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POPULAR SUPERSTITIONS OF EUROPE.

BY DANIEL G. BRINTON, M. D.

WITH PICTURES BY ANDRÉ CASTAIGNE.

DEEP down in the heart of man bides the firm conviction that he dwells in the midst of an unseen world, peopled with beings of strange powers, who move incessantly athwart the plans of his own life. Above, beneath, close by, he knows them, feels them, but they elude his grasp. Futurity and fate lie in their hands; omens and portents are the hints they give; and there are states of soul and mighty crises when they become apparent to sight and hearing.

In lonely thorps the beldam still sits in the ingle nook, and with cracked voice frights the listening group with tales of warlocks and doppel-gangers, corpse-lights and white-women, and the scores of evil things which assail the high estate of man. How venerable is her calling!

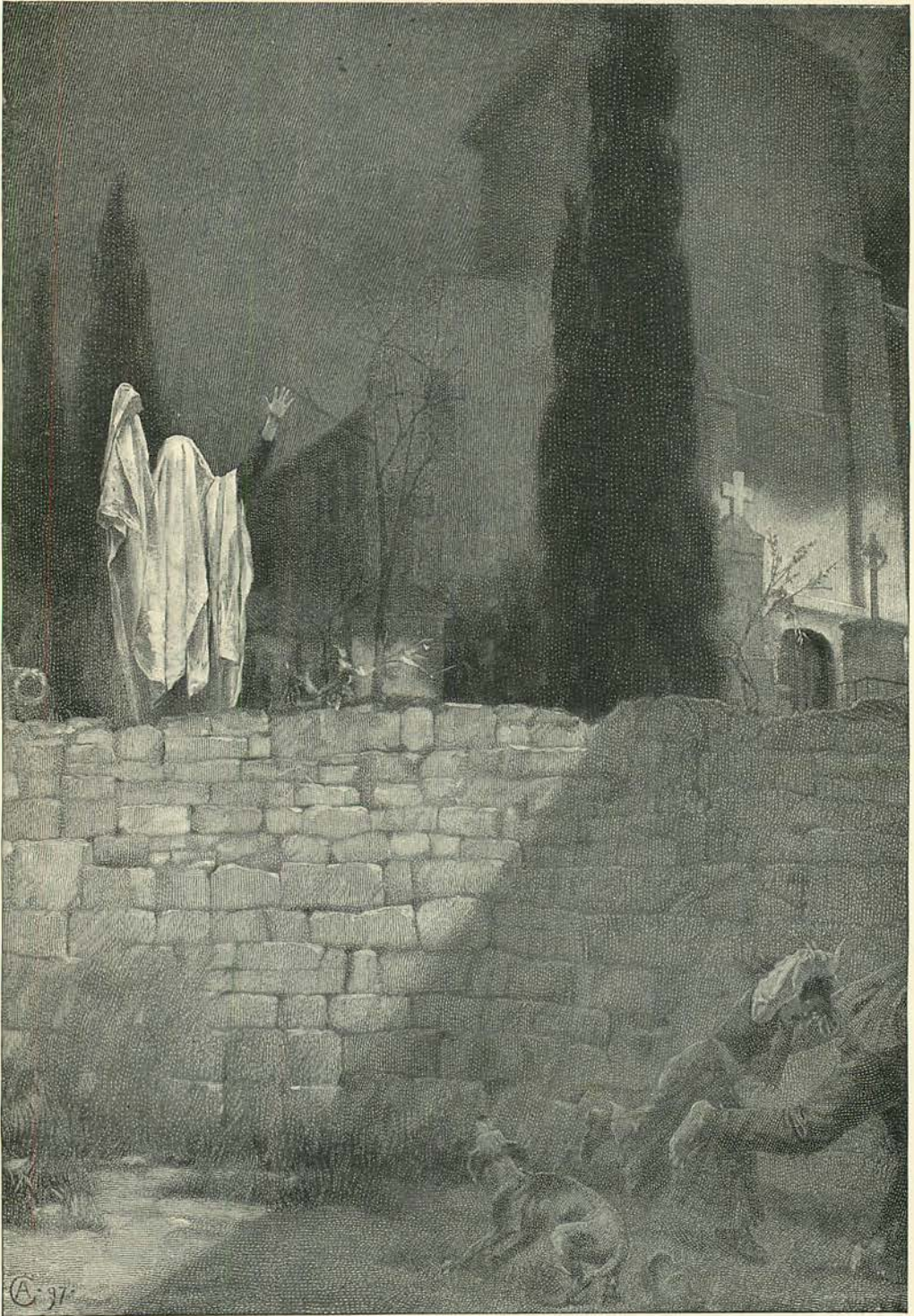
Around the camp-fire on the prairies the half-naked Indians gather, and pass the night attent on the tale of the divine trickster Gluskap, who knew all magic and was so skilled in lies that not the wildest beast but would fall into his snares; or of the Strong Boy, born many moons ago, who dared do no work, for so exceeding was his strength that when he took up a tool or weapon he could not help but break it.

Mark that group squeezing into the narrow gallery of the bazaar, its tepid air heavy with odor of roses, spices, and fresh

leather, blocking the passage as with silent eagerness they follow the teller of sweet tales, "his own, Ferdusi's, and the rest." Respect his vocation, for this it was that carried the classical "Milesian stories" from farthest India to the Levant, and with fairy hand wakened the imagination of Europe from the slumbers of medieval barbarism.

For a long time—up to quite a recent date, indeed—the learned disdained to consider these foolish trifles, rating them beneath the attention of the serious-minded. They were old wives' fables, and the pastime of boors and clowns. But a significant change has come over the spirit of science. It has been discovered that even the obscene and puerile fables of savages are as worthy of study as the surely not less indelicate recitals of Greek mythology. The fairy-tales and ghost-stories of the country-side reveal a facet of universal human nature in a naïve and ingenuous manner not to be discovered in any other development. It is with no unmerited right, therefore, that the investigations of these out-of-the-way subjects is called a science, the Science of Folk-lore.

Many of its results are curious enough to be worth the telling, but they mainly aid in the demonstration of one unexpected truth—that the alleged progress of man, about which we are all ready to say so many fine



A GHOST.

words, is in fact but a superficial veneer, a deceptive surface on society, burnishing its exterior, while the most of each man remains the pristine savage that his remote ancestor was, with the same hopes and fears, wants and wishes. What we call "modern superstition" is the most ancient stuff in our make-up, and dates back to the time when our venerable forefathers, the cannibals and cave-dwellers, framed their first ideas of the world about them, and of their own origin and destiny.

As good an example as can be selected are ghost-stories. I have seen ghosts, and therefore have a right to talk about them in a familiar manner. They are vapory creatures, easily fading into nothingness, but momentarily with clearly defined forms. Mine did not last over thirty seconds in this seemingly corporeal state; but that was long enough. The one our artist displays must have been, as astronomers say, at the period of sharpest definition.

Ghosts are supposed to be "disembodied spirits"; but neither primitive man nor present believers hold that the body from which they come must be a dead one. Something analogous to what the modern "theosophs" call the "astral body" is recognized by all savages. They hold that it is the spirit of the person which in his dreams wanders far away and experiences strange adventures. It is gifted with such power of swiftness that space offers no obstacle, and time to come is to it one with time present. Hence the visions which appear in the night-time reveal what is happening in the distance and what will occur in the future.

Sometimes, however, the errant spirit loses its way, and cannot find the homeward trail to its corporeal house. Then the sleeper awakes, dazed and daft; he talks wildly, and the spell of madness is upon him. The medicine-man is summoned, and, bringing his magical apparatus, the rattle to summon the spirit, the tube through which to blow the living breath, and the herbs of power, he calls aloud on the wandering ghost to return to the body.

Ghosts were naturally more numerous in earlier conditions of society, for then man had so many souls. Now we are content with one, and there are some who try to make us doubt even that modest allowance. But in the good old days each person was credited with several. There was one, for instance, which belonged to his body, and must abide in it, or death would arrive; then there was the dream-soul, which, I have said, might

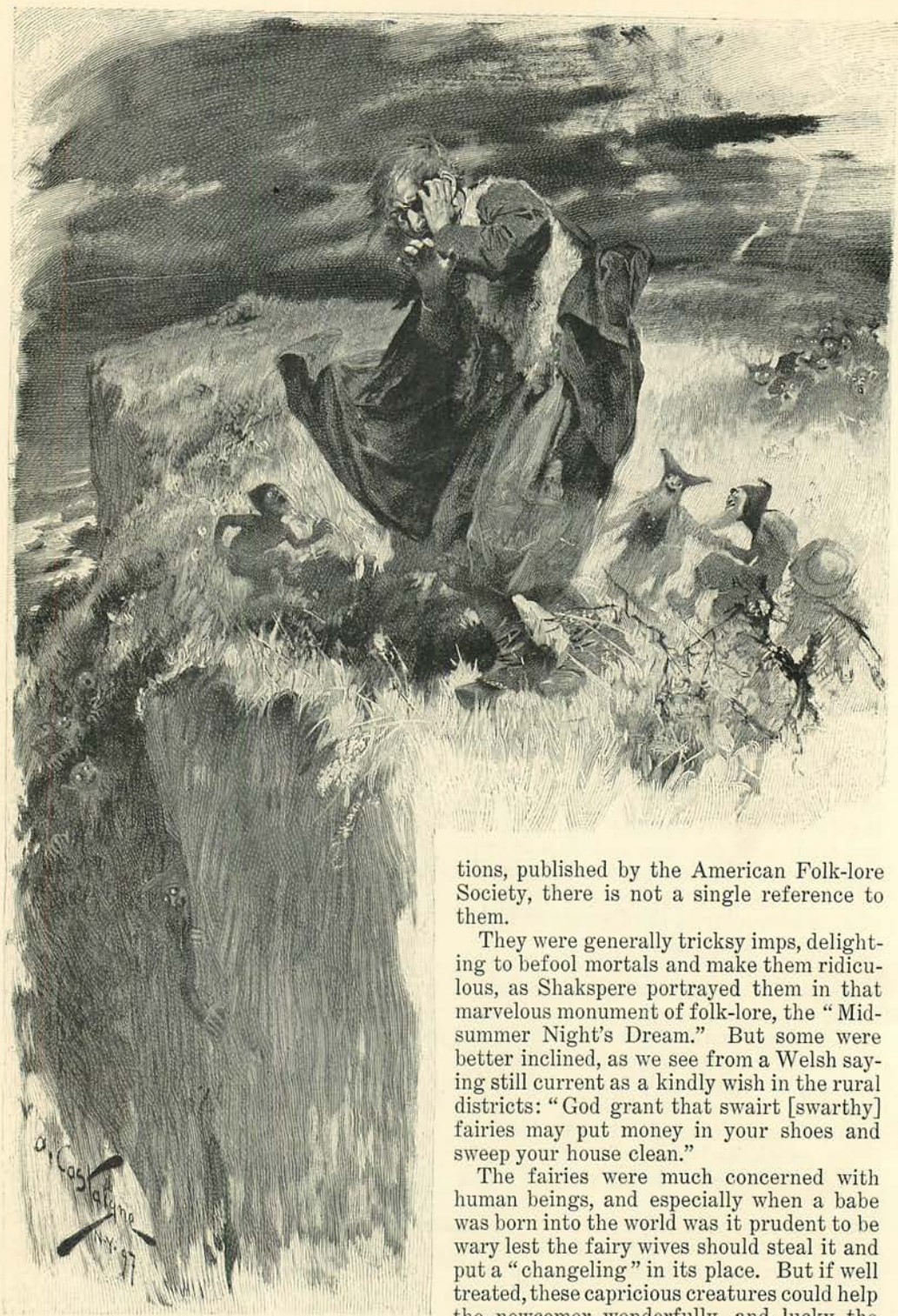
wander through time and space at will during sleep; and, most important, said many, is the name-soul, that which gives us distinctive individuality in our personal names; and, not to continue the list to a tiresome length, there was the bone-soul, which remained in the bones after the body had passed to dust. The last-mentioned was of peculiar value, for on its persistence depended the chance for resurrection into life on earth. The faith in this was nigh universal. When the body of Elijah touched the dry bones of the long-dead warriors, they clothed themselves in flesh, and were restored to living beings. The rabbis taught that especially in the bone *lutz*, the last of the spinal vertebræ, dwelt the spirit of the deceased. It is indestructible, say they, and not even a strong man with a sledge-hammer can break it.

Does any one suppose that such beliefs are antiquated, the property of distant ages and ruder conditions? Let him inquire in the grandest fanes of Christian worship as to the power flowing from the bones of the saints; let him ask the meaning of the popular dread of skulls and skeletons. Always it is this venerable belief that in them dwells some part of the spirit of the dead.

A word or two about the name-soul, before I pass to something else. The eastern Eskimos speak of it in a pleasant form. They hold to the doctrine of three souls: the one which perishes with the body; the second, which lives some generations about the village, and is lost; the third, the name-soul, which is immortal and mounts to the sky on the Milky Way, there to dance in the fiery streamers of the aurora borealis.

The relics of this belief still linger among us. Ask a French peasant his name, and he will generally put you off with a joke or with some pet sobriquet. He will not give you his baptismal name, for with it you might work some magic trick to his detriment. He has heard many a story of "the power of the name," and how he who knows it commands him who bears it. In the north of England, the peasantry do not favor naming a child from some respected ancestor; that departed worthy might not like it, and then the child would either die young or grow up "a bit of a graceless fellow."

The fairies seem to have belonged among the Celts—the ancient Britons, Welsh, and Irish. Perhaps they are to be explained by reminiscences of an early pygmy race, as some have argued. Fairy stories have wonderful tenacity, and are still thoroughly accepted in Ireland and Wales. They do not



THE KORRIGANS.

seem to have reached the United States in any other than their literary form. In Mrs. Bergen's collection of our current supersti-

tions, published by the American Folk-lore Society, there is not a single reference to them.

They were generally tricky imps, delighting to befool mortals and make them ridiculous, as Shakspeare portrayed them in that marvelous monument of folk-lore, the "Midsummer Night's Dream." But some were better inclined, as we see from a Welsh saying still current as a kindly wish in the rural districts: "God grant that swairt [swarthy] fairies may put money in your shoes and sweep your house clean."

The fairies were much concerned with human beings, and especially when a babe was born into the world was it prudent to be wary lest the fairy wives should steal it and put a "changeling" in its place. But if well treated, these capricious creatures could help the newcomer wonderfully, and lucky the babe who could count on a "fairy god-mother." They were kind to well-behaved children, and the Rev. John Horsley of Northumberland himself remembered a "fairy ring," where the fairies used to lay

"goodies" and other presents for children who kept themselves neat.

The "banshee" of the Irish is a fairy wife who is in permanent attendance on some families, but only those of good old stock and purity of descent. Her office is to announce by her wailing the approaching death of a member of the family. She is sometimes dimly descried as a spectral woman in mourning attire, her voice emitting a mournful cry. One stanza from an Irish ballad reads:

To me, my sweet Kathleen, the Benshee has cried,
And I die—ere to-morrow I die:
This rose thou hast gathered and laid by my side,
Will live, my child, longer than I.

In the artist's drawing we have a class of impish Irish fairies, the korrigans, or cluricauns, something like the kobolds or pixies of other localities. We may imagine the unfortunate wanderer is what the Manx call "pixy-led," and cannot find his way home, which is explained by the skeptical, however, as generally occurring "when the man has got a wee drap ower muckle whusky." Then it is that these little folk take their waggish fun of him, and, as the fairies in the "Merry Wives of Windsor," "pinch him, arms, legs, back, shoulders, sides, and shins."

Fairy lore became surprisingly popular in Europe after the tenth century. Much of it was introduced from Celtic sources, with the ever-popular legends of King Arthur and the



A BANSHEE.



FATA MORGANA.

Table Round. Prominent in these was the character of Morgan la Faye, and wide remains her renown! What reader has to be told the story of Ogier the Dane, a paladin of Charlemagne, of whom Morgan promised at his birth that his career should be long and glorious, and that he should never taste of death? When old of years and rich with honors he was induced to sail the seas in search of fresh conquests. But the loadstone rock of Avalon drew his craft to destruction. He alone escaped to land, and there met a beautiful damsel, who placed a golden ring upon his finger. It is Morgan la Faye, and her ring restores him to youth. Then she crowns his brow with a wreath of myrtle and laurel. It is the charm which brings forgetfulness of all that is past; and for two hundred years Ogier dallies with pleasure, recking naught of war and duty, until the cry of France in dire distress wakes him from his sybaritic slumber.

We do not rightly know in what latitude lies the sweet isle of Avalon; we are not quite certain where is that "land of double promise," *terra repromissionis*, as the medieval writers call the home of the fairies. But we know what it is like, for have they not told us with all desirable minuteness?

It is an island hidden somewhere by a wall of fog, where the day ends not and the summer lasts forever, whose flowers wither not, and yet whose fruit ever loads the boughs. It is rich in milk and ale and apples; its fortunate inhabitants know neither

age nor illness; they dwell in lofty houses, whose portals open on cerulean spaces, and whose spires and towers float in graceful lines against a cloudless sky. Some mortals, half slumbering at dawn or at dusk 'neath Italian skies, may be granted a glimpse of these stately mansions of the happy—may have a taste of that for which all are longing—the delights of fairy-land, home of Fata Morgana, the fay Morgan.

Science will call it a mirage; but when science is asked to explain it, she takes refuge in intricate hypothetical formulæ, which *might* apply to the passage of light-rays through atmospheric strata of different temperature, but which, after all, are merely guess-work. The vision is seen most frequently about the Straits of Messina, between Sicily and the mainland, and its attribution to the fairy queen Morgan came from her prominence in the romances of chivalry.

Those who dwelt inland, and knew not the mighty sea and what it hides afar, held that fairy-land was beneath the earth—not in any gloomy Plutonian realm of departed souls, but in the gay and bright domain of Queen Mab and Oberon, and of Crede, "the ever-beautiful." It, too, was the abode of perpetual youth, unending summer, and unfading flowers. From it the fairy folk would emerge to dance their mystic circles and visit the housewife's hearth. Its ruler was spoken of in northern Europe as the "earth king," and its queen as the "troll-wife."

This cycle of the fairy legends is in touch with myths of the most venerable antiquity. In numerous tribes, living far asunder, we find repeated the belief that the under-world is a place of joy, the abode of happy souls. There the sun goes at night, and it is the home of the bright stars when they sink beneath the western verge. Tribes so far asunder as the Kamschatkans and the Andaman Islanders alike cherish the expectation that some fine day this earthly plane of ours will turn upside down, and then we shall all share the delights of our subterranean relatives!

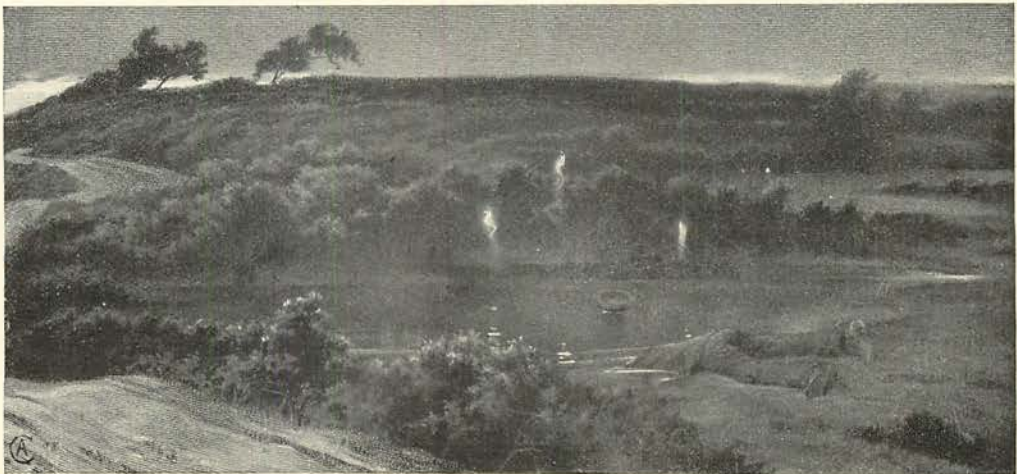
I mention this to show how modern folklore illustrates the unity of the human mind, and the similarities of the conceptions of man when he deals with the unknown. This, indeed, is the most valuable, as it also is the most surprising, result of the study of popular superstitions. Our minds work mechanically, under adamantine laws, and that master magician Nature practises no greater deception on us than when she persuades us that we are free agents.

The tricky, scampish nature of some of those pixies and nixies (the latter especially frequenting boggy places) is seen in the elf-fire with which they delude night-farers on the fens, holding before them cheery gleams of light, only to lure them into the mud and water. Scientists call this appearance an ignis fatuus, and ponderously explain it as the slow combustion of "methyl hydride." But who that watches the *feux follets* dancing along the meadow in the tepid summer night, or reflected in the inky tarn, would not rather cherish the older opinion that these are misleading kobolds from some earlier world?

There is one feature we note in the tale of Ogier the Dane which is characteristic of the later fairy literature of Europe. It is the supernatural lapse of time in fairy-land. Years, generations, centuries pass, but the mortal caught in the magic of the place wots not of speeding cycles. To him a few minutes or hours have elapsed, when to his kind epochs have been lived.

We are familiar with this in the tale of "Rip Van Winkle"; but Rip is represented as growing old with the years which had flown since he left his village. Not so the typical hero of fairy lore. He shares with the fairies the perpetual youth of their realm, and returns of the same age as when he left.

One plain, pathetic tale, such as those told by maids "who spin i' the sun," will answer as a type. There was a wedding in County Clare one summer eve. The jollity was at its height, and all were wishing good luck to bride and bridegroom over full flagons, when a guest told the happy groom that one wished to see him at the gate. He stepped aside, and found an old woman without, in her hand a wreath of gold. "This," she said, "is for your bonny bride; but first let me see it on yourself." And with that she laid it on his bare head. "Now give me a kiss, and go back to the fun," she added. He stooped and kissed her, and turned to the house. But all was dark and silent. He knocked, and after long waiting a strange man opened the door. "Where be my bride and the guests?" exclaimed the dazed youth. He asked in vain. All he could learn of the occupant of the cottage was that he had heard his grandfather say that once there was a wedding in



FEUX FOLLETS.

the house, at which the groom had suddenly disappeared and never returned.

Mr. Sidney Hartland, who has written the most philosophic analysis of fairy tales, rightly considers this power over time their most extraordinary trait. It adds, he observes, "a subtler, weirder, more awful horror to communion with the supernatural" than any other race had devised. In this "it was reserved for European nations to put the final touches of gloom and horror on the canvas." The absolute disconnection of life and time thus contemplated has in it the germs of catastrophes to all that is dear much more dreadful than separation in space.

As the Celtic mythology is the source of fairy lore, so Teutonic mythology contributed its part to general European folk-lore and superstition. Perhaps none of its legacies are more *saisissant* than the legend of "The Spectral Hunt." It is a tradition of a furious host riding through the sky, with hounds and horses, and noise of shouts and horns. Sometimes they are warlike, and instead of hunting-calls there is clash of steel, clangor of trumpet, and yells of fighting men. Or it may have been Herla, who led his crew across the Welsh marches, on land or in the air, as he chose, "a great company of men and women, with pack-saddles and panniers, birds and dogs," or the *chasse-galerie* of the French, said by old Gervase of Tilbury to be seen at

moonlight, a wild troop of soldiers, hunters, and dogs scurrying athwart the sky. The woodwards of Brittany told Gervase that this was the return of King Arthur and his merry men.

But the antiquary Jacob Grimm settled more correctly the business of the spectral huntsmen. He showed by evidence which all have accepted that the source of such tales in central Europe was the mythical stories of the hero-god Wodan (Odin) and his host. He was believed to dwell in Valhalla, with his earls and men-at-arms, quaffing mead from the skulls of slain enemies. At a signal, all would rush forth, with clatter of arms and clangor of horns, to do battle with their foes in the aerial spaces. When Valhalla had been banned by Christian teaching, Wodan became the "hidden hero," sleeping beneath the German hills, sallying forth from time to time on his wild rout across the midnight sky. And the truth of this is shown by the story of a blacksmith, recorded by Grimm, who dwelt near the Odenberg in the Black Mountains. One day he saw a gap in the face of the cliff, and stealing in, could see mighty men in armor playing at bowls with balls of iron. They were the host of Wodan.

Savage tribes everywhere looked upon the brutes as their equals, often as their superiors, and always as their gods, or in the forms of the gods. Nothing was more



LA CHASSE-GALERIE.



A LOUP-GAROU.

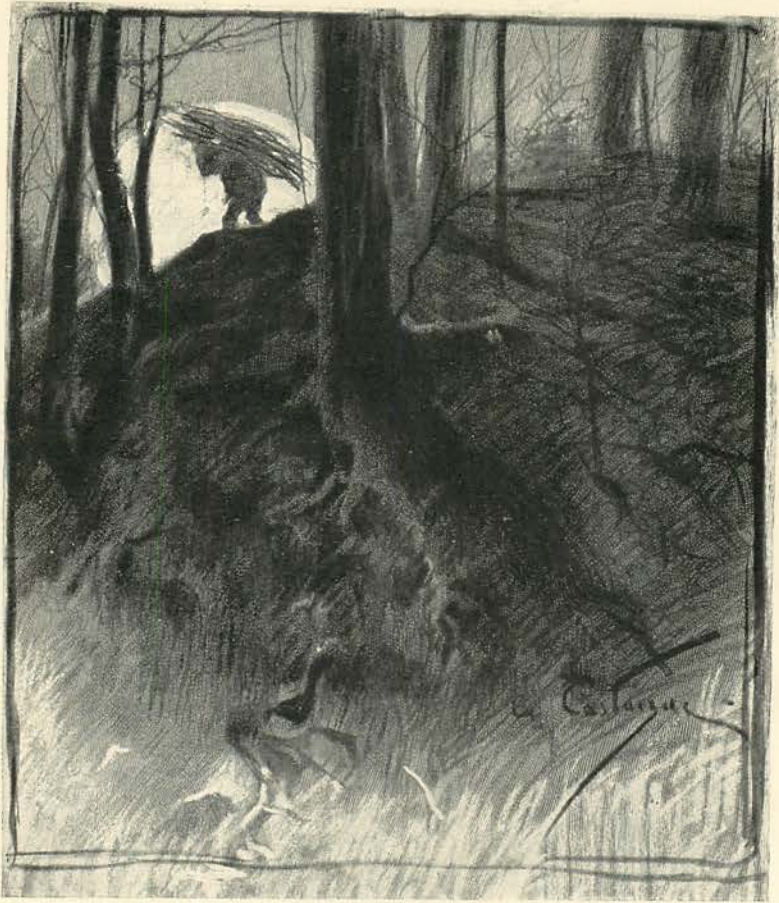
natural, seeing that the brutes possess mysterious powers far transcending those of man, such as flying, swimming, scenting danger, and swiftness or strength to escape it.

Popular superstitions preserved all these primitive notions, and they have by no means died out even in "the best society." There is something uncanny for us still in the death-tick, in the midnight screech of the owl, in the unexpected appearance of a black cat. Mrs. Bergen informs us that in some parts of Massachusetts the cows are believed to forecast the future, and if they "moo" after midnight it is a warning of an approaching death in the family.

The highest degree of witchcraft is ac-

knowledged, the world over, to be when the adept can transform himself (or herself) into some lower animal. When wolves were still feared in Europe, that was the animal usually preferred. The superstition of the *loup-garou*, or wer-wolf, belongs to the folk-lore of most modern nations, and has its reflex in the story of "Little Red Riding-hood" and others. By processes of sorcery it was held that a man or woman could at will be transformed into a wolf, and would go forth to ravage the flocks and eat the children. In French legend the loup-garou needs to sleep but two nights in the month, and can spend the others in roaming the fields.

Let no one think that this esoteric art is



THE MAN IN THE MOON.

extinct. No, indeed; it flourishes vigorously in Central America. The eminent antiquary, the Abbé Brasseur de Bourbourg, intimate as scarce another with the sorceries of the Nagualists of that region, urges that if human testimony is worth anything, the natives yet possess the means of turning themselves into wolves and tigers; and the intelligent Father Baeza of Yucatan reports that the confessional shows that certain sinners did, or thought they did, undergo such metamorphosis.

Of all the ancient divinities, the moon holds her own with greatest tenacity. In her collection of superstitions now current in the United States among English-speaking folk, Mrs. Bergen shows that those connected with the moon are largely in the majority.

Though we usually speak of the moon as feminine, in divination and fortune-telling it is evidently "the man in the moon" who is addressed. He is especially obliging in tell-

ing girls about their future husbands. An invocation very much favored in both Canada and the United States runs thus, with local variations:

New moon, true moon, tell unto me
Who my true love is to be;
The color of his hair,
The clothes he will wear,
And when he 'll be married to me.

Moonlight and love-words go together so naturally and so sweetly that no wonder the legends of many nations unite them. The classic amours of Endymion and Selene are too familiar to need more than mention. In Esthonian folk-tales it is "the man in the moon" who fell in love with the earthly maiden Videvik, and in her arms forgot his duty to light the night. Then the forest robber Wolf stole Videvik's oxen, and the "old father above," learning the mischief, separated the lovers, so that now they can see each other only in the reflection of still

pools at evening twilight. Then the moon may be seen, 'way down in the water, watching for his love to come to the brink.

The man in the moon is not visible to all people. The Aztecs, and other American as well as some Asiatic tribes, do not perceive human lineaments in the round face of the full moon. What all of them do see is a rabbit; and since I learned this, that is what I also see. He is sitting on his haunches, his nose in the air, and his long ears thrown straight back. It is lifelike. Whether, as some have asserted, the "Br'er Rabbit" stories are to be traced, through this connection, to lunar myths, is worth further study.

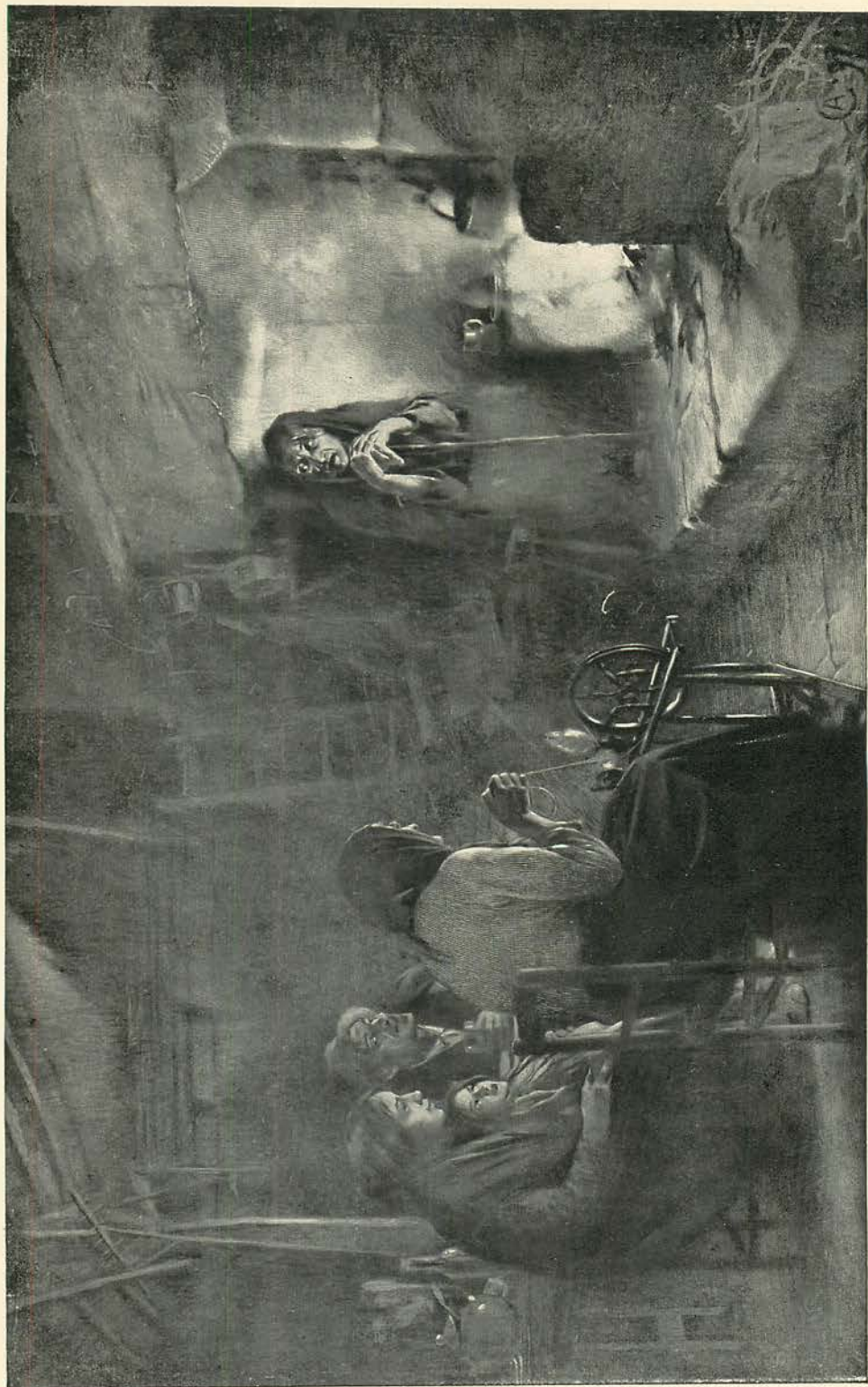
Does any one believe that these popular superstitions have passed out of existence, and have become questions for the antiquary only? Never was there a greater error. Time was when the astrologer, the diviner, the sorcerer, had to practise his mysterious arts in secret. The law of the state menaced him with its severest punishments; the church

fulminated against him and his clients its direst anathemas. He could show himself only at country fairs, among ignorant boors, himself broken by the rack and the strap-pado, lugging on his back the machinery of his harmless but suspicious deceptions. Were he consulted by the wise and rich, as he frequently was, it must be with closed doors and under studied secrecy.

How different is it now! For some strange reason, there has been a wonderful revival within the last decade of nearly every medieval superstition, under various guises, in the most enlightened centers of the world. The practitioners of this modern sorcery, instead of concealing, advertise their claims, and urge them on the community under pseudo-scientific names and jargons. Palmistry, astrology, sympathetic magic, the doctrine of signatures, hiero-therapeutics, and all the farrago of fifteenth-century thaumaturgy, flourish to-day in Boston and New York, in Paris and Chicago, to a degree surpassing anything known three centuries ago.



A SORCERER.



A STORY-TELLER.

There is a reason for this. Sorcery is science seen upside down. There is a confused groundwork of truth, a fallacious method of viewing facts, at the basis of these pseudo-sciences. Yet the truth and the facts exist, and these explain the success of the deceptions. They dazzle and daze minds not trained in sound reasoning; and how few are! The societies for "psychical research" and theosophic speculation begin with an acknowledgment of the *possible* truth of ghost-seeing and of communion with the divine. This possible ground is seized by the charlatan as proved basis for his illusory edifice.

Superstitions are at core the same everywhere and at all times, because they are

based on those desires and that ignorance which are and will ever be a part of man's nature. He is dimly aware of mighty, unmeasured forces in ceaseless activity around him, controlling his own destiny; the ominous and omnipresent portent of death meets him at every turn; dissatisfaction with his present condition, intense longing for a life and joy which it can never offer, goad him to seek a knowledge which weights and measures are impotent to accord him. Yet such restricted knowledge is all that science can supply. Therefore he turns in despair to the mystics and the adepts, the Cagliostro and the Humes, who stand ready to beckon him into their illusory temples of folly.

INCIDENTS OF THE CUBAN BLOCKADE.

BY WALTER RUSSELL.

WITH PICTURES BY THE AUTHOR.

MY time while on the blockade, serving as a special artist, was about equally divided between the various war-ships and a small steam-yacht the duty of which was to divine intuitively when and where something was to occur, and be there to witness it. Our little crew of four constituted a strategy board in itself. We were, indeed, war prophets. More than once wisdom in our reasoning brought us our reward. More than once we were alone in our glory, the only despatch-boat on the spot.

A sailor boy had asked me to bring him from Key West fifty boxes of cigarettes for some of the crew; and one morning I threw the bundle upon the deck of his ship. Tearing off the cover, he scrawled the words, "Thanks! Hope to meet you twenty-two miles to the eastward at noon," and scaled the bit of pasteboard to me.

A correspondent who by common consent was chairman of our strategy board was on board the ship at that time, and obtained another slight clue.

So we headed eastward from Havana, while the blockading fleet lay basking serenely in the sun. So also did many despatch-boats. At noon my sailor friend and his ship were there. Shortly after noon there was an engagement,—the first of the war,—and there was no other despatch-boat near. Next morning New-Yorkers were informed that despatch-boats were as numerous there as

pickets in a fence. Every newspaper had a dozen. The incident was witnessed by only one artist besides the writer; yet I have since seen a double-page color supplement of that battle in a weekly periodical, where, under the artist's name, was printed the claim that it was sketched from our yacht.

Two days later I tried the cigarette experiment again. I also brought reading-matter, upon request. Among the magazines was "Lippincott's," which contained a story by Amelie Rives, entitled "Meriel," which I had taken pleasure in reading, and which I recommended to a friend among the junior officers. The name "Meriel" struck him rather forcibly. Pulling a map of Cuba from his pocket, he pointed out a town with a similar name twenty-two miles west of Havana, around which was drawn a line in red ink.

"I think," said he, "that this will be our next stopping-place for target practice."

That evening we lay one mile off Mariel, with the *New York* alongside. We were close enough to see the low buildings and one little round blockhouse on the shore, also the town inside the cove. A beautiful picture it was. To the left of the cove a mountain rose sheer and perpendicular, its top catching the rays of the setting sun. In the valley this peaceful town nestled in the shadow of the opposite hills—a shadow very much like outstretched protecting wings, trying to screen the little town from the view of the terrible