimlessly about, laughing continually as they moved. I thought they were a senseless people, to laugh without any apparent reason, but Niav said they were shadows also.

“Now the sky darkened with heavy masses of clouds, and a strong hot wind swept out of the south upon us. Not a gleam of light was

to be seen in any point of the heavens ; notwithstanding the darkness above and around us the sea shone as though on fire. Mountainous waves rose and raced each other, and I thought that death would certainly overtake me in the midst of the sea ; but Niav laughed and bade me observe how the white horse rode over the tempestuous waves without even wetting its fetlocks.

“ ‘ Must *all* who go to your country pass by these perils ? ’ I asked Niav again, for I knew some who had been to Tir-na-noge, but I had never heard them speak of their journey thither.

“ ‘ There is no other way for those who seek the Island of the Ever-Young,’ answered Niav. ‘ Soon, however, we shall reach a pleasanter region.’

“ The wind ceased, and the sky grew bright again. In a little while we came to a very calm sea, green as grass and so clear that looking down I could see at the bottom a beautiful shining city of white marble palaces, and smooth flowery lawns where multitudes of people walked. The music of their speech



WE RODE ON, PASSING MANY OTHER ISLANDS

and laughter rose to my ears, and I asked Niav what land it was that lay hidden under the water.

“‘That is Tir-fa-tonn—the country under the waves,’ Niav replied.

“‘It would be pleasant to rest there for a time,’ I said.

“‘I must go to my own country,’ said Niav. ‘Do you wish to stop here? If you do you will not see me again for many ages.’

“I had no desire to be where Niav was not, so we rode on. After a time there fled by us a fawn, and swiftly chasing it a white dog with red ears. Next came a fair young girl on a horse, carrying a branch of golden apples in her outstretched hand, and closely following her a young man on a white horse, covered by a network of gold silken thread, holding in his right hand a shining unsheathed sword. I was eager to join in the chase, but Niav said :

“‘O Oisín, son of Fionn, heed them not; these also are passing shadows.’

“Now there came sweeping through the air a gigantic bird, whose outspread wings hid a great space of the sky. Seven golden rays

shone round its head, the rest of it was white as the swan's breast. When it saw Niav it swooped down, and hovering over her sang a very melodious song. Then it turned round, and preceding us flew straight to the west.

“In a few minutes, it seemed to me, the horse began to slacken speed, and rising out of the sea before us I saw a beautiful sunny land, its wide plains covered with jewel-like flowers, and hills that shimmered with rainbow colours in the distance. Not far from the shore stood a royal dún, with curious patterns worked in precious stones on its walls. Many other palaces were scattered about, and cheerful sun-chambers for the women.

“‘What fair and pleasant place is this?’ I inquired of Niav.

“‘This is my land,’ she proudly answered; ‘and all I have told you about it is true, and there will be fulfilled all the promises I have made you.’

“On the shore a stately and glittering company of warriors awaited us. At their head stood Niav's father, a tall man of very noble and dignified appearance, wearing a cloak

of sun-coloured silk, and on his head a red-gold crown. The queen stood by his side, attended by a number of fair young girls, and when the king and queen had greeted Niav they welcomed me.

“ ‘There is no man we welcome more gladly to our land, noble Oisin,’ the king said. ‘For love of you our daughter Niav travelled the wide sea ; for love of her you left your father and friends and country ; now our fair and gentle daughter shall be given to you to be your wife for ever. Peace and joy and lasting youth will here be yours too, and all the delights that the heart can desire or the mind imagine you will find awaiting you.’

“ I am not usually lacking in speech, Patrick, as you know, but there was such a high and splendid dignity about the king that I could find no words with which to thank him for his gracious welcome ; I could only bend my knee before him in silent homage.

“ Then we went into the dún, where a great feast was prepared in honour of our coming. For ten days we feasted and rejoiced ; at the close of that time Niav became my wife.

“Truly, Patrick, there is no other country under the sun, or above it, that equals in beauty and delight the Land of the Ever-Young. If you could once behold it you would cease your perpetual singing of praises about that heaven you have never seen.”

“You are a profane old man, Oisín,” said Patrick, “and all the prayers that I have prayed to God in heaven on your account have not yet availed to change you. But your story interests me, so proceed.”

“Time passed quickly and joyously in Tir-na-noge. Two sons Niav gave to me, and a daughter, who was so beautiful that I called her ‘The Flower of Women.’ But one day I felt a great longing to see my father and friends once more, and going to the king and my wife I asked them to grant me permission to visit my own country again.

“‘It is a sorrowful request you make, Oisín,’ said Niav; ‘but if you wish to go I will not hinder you, though I fear that if you once leave here you will never return.’

“I reassured her, and bade her put her doubts away, for the white horse with golden hoofs

would certainly bring me back to her again. When I was ready for my journey Niav stood by my side, and looking up into my face said, very solemnly :

“ ‘ Remember well what I now say to you, Oisin. If once you alight from the horse, or place your feet to the ground, you will never return to me. And I tell you your journey will be in vain, for Fionn and his Fians are no longer in the land ; instead of your great warriors you will find a multitude of weak, sad-faced men, who say prayers to a strange God night and day ; instead of the cheerful barking of hounds and sound of the chase you will hear the melancholy ringing of bells wherever you go. Again I say to you, Oisin, let nothing tempt you to dismount from the horse ; if you do you will never return to this country, for old, old age will fall upon you in the twinkling of an eye. For the third time I say to you ; whatever happens do not alight from the horse. Alas ! a great grief is in my heart, for I think I shall never see you again.’ ”

“ I put my arms round her and kissed her, and said I would remember her words, and

that not even my dear father would keep me from her side for long. Then I mounted the white horse, and swifter than the wind I travelled the waves until, in the soft clear dawn of a spring morning, I saw the cliffs and green hills of my country appear.

“I came to the silver-white sands of Berramain, where I had left my father and comrades, but no sign of their presence or any dwellings there could I see. I shouted the war-cry of the Fianna, and listened and waited for the sound of my father’s mighty tread and the hounds’ tumult, but no sound, except the lapping of the wavelets and the rustling of the leaves, disturbed the silence.

“Across plains and over hills I continued my journey, marvelling that the country should have changed so much during my short absence, for many of the thick forests I so well remembered hunting through with Fionn and the Fians had disappeared, and in some places there was hardly a tree left standing. At last I stopped before a group of puny men and women, and questioned them.

“‘Tell me,’ said I, ‘where Fionn and his

Fians are, and whether they are engaged in battle or the chase?’

“They regarded me with amazement and fear—why they feared me I do not know, for I never harmed any one except in rightful battle or dispute. Then, as no one answered me, I repeated my question again, saying that when the Fians asked questions it was not their wont to be kept waiting for answers. One of the men, in a very weak and trembling voice, then spoke :

“‘Great lord,’ he said, ‘our bards sing of a mighty hero, Fionn, who lived long ages ago, and of the deeds of him and his Fians, who were the bravest warriors the world has ever seen. They sing, too, of Oisín his son, who score upon score of years ago followed a faery maiden to the Land of the Ever-Young, and from that country he has never returned. Some of the old stories say that Fionn died of grief because his son had gone from him. But one thing is certain, that it is many generations since the noble Fionn and his Fians lived and died.’

“I was silent. I could not imagine that my

father and comrades had ceased to live. Then I turned from the wondering men and women, and travelled as quickly as I could to my old home on the Hill of Allen. But desolation reigned there. Where there had formerly been a great dún only a few broken walls were standing, and the weeds and wild flowers were growing where my father and companions had sat at many a banquet.

“Heavy sorrow enfolded me, still I could not believe that my father was not at some other of his many dwellings. North and south and west and east I searched for him, but could not find him. At length I came to Gleann-na-smol, which was one of his favourite places, and the only spot in Ireland I had not searched; if I did not find him there I should know he was no longer living, as Niav had foretold me, and I would then turn my horse’s head to the west and rejoin Niav and my children again.

“I travelled slowly, looking on all sides and listening eagerly for the sound of the hunting-cry or the laugh of my friends. Then I heard a great commotion before me, and hope sprang

up in' my heart that at last my search was ended. But on going forward I found that it was only a number of little men struggling to raise a big rock from its place in the ground. It had fallen back on some of them, who were crying and shouting over their little hurts. I tell you, Patrick, it was not of men like those that the Fianna was composed. We would not have employed them even for our horse-boys.

“Unobserved I looked at their puny efforts for a moment, then they saw me, and in their astonishment let the rock fall back more heavily on their comrades, who would surely have been crushed to death had not I, taking pity on them, stooped sideways from my saddle, and with one hand I plucked the rock from the earth and hurled it fifty yards away. Alas! it was my undoing, for with the effort I made the golden saddle-strap broke, and I slipped to the ground.

“As I touched the earth I remembered Niav's words, but too late. Quickly as a flying shadow the white horse disappeared, and still more quickly a withered, shrivelled

old age came upon me, and left me feeble and helpless as you, O Patrick, now behold me. It is my unending grief that never again shall I see Niav and my dear children; my noble father and comrades have all gone from me, and I, the last of the Fianna, am left alone, with a heart more full of sorrow than was any man's ever before."

THE SHIELD OF MANANNAN

UNNUMBERED centuries ago there came to Ireland a wise race of beings called the Tuatha de Danann. How and whence they came is a mystery: the very earliest legends say they came on the wings of the wind from an unknown world, or else they came out of the heavens. The same legendary history says that when the Tuatha de Danann—who were the people of light and goodness—arrived they found Ireland populated by a gigantic and dark race of beings; this was the race of the Fomorians, who were the people of evil, and naturally the enemies of the Tuatha de Danann. The king of the Fomorians was the great giant, Balor of the Death-giving Eye, so called because he had an eye in the centre of his forehead, which dealt death to whoever he looked at. When he wished to slay an

enemy he opened this eye ; at other times he kept it closed.

The Fomorians resented the mysterious advent of the Tuatha de Danann, and Balor, placing himself at the head of his people, led them in battle against the Tuatha de Danann, who were assembled on the plain of Moytura, in the north of Sligo, and there the legends say this battle of the gods was fought.

Every time Balor opened his eye of death on the Tuatha de Danann they fell in long lines, just as corn falls before the reaper. Even Nuada, the king of the Tuatha de Danann, was struck by its venomous glance, and seeing him fall Lugh Lam-Fada—who was so wise that he was called the Master of all Knowledge—determined to avenge him. He walked to within a short distance of Balor, who at that moment had his evil eye covered ; but when Balor saw this new and powerful enemy standing before him, with a sling that shone like white fire in his hand, slowly, very slowly, he began to uplift the heavy eyelid from his evil eye. Then, before Balor could look at him, with all his might Lugh slung a

fiery ball, which entered Balor's eye of death, and killed him. When the Fomorians saw their king fall they fled from the plain of Moytura, leaving the dead Balor on the battle-field; leaving, also, the Tuatha de Danann the victors and masters of Ireland. It was then the Mor Riga sang her wonderful song of concord, beginning, "Peace up to heaven," of which I have told you before.

After the flight of the Fomorians, Lugh walked round the battle-field, noting those of his people who were slain. Soon he came to the giant Balor, and not knowing what magical power he might still possess, though dead, he cut off Balor's head, and ordered some of his men to place it high in the fork of a hazel-tree, so that the rains and winds of heaven might cleanse it of its evil power. This was done, but the venomous dropping from Balor's eye of death gradually killed the tree.

Many years later Manannan was walking through a grove of hazel-trees, which he liked beyond all other groves, and seeing a dead tree in its midst he called some men to him, and said :

“Bring axes and hew down that tree. Why should it be left standing when it is dead?”

The men brought axes and began to cut down the tree, and as they shook it to see whether it would soon fall a bleached and gigantic skull rolled out of a forked branch, and they wondered how it came there. They continued their cutting, and soon from the hollow heart of the tree a white vapour arose, like the mist that hangs over marshy meadows on a hot summer evening. When it reached the men one after another fell dead to the ground, until eighteen were lying there. The others, seeing their companions fall, ran away from the deadly mist; but they did not escape altogether, for the poisonous vapour entered their eyes, and they were blinded for ever.

Manannan, who alone remained uninjured by the enchanted mist, picked up the skull, and when he saw the empty eye-socket in the middle of its forehead he remembered that, long years before, Lugh Lam-Fada had hidden the head of Balor of the Death-giving Eye in a tree. Seeing that the venom from the

eye had given such a strange power to the tree, Manannan caused some of the branches to be taken to his dún; but before any one went near the tree again he placed a spell on it, so that it could not injure any more of his people.

Then Manannan sent for Luchtine the carpenter, and from his hidden island in the sea he called Culain the smith. When they came he said :

“From these dead branches, Luchtine, make me the frame of a shield; and you, Culain, forge white bronze points with which to stud it, and make the centre of white bronze also. When it is finished bring it to me, and I will say a word of power over it, and call demons to dwell in it, so that it shall be a true shield of protection for any hero who may carry it hereafter; but for his enemies it will be a shield of death.”

“This shall be a shield such as the world never saw before,” said Culain, “for I, too, will invoke war-spirits to guard it night and day, and when any danger threatens it will warn the hero who carries it. Like the rush and

thunder of a mighty wave its warning will be, and the sound of it will awaken fear in the hearts of the enemy.”

Culain and Luchtine carried the wood away, and after some days they returned to Manannan, bringing a very perfect shield with them. The centre shone like the moon, and the frame, with its white bronze points, was like a circle of stars surrounding it. Manannan then took it, and put a powerful enchantment on it, so that to the hero who carried the shield it should be a silver cloud of protection, but to his enemies it should be a red mist of war.

Whenever the hostile powers of the dark underworld were contemplating war on Manannan the shield would give him warning, and taking it in his hand he would go out alone against his enemies, conquering and destroying them without receiving any hurt himself.

Often, too, Manannan would lend his shield to great kings and heroes for whom he had an affection, and so long as they carried it they were neither hurt nor killed. The last



MANANNAN PUT A POWERFUL ENCHANTMENT ON THE SHIELD

great hero who carried it was Fionn mac Cumall, and whenever he went into battle the shield would thunder like a great wave crashing against cliffs, bringing fear to Fionn's enemies; but to his own ears it sounded like a very sweet war-song. After the death of Fionn no other king or hero bore the enchanted shield, for it disappeared; but the legend says that when St. Patrick came to Ireland he found it and caused it to be burnt.

This I do not think is likely. I imagine Manannan took the shield back to his own world, knowing that when Fionn passed away the long line of great heroes and warriors had come to an end.

THE SLUMBER OF FIONN

IN Donegal there is a hill, lifting itself over a bog filled with the bleached grey stumps of trees, the dead remains of a forest that was there thousands of years ago.

It is many, many years now since a man was walking through the valley at the foot of the hill, searching for little rare plants and herbs that grow in boggy places and over lonely mountains. After a time he sat down to rest, and casting his eyes over the hillside saw, quite near to the summit, a small dark cleft in the mountain, which he never remembered to have seen before. As he sat looking at it he remembered the legends his mother had told him, when he was a child, about this mountain: how there were mysterious beings dwelling in vast caves inside it, and that the entrance to the caves

could never be found, for it was hidden by spells and druidical mists from the eyes of men.

Again and again he looked at the dark spot, half expecting to see it vanish and become green, like the rest of the hillside ; but it still remained visible. Then he determined to climb up to it, and, keeping his eyes fixed on the cleft, began the ascent. When he reached it, he found that what appeared to be a small hole from the valley below was really a very wide and lofty entrance to an immense cave, which seemed to penetrate far into the interior of the hill.

He walked some distance into this cave, and then came to a still larger one, shaped like a vast circular chamber, and filled with a faint golden misty light. A great wonder and fear came upon him as he stood on its threshold and looked within, for lying on the sandy ground was a multitude of armed and gigantic men, their right hands clasping unsheathed swords, and their shields covering their breasts, while by the side of each warrior a wolf-hound lay as though asleep. In the midst of

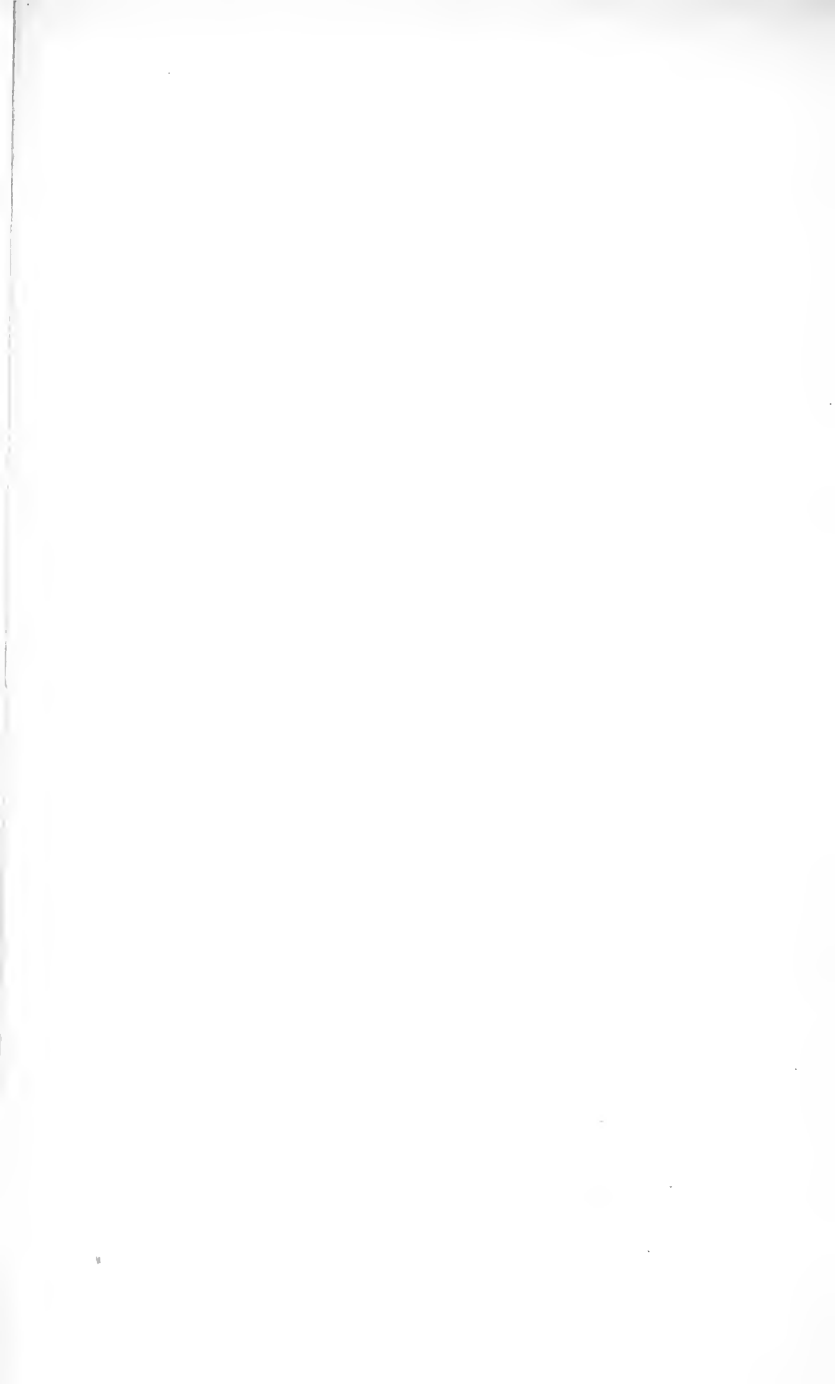
the floor reposed a more stately warrior than the others, with silver hair flowing over his shoulders; at his head was a silken banner, with a golden sun rising above the horizon, and on either side of him a hound rested.

The man looked at them; he thought they must be warriors who had died long ages ago, but the colour still remained in their cheeks, and the red in their lips, as though they only slept. He walked a few paces into the cave, and stumbled over a long, carved wooden instrument half-buried in the sand. He raised it, and standing it on one end, discovered it to be a trumpet or horn of great antiquity. Placing his lips to the mouth-piece he breathed into it, and a musical humming note filled the chamber. At the sound the hounds raised their heads and bayed, and a clash of swords and shields rose as the warriors sat upright, and from the lips of the silver-haired warrior in the centre came the words: "Is the time yet come?"

But the man turned and fled from the cave in fear. He knew then that these ancient warriors were Fionn and his heroes, who wait

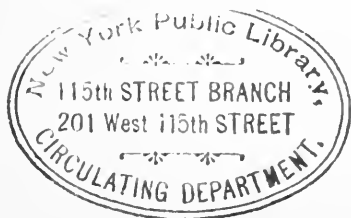


LYING ON THE SANDY GROUND WAS A MULTITUDE OF ARMED AND
GIGANTIC MEN



there, wrapped in an age-long slumber, for the coming of the day when the war-music of the Dord-Fian, the great trumpet of the Fianna, will echo through the cave. When that day comes they will ask again the question, "Is the time yet come?" and it will no longer remain unanswered, for they will hear, "The time is come"; and with sword and shield in hand they will arise and go forth to do battle for Ireland once again.

THE END



NOTE

THESE stories are founded on legends mainly derived from *Silva Gadelica* and the *Transactions of the Ossianic Society*. For some details and one or two legends I am indebted to Mr. Standish O'Grady's *Critical and Philosophical History*.

170-32
23-04

53-04
100-25

