



## THE ORIGIN OF THE "BROWNIES"

By Palmer Cox



**D**URING the publication of the series of the "Brownies" just closed in THE LADIES' HOME JOURNAL, the question has often come to me "What is the origin of the "Brownies?" And perhaps there is no better time to answer this question than now, before the next series of "Brownie" adventures shall begin on this page.

The "Brownie," as the cyclopædia informs us, springs from an old Scotch tradition, but it leaves us to follow up the tradition ourselves and learn how far back into the past it may be traced. Now a tradition, or legend, is about as difficult game to hunt to cover as your literary fowler can flush, but enough can be found to prove that the "Brownies" were good-natured little spirits or goblins of the fairy order. They were all little men, and appeared only at night to perform good and helpful deeds or enjoy harmless pranks while weary households slept, never allowing themselves to be seen by mortals. No person, except those gifted with second sight, could see the "Brownies;" but from the privileged few, principally old women, who were thus enabled to now and then catch a glimpse of their goblin guests, correct information regarding their size and color is said to have been gained.

**T**HEY were called "Brownies" on account of their color, which was said to be brown owing to their constant exposure to all kinds of weather, and also because they had brown hair, something which was not common in the country where the "Brownie" was located, as the people generally had red or black hair. There are different stories about the origin of the name. One is that during the time the Covenanters in Scotland were persecuted because they were said to teach a false and pernicious doctrine, many of them were forced to conceal themselves in caves and secret places, and food was carried to them by friends. One band of Covenanters was led by a little hunchback named Brown, who being small and active could slip out at night with some of the lads and bring in the provisions left by friends in secret places. They dressed themselves in a fantastic manner, and if seen in the dusk of the evening they would be taken for fairies. Those who knew the truth named Brown and his band the "Brownies." This is very plausible, but we have too high an opinion of the "Brownies" to believe that they took their name from a mortal. We are inclined to believe that the well-deserving hunchback took his name from the "Brownies," instead of the "Brownies" deriving their name from him. Besides, the story does not reach back far enough.

**T**HE "Brownies" were an ancient and well-organized band long before there was a Covenanter to flee to caves and caverns. Indeed, from what can be gathered from the writings of ancient authors, one is led to believe the "Brownie" idea is a very old one. It is fair to presume that the "Brownies" enjoyed their nightly pranks, or skipped over the dewy heather to aid deserving peasants even before the red-haired Dane crossed the border to be Caledonia's unwelcome guest. Every family seems to have been haunted by a spirit they called "Brownie" which did different sorts of work, and they in return gave him offerings of the various products of the place. The "Brownie" idea was woven into the affairs of everyday life. In fact, it seemed to be part of their religion, and a large part at that. When they churned their milk, or brewed, they poured some milk or wort through the hole in a flat, thin stone called "Brownie's stone." In other cases they poured the offering in the corners of the room, believing that good would surely come to their homes if "the Brownies" were remembered. On out of the way islands, where the people could neither read nor write, and were wholly ignorant of what was going on in other parts of the country, so much so that they looked upon a person that could understand black marks on paper as a supernatural being, the "Brownie" was regarded as their helper.

The poet Milton had doubtless one of these "Brownies" in his mind when he penned the lines in "L'Allegro" to the "lubber fiend," who drudged and sweat

"To earn his cream-bowl duly set."

But, strange to say, he was not as complimentary as the untarnished reputation of the "Brownies" might lead one to expect. In some villages, near their chapel, they had a large flat stone called "Brownie's stone," upon which the ancient inhabitants offered a cow's milk every Sunday to secure the good-will of the "Brownies." That the "Brownies" were good eaters, and could out-do the cat in their love for cream, is well proven in many places.

**I**T may be gratifying to some to know that even kings have not thought it beneath their dignity to dip the royal pen in the "Brownies" behalf. King James in his "Daemonology" says: "The spirit called 'Brownie' appeared like a man and haunted divers houses without doing any evil, but doing as it were necessarie turnes up and down the house, yet some were so blinded as to believe that their house was all the sonesier, as they called it, that such spirits resorted there." Other writers say that the "Brownie" was a sturdy fairy, who, if he was fed well and treated kindly would do, as the people said, a great deal of work. He is said to have been obliging, and used to come into houses by night, and for a dish of cream perform lustily any piece of work that might remain to be done.

The superstitious inhabitants had absolute faith in the "Brownies'" wisdom or judgment. The "Brownie" spirit was said to reach over the table and make a mark where his favorite was to sit at a game if he wished to win, and this "tip" from the "Brownie" was never disregarded by the player.

**T**HE seeker after facts concerning the origin of the "Brownies" will find it difficult to gather them in. He may visit the largest libraries in the land and turn the leaves of old volumes that have been neglected for centuries, and fail to find more than that at one time in the long long ago, the "Brownie" was a power in the land that no well-regulated family could afford to do without. One thing is certain, however, the more we learn about the "Brownies" the better we like them. There is a genealogy that one can trace back through the dusty centuries of the past without finding one blot on their scutcheon, or discovering that they descended from a race of robbers or evil doers. It is indeed refreshing to learn that at a time when the age was so dark that even Christianity could scarcely send a ray of light through it, and when every man's hand seemed to be against his brother, when poachers, moss-troopers and plundering men of might were denuding the land, the "Brownies" through rain and shine were found at their post every night, aiding the distressed, picking up the work that weary hands let fall, and in many ways winning the love and respect of the people.

### THE BROWNIES IN THE JOURNAL

THEY ARE PREPARING FOR A JOURNEY ROUND THE WORLD



**F**OR some time past the famous band of "Brownies" have been laying plans for a journey around the world, and next month THE LADIES' HOME JOURNAL hopes to print in its pages the first of their series of adventures in the different countries of Europe.

This series by these funny little men will undoubtedly be the most notable in which they have ever figured, and their adventures in strange countries will be as varied as they will be exciting. The series will be known as:

### THE BROWNIES ROUND THE WORLD

and for it Mr. Cox has made some of the most striking and humorous pictures which have ever come from his pen.

The little men will visit all the countries represented by the band, and the picture at the head of this page shows some of them in readiness for the start. The tour will begin in Canada and end in the Polar Regions clear to the North Pole. The band will go to England, Ireland and Scotland, Italy, France, Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Russia, China and the land of the Esquimaux. They will have sport and adventure in these countries as only the "Brownies" can have, and they will send home to their thousands of friends each month, a careful account of their doings while far away from home.

