



FOLK TALES OF BRITTANY

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gold, but he knew still richer treasure was to be had and he hastened onward as the seventh stroke of midnight pealed.

The third room that Périk entered was full of baskets where pearls streamed like milk in the stone jars at the beginning of Spring. He longed to cram his pockets, but dashed on his way as the eighth stroke tolled.

The fourth room was lighted by coffers full of diamonds, throwing out more glory than the bonfires of dry gorse on the hillsides at Saint John's Eve. Skearn was dazzled. He paused an instant, then ran to the last room as he heard the ninth stroke ring. There he drew up suddenly, breathless with admiration. In front of the hazel scepter, hanging in a halo of light, were standing a hundred maidens, each lovely enough to melt a hundred hearts.

Each beckoned to Skearn with one fair hand whilst with the other offered a goblet that flashed as though with magic fire. Skearn, who had resisted the silver, gold, the pearls and diamonds, now stood spellbound. His heart pounded against his ribs. His gaze was fixed upon the wondrous beauty of the maidens.

The tenth stroke of midnight pealed. Skearn heard it not. The eleventh rang out and he still was motionless. And now the twelfth stroke tolled, as ominous as the gunshot of some ill-fated ship lost upon the rocks.

Périk, terrified, turned at last to flee, but it was too late. The mountain's jaws had closed once more; the hundred maidens had turned into a hundred statues of granite, and all was swallowed up in darkness.

That is how our forefathers told the story of Périk Skearn. Now you know the fate of that deluded lad who opened his heart too readily to avarice and temptation. It is wiser to be content with the blessings that good Heaven grants than to turn one's longings to unbridled dreams of treasure.
