

## A CHAT ABOUT FAIRIES.



T. is a task of no little difficulty in these prosaic and hurrying days to realise the prominent position once held by Fairies and Fairy-land in the popular creed. One of the results of our higher educational achievements is that many of the old-established beliefs and fancies are disappearing, one by one, and soon their place will know them no more.

Not that we are complaining of this ; indeed,

there is every reason to be most thankful for the progress we have made and are still making ; and for the opportunities of intellectual improvement of which our good, simple-minded forefathers knew nothing. We are writing of days when people were far less highly educated than they are at present, and when they were in consequence more credulous and prone, especially in sparsely populated districts, to superstitious beliefs, and to take *omne ignotum pro magnifico*.

Then, in the common superstition, the visible bordered closely on the invisible, and there was but a narrow fence which divided this matter-of-fact, work-a-day world from that mystic and dim realm, shrouded from the observance of all but a favoured few—a realm which even yet has not lost its hold on the popular imagination, a realm whose denizens were of a different race, cast in a different mould, endued with additional powers, and animated with different objects and desires.

Even in comparatively recent times Fairies and Fairy-land were to a great extent real objects in the rustic horizon, but in the days of which we are speaking, we find grave old chroniclers narrating in sober fashion their doings—in terms of censure when their pranks were mischievous, as they often were, and speaking gently of them when they were obliging and kind ; for not all were as evil-disposed as that house-spirit which haunted—so the local gossips said—a farmhouse in Yorkshire, and who caused endless trouble to the inmates, especially to the children, against whom he seemed to have had a most unusual grudge. Sometimes, we are told, he would snatch away their bread and butter, or upset their milk, and at others he would violently shake the hangings of their beds. He became at last such an intolerable nuisance that the farmer and his wife were obliged to leave the house in which they had long dwelt and to take another and less convenient abode, in order to be rid of his presence. Vain hope ! Hardly had the farmer got settled in his new house, when the house-spirit turned up again, whereupon the worthy man philosophically remarked to his wife that they might as well go back to the old house as be tormented in one that was not so convenient.

This story is given at length by Brand in his "Popular Antiquities," being abridged from a letter in the *Literary Gazette* of 1825.

Nor were poets backward in laying their rhythmic tributes at their feet, if the expression may be allowed. Witness our own countryman, Milton, who writes :—

" Good luck betide thee, son, for at thy birth,  
The Faery Ladies danced upon the hearth.  
Thy drowsy nurse hath sworn she did them spy  
Come tripping to the room where thou didst lie,  
And, sweetly singing round about thy bed,  
Strew all their blessings on thy sleeping head."

Witness also Spenser in his "Faerie Queen," when relating the dream of Sir Thopas,

" Forweared with my sportes, I did alight  
From loftie steed, and downe to sleep me layd ;  
The verdant grass my couch did goodly dight,  
The pillow was my helmet fayre displayed ;  
Whiles every sence the humour sweet embayd,  
Me seemed by my side a royall mayd  
Her dainty limbs full softly down did lay,  
So faire a creature yet saw never sunny day."

Before passing on to say something about the subject of this paper, it may be well to prefix a few remarks as to the origin of the word "Fairy." Derivations have been sought in a Greek source from the word *pher*, the Ionic form of the classical *ther*, a wild beast ; a word, by the way, which survives in a restricted sense in the English word *deer*. By others the origin of the word has been sought in the last syllable of the word *Italie*. The Persian *peri* has been suggested as its original : the Hebrew *peer*, to adorn, and the Saxon *faran*, to go, have all been given as derivations. To say nothing of their being far-fetched, these derivations are all open to more serious objections. The true derivation of the word is to be found in the Latin *fatum*, fate. In mediæval Latin we find a verb derived from this noun, *fatere*, to enchant. Thence the transition is easy to the French *feer*, the Spanish *hada*, and the English *fairy*.

Here a very interesting digression might be made with the object of showing the various meanings through which the word "fairy" has passed. First, enchantment, pure and simple ; then, the land of those who practised enchantment ; then, in a collective sense, the people who dwelt in the enchantment-land ; and finally, an individual dweller in that abode. But space will not allow us to touch on this part of an interesting theme, and so we pass on to the fairies themselves ; and first of

*Elves*. The home of the elves was originally in Scandinavia, where they were known by the name of "Alfar." In England, as elsewhere, they were divided into two classes : the "country" elves who lived in the woods, and made their homes in the mountain sides and in caverns, and frolicked by moonlight in the fields ; and the "domestic" elves, more usually called hobgoblins and Robin Goodfellows. Their social and domestic arrangements seem to have been modelled very much on the pattern which obtains

amongst ourselves. They were ruled over by a king and a queen, and they feasted and played very much as we do. They are reported to have been a musical race, and the learned in such matters would aver that their music was equal to that of the best musicians. They were remarkably good dancers, and the simple peasant who crossed the fields on his way to his work, and who saw a ring of grass darker than that of the surrounding herbage, would say that the elves had been dancing there. The elves were usually invisible, but it was said that children who were born on Sundays had the power of seeing them, and that they themselves could confer this power on all whom they chose.

In marked contrast to these musical and dance-loving elves were the "house-spirits." They were as much distinguished by mischievous characteristics as their cousins who dwelt above ground were by amiable traits. They delighted in playing pranks, it is true, but more often from pure fun than with any malicious motive. In the reign of good Queen Bess there appeared a little book entitled "The Mad Pranks and Merry Jest of Robin Goodfellow," and from this, as quoted by Keightley in his "Fairy Mythology," we extract the following specimens of their humour:—A company of young fellows who had been making merry with their sweethearts were coming home over a heath. Robin met them, and to make himself merry took the form of a walking fire and led them up and down till daylight, and then went off saying—

"Get you home, you merry lads:  
Tell your mammies and your dads,  
And all those that news desire,  
How you saw a walking fire.  
Wenches that do smile and lispe,  
Use to call me Willie Wispe,  
If that you but weary be;  
It is sport alone for me.  
Away! unto your houses go,  
And I'll go laughing, Ho, ho, ho."

But they were not always mischievously inclined, but willing to help in domestic and farm labour, and do all sorts of menial work; they expected, however, payment in the shape of a bowl of cream and curds, and were usually very angry if these were not put ready for them when their work was finished. We next proceed to consider the

*Dwarfs.* These, like the elves, originally came from Scandinavia, where they were known as Trolls. In spite of the original signification of the word they were not usually considered to be a noxious race. They formed their dwellings in the inside of mounds and hillocks; sometimes a tribe together, and sometimes in parties of two or three. They do not seem to have mixed much with our species, but they had great riches and magnificent dwellings. It is related that on one occasion they were seen pushing large chests of money to and fro, and evidently taking great pleasure in opening and shutting them. They appear to have been friendly and willing to help, but they were terrible thieves. One curious point about them is the dislike they had to noise. Perhaps it was a recollection of the time when Thor used to throw his hammer after them, but so distasteful was noise to them, that the sound of

the church bells was sufficient to drive them out of the country. They could render themselves invisible at will, and also turn themselves into any shape that suited their fancy or their need, and were gifted with enormous bodily strength. They usually wore grey clothing and pointed red caps. As an illustration of the evil propensity of the dwarfs above alluded to, the following story from the book previously quoted may serve: "Tis not so very long since there were dwarfs in June at Göttingen, who used to go into the fields and steal sheaves of corn. They did much injury to one man who had a great deal of corn. At length he hit on a plan to catch them. At noon one day he put a rope round the field, and when the dwarfs went to creep under it, it knocked off their caps. Being now visible they were caught. They gave him many fair words, promising, if he would take away the rope, to give him a peck of money if he came to that place *before sunrise*. He agreed, but a friend whom he consulted told him not to go at sunrise but a little before twelve at night, as it was at that hour that the day really began. He did as directed, and there found the dwarfs, who did not expect him, with the peck of money." They proved so troublesome in some parts of Germany that they were once and for all expelled.

A few concluding words must be devoted to the *Pixies*. The principal home of these little creatures, as mischievous as they were small, seems to have been in Devonshire, though we hear of them in other parts. The tradition concerning them is that they were the souls of infants who had died before baptism. Handsome in form, they were clothed in green. Their chief amusement was dancing to the sombre croak of the frog, or the more lively music of the cricket. They usually dwelt in a rock. They were addicted to stealing children, and to leading travellers astray. They had no objection to vary their proceedings by blowing out the candle and to making a confusion in a house, or kissing any girls, or making noises in the walls to frighten people; in a word, whatever mischief was done was to be laid to the account of these erratic little folk.

That they were capable of vengeance and gratitude alike is evident from the two following stories with which we must conclude this paper. In a certain town in the south of England two serving girls in a farm said that the pixies were very kind to them, and used to drop a piece of silver into the bucket of water the girls were wont to place ready for their use. It so happened once that this bucket was forgotten, and when the pixies came to complain of the neglect, the girl who had retired to rest said that she would not turn out again "for all the pixies in Devonshire." The other maid said she would go, and did so; and on her return she overheard the pixies discussing what vengeance they should take on her companion. Eventually they decided that she was to be made lame for seven years and then to be cured by a herb growing on Dartmoor, the name of which the listener tried by every means to fix in her memory, but without avail. Sure enough the lazy girl woke up in the morning quite lame, and remained so for seven years,

when one day, as she was picking a mushroom, she was astonished to see a strange-looking boy appear suddenly, who insisted on striking her on the leg with a plant he held in his hand. He did so, and she was cured.

Here is a pretty story of pixy gratitude. A certain old woman had in her garden a fine bed of tulips. This bed was oft frequented by the little folk, and they might be heard at midnight lulling their babes to rest among them, and as long as the old woman lived the

bed remained undisturbed. But at length the old lady died, and the tulips were taken up, and a bed of parsley made in its place. The pixies, however, showed their power, and would not let the parsley grow, and it all withered and died. On the other hand, they diligently tended the grave of the old woman, around which they might often be heard singing dirges and lamentations. They would not allow a single weed to grow on it, but kept it always green, and beautiful with wild flowers.

H. ORMONDE.

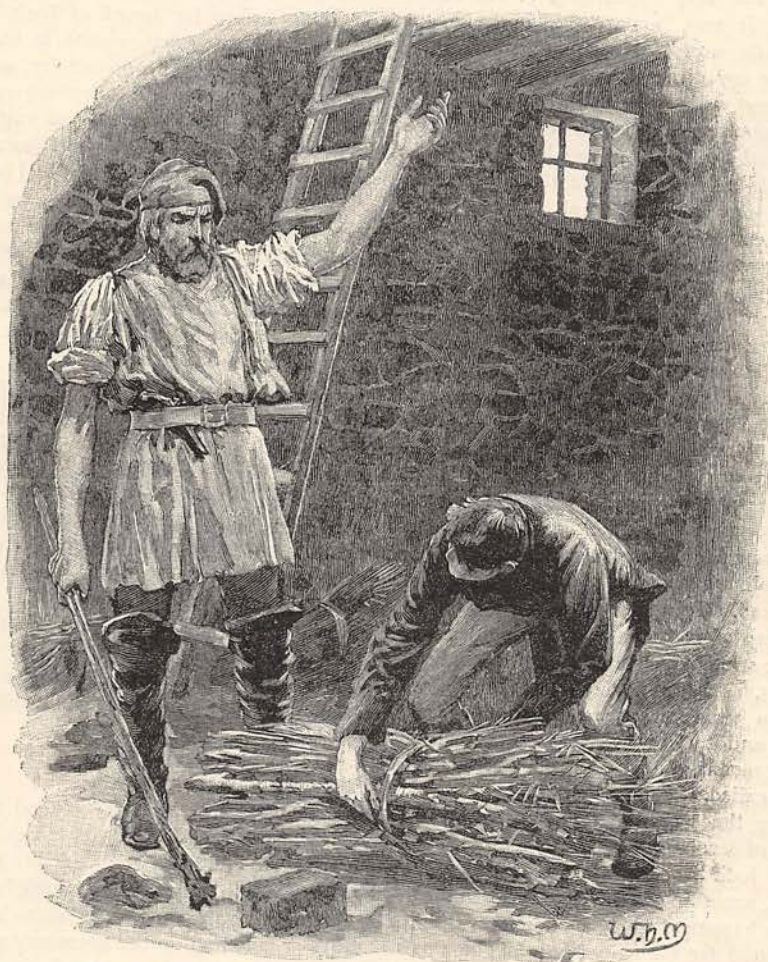
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SMUGGLER JOCK: A NORTH-COUNTRY STORY.

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“PUT ALL THESE THINGS BACK JUST AS YOU FOUND THEM” (p. 695).

“THE bonnie north countrie.” It makes my old blood circulate more freely merely to write these words. As old soldiers love to fight their battles o’er again, so we, of the hills and dales, live, methinks, more in the past than we do in the dreary work-a-day present of this swirling

world. The very thought of the wild northern moors and glens awakens pleasant memories. To see them but once would be to love them for life. To have been born amidst their beauties! what more could man desire than this? Every acre of their picturesque desolation is rich in stories of the past; and every