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# **BRITISH GOBLINS**

**Wirt Sikes**



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British Goblins; Welsh Folk-Lore, Fairy Mythology, Legends, and Traditions by Wirt Sikes.

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# I. Fairy Tales And The Ancient Mythology

At eve, the primrose path along,  
The milkmaid shortens with a song  
Her solitary way;  
She sees the fairies with their queen  
Trip hand-in-hand the circled green,  
And hears them raise, at times unseen,  
The ear-enchancing lay.

Rev. John Logan: Ode to Spring, 1780

I.

WITH regard to other divisions of the field of folk-lore, the views of scholars differ, but in the realm of faerie these differences are reconciled; it is agreed that fairy tales are relics of the ancient mythology; and the philosophers stroll hand in hand harmoniously. This is as it should be, in a realm about which cluster such delightful memories of the most poetic period of life--childhood, before scepticism has crept in as ignorance slinks out. The knowledge which introduced scepticism is infinitely more valuable than the faith it displaced; but, in spite of that, there be few among us who have not felt evanescent regrets for the displacement by the *foi scientifique* of the old faith in fairies. There was something so peculiarly fascinating in that old belief, that 'once upon a time' the world was less practical in its facts than now, less commonplace and hum-drum, less subject to the inexorable laws of gravitation, optics, and the like. What dramas it has yielded! What poems, what dreams, what delights!

But since the knowledge of our maturer years destroys all that, it is with a degree of satisfaction we can turn to the consolations of the fairy mythology. The beloved tales of old are 'not true'--but at least they are not mere idle nonsense, and they have a good and sufficient reason for being in the world; we may continue to respect them. The wit who observed that the final cause of fairy legends is 'to afford sport for people who ruthlessly track them to their origin,'<sup>1</sup> expressed a grave truth in jocular form. Since one can no longer rest in peace with one's ignorance, it is a comfort to the lover of fairy legends to find that he need not sweep them into the grate as so much rubbish; on the contrary they become even more enchanting in the crucible of science than they were in their old character.

II.

Among the vulgar in Wales, the belief in fairies is less nearly extinct than casual observers would be likely to suppose. Even educated people who dwell in Wales, and have dwelt there all their lives, cannot always be classed as other than casual observers in this field. There are some such residents who have paid special attention to the subject, and have formed an opinion as to the extent of prevalence of popular credulity herein; but most Welsh people of the educated class, I find, have no opinion, beyond a vague surprise that the question should be raised at all. So lately as the year 1858, a learned writer in the 'Archaeologia Cambrensis' declared that 'the traveller may now pass from one end of the Principality to the other, without his being shocked or amused, as the case may be, by any of the fairy legends or popular tales which used to pass current from father to son. But in the same periodical,

<sup>1</sup> Saturday Review, October 20, 1877



eighteen years later, I find Mr. John Walter Lukis (President of the Cardiff Naturalists' Society), asserting with regard to the cromlechs, tumuli, and ancient camps in Glamorganshire: 'There are always fairy tales and ghost stories connected with them; some, though *fully believed* in by the inhabitants of those localities, are often of the most absurd character; in fact the more ridiculous they are, the more they are believed in.'<sup>2</sup> My own observation leads me to support the testimony of the last-named witness. Educated Europeans generally conceive that this sort of belief is extinct in their own land, or, at least their own immediate section of that land. They accredit such degree of belief as may remain, in this enlightened age, to some remote part-to the south, if they dwell in the north; to the north, if they dwell in the south. But especially they accredit it to a previous age: in Wales, to last century, or the middle ages, or the days of King Arthur. The rector of Merthyr, being an elderly man, accredits it to his youth. 'I am old enough to remember,' he wrote me under date of January 30th, 1877, 'that these tales were thoroughly believed in among country folk forty or fifty years ago.' People of superior culture have held this kind of faith concerning fairy-lore, it seems to me, in every age, except the more remote. Chaucer held it, almost five centuries ago, and wrote<sup>3</sup>:

In olde dayes of the Kyng Arthour, ...  
 Al was this lond fulfilled of fayrie; ...  
 I speke of many hundrid yer ago;  
 But now can no man see non elves mo.

Dryden held it, two hundred years later, and said of the fairies:

I speak of ancient times, for now the swain  
 Returning late may pass the woods in vain,  
 And never hope to see the nightly train.

In all later days, other authors have written the same sort of thing; it is not thus now, say they, but it was recently thus. The truth, probably, is that if you will but sink down to the level of common life, of ignorant life, especially in rural neighbour hoods, there you will find the same old beliefs prevailing, in about the same degree to which they have ever prevailed, within the past five hundred years. To sink to this level successfully, one must become a living unit in that life, as I have done in Wales and elsewhere, from time to time. Then one will hear the truth from, or at least the true sentiments of; the class he seeks to know. The practice of every generation in thus relegating fairy belief to a date just previous to its own does not apply, however, to superstitious beliefs in general; for, concerning many such beliefs, their greater or less prevalence at certain dates (as in the history of witchcraft) is matter of well-ascertained fact. I confine the argument, for the present, strictly to the domain of faerie. In this domain, the prevalent belief in Wales may be said to rest with the ignorant, to be strongest in rural and mining districts, to be childlike and poetic, and to relate to anywhere except the spot where the speaker dwells-as to the next parish, to the next county, to the distant mountains, or to the shadow-land of Gwerddonau Llion, the green meadows of the sea.

### III.

In Arthur's clay and before that, the people of South Wales regarded North Wales as preeminently the land of faerie. In the popular imagination, that distant country was the chosen abode of giants, monsters, magicians, and all the creatures of enchantment. Out of it

<sup>2</sup> 'Archaeologia Cambrensis,' 4<sup>th</sup> Sc., vi., 174

<sup>3</sup> 'Wyf of Bathes Tale,' 'Canterbury Tales.'



came the fairies, on their visits to the sunny land of the south. The chief philosopher of that enchanted region was a giant who sat on a mountain peak and watched the stars. It had a wizard monarch called Gwydion, who possessed the power of changing himself into the strangest possible forms. The peasant who dwelt on the shores of Dyfed (Demetia) saw in the distance, beyond the blue waves of the ocean, shadowy mountain summits piercing the clouds, and guarding this mystic region in solemn majesty. Thence rolled down upon him the storm-clouds from the home of the tempest; thence streamed up the winter sky the flaming banners of the Northern lights; thence rose through the illimitable darkness on high, the star-strewn pathway of the fairy king. These details are current in the Mabinogion, those brilliant stories of Welsh enchantment, so gracefully clone into English by Lady Charlotte Guest,<sup>4</sup> and it is believed that all the Mabinogion in which these details were found were written in Dyfed. This was the region on the west, now covered by Pembroke, Carmarthen, and Cardigan shires.

More recently than the time above indicated, special traditions have located fairy-land in the Vale of Neath, in Glamorganshire. Especially does a certain steep and rugged crag there, called Craig y Ddinas, bear a distinctly awful reputation as a stronghold of the fairy tribe<sup>5</sup>. Its caves and crevices have been their favourite haunt for many centuries, and upon this rock was held the court of the last fairies who have ever appeared in Wales. Needless to say there are men still living who remember the visits of the fairies to Craig y Ddinas, although they aver the little folk are no longer seen there. It is a common remark that the Methodists drove them away; indeed, there are numberless stories which show the fairies to have been animated, when they were still numerous in Wales, by a cordial antipathy for all dissenting preachers. In this antipathy, it may be here observed, teetotallers were included.

#### IV.

The sovereign of the fairies, and their especial guardian and protector, was one Gwyn ap Nudd. He was also ruler over the goblin tribe in general. His name often occurs in ancient Welsh poetry. An old bard of the fourteenth century, who, led away by the fairies, rode into a turf bog on a mountain one dark night, called it the 'fish-pond of Gwyn ap Nudd, a palace for goblins and their tribe.' The association of this legendary character with the goblin fame of the Vale of Neath will appear, when it is mentioned that Nudd in Welsh is pronounced simply Neath, and not otherwise. As for the fairy queen, she does not seem to have any existence among Cambrian goblins. It is nevertheless thought by Cambrian etymologists, that Morgana is derived from Mor Gwyn, the white maid; and the Welsh proper name Morgan can hardly fail to be mentioned in this connection, though it is not necessarily significant.

The legend of St. Collen, in which Gwyn ap Nudd figures, represents him as king of Annwn (hell, or the shadow land) as well as of the fairies.<sup>6</sup> Collen was passing a period of mortification as a hermit, in a cell tinder a rock on a mountain. There he one day overheard two men talking about Gwyn ap Nudd, and giving him this twofold kingly character. Collen cried out to the men to go away and hold their tongues, instead of talking about devils. For this Collen was rebuked, as the king of fairyland had an objection to such language. The saint was summoned to meet the king on the hill-top at noon, and after repeated refusals, he finally went there; but he carried a flask of holy water with him. 'And when he came there he saw the fairest castle he had ever beheld, and around it the best appointed troops, and numbers of minstrels and every kind of music of voice and string, and steeds with youths upon them, the

<sup>4</sup> 'The Mabinogion, from the Welsh of the Llyfr Coch o Hergest.' Translated, with notes by Lady Charlotte Guest. (New Edition, London, 1877.)

<sup>5</sup> There are two hills in Glamorganshire called by this name, and others elsewhere in Wales

<sup>6</sup> 'Greal' (8vo. London, 1805), p.337



comeliest in the world, and maidens of elegant aspect, sprightly, light of foot, of graceful apparel, and in the bloom of youth; and every magnificence becoming the court of a puissant sovereign. And he beheld a courteous man on the top of the castle who bade him enter, saying that the king was waiting for him to come to meat. And Cohen went into the castle, and when he came there the king was sitting in a golden chair. And he welcomed Collen honourably, and desired him to eat, assuring him that besides what he saw, he should have the most luxurious of every dainty and delicacy that the mind could desire, and should be supplied with every drink and liquor that the heart could wish; and that there should be in readiness for him every luxury of courtesy and service, of banquet and of honourable entertainment, of rank and of presents, and every respect and welcome due to a man of his wisdom. "I will not eat the leaves of the trees," said Collen. "Didst thou ever see men of better equipment than these of red and blue?" asked the king. "Their equipment is good enough," said Collen, "for such equipment as it is." "What kind of equipment is that?" said the king. Then said Collen, "The red on the one part signifies burning, and the blue on the other signifies coldness." And with that Cohen drew out his flask and threw the holy water on their heads, whereupon they vanished from his sight, so that there was neither castle nor troops, nor men, nor maidens, nor music, nor song, nor steeds, nor youths, nor banquet, nor the appearance of anything whatever but the green hillocks.'

V.

A third form of Welsh popular belief as to the whereabouts of fairy-land corresponds with the Avalon of the Arthurian legends. The green meadows of the sea, called in the triads Gwerddonau Llon, are the

Green fairy islands, reposing,  
In sunlight and beauty on Ocean's calm breast.  
Parry's 'Welsh Melodies'

Many extraordinary superstitions survive with regard to these islands. They were supposed to be the abode of the souls of certain Druids, who, not holy enough to enter the heaven of the Christians, were still not wicked enough to be condemned to the tortures of annwn, and so were accorded a place in this romantic sort of purgatorial paradise. In the fifth century a voyage was made, by the British king Gavran, in search of these enchanted islands; with his family he sailed away into the unknown waters, and was never heard of more. This voyage is commemorated in the triads as one of the Three Losses by Disappearance, the two others being Merlin's and Madog's. Merlin sailed away in a ship of glass; Madog sailed in search of America and neither returned, but both disappeared for ever. In Pembrokeshire and southern Carmarthenshire are to be found traces of this belief.

There are sailors on that romantic coast who still talk of the green meadows of enchantment lying in the Irish channel to the west of Pembrokeshire. Sometimes they are visible to the eyes of mortals for a brief space, when suddenly they vanish.

There are traditions of sailors who, in the early part of the present century, actually went ashore on the fairy islands--not knowing that they were such, until they returned to their boats, when they were filled with awe at seeing the islands disappear from their sight, neither sinking in the sea, nor floating away upon the waters, but simply vanishing suddenly.

The fairies inhabiting these islands are said to have regularly attended the markets at Milford Haven and Laugharne. They made their purchases without speaking, laid down their money and departed, always leaving the exact sum required, which they seemed to know, without asking the price of anything. Sometimes they were invisible, but they were often seen, by sharp-eyed persons.



There was always one special butcher at Milford Haven upon whom the fairies bestowed their patronage, instead of distributing their favours indiscriminately. The Milford Haven folk could see the green fairy islands distinctly, lying out a short distance from land: and the general belief was that they were densely peopled with fairies. It was also said that the latter went to and fro between the islands and the shore through a subterranean gallery under the bottom of the sea.

That isolated cape which forms the county of Pembroke was looked upon as a land of mystery by the rest of Wales long after it had been settled by the Flemings in 1113. A secret veil was supposed to cover this sea-girt promontory; the inhabitants talked in an unintelligible jargon that was neither English, nor French, nor Welsh; and out of its misty darkness came fables of wondrous sort, and accounts of miracles marvellous beyond belief.

Mythology and Christianity spoke together from this strange country, and one could not tell at which to be most amazed, the pagan or the priest.



## II. Classification Of Welsh Fairies

### I.

Fairies being creatures of the imagination, it is not possible to classify them by fixed and immutable rules. In the exact sciences, there are laws which never vary, or if they vary, their very eccentricity is governed by precise rules. Even in the largest sense, comparative mythology must demean itself modestly in order to be tolerated in the severe company of the sciences. In presenting his subjects, therefore, the writer in this held can only govern himself by the purpose of orderly arrangement. To secure the maximum of system, for the sake of the student who employs the work for reference and comparison, with the minimum of dullness, for the sake of the general reader, is perhaps the limit of a reasonable ambition. Keightley<sup>7</sup> divides into four classes the Scandinavian elements of popular belief as to fairies, viz. 1. The Elves; 2. The Dwarfs, or Trolls; 3. The Nisses; and 4. The Necks, Mermen, and Mermaids. How entirely arbitrary this division is, the student of Scandinavian folklore at once perceives. Yet it is perhaps as satisfactory as another. The fairies of Wales may be divided into five classes, if analogy be not too sharply insisted on. Thus we have, I. The Ellyllon, or elves; 2. The Coblynau, or mine fairies; 3. The Bwbachod, or household fairies; 4. The Gwragedd Annwn, or fairies of the lakes and streams; and 5. The Gwyllion, or mountain fairies.

The modern Welsh name for fairies is y Tylwyth Teg, the fair folk or family. This is sometimes lengthened into y Tylwyth Teg yn y Coed, the fair family in the wood, or Tylwyth Teg y Mwn, the fair folk of the mine. They are seen dancing in moonlight nights on the velvety grass, clad in airy and flowing robes of blue, green, white, or scarlet -details as to colour not usually met, I think, in accounts of fairies. They are spoken of as bestowing blessings on those mortals whom they select to be thus favoured; and again are called Bendith y Mamau, or their mother's blessing, that is to say, good little children whom it is a pleasure to know. To name the fairies by a harsh epithet is to invoke their anger; to speak of them in flattering phrase is to propitiate their good offices. The student of fairy mythology perceives in this propitiatory mode of speech a fact of wide significance. It can be traced in numberless lands, and back to the beginning of human history, among the cloud-hung peaks of Central Asia. The Greeks spoke of the furies as the Eumenides, or gracious ones; Highlanders mentioned by Sir Walter Scott uncover to the gibbet and call it 'the kind gallows;' the Dayak will not name the small-pox, but calls it 'the chief;' the Laplander calls the bear 'the old man with the fur coat;' in Ammam the tiger is called 'grandfather;' and it is thought that the maxim, 'Speak only good of the dead,' came originally from the notion of propitiating the ghost of the departed,<sup>8</sup> who, in laying off this mortal garb, had become endowed with new powers of harming his late acquaintance.

### II.

The Ellyllon are the pigmy elves who haunt the groves and valleys, and correspond pretty closely with the English elves. The English name was probably derived from the Welsh *el*, a spirit, *elf*, an element; there is a whole brood of words of this class in the Welsh language, expressing every variety of flowing, gliding, spirituality, devilry, angelhood, and goblinism. Ellyllon (the plural of ellyll), is also doubtless allied with the Hebrew Elilim, having with it

<sup>7</sup> 'Fairy Mythology' (Bolm's Ed.), 78

<sup>8</sup> John Fiske, 'Myths and Myth-makers,' 22



an identity both of origin and meaning.<sup>9</sup> The poet Davydd ab Gwilym, in a humorous account of his troubles in a mist in the year 1340, says:

Yr ydoedd ym mhob gobant  
Ellyllon mingeimion gant.

There was in every hollow  
A hundred wrymouthed elves.

The hollows, or little dingles, are still the places where the peasant, belated on his homeward way from fair or market, looks for the ellyllon, but fails to find them. Their food is specified in Welsh folk-lore as fairy butter and fairy victuals, ymenyn tylwyth teg and bwyd ellyllon; the latter the toadstool, or poisonous mushroom, and the former a butter-resembling substance found at great depths in the crevices of limestone rocks, in sinking for lead ore. Their gloves, menyg ellyllon, are the bells of the digitalis, or fox-glove, the leaves of which are well known to be a strong sedative. Their queen--for though there is no fairy-queen in the large sense that Gwyn ap Nudd is the fairy-king, there is a queen of the elves--is none other than the Shakespearean fairy spoken of by Mercutio, who comes

In shape no bigger than an agate-stone  
On the forefinger of an alderman<sup>10</sup>

Shakespeare's use of Welsh folk-lore, it should be noted, was extensive and peculiarly faithful. Keightley in his 'Fairy Mythology' rates the bard soundly for his inaccurate use of English fairy superstitions; but the reproach will not apply as regards Wales. From his Welsh informant Shakespeare got Mab, which is simply the Cymric for a little child, and the root of numberless words signifying babyish, childish, love for children (mabgar), kitten (mabgath), prattling (mabiaith), and the like, most notable of all which in this connection is mabinogi, the singular of Mabinogion, the romantic tales of enchantment told to the young in by-gone ages.

### III.

In the Huntsman's Rest Inn at Peterstone-super-Ely, near Cardiff, sat a group of humble folk one afternoon, when I chanced to stop there to rest myself by the chimney-side, after a long walk through green lanes. The men were drinking their tankards of ale and smoking their long clay pipes; and they were talking about their dogs and horses, the crops, the hard times, and the prospect of bettering themselves by emigration to America. On this latter theme I was able to make myself Interesting, and acquaintance was thereupon easily established on a friendly footing. I led the conversation into the domain of folk-lore and this book is richer in illustration on many a page, in consequence. Among others, this tale was told:

On a certain farm in Glamorganshire lived Rowli Pugh, who was known far and wide for his evil luck. Nothing prospered that he turned his hand to; his crops proved poor, though his neighbours' might be good; his roof leaked in spite of all his mending; his walls remained damp when everyone else's walls were dry and above all, his wife was so feeble she could do no work. His fortunes at last seemed so hard that he resolved to sell out and clear out, no matter at what loss, and try to better himself in another country--not by going to America, for there was no America in those days. Well, and if there was, the poor Welshman didn't know it. So as Rowli was sitting on his wall one day, hard by his cottage, musing over his sad lot, he was accosted by a little man who asked him what was the matter. Rowli looked around in

<sup>9</sup> Pughe's 'Welsh Dictionary.' (Denbigh, 1866)

<sup>10</sup> 'Romeo and Juliet,' Act II., Sc. 4



surprise, but before he could answer the ellyll said to him with a grin, 'There, there, hold your tongue, I know more about you than you ever dreamed of knowing. You're in trouble, and you're going away. But you may stay, now I've spoken to you. Only bid your good wife leave the candle burning when she goes to bed, and say no more about it.' With this the ellyll kicked up his heels and disappeared. Of course the farmer did as he was bid, and from that day he prospered. Every night Catti Jones, his wife,<sup>11</sup> set the candle out, swept the hearth, and went to bed; and every night the fairies would come and do her baking and brewing, her washing and mending, sometimes even furnishing their own tools and materials. The farmer was now always clean of linen and whole of garb; he had good bread and good beer; he felt like a new man, and worked like one.

Everything prospered with him now as nothing had before. His crops were good, his barns were tidy, his cattle were sleek, his pigs the fattest in the parish. So things went on for three years. One night Catti Jones took it into her head that she must have a peep at the fair family who did her work for her; and curiosity conquering prudence, she arose while Rowli Pugh lay snoring, and peeped through a crack in the door. There they were, a jolly company of ellyllon, working away like mad, and laughing and dancing as madly as they worked. Catti was so amused that in spite of herself she fell to laughing too; and at sound of her voice the ellyllon scattered like mist before the wind, leaving the room empty. They never came back any more; but the farmer was now prosperous, and his bad luck never returned to plague him.

The resemblance of this tale to many he has encountered will at once be noted by the student of comparative folk-lore. He will also observe that it trenches on the domain of another class in my own enumeration, viz., that of the Bwbach, or household fairy. This is the stone over which one is constantly stumbling in this field of scientific research. Mr. Baring-Gould's idea that all household tales are reducible to a primeval root (in the same or a similar manner that we trace words to their roots), though most ingeniously illustrated by him, is constantly involved in trouble of the sort mentioned. He encounters the obstacle which lies in the path of all who walk this way. His roots sometimes get inextricably gnarled and inter-twisted with each other. But some effort of this sort is imperative, and we must do the best we can with our materials. Stories of the class of Grimm's *Witchelmänner* (*Kinder und Hausmärchen*) will be recalled by the legend of Rowli Pugh as here told. The German *Hausmänner* are elves of a domestic turn, sometimes mischievous and sometimes useful, but usually looking for some material reward for their labours. So with the English goblin named by Milton in 'L'Allegro,' which drudges to earn his cream-bowl duly set.

#### IV.

The Ellylldan is a species of elf exactly corresponding to the English Will-o'-wisp, the Scandinavian *Lyktgubbe*, and the Breton *Sand Yan y Tad*. The Welsh word *dan* means fire; *dan* also means a lure; the compound word suggests a luring elf-fire. The Breton *Sand Yan y Tad* (St. John and Father)<sup>12</sup> is a double *ignis fatuus* fairy, carrying at its finger-ends five lights, which spin round like a wheel. The negroes of the southern seaboard states of America invest this goblin with an exaggeration of the horrible peculiarly their own. They call it *Jack-muh-lantern*, and describe it as a hideous creature five feet in height, with goggle-eyes and huge mouth, its body covered with long hair, and which goes leaping and bounding through the air like a gigantic grasshopper. This frightful apparition is stronger than any man, and swifter than any horse, and compels its victims to follow it into the swamp, where it leaves them to die.

<sup>11</sup> Until recently, Welsh women retained their maiden names even after marriage

<sup>12</sup> Keightley 'Fairy Mythology,' 441



Like all goblins of this class, the Ellylldan was, of course, seen dancing about in marshy grounds, into which it led the belated wanderer; but, as a distinguished resident in Wales has wittily said, the poor elf is now starved to death, and his breath is taken from him; his light is quenched forever by the improving farmer, who has drained the bog; and, instead of the rank decaying vegetation of the autumn, where bitterns and snipes delighted to secrete themselves, crops of corn and potatoes are grown.’<sup>13</sup>

A poetic account by a modern character, called Lola the Bard, is thus condensed: ‘One night, when the moon had gone down, as I was sitting on a hill-top, the Ellylldan passed by. I followed it into the valley. We crossed splashes of water where the tops of bulrushes peeped above, and where the lizards lay silently on the surface, looking at us with an unmoved stare. The frogs sat croaking and swelling their sides, but ceased as they raised a melancholy eye at the Ellylldan. The wild fowl, sleeping with their heads under their wings, made a low cackle as we went by. A bittern awoke and rose with a scream into the air. I felt the trail of the eels and leeches peering about, as I waded through the pools. On a slimy stone a toad sat sucking poison from the night air. The Ellylldan glowed bravely in the slumbering vapours. It rose airily over the bushes that drooped in the ooze. When I lingered or stopped, it waited for me, but dwindled gradually away to a speck barely perceptible. But as soon as I moved on again, it would shoot up suddenly and glide before. A bat came flying round and round us, flapping its wings heavily. Screech-owls stared silently at us with their broad eyes. Snails and worms crawled about. The fine threads of a spider’s web gleamed in the light of the Ellylldan. Suddenly it shot away from me, and in the distance joined a ring of its fellows, who went dancing slowly round and round in a goblin dance, which sent me off to sleep.’<sup>14</sup>

V.

Pwca, or Pooka, is but another name for the Ellylldan, as our Puck is another name for the Will-o’-wisp; but in both cases the shorter term has a more poetic flavour and a wider latitude. The name Puck was originally applied to the whole race of English fairies, and there still be few of the realm who enjoy a wider popularity than Puck, in spite of his mischievous attributes. Part of this popularity is due to the poets, especially to Shakespeare. I have alluded to the bard’s accurate knowledge of Welsh folklore; the subject is really one of unique interest, in view of the inaccuracy charged upon him as to the English fairyland. There is a Welsh tradition to the effect that Shakespeare received his knowledge of the Cambrian fairies from his friend Richard Price, son of Sir John Price, of the priory of Brecon. It is even claimed that Cwm Pwca, or Puck Valley, a part of the romantic glen of the Clydach, in Breconshire, is the original scene of the *Midsummer Night’s Dream* ‘--a fancy as light and airy as Puck himself.’<sup>15</sup> Anyhow, there Cwm Pwca is, and in the sylvan days, before Frere and Powell’s ironworks were set up there, it is said to have been as full of goblins as a Methodist’s head is of piety. And there are in Wales other places bearing like names, where Pwca’s pranks are well remembered by old inhabitants. The range given to the popular fancy in Wales is expressed with fidelity by Shakespeare’s words in the mouth of Puck:

<sup>13</sup> Hon. W. O. Stanley, M.P., in ‘Notes and Queries.’

<sup>14</sup> ‘The Vale of Glamorgan.’ (London, 1839.)

<sup>15</sup> According to a letter written by the poet Campbell to Mrs Fletcher, in 1833, and published in her Autobiography, it was thought Shakespeare went in person to see this magic valley. ‘It is no later than yesterday’, wrote Campbell, ‘that I discovered a probability--almost near a certainty--that Shakespeare visited friends in the very town (Brecon in Wales) where Mrs. Siddons was born, and that he there found in a neighbouring glen, called “The Valley of Fairy Puck,” the principal machinery of his “Midsummer Night’s Dream.”’



I'll follow you, I'll lead you about a round,  
 Through bog, through bush, through brake through brier,  
 Sometime a horse I'll be, sometime a hound,  
 A hog, a headless bear, sometime a fire;  
 And neigh, and bark, and grunt, and roar, and burn,  
 Like horse, hound, hog, bear, fire, at every turn<sup>16</sup>

The various stories I have encountered bear out these details almost without an omission.

In his own proper character, however, Pwca has a sufficiently grotesque elfish aspect. It is stated that a Welsh peasant who was asked to give an idea of the appearance of Pwca, drew the above figure with a bit of coal.

A servant girl who attended to the cattle on the Trwyn farm, near Abergwyddon, used to take food to 'Master. Pwca,' as she called the elf.

A bowl of fresh milk and a slice of white bread were the component parts of the goblin's repast, and were placed on a certain spot where he got them. One night the girl, moved by the spirit of mischief, drank the milk and ate most of the bread, leaving for Master Pwca only water and crusts. Next morning she found that the fastidious fairy had left the food untouched. Not long after, as the girl was passing the lonely spot' where she had hitherto left Pwca his food, she was seized under the arm pits by fleshly hands (which, however, she could not see), and subjected to a castigation of a most mortifying character. Simultaneously there fell upon her ear in good set Welsh a warning not to repeat her offence on peril of still worse treatment. This story 'is thoroughly believed in there to this day.'<sup>17</sup>

I visited the scene of the story, a farm near Abergwyddon (now called Abercarne), and heard a great deal more of the exploits of that particular Pwca, to which I will refer again. The most singular fact of the matter is that although at least a century has elapsed, and some say several centuries, since the exploits in question, you cannot find a Welsh peasant in the parish but knows all about Pwca'r Trwyn.

## VI.

The most familiar form of the Pwca story is one which I have encountered in several localities, varying so little in its details that each account would be interchangeable with another by the alteration of local names.

This form presents a peasant who is returning home from his work, or from a fair, when he sees a light travelling before him. Looking closer he perceives that it is carried by a dusky little figure, holding a lantern or candle at arm's length over its head. He follows it for several miles, and suddenly finds himself on the brink of a frightful precipice. From far down below there rises to his ears the sound of a foaming torrent. At the same moment the little goblin with the lantern springs across the chasm, alighting on the opposite side; raises the light again high over its head, utters a loud and malicious laugh, blows out its candle and disappears up the opposite hill, leaving the awestruck peasant to get home as best he can.

## VII

Under the general title of Coblynau I class the fairies which haunt the mines, quarries and under-ground regions of Wales, corresponding to the cabalistic Gnomes. The word coblyn has the double meaning of knocker or thumper and sprite or fiend; and may it not be the original of goblin? It is applied by Welsh miners to pigmy fairies which dwell in the mines,

<sup>16</sup> 'Midsummer Night's Dream.' Act III., Sc. 3

<sup>17</sup> *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 4th Se., vi., 175. (1875)



and point out, by a peculiar knocking or rapping, rich veins of ore. The faith is extended in some parts, so as to cover the indication of subterranean treasures generally, in caves and secret places of the mountains. The coblynau are described as being about half a yard in height and very ugly to look upon, but extremely good-natured, and warm friends of the miner. Their dress is a grotesque imitation of the miner's garb, and they carry tiny hammers, picks and lamps. They work busily, loading ore in buckets, flitting about the shafts, turning tiny windlasses, and pounding away like madmen, but really accomplishing nothing whatever. They have been known to throw stones at the miners, when enraged at being lightly spoken of; but the stones are harmless. nevertheless, all miners of a proper spirit refrain from provoking them, because their presence brings good luck.

### VIII.

Miners are possibly no more superstitious than other men of equal intelligence; I have heard some of their number repel indignantly the idea that they are superstitious at all; but this would simply be to raise them above the level of our common humanity. There is testimony enough, besides, to support my own conclusions, which accredit a liberal share of credulity to the mining class. The *Oswestry Advertiser*, a short time ago, recorded the fact that, at Cefn, 'a woman is employed as messenger at one of the collieries, and as she commences her duty early each morning she meets great numbers of colliers going to their work. Some of them, we are gravely assured, consider it a bad omen to meet a woman first thing in the morning; and not having succeeded in deterring her from her work by other means, they waited upon the manager and declared that they should remain at home unless the woman was dismissed.' This was in 1874. In June, 1878, the *South Wales Daily News* recorded a superstition of the quarrymen at Penrhyn, where some thousands of men refused to work on Ascension Day. 'This refusal did not arise out of any reverential feeling, but from an old and wide-spread superstition, which has lingered in that district for years, that if work is continued on Ascension Day an accident will certainly follow. A few years ago the agents persuaded the men to break through the superstition, and there were accidents each year--a not unlikely occurrence, seeing the extent of works carried on, and the dangerous nature of the occupation of the men. This year, however, the men, one and all, refused to work.' These are examples dealing with considerable numbers of the mining class, and are quoted in this instance as being more significant than individual cases would be. Of these last I have encountered many. Yet I should be sorry if any reader were to conclude from all this that Welsh miners are not in the main intelligent church-going, newspaper-reading men. They are so, I think, even beyond the common. Their superstitions, therefore, like those of the rest of us, must be judged as 'a thing apart,' not to be reconciled with intelligence and education, but co-existing with them. Absolute freedom from superstition can come only with a degree of scientific culture not yet reached by mortal man.

It can hardly be cause for wonder that the miner should be superstitious. His life is passed in a dark and gloomy region, fathoms below the earth's green surface, surrounded by walls on which--dim lamps shed a fitful light. It is not surprising that imagination (and the Welsh imagination is peculiarly vivid) should conjure up the faces and forms of gnomes and coblynau, of phantoms and fairy men. When they hear the mysterious thumping which they know is not produced by any human being, and when in examining the place where the noise was heard they find there are really valuable indications of ore, the sturdiest incredulity must sometimes be shaken. Science points out that the noise may be produced by the action of water upon the loose stones in fissures and pot-holes of the mountain limestone, and does actually suggest the presence of metals.



In the days before a Priestley had caught and bottled that demon which exists in the shape of carbonic acid gas, when the miner was smitten dead by an invisible foe in the deep bowels of the earth it was natural his awe-struck companions should ascribe the mysterious blow to a supernatural enemy. When the workman was assailed suddenly by what we now call fire-damp, which hurled him and his companions right and left upon the dark rocks, scorching, burning, and killing, those who survived were not likely to question the existence of the mine fiend hence arose the superstition--now probably quite extinct--of basilisks in the mines, which destroyed with their terrible gaze. When the explanation came, that the thing which killed the miner was what he breathed, not what he saw and when chemistry took the fire-damp from the domain of faerie, the basilisk and the fire fiend had not a leg to stand on. The explanation of the Knockers is more recent, and less palpable and convincing.

## IX.

The Coblynau are always given the form of dwarfs, in the popular fancy; wherever seen or heard, they are believed to have escaped from the mines or the secret regions of the mountains. Their homes are hidden from mortal vision. When encountered, either in the mines or on the mountains, they have strayed from their special abodes, which are as spectral as themselves. There is at least one account extant of their secret territory having been revealed to mortal eyes. I find it in a quaint volume (of which I shall have more to say), printed at Newport, Monmouthshire, in 1813.<sup>18</sup> It relates that one William Evans, of Hafodafel, while crossing the Beacon Mountain very early in the morning, passed a fairy coal mine; where fairies were busily at work. Some were cutting the coal, some carrying it to fill the sacks, some raising the loads upon the horses' backs, and so on; but all in the completest silence. He thought this 'a wonderful extra natural thing,' and was considerably impressed by it, for well he knew that there really was no coal mine at that place. He was a person of undoubted veracity,' and what is more, 'a great man in the world--above telling an untruth.'

That the Coblynau sometimes wandered far from home, the same chronicler testifies; but on these occasions they were taking a holiday. Egbert Williams, 'a pious young gentleman of Denbighshire, then at school,' was one day playing in a field called Cae Caled, in the parish of Bodfari, with three girls, one of whom was his sister. Near the stile beyond Lanelwyd House they saw a company of fifteen or sixteen coblynau engaged in dancing madly. They were in the middle of the field, about seventy yards from the spectators, and they danced something after the manner of Morris-dancers, but with a wildness and swiftness in their motions. They were clothed in red like British soldiers, and wore red handkerchiefs spotted with yellow wound round their heads. And a strange circumstance about them was that although they were almost as big as ordinary men, yet they had unmistakably the appearance of dwarfs, and one could call them nothing but dwarfs. Presently one of them left the company and ran towards the group near the stile, who were direfully scared thereby, and scrambled in great fright to go over the stile. Barbara Jones got over first, then her sister, and as Egbert Williams was helping his sister over they saw the coblyn close upon them, and barely got over when his hairy hand was laid on the stile. He stood leaning on it, gazing after them as they ran, with a grim copper-coloured countenance and a fierce look. The young people ran to Lanelwyd House and called the elders out, but though they hurried quickly to the field the dwarfs had already disappeared.

## X.

<sup>18</sup> 'A Relation of Apparitions of Spirits in the County of Monmouth and the Principality of Wales' By Rev. Edmund Jones of the Tranch. (Newport, 1813.)



The counterparts of the Coblynau are found in most mining countries. In Germany, the Wichtlein (little Wights) are little old long-bearded men, about three-quarters of an ell high, which haunt the mines of the southern land. The Bohemians call the Wichtlein by the name of Haus-schmiedlein, little House-smiths, from their sometimes making a noise as if labouring hard at the anvil. They are not so popular as in Wales, however, as they predict misfortune or death. They announce the doom of a miner by knocking three times distinctly, and when any lesser evil is about to befall him they are heard digging, pounding, and imitating other kinds of work. In Germany also the kobolds are rather troublesome than otherwise, to the miners, taking pleasure in frustrating their objects, and rendering their toil unfruitful. Sometimes they are down-right malignant, especially if neglected or insulted, but sometimes also they are indulgent to individuals whom they take under their protection. When a miner therefore hit upon a rich vein of ore, the inference commonly was not that he possessed more skill, industry, or even luck than his fellow-workmen, but that the spirits of the mine had directed him to the treasure.<sup>19</sup>

The intimate connection between mine fairies and the whole race of dwarfs is constantly met throughout the fairy mythology; and the connection of the dwarfs with the mountains is equally universal. 'God,' says the preface to the Heldenbuch, 'gave the dwarfs being, because the land and the mountains were altogether waste and uncultivated, and there was much store of silver and gold and precious stones and pearls still in the mountains.' From the most ancient times, and in the oldest countries, down to our own time and the new world of America, the traditions are the same. The old Norse belief which made the dwarfs the current machinery of the northern Sagas is echoed in the Catskill Mountains with the rolling of the thunder among the crags where Hendrik Hudson's dwarfs are playing ninepins.

## XI.

The Bwbach, or Boobach, is the good-natured goblin which does good turns for the tidy Welsh maid who wins its favour by a certain course of behaviour recommended by long tradition. The maid having swept the kitchen, makes a good fire the last thing at night, and having put the churn, filled with cream, on the whitened hearth, with a basin of fresh cream for the Bwbach on the hob, goes to bed to await the event. In the morning she finds (if she is in luck) that the Bwbach has emptied the basin of cream, and plied the churn-dasher so well that the maid has but to give a thump or two to bring the butter in a great lump. Like the Ellyll which it so much resembles, the Bwbach does not approve of dissenters and their ways, and especially strong is its aversion to total abstainers.

There was a Bwbach belonging to a certain estate in Cardiganshire, which took great umbrage at a Baptist preacher who was a guest in the house, and who was much fonder of prayers than of good ale. Now the Bwbach had a weakness in favour of people who sat around the hearth with their mugs of cwrw da and their pipes, and it took to pestering the preacher. One night it jerked the stool from under the good man's elbows, as he knelt pouring forth prayer, so that he fell down flat on his face. Another time it interrupted the devotions by jangling the fire-irons on the hearth and it was continually making the dogs fall a-howling during prayers, or frightening the farm boy by grinning at him through the window, or throwing the maid into fits. At last it had the audacity to attack the preacher as he was crossing a field. The minister told the story in this wise 'I was reading busily in my hymn-book as I walked on, when a sudden fear came over me and my legs began to tremble. A shadow crept upon me from behind, and when I turned round--it was myself!--my person, my dress, and even my hymn-book. I looked in its face a moment, and then fell insensible to the

<sup>19</sup> Scott, 'Demonology and Witchcraft,' 121



ground.’ And there, insensible still, they found him. This encounter proved too much for the good man, who considered it a warning to him to leave those parts. He accordingly mounted his horse next day and rode away. A boy of the neighbourhood, whose veracity was, like that of all boys, unimpeachable, afterwards said that he saw the Bwbach jump up behind the preacher, on the horse’s back. And the horse went like lightning, with eyes like balls of fire, and the preacher looking back over his shoulder at the Bwbach, that grinned from ear to ear.

## XII.

The same confusion in outlines which exists regarding our own Bogie and Hobgoblin gives the Bwbach a double character, as a household fairy and as a terrifying phantom. In both aspects it is ludicrous, but in the latter it has dangerous practices. To get into its clutches under certain circumstances is no trifling matter, for it has the power of whisking people off through the air. Its services are brought into requisition for this purpose by troubled ghosts who cannot sleep on account of hidden treasure they want removed; and if they can succeed in getting a mortal to help them in removing the treasure, they employ the Bwbach to transport the mortal through the air.

This ludicrous fairy is in France represented by the goblin. Mothers threaten children with him. ‘Le goblin vous mangera, le goblin vous emportera.’<sup>20</sup> In the English ‘hobgoblin’ we have a word apparently derived from the Welsh hob, to hop, and coblyn, a goblin, which presents a hopping goblin to the mind, and suggests the Pwca (with which the Bwbach is also confused in the popular fancy at times), but should mean in English simply the goblin of the hob, or household fairy. In its bugbear aspect, the Bwbach, like the English bogie, is believed to be identical with the Slavonic ‘bog,’ and the ‘baga’ of the Cuneiform Inscriptions, both of which are names for the Supreme Being, according to Professor Fiske. ‘The ancestral form of these epithets’ is found in ‘the old Aryan “Bhaga,” which reappears unchanged in the Sanskrit of the Vedas, and has left a memento of itself in the surname of the Phrygian Zeus “Bagaios.” It seems originally to have denoted either the unclouded sun, or the sky of noonday illuminated by the solar rays.

. . Thus the same name which to the Vedic poet, to the Persian of the time of Xerxes, and to the modern Russian, suggests the supreme majesty of deity, is in English associated with an ugly and ludicrous fiend, closely akin to that grotesque Northern Devil of whom Southey was unable to think without laughing.’<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Père l’Abbé, ‘Etymologie,’ 262

<sup>21</sup> Fiske, *Myths and Myth-makers* 105



### III. Lake Fairies

#### I.

THE Gwragedd Annwn (literally, wives of the lower world, or hell) are the elfin dames who dwell under the water. I find no resemblance in the Welsh fairy to our familiar mermaid, beyond the watery abode, and the sometimes winning ways. The Gwragedd Annwn are not fishy of aspect, nor do they dwell in the sea. Their haunt is the lakes and rivers, but especially the wild and lonely lakes upon the mountain heights. These romantic sheets are surrounded with numberless superstitions, which will be further treated of. In the realm of faerie they serve as avenues of communication between this world and the lower one of annwn, the shadowy domain presided over by Gwyn ap Nudd, king of the fairies. This sub-aqueous realm is peopled by those children of mystery termed Plant Annwn, and the belief is current among the inhabitants of the Welsh mountains that the Gwragedd Annwn still occasionally visit this upper world of ours.<sup>22</sup> The only reference to Welsh mermaids I have either read or heard is contained in Drayton's account of the Battle of Agincourt. There it is mentioned, among the armorial ensigns of the counties of Wales:

As Cardigan, the next to them that went,  
Came with a mermaid sitting on a rock<sup>23</sup>

#### II.

Crumlyn Lake, near the quaint village of Briton Ferry, is one of the many in Wales which are a resort of the elfin dames. It is also believed that a large town lies swallowed up there, and that the Gwragedd Annwn have turned the submerged walls to use as the superstructure of their fairy palaces. Some claim to have seen the towers of beautiful castles lifting their battlements beneath the surface of the dark waters, and fairy bells are at times heard ringing from these towers. The way the elfin dames first came to dwell there was this: A long, ay, a very long time ago, St. Patrick came over from Ireland on a visit to St. David of Wales, just to say 'Sut yr y'ch chwi?' (How d'ye do?); and as they were strolling by this lake conversing on religious topics in a friendly manner, some Welsh people who had ascertained that it was St. Patrick, and being angry at him for leaving Cambria for Erin, began to abuse him in the Welsh language, his native tongue. Of course such an insult could not go unpunished, and St. Patrick caused his villifiers to be transformed into fishes; but some of them being females, were converted into fairies instead. It is also related that the sun, on account of this insolence to so holy a man, never shed its life-giving rays upon the dark waters of this picturesque lake, except during one week of the year. This legend and these magical details are equally well accredited to various other lakes, among them Llyn Barfog, near Aberdovey, the town whose 'bells' are celebrated in immortal song.

#### III.

Llyn Barfog is the scene of the famous elfin cow's descent upon earth, from among the droves of the Gwragedd Annwn. This is the legend of the origin of the Welsh black cattle, as related to me in Carmarthenshire: In times of old there was a band of elfin ladies who used to haunt the neighbourhood of Llyn Barfog, a lake among the hills just back of Aberdovey. It

<sup>22</sup> 'Archaeologia Cambrensis,' 2<sup>nd</sup> Se., iv., 253

<sup>23</sup> There is in 'Cymru Fu' a mermaid story, but its mermaid feature is apparently a modern embellishment of a real incident, and without value here.



was their habit to make their appearance at dusk clad all in green, accompanied by their milk-white hounds. Besides their hounds, the green ladies of Llyn Barfog were peculiar in the possession of droves of beautiful milk-white kine, called Gwartheg y Llyn, or kine of the lake. One day an old farmer, who lived near Dyssyrnant, had the good luck to catch one of these mystic cows, which had fallen in love with the cattle of his herd. From that day the farmer's fortune was made. Such calves, such milk, such butter and cheese, as came from the milk-white cow never had been seen in Wales before, nor ever will be seen again. The fame of the Fwch Gyfeiliorn (which was what they called the cow) spread through the country round. The farmer, who had been poor, became rich; the owner of vast herds, like the patriarchs of old. But one day he took it into his silly noddle that the elfin cow was getting old, and that he had better fatten her for the market. His nefarious purpose thrived amazingly. Never, since beef steaks were invented, was seen such a fat cow as this cow grew to be. Killing day came, and the neighbours arrived from all about to witness the taking-off of this monstrously fat beast. The farmer had already counted up the gains from the sale of her, and the butcher had bared his red right arm. The cow was tethered, regardless of her mournful lowing and her pleading eyes; the butcher raised his bludgeon and struck fair and hard between the eyes; when lo! a shriek resounded through the air, awakening the echoes of the hills, as the butcher's bludgeon went through the goblin head of the elfin cow, and knocked over nine adjoining men, while the butcher himself went frantically whirling around trying to catch hold of something permanent. Then the astonished assemblage beheld a green lady standing on a crag high up over the lake, and crying with a loud voice:

Dere di felen Emion,  
Cyrn Cyfeiliorn-braith y Llyn,  
A'r foci Dodin,  
Codwch, dewch adre.

Come yellow Anvil, stray horns,  
Speckled one of the lake,  
And of the hornless Dodlin,  
Arise, come home.

Whereupon not only did the elfin cow arise and go home, but all her progeny to the third and fourth generations went home with her, disappearing in the air over the hill tops and returning nevermore. Only one cow remained of all the farmer's herds, and she had turned from milky white to raven black. Whereupon the farmer in despair drowned himself in the lake of the green ladies, and the black cow became the progenitor of the existing race of Welsh black cattle.

This legend appears, in a slightly different form, in the 'Iola MSS.,' as translated by Taliesin Williams, of Merthyr:<sup>24</sup> 'The milk-white milch cow gave enough of milk to everyone who desired it; and however frequently milked, or by whatever number of persons, she was never found deficient. All persons who drank of her milk were healed of every illness; from fools they became wise; and from being wicked, became happy. This cow went round the world; and wherever she appeared, she filled with milk all the vessels that could be found, leaving calves behind her for all the wise and happy. It was from her that all the milch cows in the world were obtained. After traversing through the island of Britain, for the benefit and blessing of country and kindred, she reached the Vale of Towy; where, tempted by her fine appearance and superior condition, the natives sought to kill and eat her; but just as they were proceeding to effect their purpose, she vanished from between their hands, and was never

<sup>24</sup> Llandovery, published for the Welsh MSS. Society, 1848.



seen again. A house still remains in the locality, called Y Fwch Laethwen Lefrith (The Milk-white Milch Cow.)'

#### IV.

The legend of the Meddygon Myddfai again introduces the elfin cattle to our notice, but combines with them another and a very interesting form of this superstition, namely, that of the wife of supernatural race. A further feature gives it its name, Meddygon meaning physicians, and the legend professing to give the origin of certain doctors who were renowned in the thirteenth century. The legend relates that a farmer in the parish of Myddfai, Carmarthenshire, having bought some lambs in a neighbouring fair, led them to graze near Llyn y Fan Fach, on the Black Mountains. Whenever he visited these lambs three beautiful damsels appeared to him from the lake, on whose shores they often made excursions. Sometimes he pursued and tried to catch them, but always failed; the enchanting nymphs ran before him and on reaching the lake taunted him in these words:

Cras dy fara,  
Anhawdd ein dala;

which, if one must render it literally, means:

Bake your bread,  
'Twill be hard to catch us;

but which, more poetically treated, might signify

Mortall, who eatest baken bread,  
Not for thee is the fairy's bed!

One day some moist bread from the lake came floating ashore. The farmer seized it, and devoured it with avidity. The following day, to his great delight, he was successful in his chase, and caught the nymphs on the shore. After talking a long time with them, he mustered up the courage to propose marriage to one of them. She consented to accept him on condition that he would distinguish her from her sisters the next day. This was a new and great difficulty to the young farmer, for the damsels were so similar in form and features, that he could scarcely see any difference between them. He noted, however, a trifling singularity in the strapping of the chosen one's sandal, by which he recognized her on the following day. As good as her word, the gwraig immediately left the lake and went with him to his farm. Before she quitted the lake she summoned therefrom to attend her, seven cows, two oxen, and one bull. She stipulated that she should remain with the farmer only until such time as he should strike her thrice without cause. For some years they dwelt peaceably together, and she bore him three sons, who were the celebrated Meddygon Myddfai. One day, when preparing for a fair in the neighbourhood) the farmer desired her to go to the held for his horse. She said she would, but being rather dilatory, he said to her humorously *Dos, dos, dos,* i.e., 'Go, go, go,' and at the same time slightly tapped her arm three times with his glove.

... The blows were slight--but they were blows. The terms of the marriage contract were broken, and the dame departed, summoning with her seven cows, her two oxen, and the bull. The oxen were at that moment ploughing in the field, but they immediately obeyed her call and dragged the plough after them to the lake. The furrow, from the field in which they were ploughing to the margin of the lake, is still to be seen--in several parts of that country--at the present day. After her departure, the gwraig annwn once met her three sons in the valley now called Cwm Meddygon, and gave them a magic box containing remedies of wonderful power, through whose use they became celebrated. Their names were Cadogan, Gruffydd and Emion, and the farmer's name was Rhiwallon. Rhiwallon and his sons, named as above, were



physicians to Rhys Gryg, Lord of Dynevor, and son of the last native prince of Wales. They lived about 1230, and dying, left behind them a compendium of their medical practice. 'A copy of their works is in the Welsh School Library in Gray's Inn Lane.'<sup>25</sup>

V.

In a more polished and elaborate form this legend omits the medical features altogether, but substitutes a number of details so peculiarly Welsh that I cannot refrain from presenting them. This version relates that the enamoured farmer had heard of the lake maiden, who rowed up and down the lake in a golden boat, with a golden oar. Her hair was long and yellow, and her face was pale and melancholy. In his desire to see this wondrous beauty, the farmer went on New Year's Eve to the edge of the lake, and in silence awaited the coming of the first hour of the new year. It came, and there in truth was the maiden in her golden boat, rowing softly to and fro. Fascinated, he stood for hours beholding her, until the stars faded out of the sky, the moon sank behind the rocks, and the cold gray dawn drew nigh; and then the lovely gwraig began to vanish from his sight. Wild with passion, and with the thought of losing her forever, he cried aloud to the retreating vision, 'Stay! stay Be my wife.' But the gwraig only uttered a faint cry, and was gone. Night after night the young farmer haunted the shores of the lake, but the gwraig returned no more. He became negligent of his person; his once robust form grew thin and wan; his face was a map of melancholy and despair. He went one day to consult a soothsayer who dwelt on the mountain, and this grave personage advised him to besiege the damsel's heart with gifts of bread and cheese. This counsel commending itself strongly to his Welsh way of thinking, the farmer set out upon an assiduous course of casting his bread upon the waters, accompanied by cheese. He began on Midsummer eve by going to the lake and dropping therein a large cheese and a loaf of bread. Night after night he continued to throw in loaves and cheeses, but nothing appeared in answer to his sacrifices. His hopes were set, however, on the approaching New Year's eve. The momentous night arrived at last. Clad in his best array, and armed with seven white loaves and his biggest and handsomest cheese, he set out once more for the lake.

There he waited till midnight, and then slowly and solemnly dropped the seven loaves into the water, and with a sigh sent the cheese to keep them company. His persistence was at length rewarded. The magic skiff appeared; the fair gwraig guided it to where he stood; stepped ashore, and accepted him as her husband. The before-mentioned stipulation was made as to the blows; and she brought her dower of cattle. One day, after they had been four years married, they were invited to a christening. In the midst of the ceremony the gwraig burst into tears. Her husband gave her an angry look, and asked her why she thus made a fool of herself. She replied, 'The poor babe is entering a world of sin and sorrow; misery lies before it. Why should I rejoice?' He pushed her pettishly away. 'I warn you, husband,' said the gwraig; 'you have struck me once.' After a time they were bidden to the funeral of the child they had seen christened. Now the gwraig laughed, sang, and danced about. The husband's wrath again arose, and again he asked her why she thus made a fool of herself. She answered, 'The dear babe has escaped the misery that was before it' and gone to be good and happy for ever. Why should I grieve?' Again he pushed her from him, and again she warned him; he had struck her twice. Soon they were invited to a wedding; the bride was young and fair, the groom a tottering, toothless, decrepit old miser. In the midst of the wedding feast the gwraig annwn burst into tears, and to her husband's question why she thus made a fool of herself she replied, 'Truth is wedded to age for greed, and not for love-summer and winter cannot agree--it is the diawl's compact.' The angry husband thrust her from him for the third and last time. She looked at him with tender love and reproach, and said, 'The three blows are

<sup>25</sup> 'Cambro Briton,' ii., 315



struck-husband, farewell!’ He never saw her more, nor any of the flocks and herds she had brought him for her dowry.

In its employment of the myth to preach a sermon, and in its introduction of cheese, this version of the legend is very Welsh indeed. The extent to which cheese figures in Cambrian folk-lore is surprising; cheese is encountered in every sort of fairy company; you actually meet cheese in the Mabinogion, along with the most romantic forms of beauty known in story. And herein again is illustrated Shakespeare’s accurate knowledge of the Cambrian goblins. Heaven defend me from that Welsh fairy!’ says Falstaff, ‘lest he transform me to a piece of cheese’<sup>26</sup> Bread is found figuring actively in the folk-lore of every country, especially as a sacrifice to water-gods; but cheese is, so far as I know, thus honoured only in Cambria.

## VI.

Once more this legend appears, this time with a feature I have nowhere else encountered in fairy land, to wit, the father of a fairy damsel. The son of a farmer on Drws Coed farm was one foggy day looking after his father’s sheep, when crossing a marshy meadow he beheld a little lady behind some rising ground. She had yellow hair, blue eyes and rosy cheeks. He approached her, and asked permission to converse; whereupon she smiled sweetly and said to him, ‘Idol of my hopes, you have come at last!’ They there and then began to ‘keep company,’ and met each other daily here and there along the farm meadows. His intentions were honourable; he desired her to marry him. He was sometimes absent for days together, no one knew where, and his friends whispered about that he had been witched. Around the Turf Lake (Llyn y Dywarchen) was a grove of trees, and under one of these one day the fairy promised to be his. The consent of her father was now necessary. One moonlight night an appointment was made to meet in this wood. The father and daughter did not appear till the moon had disappeared behind the hill. Then they both came. The fairy father immediately gave his consent to the marriage, on one condition, namely, that her future husband should never hit her with iron. ‘If ever thou dost touch her flesh with iron she shall be no more thine, but she shall return to her own.’ They were married--a good-looking pair. Large sums of money were brought by her, the night before the wedding, to Dnvs Coed. The shepherd lad became wealthy, had several handsome children, and they were very happy. After some years, they were one day out riding, when her horse sank in a deep mire, and by the assistance of her husband, in her hurry to remount, she was struck on her knee by the stirrup of the saddle. Immediately voices were heard singing on the brow of the hill, and she disappeared, leaving all her children behind. She and her mother devised a plan by which she could see her beloved, but as she was not allowed to walk the earth with man, they floated a large turf on the lake, and on this turf she stood for hours at a time holding converse with her husband. This continued until his death<sup>27</sup>.

## VII

The didactic purpose again appears in the following legend, which, varying but little in phraseology, is current in the neighbourhood of a dozen different mountain lakes: In other days, before the Cymry had become reconciled to their Saxon foe, on every New Year’s morning a door was found open in a rock hard by the lake. Those mortals who had the curiosity and the resolution to enter this door were conducted by a secret passage to a small island in the middle of the lake. Here they found a most enchanting garden, stored with the choicest fruits and flowers, and inhabited by the Gwragedd Annwn, whose beauty could be

<sup>26</sup> ‘Merry Wives of Windsor’, Act. V., Sc. 5

<sup>27</sup> ‘Cymru Fu,’ 476



equalled only by the courtesy and affability which they exhibited to those who pleased them. They gathered fruit and flowers for each of their guests, entertained them with the most exquisite music, disclosed to them many secrets of futurity, and invited them to stay as long as they liked. 'But,' said they, 'the island is secret, and nothing of its produce must be carried away.' The warning being heeded, all went well. But one day there appeared among the visitors a wicked Welsh-man, who, thinking to derive some magical aid therefrom, pocketed a flower with which he had been presented, and was about to leave the garden with his prize. But the theft boded him no good. As soon as he had touched unhallowed ground the flower vanished, and he lost his senses. However, of this abuse of their hospitality the Gwragedd Annwn took no notice at the time. They dismissed their guests with their accustomed courtesy, and the door was closed as usual. But their resentment was bitter; for though the fairies of the lake and their enchanted garden undoubtedly occupy the spot to this day, the door which led to the island has never been reopened.

### VIII

In all these legends the student of comparative folk-lore traces the ancient mythology, however overlain with later details. The water-maidens of every land doubtless originally were the floating clouds of the sky, or the mists of the mountain. From this have come certain fair and fanciful creations with which Indo-European folk-lore teems, the most familiar of which are Undine, Melusina, Nausicaa, and the classic Muse. In Wales, as in other lands, the myth has many forms. The dispersion of dark clouds from the mountains, by the beams of the rising sun, or the morning breezes, is localized in the legend of the Men of Arduwy. These men make a raid on the maidens of the Vale of Clwyd, and are pursued and slaughtered by the latter's fathers and brothers. The maidens thereupon cast themselves headlong into the lake, which is thenceforth called the Maidens Lake, or Llyn y Morwynion. In another legend, the river mist over the Cynwal is the spirit of a traitress who perished long ago in the lake. She had conspired with the sea-born pirates of the North (the ocean storms) to rob her Cambrian lord of his domains. She was defeated by the aid of a powerful enchanter (the sun), and fled up the river to the lake, accompanied by her maidens, who were drowned with her there.<sup>28</sup>

### IX.

As the mermaid superstition is seemingly absent in Wales, so there are no fairy tales of maidens who lure mortals to their doom beneath the water, as the Dracae did women and children, and as the Nymph of the Lurley did marriageable young men.

But it is believed that there are several old Welsh families who are the descendants of the Gwragedd Annwn, as in the case of the Meddygon Myddfai. The familiar Welsh name of Morgan is sometimes thought to signify, 'Born of the Sea.' Certainly môr in Welsh means sea, and gân a birth. It is curious, too, that a mermaid is called in Basse Bretagne 'Mary Morgan.' But the class of stories in which a mortal marries a water-maiden is large, and while the local details smack of the soil, the general idea is so like in lands far remote from each other as to indicate a common origin in pre-historic times.

In Wales, where the mountain lakes are numerous, gloomy, lonely, and yet lovely; where many of them, too, show traces of having been inhabited in ancient times by a race of lake-dwellers, whose pile-supported villages vanished ages ago; and where bread and cheese are as classic as beer and candles, these particulars are localized in the legend. In the Faro

<sup>28</sup> 'Arch. Camb.,' 4th Se., vii., 251



Islands, where the seal is a familiar yet ever-mysterious object, with its human-like eyes, and glossy skin, the wife of supernatural race is a transformed seal.

She comes ashore every ninth night, sheds her skin, leaves it on the shore, and dances with her fairy companions. A mortal steals her sealskin dress, and when day breaks, and her companions return to their abode in the sea, compels her to remain and be his wife. Some day he offends her; she recovers her skin and plunges into the sea. In China, the superstition appears in a Lew-chewan legend mentioned by Dr. Dennys,<sup>29</sup> which relates how a fairy in the guise of a beautiful woman is found bathing in a man's well. He persuades her to marry him, and she remains with him for nine years, at the end of which time, despite the affection she has for their two children, she 'glides upwards into a cloud' and disappears.

<sup>29</sup> 'Folk-Lore of China,' 99



## IV. Mountain Fairies

### I.

THE Gwyllion are female fairies of frightful characteristics, who haunt lonely roads in the Welsh mountains, and lead night-wanderers astray. They partake somewhat of the aspect of the Hecate of Greek mythology, who rode on the storm, and was a hag of horrid guise. The Welsh word gwyll is variously used to signify gloom, shade, duskiness, a hag, a witch, a fairy, and a goblin but its special application is to these mountain fumes of gloomy and harmful habits, as distinct from the Ellyllon of the forest glades and dingles, which are more often beneficent. The Gwyllion take on a more distinct individuality under another name--as the Ellyllon do in mischievous Puck--and the Old Woman of the Mountain typifies all her kind. She is very carefully described by the Prophet Jones in the guise in which she haunted Lanhyddel Mountain in Monmouthshire. This was the semblance of a poor old woman, with an oblong four-cornered hat, ash-coloured clothes, her apron thrown across her shoulder, with a pot or wooden can in her hand, such as poor people carry to fetch milk with, always going before the spectator, and sometimes crying 'Wow up!' This is an English form of a Welsh cry of distress) 'Wwb!' or 'Ww-bwb!'<sup>30</sup> Those who saw this apparition, whether by night or on a misty day, would be sure to lose their way, though they might be perfectly familiar with the road. Sometimes they heard her cry, 'Wow up!' when they did not see her. Sometimes when they went out by night, to fetch coal, water, etc., the dwellers near that mountain would hear the cry very close to them, and immediately after they would hear it afar off, as if it were on the opposite mountain, in the parish of Aberystwith. The popular tradition in that district was that the Old Woman of the Mountain was the spirit of one Juan White, who lived time out of mind in those parts, and was thought to be a witch; because the mountains were not haunted in this manner until after Juan White's death.<sup>31</sup> When people first lost their way, and saw her before them, they used to hurry forward and try to catch her, supposing her to be a flesh-and-blood woman, who could set them right; but they never could overtake her, and she on her part never looked back; so that no man ever saw her face. She has also been seen in the Black Mountain in Breconshire. Robert Williams, of Langattock, Crickhowel, 'a substantial man and of undoubted veracity,' tells this tale As he was travelling one night over part of the Black Mountain, he saw the Old Woman, and at the same time found he had lost his way. Not knowing her to be a spectre he hallooed to her to stay for him, but receiving no answer thought she was deaf. He then hastened his steps, thinking to over take her, but the faster he ran the further he found himself behind her, at which he wondered very much, not knowing the reason of it. He presently found himself stumbling in a marsh, at which discovery his vexation increased and then he heard the Old Woman laughing at him with a weird, uncanny crackling old laugh. This set him to thinking she might be a gwyll; and when he happened to draw out his knife for some purpose, and the Old Woman vanished, then he was sure of it; for Welsh ghosts and fairies are afraid of a knife.

### II.

Another account relates that John ap John, of Cwm Celyn, set out one morning before daybreak to walk to Caerleon Fair. As he ascended Milfre Mountain he heard a shouting

<sup>30</sup> Pronounced Woobooob

<sup>31</sup> 'Juan (Shui) White is an old acquaintance of my boyhood,' writes to me a friend who was born some thirty years ago in Monmouthshire. 'A ruined cottage on the Lasgarn hill near Pontypool was understood by us boys to have been her house, and there she appeared at 12 p.m., carrying her head under her arm.'



behind him as if it were on Bryn Mawr, which is a part of the Black Mountain in Breconshire. Soon after he heard the shouting on his left hand, at Bwlch y Llwyn, nearer to him, whereupon he was seized with a great fright, and began to suspect it was no human voice. He had already been wondering, indeed, what anyone could be doing at that hour in the morning, shouting on the mountain side. Still going on, he came up higher on the mountain, when he heard the shouting Just before him, at Gilfach fields, to the right-and now he was sure it was the Old Woman of the Mountain, who purposed leading him astray. Presently he heard behind him the noise of a coach, and with it the special cry of the Old Woman of the Mountain, viz., 'Wow up!' Knowing very well that no coach could go that way, and still hearing its noise approaching nearer and nearer, he became thoroughly terrified, and running out of the road threw himself down upon the ground and buried his face in the heath, waiting for the phantom to pass. When it was gone out of hearing, he arose; and hearing the birds singing as the day began to break, also seeing some sheep before him, his fear went quite off. And this, says the Prophet Jones, was 'no profane, immoral man,' but 'an honest, peaceable, knowing man, and a very comely person more-over.

### III.

The exorcism by knife appears to be a Welsh notion; though there is an old superstition of wide prevalence in Europe that to give to or receive from a friend a knife or a pair of scissors cuts friendship. I have even encountered this superstition in America; once an editorial friend at Indianapolis gave me a very handsome pocket-knife, which he refused to part with except at the price of one cent, lawful coin of the realm, asserting that we should become enemies without this precaution. In China, too, special charms are associated with knives, and a knife which has slain a fellow-being is an invaluable possession. In Wales, according to Jones, the Gwyllion often came into the houses of the people at Aberystroth, especially in stormy weather, and the inmates made them welcome--not through any love they bore them, but through fear of the hurts the Gwyllion might inflict if offended--by providing clean water for them, and taking especial care that no knife, or other cutting tool, should be in the corner near the fire, where the fairies would go to sit. 'For want of which care many were hurt by them.' While it was desirable to exorcise them when in the open air, it was not deemed prudent to display an inhospitable spirit towards any member of the fairy world. The cases of successful exorcism by knife are many, and nothing in the realm of faerie is better authenticated. There was Evan Thomas, who, travelling by night over Bedwellty Mountain, towards the valley of Ebwy Fawr, where his house and estate were, saw the Gwyllion on each side of him, some of them dancing around him in fantastic fashion. He also heard the sound of a bugle-horn winding in the air, and there seemed to be invisible hunters riding by. He then began to be afraid, but recollected his having heard that any person seeing Gwyllion may drive them away by drawing out a knife. So he drew out his knife, and the fairies vanished directly. Now Evan Thomas was 'an old gentleman of such strict veracity that he' on one occasion 'did confess a truth against himself,' when he was 'like to suffer loss' thereby, and notwithstanding he 'was persuaded by some not to do it, yet he would persist in telling the truth, to his own hurt.' Should we find, in tracing these notions back to their source that they are connected with Arthur's sword Excalibur? If so, there again we touch the primeval world. Jones says that the Old Woman of the Mountain has, since about 1800, (at least in South Wales,) been driven into close quarters by the light of the Gospel--in fact, that she now haunts mines--or in the preacher's formal words, 'the coal-pits and holes of the earth.'

### IV.

Among the traditions of the origin of the Gwyllion one which associates them with goats. Goats are in Wales held in peculiar esteem for their supposed occult intellectual powers.



They are believed to be on very good terms with the Tylwyth Teg, and possessed of more knowledge than their appearance indicates. It is one of the peculiarities of the Tylwyth Teg that every Friday night they comb the goats' beards to make them decent for Sunday. Their association with the Gwyllion is related in the legend of Cadwaladr's goat: Cadwaladr owned a very handsome goat, named Jenny, of which he was extremely fond; and which seemed equally fond of him; but one day, as if the very diawi possessed her, she ran away into the hills, with Cadwaladr tearing after her, half mad with anger and affright. At last his Welsh blood got so hot, as the goat eluded him again and again, that he flung a stone at her, which knocked her over a precipice, and she fell bleating to her doom. Cadwaladr made his way to the foot of the crag; the goat was dying, but not dead, and licked his hand--which so affected the poor man that he burst into tears, and sitting on the ground took the goat's head on his arm. The moon rose, and still he sat there. Presently he found that the goat had become transformed to a beautiful young woman, whose brown eyes, as her head lay on his arm, looked into his in a very disturbing way. 'Ah, Cadwaladr,' said she, 'have I at last found you?' Now Cadwaladr had a wife at home, and was much discomfited by this singular circumstance; but when the goat--yn awr maiden--arose, and putting her black slipper on the end of a moonbeam, held out her hand to him, he put his hand in hers and went with her. As for the hand, though it looked so fair, it felt just like a hoof. They were soon on the top of the highest mountain in Wales, and surrounded by a vapoury company of goats with shadowy horns. These raised a most unearthly bleating about his ears. One, which seemed to be the king, had a voice that sounded above the din as the castle bells of Carmarthen used to do long ago above all the other bells in the town. This one rushed at Cadwaladr and butting him in the stomach sent him toppling over a crag as he had sent his poor nanny goat. When he came to himself, after his fall, the morning sun was shining on him and the birds were singing over his head. But he saw no more of either his goat or the fairy she had turned into, from that time to his death.



## V. Changelings

### I.

THE Tylwyth Teg have a fatal admiration for lovely children. Hence the abundant folklore concerning infants who have been stolen from their cradles, and a plentyn-newid (change-child-the equivalent of our changeling) left in its place by the Tylwyth Teg. The plentyn-newid has the exact appearance of the stolen infant, at first; but its aspect speedily alters. It grows ugly of face, shrivelled of form, ill-tempered, wailing, and generally frightful. It bites and strikes, and becomes a terror to the poor mother. Sometimes it is idiotic; but again it has a supernatural cunning, not only impossible in a mortal babe, but not even appertaining to the oldest heads, on other than fairy shoulders. The veracious Prophet Jones testifies to a case where he himself saw the plentyn-newid--an idiot left in the stead of a son of Edmund John William, of the Church Valley, Monmouthshire. Says Jones: 'I saw him myself. There was something diabolical in his aspect,' but especially in his motions. He 'made very disagreeable screaming sounds,' which used to frighten strangers greatly, but otherwise he was harmless. He was of a 'dark, tawny complexion.' He lived longer than such children usually lived in Wales in that day, (a not altogether pleasant intimation regarding the hard lot to which such children were subjected by their unwilling parents,) reaching the age of ten or twelve years. But the creed of ignorance everywhere as regards changelings is a very cruel one, and reminds us of the tests of the witchcraft trials. Under the pretence of proving whether the objectionable baby is a changeling or not, it is held on a shovel over the fire, or it is bathed in a solution of the fox-glove, which kills it; a case where this test was applied is said to have actually occurred in Carnarvonshire in 1857. That there is nothing specially Welsh in this, needs not to be pointed out. Apart from the fact that infanticide, like murder, is of no country, similar practices as to changelings have prevailed in most European lands, either to test the children's uncanny quality, or, that being admitted, to drive it away and thus compel the fairies to restore the missing infant. In Denmark the mother heats the oven, and places the changeling on the peel, pretending to put it in; or whips it severely with a rod; or throws it into the water. In Sweden they employ similar methods. In Ireland the hot shovel is used. With regard to a changeling which Martin Luther tells of in his 'Colloquia Mensalia,' the great reformer declared to the Prince of Anhalt, that if he were prince of that country he would 'venture *homicidium* thereon, and would throw it into the River Moldaw.' He admonished the people to pray devoutly to God to take away the devil, which 'was done accordingly; and the second year after the changeling died.' It is hardly probable that the child was very well fed during the two years that this pious process was going on. Its starved ravenous appetite indeed is indicated in Luther's description: It 'would eat as much as two threshers, would laugh and be joyful when any evil happened in the house, but would cry and be very sad when all went well.'

### II.

A story, told in various forms in Wales, preserves a tradition of an exceedingly frugal meal which was employed as a means of banishing a plentyn-newid. M. Villemarqué, when in Glamorganshire, heard this story, which he found to be precisely the same as a Breton legend, in which the changeling utters a rhymed triad as follows:

Gwcljz vi ken gwelet iar wenn,  
 Gwcljz mez ken gwelet gwezen.  
 Gweljz mez ha gweliz gwial,



Gweliz derven e Koat Brezal,  
Biskoaz na weliz kemend all.

In the Glamorgan story the changeling was heard muttering to himself in a cracked voice: 'I have seen the acorn before I saw the oak: I have seen the egg before I saw the white hen: I have never seen the like of this.' M. Villemarqu  found it remarkable that these words form in Welsh a rhymed triad nearly the same as in the Breton ballad, thus:

Gweliz mez ken gwelet derven,  
Gweliz vi ken gwelet iar wenn,  
Erio ez ne wiliz evelhenn<sup>32</sup>

Whence he concluded that the story and the rhyme are older than the seventh century, the epoch of the separation of the Britons of Wales and Armorica. And this is the story: A mother whose child had been stolen, and a changeling left in its place, was advised by the Virgin Mary to prepare a meal for ten farm-servants in an egg-shell, which would make the changeling speak. This she did, and the changeling asked what she was about. She told him. Whereupon he exclaimed, 'A meal for ten, dear mother, in one egg-shell?' Then he uttered the exclamation given above, ('I have seen the acorn, etc.,) and the mother replied, 'You have seen too many things, my son, you shall have a beating.' With this she fell to beating him, the child fell to bawling, and the fairy came and took him away, leaving the stolen child sleeping sweetly in the cradle. It awoke and said, 'Ah, mother, I have been a long time asleep!'

### III.

I have encountered this tale frequently among the Welsh, and it always keeps in the main the likeness of M. Villemarqu s story. The following is a nearly literal version as related in Radnorshire (an adjoining county to Montgomeryshire), and which, like most of these tales, is characterised by the non-primitive tendency to give names of localities: 'In the parish of Trefeglwys, near Llanidloes, in the county of Montgomery, there is a little shepherd's cot that is commonly called the Place of Strife, on account of the extraordinary strife that has been there. The inhabitants of the cottage were a man and his wife, and they had born to them twins, whom the woman nursed with great care and tenderness. Some months after, indispensable business called the wife to the house of one of her nearest neighbours, yet not withstanding that she had not far to go, she did not like to leave her children by themselves in their cradle, even for a minute, as her house was solitary, and there were many tales of goblins, or the Tylwyth Teg, haunting the neighbourhood. However, she went and returned as soon as she could;' but on her way back she was 'not a little terrified at seeing, though it was midday, some of the old elves of the blue petticoat.' She hastened home in great apprehension; but all was as she had left it, so that her mind was greatly relieved. 'But after some time had passed by, the good people began to wonder that the twins did not grow at all, but still continued little dwarfs. The man would have it that they were not his children; the woman said they must be their children, and about this arose the great strife between them that gave name to the place. One evening when the woman was very heavy of heart, she determined to go and consult a conjuror, feeling assured that everything was known to him . . . Now there was to be a harvest soon of the rye and oats, so the wise man said to her, "When you are preparing dinner for the reapers, empty the shell of a hen's egg, and boil the shell full of pottage, and take it out through the door as if you meant it for a dinner to the reapers, and then listen what the twins will say; if you hear the children speaking things above the understanding of children, return into the house, take them and throw them into the waves of Llyn Ebyr, which is very near to you; but if you don't hear anything remarkable do them no

<sup>32</sup> Keightley, 'Fairy Mythology'



injury.” And when the day of the reaping came, the woman did as her adviser had recommended to her; and as she went outside the door to listen she heard one of the children say to the other:

Gwelais fesen cyn gweled derwen;  
Gweiais wy cyn gweled iâr  
Erioed ni welais ferwi bwyd i fedel  
Mewn plisgyn wy iâr!

Acorns before oak I knew;  
An egg before a hen;  
Never one hen’s egg-shell stew  
Enough for harvest men!

‘On this the mother returned to her house and took the two children and threw them into the Llyn; and suddenly the goblins in their blue trousers came to save their dwarfs, and the mother had her own children back again; and thus the strife between her and her husband ended.’<sup>33</sup>

#### IV

This class of story is not always confined to the case of the plentyn-newid, as I have said. It is applied to the household fairy, when the latter, as in the following instance, appears to have brought a number of extremely noisy friends and acquaintances to share his shelter. Dewi Dal was a farmer, whose house was over-run with fairies, so that he could not sleep of nights for the noise they made. Dewi consulted a wise man of Taiar, who entrusted Dewi’s wife to do certain things, which she did carefully, as follows: ‘It was the commencement of oat harvest, when Cae Mawr, or the big field, which it took fifteen men to mow in a day, was ripe for the harvesters. “I will prepare food for the fifteen men who are going to mow Cae Mawr tomorrow,” said Eurwallt, the wife, aloud. “Yes, do,” replied Dewi, also aloud, so that the fairies might hear, “and see that the food is substantial and sufficient for the hard work before them.” Said Eurwallt, “The fifteen men shall have no reason to complain upon that score. They shall be fed according to our means.” Then when evening was come Eurwallt prepared food for the harvesters’ sustenance upon the following day. Having procured a sparrow, she trussed it like a fowl, and roasted it by the kitchen lire. She then placed some salt in a nutshell, and set the sparrow and the salt, with a small piece of bread, upon the table, ready for the fifteen men’s support while mowing Cae Mawr. So when the fairies beheld the scanty provision made for so many men, they said “Let us quickly depart from this place, for alas the means of our hosts are exhausted. Who before this was ever so reduced in circumstances as to serve up a sparrow for the day’s food of fifteen men?” So they departed upon that very night. And Dewi Dal and his family lived, ever afterwards, in comfort and peace.’<sup>34</sup>

#### V.

The Welsh fairies have several times been detected in the act of carrying off a child; and in these cases, if the mother has been sufficiently energetic in her objections, they have been forced to abandon their purpose Dazzy Walter, the wife of Abel Walter, of Ebwy Fawr, one night in her husband’s absence awoke in her bed and found her baby was not at her side. In great fright she sought for it, and caught it with her hand upon the boards above the bed, which was as far as the fairies had succeeded in carrying it. And Jennet Francis, of that same valley of Ebwy Fawr, one night in bed felt her infant son being taken from her arms;

<sup>33</sup> ‘Cambrian Quarterly,’ ii., 86.

<sup>34</sup> Rev. T. R. Lloyd (Estyn), in ‘The Principality.’



whereupon she screamed and hung on, and, as she phrased it, ‘God and me were too hard for them.’ This son subsequently grew up and became a famous preacher of the gospel.

There are special exorcisms and preventive measures to interfere with the fairies in their quest of infants. The most significant of these, throughout Cambria, is a general habit of piety. Any pious exclamation has value as an exorcism; but it will not serve as a preventive. To this end you must put a knife in the child’s cradle when you leave it alone, or you must lay a pair of tongs across the cradle.

But the best preventive is baptism; it is usually the unbaptised infant that is stolen. So in Friesland, Germany, it is considered a protection against the fairies who deal in changelings, to lay a Bible under the child’s pillow. In Thuringia it is deemed an infallible preventive to hang the fathers breeches against the wall. Anything more trivial than this, as a matter for the consideration of grave and scholarly men, one could hardly imagine; but it is in precisely these trivial or seemingly trivial details that the student of comparative folk-lore finds his most extraordinary indices. Such a superstition in isolation would suggest nothing; but it is found again in Scotland,<sup>35</sup> and other countries including China, where a pair of the trousers of the child’s father are put on the frame of the bedstead in such a way that the waist shall hang downward or be lower than the legs. On the trousers is stuck a piece of red paper, having four words written upon it intimating that all unfavourable influences are to go into the trousers instead of afflicting the babe.’<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Henderson, ‘Notes on the Folk-Lore of the Northern Counties

<sup>36</sup> See Doolittle’s ‘Social Life of the Chinese.’



## VI. Living With The Tylwyth Teg

### I.

CLOSELY akin to the subject of changelings is that of adults or well-grown children being led away to live with the Tylwyth Teg. In this field the Welsh traditions are innumerable, and deal not only with the last century or two, but distinctly with the middle ages. Famed among British goblins are those fairies which are immortalised in the Tale of Elidurus. This tale was written in Latin by Giraldus Cambrensis (as he called himself, after the pedantic fashion of his day), a Welshman, born at Pembroke Castle, and a hearty admirer of everything Welsh, himself included. He was beyond doubt a man of genius, and of profound learning. In 1188 he made a tour through Wales, in the interest of the crusade then in contemplation, and afterwards wrote his book--a fascinating picture of manners and customs in Wales in the twelfth century.

The scene of the tale is that Vale of Neath, already named as a famous centre of fairyland. Elidurus, when a youth of twelve years, 'in order to avoid the severity of his preceptor,' ran away from school, 'and concealed himself under the hollow bank of a river. After he had fasted in that situation for two days, 'two little men of pigmy stature appeared to him,' and said, 'If you will go with us, we will lead you into a country full of delights and sports.' Assenting, Elidurus rose up and 'followed his guides through a path at first subterranean and dark, into a most beautiful country, but obscure and not illuminated with the full light of the sun.' All the days in that country 'were cloudy, and the nights extremely dark.' The boy was brought before the king of the strange little people, and introduced to him in the presence of his Court. Having examined Elidurus for a long time, the king delivered him to his son, that prince being then a boy. The men of this country, though of the smallest stature, were very well proportioned, fair-complexioned, and wore long hair. 'They had horses and greyhounds adapted to their size. They neither ate flesh nor fish, but lived on milk-diet, made up into messes with saffron. As often as they returned from our hemisphere, they reprobated our ambition, infidelities, and inconstancies; and though they had no form of public worship, were, it seems, strict lovers and reverers of truth. The boy frequently returned to our hemisphere, sometimes by the way he had gone, sometimes by others; at first in company, and afterwards alone; and made himself known only to his mother, to whom he described what he had seen. Being desired by her to bring her a present of gold, with which that country abounded, he stole, whilst at play with the king's son, a golden ball with which he used to divert himself, and brought it in haste to his mother, but not un-pursued; for, as he entered the house of his father, he stumbled at the threshold; the ball fell, 'and two pigmies seizing it, departed, showing the boy every mark of contempt and derision. Notwithstanding every attempt for the space of a year, he never again could find the track to the subterranean passage. He had made himself acquainted with the language of his late hosts, 'which was very conformable to the Greek idiom. When they asked for water, they said *Udor udorum*; when they want salt, they say *Halgein udorum*.'<sup>37</sup>

### II.

Exactly similar to this medieval legend in spirit, although differing widely in detail, is the modern story of Shuï Rhys, told to me by a peasant in Cardiganshire. Shuï was a beautiful girl of seventeen, tall and fair, with a skin like ivory, hair black and curling, and eyes of dark

<sup>37</sup> See Sir R. C. Hoare's Translation of Giraldus



velvet. She was but a poor farmer's daughter, notwithstanding her beauty, and among her duties was that of driving up the cows for the milking. Over this work she used to loiter sadly, to pick flowers by the way, or chase the butterflies, or amuse herself in any agreeable manner that fortune offered. For her loitering she was often chided; indeed, people said Shuï's mother was far too sharp with the girl, and that it was for no good the mother had so bitter a tongue. After all the girl meant no harm, they said. But when one night Shuï never came home till bed-time, leaving the cows to care for themselves, dame Rhys took the girl to task as she never had done before.

'Ysgwaetheroedd, mami,' said Shuï, 'I couldn't help it, it was the Tylwyth Teg.' The dame was aghast at this, but she could not answer it--for well she knew the Tylwyth Teg were often seen in the woods of Cardigan. Shuï was at first shy about talking of the fairies, but finally confessed they were little men in green coats, who danced around her and made music on their tiny harps; and they talked to her in language too beautiful to be repeated; indeed she couldn't understand the words, though she knew well enough what the fairies meant.

Many a time after that Shuï was late; but now nobody chided her, for fear of offending the fairies. At last one night Shuï did not come home at all. In alarm the woods were searched; there was no sign of her; and never was she seen in Cardigan again. Her mother watched in the fields on the Teir-nos Ysprydion or three nights of the year when goblins are sure to be abroad; but Shuï never returned. Once indeed there came back to the neighbourhood a wild rumour that Shuï Rhys had been seen in a great city in a foreign land-Paris, perhaps, or London, who knows? but this tale was in no way injurious to the sad belief that the fairies had carried her off; they might take her to those well-known centres of idle and sinful pleasure, as well as to any other place.

### III.

An old man who died in St. Dogmell's parish, Pembrokeshire, a short time since (viz., in 1860), nearly a hundred years old, used to say that that whole neighbourhood was considered 'fou.' It was a common experience for men to be led astray there all night, and after marvellous adventures and untellable trappings, which seemed as if they would be endless, to find when day broke that they were close to their own homes. In one case, a man who was led astray chanced to have with him a number of hoop-rods, and as he wandered about under the influence of the deluding phantom, he was clever enough to drop the rods one by one, so that next day he might trace his journeyings. When daylight came, and the search for the hoop-rods was entered on, it was found they were scattered over miles upon miles of country. Another time, a St. Dogmell's fisherman was returning home from a wedding at Moelgrove, and it being very dark, the fairies led him astray, but after a few hours he had the good luck (which Sir John Franklin might have envied him) to 'discover the North Pole,' and by this beacon he was able to steer his staggering barque to the safe port of his own threshold. It is even gravely stated that a severe and dignified clerical person, no longer in the frisky time of life, but advanced in years, was one night forced to join in the magic dance of St. Dogmell's, and keep it up till nearly daybreak. Specific details in this instance are wanting; but it was no doubt the Ellyllon who led all these folk astray, and put a cap of oblivion on their heads, which prevented them from ever telling their adventures clearly.

### IV.

Dancing and music play a highly important part in stories of this class. The Welsh fairies are most often dancing together when seen. They seek to entice mortals to dance with them, and when anyone is drawn to do so, it is more than probable he will not return to his friends for a long time. Edmund William Rees, of Aberystwith, was thus drawn away by the fairies, and



came back at the year's end, looking very bad. But he could not give a very clear account of what he had been about, only said he had been dancing. This was a common thing in these cases. Either they were not able to, or they dared not, talk about their experiences.

Two farm servants named Rhys and Llewellyn were one evening at twilight returning home from their work, when Rhys cried Out that he heard the fairy music. Llewellyn could hear nothing, but Rhys said it was a tune to which he had danced a hundred times, and would again, and at once. 'Go on,, says he, ' and I'll soon catch you up again.' Llewellyn objected, but Rhys stopped to hear no more; he bounded away and left Llewellyn to go home alone, which he did, believing Rhys had merely gone off on a spree, and would come home drunk before morning. But the morning came, and no Rhys. In vain search was made, still no Rhys. Time passed on; days grew into months; and at last suspicion fell on Llewellyn, that he had murdered Rhys. He was put in prison. A farmer learned in fairy-lore, suspecting how it was, proposed that he and a company of neighbours should go with poor Llewellyn to the spot where lie had last seen Rhys. Agreed. Arrived at the spot, ' Hush,' cried Llewellyn, 'I hear music! I hear the sweet music of the harps! ' They all listened, but could hear nothing. ' Put your foot on mine, David,' says Llewellyn to one of the company; his own foot was on the outward edge of a fairy ring as lie spoke. David put his foot on Llewellyn's, and so did they all, one after another; and then they heard the sound of many harps, and saw within a circle about twenty feet across, great numbers of little people dancing round and round. And there was Rhys, dancing away like a madman! As he came whirling by, Llewellyn caught him by his smockfrock and pulled him out of the circle. 'Where are the horses? where are the horses?' cried Rhys in an excited manner. ' Horses, indeed!' sneered Llewellyn, in great disgust; 'wfft! go home. Horses! But Rhys was for dancing longer, declaring he had not been there five minutes. You've been there,' says Llewellyn, 'long enough to come near getting me hanged, anyhow.' They got him home finally, but he was never the same man again, and soon after he died.

## V.

In the great majority of these stories the hero dies immediately after his release from the thralldom of the fairies--in some cases with a suddenness and a completeness of obliteration as appalling as dramatic. The following story, well known in Carmarthenshire, presents this detail with much force: There was a certain farmer who, while going early one morning to fetch his horses from the pasture, heard harps playing. Looking carefully about for the source of this music, he presently saw a company of Tylwyth Teg footing it merrily in a corelw. Resolving to join their dance and cultivate their acquaintance, the farmer stepped into the fairy ring. Never had man his resolution more thoroughly carried out, for having once begun the reel he was not allowed to finish it till years had elapsed. Even then he might not have been released, had it not chanced that a man one day passed by the lonely spot, so close to the ring that he saw the farmer dancing. ' Duw catto ni!' cried the man, 'God save us! but this is a merry one. Hai, holo! man, what, in Heaven's name, makes you so lively?' This question, in which the name of Heaven was uttered, broke the spell which rested on the farmer, who spoke like one in a dream: 'O dyn!' cried he, 'what's become of the horses?' Then he stepped from the fairy circle and instantly crumbled away and mingled his dust with the earth.

A similar tale is told in Carnarvon, but with the fairy dance omitted and a pious character substituted, which helps to indicate the antiquity of this class of legend, by showing that it was one of the monkish adoptions of an earlier story. Near Clynog, in Carnarvonshire, there is a place called Llwyn y Nef, (the Bush of Heaven,) which thus received its name: In Clynog lived a monk of most devout life, who longed to be taken to heaven. One evening, whilst walking without the monastery by the riverside, he sat down under a green tree and fell into a



deep reverie, which ended in sleep and he slept for thousands of years. At last he heard a voice calling unto him, 'Sleeper, awake and be up.' He awoke. All was strange to him except the old monastery, which still looked down upon the river. He went to the monastery, and was made much of. He asked for a bed to rest himself on and got it. Next morning when the brethren sought him, they found nothing in the bed but a handful of ashes.<sup>38</sup>

So in the monkish tale of the five saints, who sleep in the cave of Caio, reappears the legend of Arthur's sleeping warriors under Craig-y-Ddinas.

## VI.

A tradition is current in Mathavarn, in the parish of Llanwrin, and the Cantref of Cyfeillioc, concerning a certain wood called Ffridd yr Ywen, (the Forest of the Yew,) that it is so called on account of a magical yew-tree which grows exactly in the middle of the forest. Under that tree there is a fairy circle called The Dancing Place of the Goblin. There are several fairy circles in the Forest of the Yew, but the one under the yew-tree in the middle has this legend connected with it: Many years ago, two farm-servants, whose names were Twm and Iago, went out one day to work in the Forest of the Yew. Early in the afternoon the country became covered with so dense a mist that the youths thought the sun was setting, and they prepared to go home but when they came to the yew-tree in the middle of the forest, suddenly they found all light around them. They now thought it too early to go home, and concluded to lie down under the yew-tree and have a nap. By--and--by Twm awoke, to find his companion gone. He was much surprised at this, but concluded Iago had gone to the village on an errand of which they had been speaking before they fell asleep. So Twm went home, and to all inquiries concerning Iago. he answered, 'Gone to the cobbler's in the village.'

But Iago was still absent next morning, and now Twm was cross-questioned severely as to what had become of his fellow-servant. Then he confessed that they had fallen asleep under the yew where the fairy circle was, and from that moment he had seen nothing more of Iago. They searched the whole forest over, and the whole country round, for many days, and finally Twm went to a gwr cyfarwydd (or conjuror), a common trade in those days, says the legend. The conjuror gave him this advice 'Go to the same place where you and the lad slept. Go there exactly a year after the boy was lost. Let it be on the same day of the year and at the same time of the clay but take care that you do not step inside the fairy ring. Stand on the border of the green circle you saw there, and the boy will come out with many of the goblins to dance. When you see him so near to you that you may take hold of him, snatch him out of the ring as quickly as you can.'

These instructions were obeyed. Iago appeared, dancing in the ring with the Tylwyth Teg, and was promptly plucked forth. 'Duw! Duw!' cned Tom, 'how wan and pale you look! And don't you feel hungry too?' 'No,' said the boy, 'and if I did, have I not here in my wallet the remains of my dinner that I had before I fell asleep?' But when he looked in his wallet, the food was not there. Well, it must be time to go home,' he said, with a sigh for he did not know that a year had passed by. His look was like a skeleton, and as soon as he had tasted food, he mouldered away.

## VII.

Taffy ap Sion, the shoemaker's son, living near Pencader, Carmarthenshire, was a lad who many years ago entered the fairy circle on the mountain hard by there, and having danced a few minutes, as he supposed, chanced to step out. He was then astonished to find that the scene which had been so familiar was now quite strange to him. Here were roads and houses

<sup>38</sup> 'Cymru Fu,' 188



he had never seen, and in place of his father's humble cottage there now stood a fine stone farmhouse. About him were lovely cultivated fields instead of the barren mountain he was accustomed to. 'Ah,' thought he, 'this is some fairy trick to deceive my eyes. It is not ten minutes since I stepped into that circle, and now when I step out they have built my father a new house! Well, I only hope it is real; anyhow, I'll go and see.' So he started off by a path he knew instinctively, and suddenly struck against a very solid hedge. He rubbed his eyes, felt the hedge with his fingers, scratched his head, felt the hedge again, ran a thorn into his fingers and cried out, 'Wbwb! this is no fairy hedge anyhow, nor, from the age of the thorns, was it grown in a few minutes' time.' So he climbed over it and walked on. Here was I born,' said he, as he entered the farmyard, staring wildly about him, 'and not a thing here do I know!' His mystification was complete when there came bounding towards him a huge dog, barking furiously. 'What dog is this? Get out, you ugly brute! Don't you know I'm master here?--at least, when mother's from home, for father don't count.' But the dog only barked the harder. 'Surely,' muttered Taffy to himself, 'I have lost my road and am wandering through some unknown neighbourhood; but no, yonder is the Careg Hir!' and he stood staring at the well-known erect stone thus called, which still stands on the mountain south of Pencader, and is supposed to have been placed there in ancient times to commemorate a victory. As Taffy stood thus looking at the Long Stone, he heard footsteps behind him, and turning, beheld the occupant of the farmhouse, who had come out to see why his dog was barking. Poor Taffy was so ragged and wan that the farmer's Welsh heart was at once stirred to sympathy. 'Who are you, poor man?' he asked. To which Taffy answered, 'I know who I was, but I do not know who I *am now*. 'I was the son of a shoemaker who lived in this place, this morning for that rock, though it is changed a little, I know too well.' 'Poor fellow,' said the farmer, you have lost your senses. This house was built by my great-grandfather, repaired by my grandfather; and that part there, which seems newly built, was done about three years ago at my expense. You must be deranged, or have missed the road; but come in and refresh yourself with some victuals, and rest.' Taffy was half persuaded that he had overslept himself and lost his road, but looking back he saw the rock before mentioned, and exclaimed, 'It is but an hour since I was on yonder rock robbing a hawk's nest.' 'Where have you been since?' Taffy related his adventure. 'Ah,' quoth the farmer, 'I see how it is--you have been with the fairies. Pray, who was your father?' 'Sion Evan y Crydd o Glanrhyd,' was the answer. 'I never heard of such a man,' said the farmer, shaking his head, 'nor of such a place as Glanrhyd, either: but no matter, after you have taken a little food we will step down to Catti Shon, at Pencader, who will probably be able to tell us something.' With this he beckoned Taffy to follow him, and walked on; but hearing behind him the sound of footsteps growing weaker and weaker, he turned round, when to his horror he beheld the poor fellow crumble in an instant to about a thimbleful of black ashes. The farmer, though much terrified at this sight, preserved his calmness sufficiently to go at once and see old Catti, the aged crone he had referred to, who lived at Pencader, near by. He found her crouching over a fire of faggots, trying to warm her old bones. 'And how do you do the day, Catti Shon?' asked the farmer. 'Ah,' said old Catti, 'I'm wonderful well, farmer, considering how old I am.' Yes, yes, you're very old. Now, since you are so old, let me ask you--do you remember anything about Sion y Crydd o Glanrhyd? Was there ever such a man, do you know?' 'Sion Glanrhyd? O! I have some faint recollection of hearing my grandfather, old Evan Shenkin, Penferdir, relate that Sion's son was lost one morning, and they never heard of him afterwards, so that it was said he was taken by the fairies. His father's cot stood some where near your house.' 'Were there many fairies about at that time?' asked the farmer. 'O yes; they were often seen on yonder hill, and I was told they were lately seen in Pant Shon Shenkin, eating flummery out of egg-shells, which they had stolen from a farm hard by.' 'Dir anwyl fi!' cried the farmer; 'dear me! I recollect now--I saw them myself!'



Pant Shon<sup>39</sup> another place.

The young men followed, whereupon the little folks suddenly appeared dancing at the first place. Seeing this, the men divided and surrounded them, when they immediately became invisible, and were never more seen there. Shenkin, it must be here remarked, was a famous place for the Carmarthenshire fairies. The traditions thereabout respecting them are numerous. Among the strangest is, that a woman once actually caught a fairy on the mountain near Pant Shon Shenkin, and that it remained long in her custody, retaining still the same height and size, but at last made its escape.

Another curious tradition relates that early one Easter Monday, when the parishioners of Pencarreg and Caio were met to play at football, they saw a numerous company of Tylwyth Teg dancing. Being so many in number, the young men were not intimidated at all, but proceeded in a body towards the puny tribe, who, perceiving them, removed to another place. The young men followed, whereupon the little folks suddenly appeared dancing at the first place. Seeing this, the men divided and surrounded them when they immediately became invisible, and were never more seen there.

### VIII.

Ignorance of what transpired in the fairy circle is not an invariable feature of legends like those we have been observing. In the story of Tudur of Llangollen, preserved by several old Welsh writers, the hero's experiences are given with much liveliness of detail. The scene of this tale is a hollow near Llangollen, on the mountain side half-way up to the ruins of Dinas Bran Castle, which hollow is to this day called Nant yr Ellyllon. It obtained its name, according to tradition, in this wise: A young man, called Tudur ap Einion Gloff, used in old times to pasture his master's sheep in that hollow. One summer's night, when Tudur was preparing to return to the lowlands with his woolly charge, there suddenly appeared, perched upon a stone near him, 'a little man in moss breeches with a fiddle under his arm. He was the tiniest wee specimen of humanity imaginable. His coat was made of birch leaves, and he wore upon his head a helmet which consisted of a gorse flower, while his feet were encased in pumps made of beetle's wings. He ran his fingers over his instrument, and the music made Tudur's hair stand on end. "Nos da'ch', nos da'ch'," said the little man, which means "Good-night, good-night to you," in English. "Ac i chwithau," replied Tudur; which again, in English, means "The same to you." Then continued the little man, "You are fond of dancing, Tudur; and if you but tarry awhile you shall behold some of the best dancers in Wales, and I am the musician." Quoth Tudur, "Then where is your harp? A Welshman even cannot dance without a harp." "Oh," said the little man, "I can discourse better dance music upon my fiddle." "Is it a fiddle you call that stringed wooden spoon in your hand?" asked Tudur, for he had never seen such an instrument before. And now Tudur beheld through the dusk hundreds of pretty little sprites converging towards the spot where they stood, from all parts of the mountain. Some were dressed in white, and some in blue, and some in pink, and some carried glow-worms in their hands for torches. And so lightly did they tread that not a blade nor a flower was crushed beneath their weight, and every one made a curtsy or a bow to Tudur as they passed, and Tudur doffed his cap and moved to them in return. Presently the little minstrel drew his bow across the strings of his instrument, and the music produced was so enchanting that Tudur stood transfixed to the spot.' At the sound of the sweet melody, the Tylwyth Teg ranged themselves in groups, and began to dance. Now of all the dancing Tudur

<sup>39</sup> Sion and Shon are the same word, just as are our Smith and Smyth. Where there are so few personal names as in Wales, while I would not myself change a single letter in order to render the actors in a tale more distinct, it is perhaps as well to encourage any eccentricities of spelling which we are so lucky as to and on the spot.



had ever seen, none was to be compared to that he saw at this moment going on. He could not help keeping time with his hands and feet to the merry music, but he dared not join in the dance, 'for he thought within himself that to dance on a mountain at night in strange company, to perhaps the devil's fiddle, might not be the most direct route to heaven.' But at last he found there was no resisting this bewitching strain, joined to the sight of the capering Eflyllon. "Now for it, then," screamed Tudur, as he pitched his cap into the air under the excitement of delight. "Play away, old devil; brimstone and water, if you like!" No sooner were the words uttered than everything underwent a change. The gorse-blossom cap vanished from the minstrel's head, and a pair of goat's horns branched out instead. His face turned as black as soot; a long tail grew out of his leafy coat, while cloven feet replaced the beetle-wing pumps. Tudur's heart was heavy, but his heels were light. Horror was in his bosom, but the impetus of motion was in his feet. The fairies changed into a variety of forms. Some became goats, and some became dogs, some assumed the shape of foxes, and others that of cats. It was the strangest crew that ever surrounded a human being. The dance became at last so furious that Tudur could not distinctly make out the forms of the (lancers. They reeled around him with such rapidity that they almost resembled a wheel of fire. Still Tudur danced on. He could not stop, the devil's fiddle was too much for him, as the figure with the goat's horns kept pouring it out with unceasing vigour, and Tudur kept reeling around in spite of himself. Next day Tudur's master ascended the mountain in search of the lost shepherd and his sheep. He found the sheep all right at the foot of the Fron, but fancy his astonishment when, ascending higher, he saw Tudur spinning like mad in the middle of the basin now known as Nant yr Ellyllon.' Some pious words of the master broke the charm, and restored Tudur to his home in Llangollen, where he told his adventures with great gusto for many years afterwards.<sup>40</sup>

## IX.

Polly Williams, a good dame who was born in Trefethin parish, and lived at the Ship Inn, at Pontypool, Monmouthshire, was wont to relate that, when a child, she danced with the Tylwyth Teg. The first time was one day while coming home from school. She saw the fairies dancing in a pleasant, dry place, under a crab-tree, and, thinking they were children like herself, went to them, when they induced her to dance with them. She brought them into an empty barn and they danced there together. After that, during three or four years, she often met and danced with them, when going to or coming from school. She never could hear the sound of their feet, and having come to know that they were fairies, took off her ffollachau (clogs), so that she, too, might make no noise, fearful that the clattering of her clog-shodden feet was displeasing to them. They were all dressed in blue and green aprons, and, though they were so small, she could see by their mature faces that they were no children. Once when she came home barefoot, after dancing with the fairies, she was chided for going to school in that condition; but she held her tongue about the fairies, for fear of trouble, and never told of them till after she grew up. She gave over going with them to dance, however, after three or four years, and this displeased them. They tried to coax her back to them, and, as she would not come, hurt her by dislocating 'one of her walking members,'<sup>41</sup> which, as a euphemism for legs, surpasses anything charged against American prudery.

## X.

Contrasting strongly with this matter-of-fact account of a modern witness is the glowing description of fairy life contained in the legend of the Fairies of Frennifawr. About ten miles

<sup>40</sup> Rev. T. R. Lloyd (Estyn), in 'The Principality.'

<sup>41</sup> Jones, 'Apparitions.'



south of Cardigan is the Pembrokeshire mountain called Frennifawr, which is the scene of this tale. A shepherd's lad was tending his sheep on the small mountains called Frennifach one fine morning in June. Looking to the top of Frennifawr to note what way the fog hung--for if the fog on that mountain hangs on the Pembrokeshire side, there will be fair weather, if on the Cardigan side, storm--he saw the Tylwyth Teg, in appearance like tiny soldiers, dancing in a ring. He set out for the scene of revelry', and soon drew near the ring where, in a gay company of males and females, they were footing it to the music of the harp. Never had he seen such handsome people, nor any so enchantingly cheerful. They beckoned him with laughing faces to join them as they leaned backward almost falling, whirling round and round with joined hands. Those who were dancing never swerved from the perfect circle; but some were clambering over the old cromlech, and others chasing each other with surprising swiftness and the greatest glee. Still others rode about on small white horses of the most beautiful form these riders were little ladies, and their dresses were indescribably elegant, surpassing the sun in radiance, and varied in colour, some being of bright whiteness, others the most vivid scarlet. The males wore red tripled caps, and the ladies a light fantastic headdress which waved in the wind. All this was in silence, for the shepherd could not hear the harps, though he saw them. But now he drew nearer to the circle, and finally ventured to put his foot in the magic ring. The instant he did this, his ears were charmed with strains of the most melodious music he had ever heard. Moved with the transports this seductive harmony produced in him, he stepped fully into the ring. He was no sooner in than he found himself in a palace glittering with gold and pearls. Every form of beauty surrounded him, and every variety of pleasure was offered him. He was made free to range whither he would, and his every movement was waited on by young women of the most matchless loveliness. And no tongue can tell the joys of feasting that were his. Instead of the *tatws-a-llaeth* (potatoes and butter-milk) to which he had hitherto been accustomed, here were birds and meats of every choice description, served on plates of silver. Instead of home-brewed *cwrw*, the only bacchic beverage he had ever tasted in real life, here were red and yellow wines of wondrous enjoyableness, brought in golden goblets richly inlaid with gems. The waiters were the most beautiful virgins, and everything was in abundance. There was but one restriction on his freedom: he must not drink, on any consideration, from a certain well in the garden, in which swam fishes of every colour, including the colour of gold. Each day new joys were provided for his amusement, new scenes of beauty were unfolded to him, new faces presented themselves, more lovely if possible than those he had before encountered. Everything was done to charm him; but one day all his happiness fled in an instant. Possessing every joy that mortal could desire, he wanted the one thing forbidden--like Eve in the garden, like Fatima in the castle; curiosity undid him. He plunged his hand into the well the fishes all disappeared instantly. He put the water to his mouth: a confused shriek ran through the garden. He drank: the palace and all vanished from his sight, and he stood shivering in the night air, alone on the mountain, in the very place where he had first entered the ring.<sup>42</sup>

## XI.

Comment on the resemblances borne by these tales to the more famous legends of other lands, is perhaps unnecessary; they will occur to every reader who is at all familiar with the subject of folk-lore.

<sup>42</sup> *Cambrian Superstitions*, 148. (This is a small collection of Welsh stories printed at Tipton in 1831, and now rare; its author was W. Howells, a lad of nineteen, and his work was drawn out by a small prize offered by Archdeacon Beynon through a Carmarthen newspaper in 1830. Its English requires rehandling, but its material is of value.)



To those who are not, it is sufficient to say that these resemblances exist, and afford still further testimony to the common origin of such tales in a remote past. The legend last given embodies the curiosity feature which is familiar through the story of Bluebeard, but has its root in the story of Psyche. She was forbidden to look upon her husband Eros, the god of love she disobeyed the injunction, and the beautiful palace in which she had dwelt with him vanished in an instant, leaving her alone in a desolate spot. Ages older than the Psyche story, however, is the legend embodying the original Aryan myth. The drop of oil which falls upon the shoulder of the sleeping prince and wakes him, revealing Psyche's curiosity and destroying her happiness, is paralleled among the Welsh by the magic ointment in the legend of the Fiend Master. This legend, it may be premised, is also familiar to both France and Germany, where its details differ but little from those here given: A respectable young Welshwoman of the working class, who lived with her parents, went one day to a hiring fair. Here she 'was addressed by a very noble looking gentleman all in black, who asked her if she would be a nursemaid, and undertake the management of his children. She replied that she had no objection when he promised her immense wages, and said he would take her home behind him, but that she must, before they started, consent to be blindfolded. This done, she mounted behind him on a coal-black steed, and away they rode at a great rate. At length they dismounted, when her new master took her by the hand and led her on, still blindfolded, for a considerable distance. The handkerchief was then removed, when she beheld more grandeur than she had ever seen before; a beautiful palace lighted up by more lights than she could count, and a number of little children as beautiful as angels; also many noble looking ladies and gentlemen. The children her master put under her charge, and gave her a box containing ointment, which she was to put on their eyes. At the same time he gave her strict orders always to wash her hands immediately after using the ointment, and be particularly careful never to let a bit of it touch her own eyes. These injunctions she strictly followed, and was for some time very happy; yet she sometimes thought it odd that they should always live by candle-light; and she wondered, too, that grand and beautiful as the palace was, such fine ladies and gentlemen as were there should never wish to leave it. But so it was; no one ever went out but her master. One morning, while putting the ointment on the eyes of the children, her own eye itched, and forgetting the orders of her master she touched one corner of it with her finger which was covered with ointment. Immediately, with the vision of that corner of her eye, she saw herself surrounded by fearful flames the ladies and gentlemen looked like devils, and the children appeared like the most hideous imps of hell. Though with the other parts of her eyes she beheld all grand and beautiful as before, she could not help feeling much frightened at all this; but having great presence of mind she let no one see her alarm. However, she took the first opportunity of asking her master's leave to go and see her friends. He said he would take her, but she must again consent to be blindfolded. Accordingly a handkerchief was put over her eyes; she was again mounted behind her master, and was soon put down in the neighbourhood of her own house. It will be believed that she remained quietly there, and took good care not to return to her place; but very many years afterwards, being at a fair, she saw a man stealing something from a stall, and with one corner of her eye beheld her old master pushing his elbow. Unthinkingly she said, How are you master? how are the children?" He said, "How did you see me?" She answered, "With the corner of my left eye." From that moment she was blind of her left eye, and lived many years with only her right.'<sup>43</sup> An older legend preserving this mythical detail is the story of Taliesin. Gwion Bach's eyes are opened by a drop from Caridwen's caldron falling upon his finger, which he puts in his mouth.

<sup>43</sup> 'Camb. Sup.,' 349



## XII.

A Carmarthenshire tradition names among those who lived for a period among the Tylwyth Teg no less a person than the translator into Welsh of Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress'. He was called Iago ap Dewi, and lived in the parish of Llanllawddog, Carmarthenshire, in a cottage situated in the wood of Llangwyly. He was absent from the neighbourhood for a long period, and the universal belief among the peasantry was that Iago 'got out of bed one night to gaze on the starry sky, as he was accustomed (astrology being one of his favourite studies), and whilst thus occupied the fairies (who were accustomed to resort in a neighbouring wood), passing by, carried him away, and he dwelt with them seven years. Upon his return he was questioned by many as to where he had been, but always avoided giving them a reply.'

## XIII.

The wide field of interest opened up in tales of this class is a fascinating one to the students of fairy mythology. The whole world seems to be the scene of such tales, and collectors of folklore in many lands have laid claim to the discovery of 'the original' on which the story of Rip van Winkle is based. It is an honour to American genius, to which I cannot forbear a passing allusion, that of all these legends, none has achieved so wide a fame as that which Washington Irving has given to our literature, and Joseph Jefferson to our stage. It is more than probable that Irving drew his inspiration from Grimm, and that the Catskills are indebted to the Hartz Mountains of Germany for their romantic fame. But the legends are endless in which occur this unsuspected lapse of time among supernatural beings, and the wandering back to the old home to find all changed. In Greece, it is Epimenides, the poet, who, while searching for a lost sheep, wanders into a cave where he slumbers forty-seven years. The Gaelic and Teutonic legends are well known. But our wonder at the vitality of this myth is greatest when we find it in both China and Japan. In the Japanese account a young man fishing in his boat on the ocean invited by the goddess of the sea to her home beneath the waves. After three days he desires to see his old mother and father. On parting she gives him a golden casket and a key, but begs him never to open it. At the village where he lived he finds that all is changed, and he can get no trace of his parents until an aged woman recollects having heard of their names. He finds their graves a hundred years old. Thinking that three days could not have made such a change, and that he was under a spell, he opens the casket. A white vapour rises, and under its influence the young man falls to the ground. His hair turns grey, his form loses its youth, and in a few moments he dies of old age. The Chinese legend relates how two friends wandering amongst the ravines of their native mountains in search of herbs for medicine purposes, come to a fairy bridge where two maidens of more than earthly beauty are on guard. They invite them to the fairy land which lies on the other side of the bridge, and the invitation being accepted, they become enamoured of the maidens, and pass what to them seems a short though blissful period of existence with the fairy folk. At length they desire to revisit their earthly homes and are allowed to return, when they find that seven generations have lived and died during their apparently short absence, they themselves having become centenarians.<sup>44</sup> In China, as elsewhere, the legend takes divers forms.

<sup>44</sup> Dennys, 'Folk-Lore of China,' 98



## VII. Fairy Music

### I.

IN those rare cases where it is not dancing which holds the victim of Tylwyth Teg in its fatal fascination, the seducer is music. There is a class of stories still common in Wales, in which is preserved a wondrously beautiful survival of the primitive mythology. In the vast middle ground between our own commonplace times and the pre-historic ages we encounter more than once the lovely legend of the Birds of Rhiannon, which sang so sweetly that the warrior knights stood listening entranced for eighty years. This legend appears in the Mabinogi of 'Branwen, daughter of Llyr,' and, as we read it there it is a medieval tale; but the medieval authors of the Mabinogion as we know them were working over old materials--telling again the old tales which had come down through unnumbered centuries from father to son by tradition. Cambrian poets of an earlier age often allude to the birds of Rhiannon; they are mentioned in the Triads. In the Mabinogi, the period the warriors listened is seven years. Seven men only had escaped from a certain battle with the Irish, and they were bidden by their dying chief to cut off his head and bear it to London and bury it with the face towards France. Various were the adventures they encountered while obeying this injunction. At Harlech they stopped to rest, and sat down to eat and drink. 'And there came three birds, and began singing unto them a certain song, and all the songs they had ever heard were unpleasant compared thereto; and the birds seemed to them to be at a great distance from them over the sea, yet they appeared as distinct as if they were close by; and at this repast they continued seven years.'<sup>45</sup> This enchanting fancy reappears in the local story of Shon ap Shenkin, which was related to me by a farmer's wife near the reputed scene of the legend. Pant Shon Shenkin has already been mentioned as a famous centre for Carmarthenshire fairies.

The story of Taffy ap Sion and this of Shon ap Shenkin were probably one and the same at some period in their career, although they are now distinct. Shon ap Shenkin was a young man who lived hard by Pant Shon Shenkin. As he was going afield early one fine summer's morning he heard a little bird singing, in a most enchanting strain, on a tree close by his path. Allured by the melody he sat down under the tree until the music ceased, when he arose and looked about him. What was his surprise at observing that the tree, which was green and full of life when he sat down, was now withered and barkless! Filled with astonishment he returned to the farmhouse which he had left, as he supposed, a few minutes before; but it also was changed, grown older, and covered with ivy. In the doorway stood an old man whom he had never before seen; he at once asked the old man what he wanted there. 'What do I want here?' ejaculated the old man, reddening angrily; 'that's a pretty question Who are you that dare to insult me in my own house?' 'In your own house? How is this? where's my father and mother, whom I left here a few minutes since, whilst I have been listening to the charming music under yon tree, which, when I rose, was withered and leafless?'

'Under the tree!--music! what's your name?' Shon ap Shenkin.' 'Alas, poor Shon, and is this indeed you.' cried the old man. I often heard my grandfather, your father, speak of you, and long did he bewail your absence. Fruitless inquiries were made for you; but old Catti Maddock of Brechfa said you were under the power of the fairies, and would not be released until the last sap of that sycamore tree would be dried up. Embrace me, my dear uncle, for

<sup>45</sup> Lady Charlotte Guest's 'Mabinogion,' 381.



you are my uncle--embrace your nephew.' With this the old man extended his arms, but before the two men could embrace, poor Shon ap Shenkin crumbled into dust on the doorstep.

## II.

The harp is played by Welsh fairies to an extent unknown in those parts of the world where the harp is less popular among the people. When any instrument is distinctly heard in fairy cymmoedd it is usually the harp. Sometimes it is a fiddle, but then on close examination it will be discovered that it is a captured mortal who is playing it; the Tylwyth Teg prefer the harp. They play the bugle on specially grand occasions, and there is a case or two on record where the drone of the bagpipes was heard; but it is not doubted that the player was some stray fairy from Scotland or elsewhere over the border. On the top of Craig-y-Ddinas thousands of white fairies dance to the music of many harps. In the dingle called Cwm Pergwm, in the Vale of Neath, the Tylwyth Teg make music behind the waterfall, and when they go off over the mountains the sounds of their harps are heard dying away as they recede. The story which presents the Cambrian equivalent of the Magic Flute substitutes a harp for the (to Welsh-men) less familiar instrument. As told to me this story runs somewhat thus: A company of fairies which frequented Cader Idris were in the habit of going about from cottage to cottage in that part of Wales, in pursuit of information concerning the degree of benevolence possessed by the cottagers. Those who gave these fairies an ungracious welcome were subject to bad luck during the rest of their lives, but those who were good to the little folk became the recipients of their favour. Old Morgan ap Rhys sat one night in his own chimney corner making himself comfortable with his pipe and his pint of cwnv da. The good ale having melted his soul a trifle, he was in a more jolly mood than was natural to him, when there came a little rap at the door, which reached his ear dully through the smoke of his pipe and the noise of his own voice--for in his merriment Morgan was singing a roistering song, though he could not sing any better than a haw--which is Welsh for a donkey. But Morgan did not take the trouble to get tip at sound of the rap; his manners were not the most refined; he thought it was polite enough for a man on hospitable purposes bent to bawl forth in ringing Welsh, 'Gwaed dyn a'i gilydd! Why don't you come in when you've got as far as the door?' The welcome was not very polite, but it was sufficient. The door opened, and three travellers entered, looking worn and weary. Now these were the fairies from Cader Idris, disguised in this manner for purposes of observation, and Morgan never suspected they were other than they appeared. 'Good sir,' said one of the travellers, 'we are worn and weary, but all we seek is a bite of food to put in our wallet, and then we will go on our way.' 'Waw, lads! is that all you want? Well, there, look you, is the loaf and the cheese, and the knife lies by them, and you may cut what you like, and fill your bellies as well as your wallet, for never shall it be said that Morgan ap Rhys denied bread and cheese to a fellow creature.' The travellers proceeded to help themselves, while Morgan continued to drink and smoke, and to sing after his fashion, which was a very rough fashion indeed. As they were about to go, the fairy travellers turned to Morgan and said, 'Since you have been so generous we will show that we are grateful. It is in our power to grant you any one wish you may have; therefore tell us what that wish may be.' 'Ho, ho!' said Morgan, 'is that the case? Ah, I see you are making sport of me. Wela, wela, the wish of my heart is to have a harp that will play under my fingers. no matter how ill I strike it; a harp that will play lively tunes, look you; no melancholy music for me!' He had hardly spoken, when to his astonishment, there on the hearth before him stood a splendid harp, and he was alone. 'Waw!' cried Morgan, 'they're gone already.' Then looking behind him he saw they had not taken the bread and cheese they had cut off; after all. ' 'Twas the fairies, perhaps,' he muttered, but sat serenely quaffing his beer, and staring at the harp. There was a sound of footsteps behind him, and his wife came in



from out doors with some friends. Morgan feeling very jolly, thought he would raise a little laughter among them by displaying his want of skill upon the harp. So he commenced to play--oh, what a mad and capering tune it was! 'Waw!' said Morgan, 'but this is a harp. Holo! what ails you all?' For as fast as he played his neighbours danced, every man, woman, and child of them all footing it like mad creatures. Some of them bounded up against the roof of the cottage till their heads cracked again others spun round and round, knocking over the furniture; and, as Morgan went on thoughtlessly playing, they began to pray to him to stop before they should be jolted to pieces. But Morgan found the scene too amusing to want to stop; besides, he was enamoured of his own suddenly developed skill as a musician; and he twanged the strings and laughed till his sides ached and the tears rolled down his cheeks, at the antics of his friends. Tired out at last he stopped, and the dancers fell exhausted on the floor, the chairs, the tables, declaring the diawl himself was in the harp. 'I know a tune worth two of that,' quoth Morgan, picking up the harp again; but at sight of this motion all the company vanished from the house and escaped, leaving Morgan rolling merrily in his chair. Whenever Morgan got a little tipsy after that, he would get the harp and set everybody round him to dancing; and the consequence was he got a bad name, and no one would go near him. But all their precautions did not prevent the neighbours from being caught now and then, when Morgan took his revenge by making them dance till their legs were broken, or some other damage was done them. Even lame people and invalids were compelled to dance whenever they heard the music of this diabolical telyn. In short, Morgan so abused his fairy gift that one night the good people came and took it away from him, and he never saw it more. The consequence was he became morose, and drank himself to death--a warning to all who accept from the fairies favours they do not deserve.

### III.

The music of the Tylwyth Teg has been variously described by people who claim to have heard it; but as a rule with much vagueness, as of a sweet intangible harmony, recalling the experience of Caliban:

The isle is full of noises;  
 Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.  
 Sometimes a thousand twanging instruments  
 Will hum about mine ears.<sup>46</sup>

One Morgan Gwilym, who saw the fairies by Cylepsta Waterfall, and heard their music dying away, was only able to recall the last strain, which he said sounded something like this:

### (SHEET MUSIC IMAGE)

Edmund Daniel, of the Arail, 'an honest man and a constant speaker of truth,' told the Prophet Jones that he often saw the fairies after sunset crossing the Cefn Bach from the Valley of the Church towards Hafodafel, leaping and striking in the air, and making a serpentine path through the air.

The fairies were seen and heard by many persons in that neighbourhood, and sometimes by several persons together. They appeared more often by night than by day, and in the morning and evening more often than about noon. Many heard their music, and said of it that it was low and pleasant; but that it had this peculiarity: no one could ever learn the tune. In more favoured parts of the Principality, the words of the song were distinctly heard, and under the name of the 'Cân y Tylwyth Teg' are preserved as follows:

<sup>46</sup> 'Tempest,' Act III., Sc. 2.



Dowch, dowch, gyfeillon mân,  
 O blith marwolion byd,  
 Dowch, dowch, a dowch yn lân.  
 Partowch partowch eich pibau cân,  
 Gan ddawnsio dowch i gyd,  
 Mae yn hyfryd heno i hwn.

One is reluctant to turn into bald English this goblin song which in its native Welsh is almost as impressive as 'Fi Fo Fum.' Let it suffice that the song is an invitation to the little ones among the dead of earth to come with music and dancing to the delights of the night revel.

#### IV.

In the legend of Lola ap Hugh, than which no story is more widely known in Wales, the fairy origin of that famous tune 'Ffarwel Ned Pugh' is shown. It is a legend which suggests the Enchanted Flute fancy in another form, the instrument here being a fiddle, and the victim and player one under fairy control. In its introduction of bread and cheese and candles it smacks heartily of the soil. In North Wales there is a famous cave which is said to reach from its entrance on the hill-side under the Morda, the Ceiriog, and a thousand other streams, under many a league of mountain, marsh and moor, under the almost unfathomable wells that, though now choked up, once supplied Sycharth, the fortress of Glyndwr, all the way to Chirk Castle.' Tradition said that whoever went within five paces of its mouth would be drawn into it and lost. That the peasants dwelling near it had a thorough respect for this tradition, was proved by the fact that all around the dangerous hole 'the grass grew as thick and as rank as in the wilds of America or some unapproached ledge of the Alps.' Both men and animals feared the spot: 'A fox, with a pack of hounds in full cry at his tail,' once turned short round on approaching it, 'with his hair all bristled and fretted like frostwork with terror,' and ran into the middle of the pack, 'as if anything earthly--even an earthly death--was a relief to his supernatural perturbations.' And the dogs in pursuit of this fox all declined to seize him, on account of the phosphoric smell and gleam of his coat. Moreover, 'Elias ap Evan, who happened one fair night to stagger just upon the rim of the forbidden space, was so frightened at what he saw and heard that he arrived at home perfectly sober, 'the only interval of sobriety, morning, noon, or night, Elias had been afflicted with for upwards of twenty years.' Nor ever after that experience--concerning which he was wont to shake his head solemnly, as if he might tell wondrous tales--he dared--could Elias get tipsy, drink he never so faithfully to that end. As he himself expressed it, 'His shadow walked steadily before him, that at one time wheeled around him like a pointer over bog and stone.' One misty Hallow E'en, Iola ap Hugh, the fiddler, determined to solve the mysteries of the Ogof, or Cave, provided himself with 'an immense quantity of bread and cheese and seven pounds of candles,' and ventured in. He never returned; but long, long afterwards, at the twilight of another Hallow E'en, an old shepherd was passing that--as he called it--'Land-Maelstrom of Diaboly,' when he heard a faint burst of melody dancing up and down the rocks above the cave. As he listened, the music gradually 'moulded itself in something like a tune, though it was a tune the shepherd had never heard before.' And it sounded as if it were being played by some jolting fiend, so rugged was its rhythm, so repeated its discordant groans. Now there appeared at the mouth of the Ogof a figure well known to the shepherd by remembrance. It was dimly visible; but it was Iola ap Hugh, one could see that at once. He was capering madly to the music of his own fiddle, with a lantern dangling at his breast. 'Suddenly the moon shone full on the cave's yellow mouth, and the shepherd saw poor Iola for a single moment--but it was distinctly and horribly. His face was pale as marble, and his eyes stared fixedly and deathfully, whilst his head dangled loose and unjointed on his shoulders. His arms seemed to keep his fiddlestick in motion without the least sympathy from their master. The shepherd



saw him a moment on the verge of the cave, and then, still capering and fiddling, vanish like a shadow from his sight; but the old man was heard to say he seemed as if he slipped into the cave in a manner quite different from the step of a living and a willing man; 'he was dragged inwards like the smoke up the chimney, or the mist at sunrise.' Years elapsed 'all hopes and sorrows connected with poor Iolo had not only passed away, but were nearly forgotten; the old shepherd had long lived in a parish at a considerable distance amongst the hills. One cold December Sunday evening he and his fellow-parishioners were shivering in their seats as the clerk was beginning to light the church, when a strange burst of music, starting suddenly from beneath the aisle, threw the whole congregation into confusion, and then it passed faintly along to the farther end of the church, and died gradually away till at last it was impossible to distinguish it from the wind that was careering and wailing through almost every pillar of the old church.' The shepherd immediately recognised this to be the tune Iolo had played at the mouth of the Ogof. The parson of the parish-a connoisseur in music-took it down from the old man's whistling; and to this day, if you go to the cave on Hallow eve and put your ear to the aperture, you may hear the tune 'Ffarwel Ned Pugh' as distinctly as you may hear the waves roar in a sea-shell. 'And it is said that in certain nights in leap-year a star stands opposite the farther end of the cave, and enables you to view all through it and to see Iolo and its other inmates.'<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> 'Camb. Quarterly,' i., 45.



## VIII. Fairy Rings

### I.

THE circles in the grass of green fields, which are commonly called fairy rings, are numerous in Wales, and it is deemed just as well to keep out of them, even in our day. The peasantry no longer believe that the fairies can be seen dancing there, nor that the cap of invisibility will fall on the head of one who enters the circle; but they do believe that the fairies, in a time not long gone, made these circles with the tread of their tripping feet, and that some misfortune will probably befall any person intruding upon this forbidden ground. An old man at Peterstone-super-Ely told me he well remembered in his childhood being warned by his mother to keep away from the fairy rings. The counsel thus given him made so deep an impression on his mind, that he had never in his life entered one. He remarked further, in answer to a question, that he had never walked under a ladder, because it was unlucky to walk under a ladder. This class of superstitions is a very large one, and is encountered the world over; and the fairy rings seem to fall into this class, so far as present-day belief in Wales is concerned.

### II.

Allusion has been made in the preceding pages to the Prophet Jones, and as some account of this personage is imperatively called for in a work treating of Welsh folk-lore, I will give it here, before citing his remarks respecting fairy circles. Edmund Jones, 'of the Tranch,' was a dissenting minister, noted in Monmouthshire in the first years of the present century for his fervent piety and his large credulity with regard to fairies and all other goblins. He was for many years pastor of the congregation of Protestant Dissenters at the Ebenezer Chapel, near Pontypool, and lived at a place called 'The Tranch,' near there. He wrote and published two books, one an 'Account of the Parish of Aberystwith,' printed at Trevecca; the other a 'Relation of Apparitions of Spirits in the County of Monmouth and the Principality of Wales,' printed at Newport; and they have been referred to by most writers on folk-lore who have attempted any account of Welsh superstitions during the past half-century; but the books are extremely rare, and writers who have quoted from them have generally been content to do so at second-hand. Keightley<sup>48</sup> quoting from the 'Apparitions,' misprints the author's name 'Edward Jones of the Tiarch,' and accredits the publication to 'the latter half of the eighteenth century,' whereas it was published in 1813. Keightley's quotations are taken from Croker, who himself had never seen the book; but heard of it through a Welsh friend. It is not in the library of the British Museum, and I know of but a few copies in Wales; the one I saw is at Swansea. The author of these curious volumes was called the Prophet Jones, because of his gift of prophecy--so a Welshman in Monmouthshire told me. In my informant's words, He was noted in his district for foretelling things. He would, for instance, be asked to preach at some anniversary, or quarterly meeting, and he would answer, "I cannot, on that day; the rain will descend in torrents, and there will be no congregation." He would give the last mite he possessed to the needy, and tell his wife, "God will send a messenger with food and raiment at nine o'clock tomorrow." "And so it would be." He was a thorough-going believer in Welsh fairies, and full of indignant scorn toward all who dared question their reality. To him these phantoms were part and parcel of the Christian faith, and those who disbelieved in them were denounced as Sadducees and infidels.

<sup>48</sup> 'Fairy Mythology,' 412



## III.

With regard to the fairy rings, Jones held that the Bible alludes to them, Matt. xii. 43 'The fairies dance in circles in dry places; and the Scripture saith that the walk of evil spirits is in dry places.' They favour the oak-tree, and the female oak especially, partly because of its more wide-spreading branches and deeper shade, partly because of the 'superstitious use made of it beyond other trees in the days of the Druids. Formerly, it was dangerous to cut down a female oak in a fair dry place. 'Some were said to lose their lives by it, by a strange aching pain which admitted of no remedy, as one of my ancestors did; but now that men have more knowledge and faith, this effect follows not.' William Jenkins was for a long time the schoolmaster at Trefethin church, in Monmouthshire, and coming home late in the evening, as he usually did, he often saw the fairies under an oak within two or three fields from the church. He saw them more often on Friday evenings than any other. At one time he went to examine the ground about this oak, and there he found the reddish circle wherein the fairies danced, 'such as have often been seen under the female oak, called Brenhin-bren.' They appeared more often to an uneven number of persons, as one, three, five, &c.; and oftener to men than to women. Thomas William Edmund, of Hafodafel, 'an honest pious man, who often saw them,' declared that they appeared with one bigger than the rest going before them in the company. They were also heard talking together in a noisy, jabbering way; but no one could distinguish the words. They seemed, however, to be a very disputatious race; insomuch, indeed, that there was a proverb in some parts of Wales to this effect: 'Ni chytunant hwy mwy na Bendith eu Mammau,' (They will no more agree than the fairies).

## IV.

This observation respecting the mysterious language used by fairies recalls again the medieval story of Elidurus. The example of fairy words there given by Giraldus is thought by the learned rector of Llanarmon<sup>49</sup> to be 'a mixture of Irish and Welsh. The letter U, with which each of the words begins, is, probably, no more than the representative of an indistinct sound like the E mute of the French, and which those whose language and manners are vulgar often prefix to words indifferently. If, then, they be read dor dorum, and halgein dorum, dor and halgein are nearly dwr (or, as it is pronounced, door) and halen, the Welsh words for water and salt respectively. Dorum therefore is equivalent to "give me," and the Irish expression for give me" is thorum; the Welsh dyro i mi. The order of the words, however, is reversed. The order should be thorum dor, and thorum halen in Irish, and in Welsh dyro i mi ddwr, and dyro i mi halen, but was, perhaps, reversed intentionally by the narrator, to make his tale the more marvellous.'<sup>50</sup>

## V.

The horse plays a very active part in Welsh fairy tales. Not only does his skeleton serve for Mary Lwyds<sup>51</sup> and the like, but his spirit flits. The Welsh fairies seem very fond of going horseback. An old woman in the Vale of Neath told Mrs. Williams, who told Thomas Keightley, that she had seen fairies to the number of hundreds, mounted on little white horses, not bigger than dogs, and riding four abreast. This was about dusk, and the fairy equestrians passed quite close to her, in fact less than a quarter of a mile away. Another old woman asserted that her father had often seen the fairies riding in the air on little white horses; but he never saw them come to the ground. He heard their music sounding in the air as they galloped by. There is a tradition among the Glamorgan peasantry of a fairy battle

<sup>49</sup> Rev. Peter Roberts, 'Cambrian Popular Antiquities,' 195. (1815)

<sup>50</sup> Supra, p. 67

<sup>51</sup> See Index



fought on the mountain between Merthyr and Aberdare, in which the pigmy combatants were on horseback. There appeared to be two armies, one of which was mounted on milk-white steeds, and the other on horses of jet-black. They rode at each other with the utmost fury, and their swords could be seen flashing in the air like so many penknife blades. The army on the white horses won the day, and drove the black-mounted force from the field. The whole scene then disappeared in a light mist.

## VI.

In the agricultural districts of Wales, the fairies are accredited with a very complete variety of useful animals; and Welsh folk-lore, both modern and medieval, abounds with tales regarding cattle, sheep, horses, poultry, goats, and other features of rural life. Such are the marvellous mare of Teirnyon, which foaled every first of May, but whose colt was always spirited away, no man knew whither the Ychain Banog, or mighty oxen, which drew the water-monster out of the enchanted lake, and by their lowing split the rocks in twain; the lambs of St. Melangell, which at first were hares, and ran frightened under the fair saint's robes; the fairy cattle which belong to the Gwraig Annwn; the fairy sheep of Cefn Rhychdir, which rose up out of the earth and vanished into the sky; even fairy swine, which the hay-makers of Bedwellty beheld flying through the air. To some of these traditions reference has already been made; others will be mentioned again. Welsh mountain sheep will run like stags, and bound from crag to crag like wild goats; and as for Welsh swine, they are more famed in Cambrian romantic story than almost any other animal that could be named. Therefore the tale told by Rev. Roger Rogers, of the parish of Bedwellty, sounds much less absurd in Wales than it might elsewhere. It relates to a very remarkable and odd sight, seen by Lewis Thomas Jenkin's two daughters, described as virtuous and good young women, their father a substantial freeholder; and seen not only by them but by the man-servant and the maid-servant, and by two of the neighbours, viz., Elizabeth David, and Edmund Roger. All these six people were on a certain day making hay in a field called Y Weirglodd Fawr Dafolog, when they plainly beheld a company of fairies rose up out of the earth in the shape of a flock of sheep; the same being about a quarter of a mile distant, over a hill, called Cefn Rhychdir; and soon the fairy flock went out of sight, as if they vanished in the air. Later in the day they all saw this company of fairies again, but while to two of the haymakers the fairies appeared as sheep, to others they appeared as greyhounds, and to others as swine, and to others as naked infants. Whereupon the Rev. Roger remarks:

'The sons of infidelity are very unreasonable not to believe the testimonies of so many witnesses.'<sup>52</sup>

## VII.

The Welsh sheep, it is affirmed, are the only beasts which will eat the grass that grows in the fairy rings; all other creatures avoid it, but the sheep eat it greedily, hence the superiority of Welsh mutton over any mutton in the wide world. The Prophet Jones tells of the sheepfold of the fairies, which he himself saw--a circumstance to be accorded due weight, the judicious reader will at once perceive, because as a habit Mr. Jones was not specially given to seeing goblins on his own account. He believes in them with all his heart, but it is usually a friend or acquaintance who has seen them. In this instance, therefore, the exception is to be noted sharply. He thus tells the tale:

If any think I am too credulous in these relations, and speak of things of which I myself have had no experience, I must let them know they are mistaken. For when a very young boy,

<sup>52</sup> Jones 'Apparitions,' 24.



going with my aunt, early in the morning, but after sun-rising, from Hafodafel towards my father's house at Pen-y-Llwyn, at the end of the upper field of Cae'r Cefn, ... I saw the likeness of a sheepfold, with the door towards the south, ... and within the fold a company of many people. Some sitting down, and some going in, and coming out, bowing their heads as they passed under the branch over the door. ... I well remember the resemblance among them of a fair woman with a high-crown hat and a red jacket, who made a better appearance than the rest, and whom I think they seemed to honour. I still have a pretty clear idea of her white face and well-formed countenance. The men wore white cravats. . . . I wondered at my aunt, going before me, that she did not look towards them, and we going so near them. As for me, I was loth to speak until I passed them some way, and then told my aunt what I had seen, at which she wondered, and said I dreamed. . . . There was no fold in that place. There is indeed the ruins of some small edifice in that place, most likely a fold, but so old that the stones are swallowed up, and almost wholly crusted over with earth and grass.'

This tale has long been deemed a poser by the believers in Cambrian phantoms; but there is something to be said on the side of doubt. Conceding that the Reverend Edmund Jones, the dissenting minister, was an honest gentleman who meant to tell truth, it is still possible that Master Neddy Jones, the lad, could draw a long bow like another boy; and that having seen, possibly, some gypsy group (or possibly nothing whatever) he embellished his tale to excite wonderment, as boys do. Telling a fictitious tale so often that one at last comes to believe it oneself, is a well-known mental phenomenon.

#### VIII.

The only other instance given by the Prophet Jones as from the depths of his own personal experience, is more vague in its particulars than the preceding, and happened when he had presumably grown to years of discretion. He was led astray, it appears, by the Old Woman of the Mountain, on Llanhiddel Bryn, near Pontypool--an eminence with which he was perfectly well acquainted, and which is no more than a mile and a half long and about half a mile broad.' But as a result of his going astray, he came to a house where he had never been before; and being deeply moved by his uncanny experience, 'offered to go to prayer, which they admitted. . . . I was then about twenty-three years of age and had begun to preach the everlasting gospel. They seemed to admire that a person so young should be so warmly disposed; few young men of my age being religious in this country then. Much good came into this house and still continues in it. . . . So the old hag got nothing by leading me astray that time.'



## IX. Piety As A Protection From The Seductions Of The Tylwyth Teg

### I.

THE extreme piety of his daily walk and conversation may have been held as an explanation why the Prophet Jones saw so few goblins himself, and consequently why most of his stories of the fairies are related as coming from other people. The value of a general habit of piety, as a means of being rid of fairies, has already been mentioned. The more worldly exorcisms, such as the production of a black-handled knife, or the turning one's coat wrong side out, are passed over by the Prophet as trivial; but by the student of comparative folk-lore, they are not deemed unimportant. The last-mentioned exorcism, by the way, is current among the Southern negroes of the United States. The more spiritual exorcisms are not less interesting than the others, however. First among these is ranked the pronunciation of God's name; but the crowing of a cock is respectfully mentioned, in connection with the story of our Saviour. Jones gives many accounts which terminate in the manner of the following: Rees John Rosser, born at Hendy, in the parish of Llanhiddel, a very religious young man,' went one morning very early to feed the oxen in a barn called Ysgubor y Llan, and having fed them lay himself upon the hay to rest. While he lay there he heard the sound of music approaching, and presently a large company of fairies came into the barn. They wore striped clothes, some in gayer colours than the others, but all very gay; and they all danced to the music. He lay there as quiet as he could, thinking they would not see him, but he was espied by one of them, a woman, who brought a striped cushion with four tassels, one at each corner of it, and put it under his head. After some time the cock crew at the house of Blaen y Cwm, hard by, upon which they appeared as if they were surprised and displeased; the cushion was hastily whisked from under his head, and the fairies vanished. 'The spirits of darkness do not like the crowing of the cock, because it gives notice of the approach of day, for they love darkness rather than light ... And it hath been several times observed that these fairies cannot endure to hear the name of God.' A modern Welsh preacher (but one whose opinions contrast most decidedly with those of Jones) observes: 'The cock is wonderfully well versed in the circumstances of the children of Adam; his shrill voice at dawn of day is sufficient intimation to every spirit, cobyln, wraith, elf, bwci, and apparition to flee into their illusive country for their lives, before the light of day will show them to be an empty nothingness, and bring them to shame and reproach.'<sup>53</sup> Shakspeare introduces this superstition in Hamlet:

*Ber.* It was about to speak, when the cock crew.

*Hor.*.. And then it started like a guilty thing

Upon a fearful summons.<sup>54</sup>

But the opinion that spirits fly away at cock-crow is of extreme antiquity. It is mentioned by the Christian poet Prudentius (fourth century) as a tradition of common belief.<sup>55</sup> As for the effect of the name of God as an exorcism, we still encounter this superstition, a living thing in our own day, and in every land where modern 'spiritualism' finds believers. The mischief produced at 'spiritual séances' by 'bad spirits' is well-known to those who have paid any attention to this subject. The late Mr. FitzHugh Ludlow once related to me, with dramatic

<sup>53</sup> Rev. Robert Ellis, in 'Manion Hynafiaethol' (Treherbert, 1873.)

<sup>54</sup> 'Hamlet,' Act I., Sc. I

<sup>55</sup> Brad, 'Popular Antiquities,' ii., 31



fervour, the result of his attempts to exorcise a bad spirit which was in possession of a female 'medium,' by trying to make her pronounce the name of Christ. She stumbled and stammered over this test in a most embarrassing way, and finally emerged from her trance with the holy name unspoken; the bad spirit had fled. This was in New York, in 1867. Like many others who assert their unbelief in spiritualism, Mr. Ludlow was intensely impressed by this phenomenon.

Students of comparative folklore class all such manifestations under a common head, whether related of fairies or spirit mediums. They trace their origin to the same source whence come the notions of propitiating the fairies by euphemistic names. The use of such names as Jehovah, the Almighty, the Supreme Being, etc., for the terrible and avenging God of the Jewish theology, being originally an endeavour to avoid pronouncing the name of God, it is easy to see the connection with the exorcising power of that name upon all evil spirits, such as fairies are usually held to be. Here also, it is thought, is presented the ultimate source of that horror of profane language which prevails among the Puritanic peoples of England and America. The name of the devil is similarly provided with euphemisms, some of which--such as the Old Boy--are not of a sort to offend that personage's ears and until recently the word devil was deemed almost as offensive as the word God, when profanely used.

## II.

A popular protection from the encroachments of fairies is the eithin, or prickly furze, common in Wales. It is believed that the fairies cannot penetrate a fence or hedge composed of this thorny shrub. An account illustrating this, and otherwise curious in its details, was given in 1871 by a prominent resident of Anglesea:<sup>56</sup> 'One day, some thirty years ago, Mrs. Stanley went to one of the old houses to see an old woman she often visited. It was a wretched hovel so unusually dark when she opened the door, that she called to old Betty Griffith, but getting no answer she entered the room. A little tiny window of one pane of glass at the further side of the room gave a feeble light. A few cinders alight in the miserable grate also gave a glimmer of light, which enabled her to see where the bed used to be, in a recess. To her surprise she saw it entirely shut out by a barricade of thick gorse, so closely packed and piled up that no bed was to be seen. Again she called Betty Griffith no response came. She looked round the wretched room the only symptom of life was a plant of the Wandering Jew (*Saxifraga tricolor*), so called by the poor people, and clearly loved to grace their windows. It was planted in a broken jar or teapot on the window, trailing its long tendrils around, with here and there a new formed plant seeming to derive sustenance from the air alone. As she stood, struck with the miserable poverty of the human abode, a faint sigh came from behind the gorse. She went close and said, "Betty, where are you?"--Betty instantly recognised her voice, and ventured to turn herself round from the wall. Mrs. Stanley then made a small opening in the gorse barricade, which sadly pricked her fingers; she saw Betty in her bed and asked her, "Are you not well? are you cold, that you are so closed up?" "Cold! no. It is not cold, Mrs. Stanley; it is the Tylwyth Teg; they never will leave me alone, there they sit making faces at me, and trying to come to me. "Indeed! oh how I should like to see them, Betty." "Like to see them, is it? Oh, don't say so." "Oh but Betty, they must be so pretty and good." "Good? they are not good." By this time the old woman got excited, and Mrs. Stanley knew she should hear more from her about the fairies, so she said, "Well, I will go out; they never will come if I am here." Old Betty replied sharply, "No, do not go. You must not leave me. I will tell you all about them. Ah! they come and plague me sadly. If I am up they will sit upon the table; they turn my milk sour and spill my tea; then they will not leave me at peace in my bed, but come all round me and mock at me." "But Betty, tell me

<sup>56</sup> Hon. W.O. Stanley, in 'Notes and Queries'



what is all this gorse for? It must have been great trouble for you to make it all so close.” “Is it not to keep them off? They cannot get through this, it pricks them so bad, and then I get some rest.” So she replaced the gorse and left old Betty Griffith happy in her device for getting rid of the Tylwyth Teg.’

### III.

A common means of getting rid of the fairies is to change one's place of residence; the fair folk will not abide in a house which passes into new hands. A story is told of a Merionethshire farmer who, being tormented beyond endurance by a Bwbach of a mischievous turn, reluctantly resolved to flit. But first consulting a wise woman at Dolgelly, he was advised to make a pretended flitting, which would have the same effect; he need only give out that he was going to move over the border into England, and then get together his cattle and his household goods, and set out for a day's drive around the Arenig. The fairy would surely quit the house when the farmer should quit it, and especially would it quit the premises of a born Cymro who avowed his purpose of settling in the foreign land of the Sais. So then he could come back to his house by another route, and he would find the obnoxious Bwbach gone. The farmer did as he was told, and set out upon his journey, driving his cattle and sheep before him, and leading the cart upon which his furniture was piled, while his wife and children trudged behind. When he reached Rhyd-y-Fen, a ford so called from this legend, they met a neighbour, who exclaimed, ‘Holo, Dewi, are you leaving us for good?’ Before the farmer could answer there was a shrill cry from inside the churn on the cart, ‘Yes, yes, we are flitting from Hendrefawr to Eingl-dud, where we've got a new home.’ It was the Bwbach that spoke. He was flitting with the household gods, and the farmer's little plan to be rid of him was a complete failure. The good man sighed as he turned his horses about and went back to Hendrefawr by the same road he had come.

### IV.

The famous Pwca of the Trwyn Farm, in Mynyddyslwyn parish, came there from his first abode, at Pantygasseg, in a jug of barm. One of the farm-servants brought the jug to Pantygasseg, and as she was being served with the barm in the jug, the Pwca was heard to say, ‘The Pwca is going away now in this jug of barm, and he'll never come back;’ and he was never heard at Pantygasseg again. Another story tells that a servant let fall a ball of yarn, over the ledge of the hill whose base is washed by the two fishponds between Hafod-yr-Ynys and Pontypool, and the Pwca said, ‘I am going in this ball, and I'll go to the Trwyn, and never come back,’--and directly the ball was seen to roll down the hill-side, and across the valley, ascending the hill on the other side, and trundling along briskly across the mountain top to its new abode.



## X. Fairy Money And Fairy Gifts In General

### I.

‘THIS is fairy gold, boy, and ‘twill prove so, says the old shepherd in ‘Winter’s Tale;’ sagely adding, ‘Up with it, keep it close; home, home, the next way We are lucky, boy, and to be so still, requires nothing but secrecy.’<sup>57</sup> Here we have the traditional belief of the Welsh peasantry in a nut-shell. Fairy money is as good as any, so long as its source is kept a profound secret; if the finder relate the particulars of his good fortune, it will vanish. Sometimes--especially in cases where the money has been spent--the evil result of tattling consists in there being no further favours of the sort. The same law governs fairy gifts of all kinds. A Breconshire legend tells of the generosity of the Tylwyth Teg in presenting the peasantry with loaves of bread, which turned to toadstools next morning; it was necessary to eat the bread in darkness and silence to avoid this transformation. The story of Gitto Bach, a familiar one in Wales, is a picturesque example. Gitto Bach (little Griffith), a good little farmer’s boy of Glamorganshire, used often to ramble to the top of the mountain to look after his father’s sheep. On his return he would show his brothers and sisters pieces of remarkably white paper, like crown pieces, with letters stamped upon them, which he said were given to him by the little children with whom he played on the mountain. One day he did not return. For two years nothing was heard of him. Meantime other children occasionally got like crown-pieces of paper from the mountains. One morning when Gitto’s mother opened the door there he sat--the truant--dressed exactly as he was when she saw him last, two years before. He had a little bundle under his arm. ‘Where in the world have you been all this time?’ asked the mother. ‘Why, it’s only yesterday I went away!’ quoth Gitto. ‘Look at the pretty clothes the children gave me on the mountain, for dancing with them to the music of their harps.’ With this he opened his bundle, and showed a handsome dress; and behold, it was only paper, like the fairy money.

### II.

But usually, throughout Wales, it is simply a discontinuance of fairy favour which follows blabbing. A legend is connected with a bridge in Anglesea, of a lad who often saw the fairies there, and profited by their generosity. Every morning, while going to fetch his father’s cows from pasture, he saw them, and after they were gone he always found a groat on a certain stone of Cymmunod Bridge. The boy’s having money so often about him excited his father’s suspicion, and one Sabbath day he cross-questioned the lad as to the manner in which it was obtained. Oh, the meddlesomeness of fathers! Of course the poor boy confessed that it was through the medium of the fairies, and of course, though he often went after this to the field, he never found any money on the bridge, nor saw the offended Tylwyth Teg again. Through his divulging the secret their favour was lost.

Jones tells a similar story of a young woman named Anne William Francis, in the parish of Bassalleg, who on going by night into a little grove of wood near the house, heard pleasant music, and saw a company of fairies dancing on the grass. She took a pail of water there, thinking it would gratify them. The next time she went there she had a shilling given her, ‘and so had for several nights after, until she had twenty-one shillings.’ But her mother happening to find the money, questioned her as to where she got it, fearing she had stolen it. At first the girl would not tell, but when her mother ‘went very severe on her,’ and threatened

<sup>57</sup> ‘Winter’s Tale,’ Act III., Sc. 3.



to beat he?, she confessed she got the money from the fairies. After that they never gave her any more. The Prophet adds: 'I have heard of other places where people have had money from the fairies, sometimes silver sixpences, but most commonly copper coin. As they cannot make money, it certainly must be money lost or concealed by persons.' The Euhemerism of this is hardly like the wonder-loving Jones.

### III.

In the legends of the two shepherds of Cwm Llan and their experience with the fairies, the first deals with the secrecy feature, while the second reproduces the often impressed lesson concerning the money value of kindness. The first is as follows: One evening a shepherd, who had been searching for his sheep on the side of Nant y Bettws, after crossing Bwlch Cwm Llan, espied a number of little people singing and dancing, and some of the prettiest damsels he ever set eyes on preparing a feast. He went to them and partook of the meal, and thought he had never tasted anything to equal those dishes. When it became dusk they pitched their tents, and the shepherd had never seen before such beautiful things as they had about them there. They provided him with a soft feather-bed and sheets of the finest linen, and he retired, feeling like a prince. But on the morrow, lo and behold! his bed was but a bush of bulrushes, and his pillow a tuft of moss. He however found in his shoes some pieces of silver, and afterwards, for a long time he continued to find once a week a piece of silver; placed between two stones near the spot where he had lain. One day he divulged his secret to another, and the weekly coin was never placed there again.

There was another shepherd near Cwm Llan, who heard some strange noise in a crevice of a rock, and turning to see what it was, found there a singular creature who wept bitterly. He took it out and saw it to be a fairy child, but whilst he was looking at it compassionately, two middle-aged men came to him and thanked him courteously for his kindness, and on leaving him presented him with a staff as a token of remembrance of the occasion. The following year every sheep he possessed bore two ewe lambs. They continued to thus breed for years to come; but one very dark and stormy night, having stayed very late in the village, in crossing the river that comes down from Cwm Llan, there being a great flood sweeping everything before it, he dropped his staff into the river and saw it no more. On the morrow he found that nearly all his sheep and lambs, like his staff, had been swept away by the flood. His wealth had departed from him in the same way as it came-with the staff which he had received from the guardians of the fairy child.

### IV.

A Pembrokeshire Welshman told me this story as a tradition well known in that part of Wales. Lanto Llewellyn was a man who lived in the parish of Llanfihangel, not more than fifty or eighty years ago, and who had precious good reason to believe in the fairies. He used to keep his fire of coal balls burning all night long, out of pure kindness of heart, in case the Tylwyth Teg should be cold. That they came into his kitchen every night he was well aware; he often heard them. One night when they were there as usual, lanto was lying wide awake and heard them say, 'I wish we had some good bread and cheese this cold night, but the poor man has only a morsel left; and though it's true that would be a good meal for us, it is but a mouthful to him, and he might starve if we took it.' At this lanto cried out at the top of his voice, 'Take anything I've got in my cupboard and welcome to you!' Then he turned over and went to sleep. The next morning, when he descended into the kitchen, he looked in his cupboard, to see if by good luck there might be a bit of crust there. He had no sooner opened the cupboard door than he cried out, 'O'r anwyl! what's this?' for there stood the finest cheese he had ever seen in his life, with two loaves of bread on top of it 'Lwc dda i ti!' cried lanto, waving his hand toward the wood where he knew the fairies lived; 'good luck to you!



May you never be hungry or penniless!’ And he had not got the words out of his mouth when he saw--what do you think?--a shilling on the hob! But that was the lucky shilling. Every morning after this, when lanto got up, there was the shilling on the hob another one, you mind, for he’d spent the first for beer and tobacco to go with his bread and cheese. Well, after that, no man in the parish was better supplied with money than lanto Llewellyn, though he never did a stroke of work. He had enough to keep his wife in ease and comfort, too, and he got the name of Lucky lanto. And lucky he might have been to the day of his death but for the curiosity of woman. Betsi his wife was determined to know where all this money came from’ and gave the poor man no peace. ‘Wel, naw wfft!’ she cried--which means in English, ‘Nine shames on you ‘--’ to have a bad secret from your own dear wife!’ ‘But you know, Betsi, if I tell you I’ll never get any more money.’ ‘Ah,’ said she, ‘then it’s the fairies!’ ‘Drato!’ said he--and that means ‘Bother it all ‘--’ yes--the fairies it is.’ With that he thrust his hands down in his breeches pockets in a sullen manner and left the house. He had had seven shillings in his pockets up to that minute, and he went feeling for them with his fingers, and found they were gone. In place of them were some pieces of paper fit only to light his pipe. And from that day the fairies brought him no more money.

## V.

The lesson of generosity is taught with force and simplicity in the legend of Hafod Lwyddog, and the necessity for secrecy is quite abandoned. Again it is a shepherd, who dwelt at Cwm Dyli, and who went every summer to live in a cabin by the Green Lake (Llyn Glas) along with his fold. One morning on awaking from sleep he saw a good-looking damsel dressing an infant close by his side. She had very little in which to wrap the babe, so he threw her an old shirt of his own, and bade her place it about the child. She thanked him and departed. Every night thereafter the shepherd found a piece of silver placed in an old clog in his cabin. Years and years this good luck continued, and Meirig the shepherd became immensely wealthy. He married a lovely girl, and went to the Hafod Lwyddog to live. Whatever he undertook prospered--hence the name Hafod Lwyddog, for Lwydd means prosperity. The fairies paid nightly visits to the Hafod. No witch or evil sprite could harm this people, as Bendith y Mammau was poured down upon the family, and all their descendants.<sup>58</sup>

## VI.

The thought will naturally occur that by fostering belief in such tales as some of the foregoing, roguery might make the superstition useful in silencing inquiry as to ill-gotten gains. But on the other hand the virtues of hospitality and generosity were no doubt fostered by the same influences. If anyone was favoured by the fairies in this manner, the immediate explanation was, that he had done a good turn to them, generally without suspecting who they were. The virtues of neatness, in young girls and servants, were encouraged by the like notions; the belief that a fairy will leave money only on a clean-kept hob, could tend to nothing more directly. It was also made a condition of pleasing the Tylwyth Teg that the hearth should be carefully swept and the pails left full of water. Then the fairies would come at midnight, continue their revels till daybreak, sing the well-known strain of ‘Toriad y Dydd,’ or ‘The Dawn,’ leave a piece of money on the hob, and disappear. Here is seen a precaution against fire in the clean-swept hearth and the provision of filled water-pails. That the promised reward did not always arrive, was not evidence it would never arrive; and so the virtue of perseverance was also fostered.

Superstitions of this class are widely prevalent among Aryan peoples. The ‘Arabian Nights’ story of the old rogue whose money turned to leaves will be recalled. In Danish folk-lore, the

<sup>58</sup> ‘Cymru Fu,’ 472



fairy money bestowed on the boors turns sometimes to pebbles, and sometimes grows hot and burns their fingers, so that they drop it, when it sinks into the earth.



## XI. Origins Of Welsh Fairies

### I.

CONCERNING the origin of the Tylwyth Teg, there are two popular explanations, the one poetico-religious in its character, the other practical and realistic. Both are equally wide of the truth, the true origin of fairies being found in the primeval mythology; but as my purpose is to avoid enlarging in directions generally familiar to the student, I have only to present the local aspects of this, as of the other features of the subject.

The realistic theory of the origin of the Tylwyth Teg must be mentioned respectfully, because among its advocates have been men of culture and good sense. This theory presumes that the first fairies were men and women of mortal flesh and blood, and that the later superstitions are a mere echo of tales which first were told of real beings. In quasi-support of this theory, there is a well-authenticated tradition of a race of beings who, in the middle of the sixteenth century, inhabited the Wood of the Great Dark Wood (Coed y Dugod Mawr) in Merionethshire, and who were called the Red Fairies. They lived in dens in the ground, had fiery red hair and long strong arms, and stole sheep and cattle by night. There are cottages in Cemmaes parish, near the Wood of the Great Dark Wood, with scythes in the chimneys, which were put there to keep these terrible beings out. One Christmas eve a valiant knight named Baron Owen headed a company of warriors who assailed the Red Fairies, and found them flesh and blood. The Baron hung a hundred of them; but spared the women, one of whom begged hard for the life of her son. The Baron refused her prayer, whereupon she opened her breast and shrieked, 'This breast has nursed other sons than he, who will yet wash their hands in thy blood, Baron Owen!' Not very long thereafter, the Baron was waylaid at a certain spot by the sons of the 'fairy, woman, who washed their hands in his warm and reeking blood, in fulfilment of their mother's threat.. And to this day that spot goes by the name of Llidiart y Barwn (the Baron's Gate); any peasant of the neighbourhood will tell you the story, as one told it to me. There is of course no better foundation for the fairy features of it than the fancies of the ignorant mind, but the legend itself is--very nearly in this shape--historical. The beings in question were a band of outlaws, who might naturally find it to their interest to foster belief in their supernatural powers.

### II.

The so-called Pwca'r Trwyn, which haunted the farm-house in the parish of Mynyddyslwyn, is some-times cited as another case in which a fairy was probably a being of flesh and blood; and if this be true, it of course proves nothing but the adoption of an ancient superstition by a proscribed Welsh nobleman. There is a tradition that this fairy had a name, and that this name was 'yr Arglwydd Hywel,' which is in English 'Lord Howell.' And it is argued that this Lord, in a contest with the forces of the English king, was utterly worsted, and driven into hiding; that his tenants at Pantygasseg and the Trwyn Farm, loving their Lord, helped to hide him, and to disseminate the belief that he was a household fairy, or Bwbach. It is related that he generally spoke from his own room in this farm-house, in a gentle voice which came down between the boards' into the common room beneath. One day the servants were comparing their hands, as to size and whiteness, when the fairy was heard to say, 'The Pwca's hand is the fairest and smallest.' The servants asked if the fairy would show its hand, and immediately a plank overhead was moved and a hand appeared, small, fair and beautifully formed, with a large gold ring on the little finger.

### III.



Curiously interesting is the hypothesis concerning the realistic origin of the Tylwyth Teg, which was put forth at the close of the last century by several writers, among them the Rev. Peter Roberts, author of the 'Collectanea Cambrica.' This hypothesis precisely accounts for the fairies anciently as being the Druids, in hiding from their enemies, or if not they, other persons who had such cause for living concealed in subterraneous places, and venturing forth only at night. 'Some conquered aborigines,' thought Dr. Guthrie; while Mr. Roberts fancied 'that as the Irish had frequently landed hostilely in Wales, 'it was very possible that some small bodies of that nation left behind, or unable to return, and fearing discovery, had hid themselves in caverns during the day, and sent their children out at night, fantastically dressed, for food and exercise, and thus secured themselves.' But there were objections to this presumption, and the Druidical theory was the favourite one. Says Mr. Roberts: 'The fairy customs appeared evidently too systematic, and too general, to be those of an accidental party reduced to distress. They are those of a consistent and regular policy instituted to prevent discovery, and to inspire fear of their power, and a high opinion of their beneficence. Accordingly tradition notes, that to attempt to discover them was to incur certain destruction. "They are fairies," says Falstaff: "he that looks on them shall die." They were not to be impeded in ingress or egress; a bowl of milk was to be left for them at night on the hearth; and, in return, they left a small present in money when they departed, if the house was kept clean; if not, they inflicted some punishment on the negligent, which, as it was death to look on them, they were obliged to suffer, and no doubt but many unlucky tricks were played on such occasions. Their general dress was green, that they might be the better concealed; and, as their children might have betrayed their haunts, they seem to have been suffered to go out only in the night time, and to have been entertained by dances on moonlight nights. These dances, like those round the May-pole, have been said to be performed round a tree; and on an elevated spot mostly a tumulus, beneath which was probably their habitation, or its entrance. The older persons, probably, mixed as much as they dared with the world; and, if they happened to be at any time recognised, the certainty of their vengeance was their safety. If by any chance their society was thinned, they appear to have stolen children, and changed feeble for strong infants. The stolen children, if beyond infancy, being brought into their subterraneous dwellings, seem to have had a soporific given them, and to have been carried to a distant part of the country; and, being there allowed to go out merely by night, mistook the night for the day, and probably were not undeceived until it could be done securely. The regularity and generality of this system shows that there was a body of people existing in the kingdom distinct from its known inhabitants, and either confederated, or obliged to live or meet mysteriously; and their rites, particularly that of dancing round a tree, probably an oak, as Herne's, etc., as well as their character for truth and probity, refer them to a Druidic origin. If this was the case, it is easy to conceive, as indeed history shows, that, as the Druids were persecuted by the Romans and Christians, they used these means to preserve themselves and their families, and whilst the country was thinly peopled and thickly wooded, did so successfully and, perhaps, to a much later period than is imagined: till the increase of population made it impossible. As the Druidical was one of the most ancient religions, so it must have been one of the first persecuted, and forced to form a regular plan of security, which their dwelling in caves may have suggested, and necessity improved.'

#### IV.

It will be observed that one of the points in this curious speculation rests on the green dress of the fairies. I do not call attention to it with any Quixotic purpose of disputing the conclusion it assists; it is far more interesting as one feature of the general subject of fairies' attire. The Welsh fairies are described with details as to colour in costume not commonly met with in fairy tales, a fact to which I have before alluded. In the legend of the Place of Strife, the



Tylwyth Teg encountered by the women are called ‘the old elves of the blue petticoat.’ A connection with the blue of the sky has here been suggested. It has also been pointed out that the sacred Druidical dress was blue. The blue petticoat fancy seems to be local to North Wales. In Cardiganshire, the tradition respecting an encampment called Moyddin, which the fairies frequented, is that they were always in green dresses, and were never seen there but in the vernal month of May. There is a Glamorganshire goblin called the Green Lady of Caerphilly, the colour of whose dress is indicated by her title. She haunts the ruin of Caerphilly Castle at night, wearing a green robe, and has the power of turning herself into ivy and mingling with the ivy growing on the wall. A more ingenious mode of getting rid of a goblin was perhaps never invented. The fairies of Frennifawr, in Pembrokeshire, were on the contrary gorgeous in scarlet, with red caps, and feathers waving in the wind as they danced. But others were in white, and this appears to be the favourite hue of modern Welsh fairy costume, when the Tylwyth Teg are in holiday garb. These various details of colour are due to the fervour of the Welsh fancy, of course, and perhaps their variety may in part be ascribed to a keener sense of the fitness of things among moderns than was current in earlier times. White, to the Welsh, would naturally be the favourite colour for a beautiful creature, dancing in the moonlight on the velvet sward. The most popular pet name for a Welsh lass is to-day exactly what it has been for centuries, viz., Gwenny, the diminutive of Gwenllian (Anglicised into Gwendoline)--a name which means simply white linen; and the white costume of the favourite fairies undoubtedly signifies a dress of white linen. This fabric, common as it is in our day, was in ancient times of inestimable value. In the Mabinogion, linen is repeatedly particularised in the gorgeous descriptions of fabled splendour in princely castles--linen, silk, satin, velvet, gold-lace, and jewels, are the constantly-recurring features of sumptuous attire. In his account of the royal tribes of *Wales*, Yorke mentions that linen was so rare in the reign of Charles VII. of France (i.e., in the fifteenth century) ‘that her majesty the queen could boast of only two shifts of that commodity.’ The first cause of the fairies’ robes being white is evidently to be discerned here; and in Wales the ancient sentiment as to whiteness remains. The Welsh peasantry, coarsely and darkly clad themselves, would make white a purely holiday colour, and devise some other hue for such commoner fairies as the Bwbach and his sort:

The coarse and country fairy,  
That doth haunt the hearth and dairy.<sup>59</sup>

So the Bwbach is usually brown, often hairy and the Coblynau are black or copper-coloured in face as well as dress.

V.

A local legend of the origin of fairies in Anglesea mingles the practical and the spiritual in this manner: ‘In our Saviour’s time there lived a woman whose fortune it was to be possessed of nearly a score of children, . . . and as she saw our blessed Lord approach her dwelling, being ashamed of being so prolific, and that He might not see them all, she concealed about half of them closely, and after his departure, when she went in search of them, to her great surprise found they were all gone. They never afterwards could be discovered, for it was supposed that as a punishment from heaven for hiding what God had given her, she was deprived of them and it is said these her offspring have generated the race called fairies.’<sup>60</sup>

VI.

<sup>59</sup> Jonson, *Masque of ‘Oberon.’*

<sup>60</sup> ‘Camb. Sup,’ 118



The common or popular theory, however, is in Wales the poetico-religious one. This is, in a word, the belief that the Tylwyth Teg are the souls of dead mortals not bad enough for hell nor good enough for heaven. They are doomed to live on earth, to dwell in secret places, until the resurrection day, when they will be admitted into paradise. Meantime they must be either incessantly toiling or incessantly playing, but their toil is fruitless and their pleasure unsatisfying. A variation of this general belief holds these souls to be the souls of the ancient Druids, a fancy which is specially impressive, as indicating the duration of their penance, and reminds us of the Wandering Jew myth. It is confined mainly to the Coblynau, or dwellers in mines and caves. Another variation considers the fairies bad spirits of still remoter origin--the same in fact who were thrown over the battlements of heaven along with Satan, but did not fall into hell--landed on the earth instead, where they are permitted to tarry till doomsday as above. A detail of this theory is in explanation of the rare appearance of fairies nowadays; they are refraining from mischief in view of the near approach of the judgment, with the hope of thus conciliating heaven.

The Prophet Jones, in explaining why the fairies have been so active in Wales, expounds the poetico-religious theory in masterly form. After stating that some in Monmouthshire were so ignorant as to think the fairies happy spirits, because they had music and dancing among them, he proceeds to assert, in the most emphatic terms, that the Tylwyth Teg are nothing else, 'after all the talking about them,' but the disembodied spirits of men who lived and died without the enjoyment of the means of grace and salvation, as Pagans and others, and whose punishment therefore is far less severe than that of those who have enjoyed the means of salvation. But some persons may desire to know why these fairies have appeared in Wales more than in some other countries? to which I answer, that I can give no other reason but this, that having lost the light of the true religion in the eighth and ninth centuries of Christianity, and received Popery in its stead, it became dark night upon them; and then these spirits of darkness became more bold and intruding; and the people, as I said before, in their great ignorance seeing them like a company of children in dry clean places, dancing and having music among them, thought them to be some happy beings, . . . and made them welcome in their houses. . . The Welsh entered into familiarity with the fairies in the time of Henry IV., and the evil then increased; the severe laws of that prince enjoining, among other things, that they were not to bring up their children to learning, etc., by which a total darkness came upon them; which cruel laws were occasioned by the rebellion of Owen Glandwr, and the Welsh which joined with him; foolishly thinking to shake off the Saxon yoke before they had repented of their sins.'

Whatever their locally accepted causes of being may be, it is beyond any question that in the fairy folk-lore of Wales, as of other lands, are to be found the *debris* of ancient mythology--scintillant fragments of those magic constellations which glow in the darkness of primeval time, grand and majestic as the vast Unknown out of which they were evolved by barbaric fancy. Through the aid of modern scientific research, 'those ages which the myths of centuries have peopled with heroic shadows'<sup>61</sup> are brought nearer to us, and the humble Welsh Tylwyth Teg may reach back and shake hands with the Olympian gods.

THE END

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**I'm Julie, and I run [Global Grey](#) - the website where this ebook was published. These are my own formatted editions, and I hope you enjoyed reading this particular one.**

<sup>61</sup> Marquis of Bute, address before the Royal Archaeological Institute, Cardiff meeting.



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