

FAIRY LEGENDS FROM THE ISLE OF MAN (5)

THE TAILOR AND THE FAIRY CHANGLING

ROEDER (1892)

1 An old man was coming here often, and my daughter would be giving him a penny to tell her some fairy tale, and he come in one day and told her about a young woman who went to be churched. She left her baby in the cradle, and a tailor sitting by, and when she was gone the tailor goes to the baby and asks it to come and dance and he would play a tune, and the baby got up on the cradle and commenced dancing till the tailor went off fiddling away with the baby. When the woman came back she looked in the cradle for the child and could not find it nowhere, so it became a fairy child—that's what they were saying.

Karl Roeder, "Manx Folk-Lore, 1882 to 1885," *Yn Lioar Manninagh* i.xi (1892): 235.

ROPER (1894)

2 In the vicinity of South Burrule there lived a tailor who was very clever, and alas! very lazy. He could fiddle splendidly, and play any tune you wished for. He was fiddling away one day for coppers when he came to a house where there was a young child lying in the cradle, crying. It had a big nose, large front teeth, and features generally that gave it a somewhat repulsive look. As soon as he played a certain tune the child laughed. "Mercy!" said its mother; "that's the first time it's laughed since it was born." The tailor asked her to go out of the room while he played another tune. When they were alone he gave the fiddle to the child, who got out of the cradle on to the table, and played most wonderfully. When at last the tailor said "Here she comes," the child got back into the cradle and began to cry again. This fiddling tailor one day called at a farm, the inmates of which said they were poor and couldn't give him anything; but he said, "You've got such and such things in the cupboard," and so they had. It was said that he played with the fairy musicians at night, knew their tales and secrets, and, therefore, could always get whatever he wished for.

Charles Roper, *Where the Birds Sing: A Selection of Rustic Sketches and Idylls of Common Life* (Manchester: John Heywood, 1894) 197–98.

ROEDER (1902)

3 There was a travelling tailor once serving in a house in the north of the Island, and the farmer's wife had a fairy child crying and yelling in the cradle. Her own child had been exchanged. And the tailor was a great fiddler and always took his fiddle

with him, and was playing it when not sewing at meal times. The farmer's wife went out to milk the cows in the morning, and when the tailor was left along with the child, he took the fiddle, and began to play some new tune he had been practising when, to his surprise, the baby leapt out of the cradle, and began to dance, and jump like a mad thing, but when he heard the footsteps of the farmer's wife, he got into the cradle again, and was crying as usual. The tailor said nothing about it for some days, but whenever the house was clear he took the fiddle, and began to play, and the baby was on the floor in a moment dancing like a juggler, but when the tailor had nearly finished his work, he told the farmer's wife about it, and that the child was a fairy. Then they made a great fire, and were intending to put it in the fire, but when the fire was ready he was gone, and their own baby was sleeping in the cradle.

Karl Roeder, "Manx Notes and Queries: Nos 132-140," *Isle of Man Examiner* 26 July 1902, 6a, see Note 132.

MORRISON (1910)

4 There was one time a woman named Colloo in Close-ny-Lhey, near Glen Meay, and she had a child that had fallen sick in a strange way. Nothing seemed wrong with him, yet crosser and crosser he grew, nying-nyanging night and day. The woman was in great distress. Charms had failed, and she didn't know rightly what to do.

It seems that, about a fortnight after birth, the child, as fine a child for his age as you would see in a day's walk, was left asleep while the mother went to the well for water. Now Herself forgot to put the tongs on the cradle, and, when she came back, the child was crying pitiful, and no quatin' for him. And from that very hour the flesh seemed to melt off his bones, till he became as ugly and as wizened a child as you would see between the Point of Ayre and the Calf. He was that way, his whining howl filling the house, for four years, lying in the cradle without a motion on him to put his feet under him. Not a day's res' nor a night's sleep was there at the woman these four years with him. She was fair scourged with him, until there came a fine day in the spring that Hom beg Bridson, the tailor, was in the house sewing. Hom is dead now, but there's many alive as remember him. He was wise tremenjus, for he was going from house to house sewing, and gathering wisdom as he was going.

Well, before that day the tailor was seeing lots of wickedness at the child. When the woman would be out feeding the pigs and sarvin' the craythurs, he would be hoisting his head up out of the cradle and making faces at the tailor, winking, and slicking, and shaking his head, and saying "What a lad I am!"

That day the woman wanted to go to the shop in Glen Meay to sell some eggs that she had, and says she to the tailor: "Hom man, keep your eye on the chile that the bogh [poor dear] won't fall out of the cradle and hurt himself while I slip down to

the shop." When she was gone the tailor began to whistle aisy to himself, as he stitched, the tune on a lil hymn.

"Drop that, Hom beg," said a lil harsh voice.

The tailor, scandalised, looked round to see if it was the child that had spoken, and it was.

"Whush, whush, now, lie quate," says the tailor, rocking the cradle with his foot, and as he rocked he whistled the hymn tune louder.

"Drop that, Hom beg, I tell ye, an' give us something light an' handy," says the lil fella back to him, middling sharp.

"Aw, anything at all to plaze thee," says the tailor, whistling a jig.

"Hom," says my lad, "can thou dance anything to that?"

"I can," says the tailor, "can thou?"

"I can that," says my lad, "would thou like to see me dance?"

"I would," says the tailor.

"Take that oul' fiddle down then, Hom man," he said, "and put 'Tune y wheeyl vooar' [Tune of the big wheel] on it."

"Aw, I'll do that for thee, an' welcome," says the tailor.

The fiddle quits its hook on the wall, and the tailor tunes up.

"Hom," says the lil fella, "before thou begin to play, clear the kitchen for me,—cheers an' stools, everything away. Make a place for me to step out to the music, man."

"Aw, I'll do that for thee, too," says the tailor.

He cleared the kitchen floor, and then he struck up "Tune y wheeyl vooar."

In a crack the lil fella bounced from his cradle on to the floor with a "Chu!" and began flying round the kitchen. "Go it Hom,—face your partner,—heel and toe does it. Well done, Hom,—jog your elbow, man."

Hom plays faster and faster, till me lad was jumping as high as the table.

With a "Chu!" up goes his foot on top of the dresser, and "Chu!" then on top of the chimlee piece, and "Chu!" bang against the partition, then he was half flying, half footing it round the kitchen, turning and going round that quick that it put a reel in Hom's head to be looking at him. Then he was whirling everything round for a clear spade, even Hom himself, who by degrees gets up on the table in the corner and plays wilder and wilder, as the whirling jig grew madder and madder.

"M' Yee!" says the tailor, throwing down the fiddle, "I mus' run, thou're not the chile that was in the cradle. Are thou?"

"Houl' man! thou're right enough," says the lil fella. "Strike up for me, make has'e, make has'e, man,—more power to your elbow."

"Whush!" said the tailor, "here's Herself coming."

The dancing ceased. The child gave a hop, skip, and jump into the cradle.

“Get on with thee sewing, Horn; don’t say a word,” says the lil fella, covering himself up in the clothes till nothing was left of him to be seen except his eyes which keeked out like a ferret’s.

When Herself came in the house, the tailor, all of a tremble, was sitting cross-legged on the round table and his specs on his nose and letting on that he was busy sewing; the child in the cradle was shouting and sweeling [squealing] as usual. “What in all the earthly wor’...! But it’s the quare stitching, altogether, there’s been goin’ on here, an’ me out. An’ how thou can see thee needle in that dark corner, Hom Bridson, let alone sew, it beats me,” says she, siding the place. “Well, well, then, well, well, on the *boghee veg* (poor little thing). What is it at all, at all, that’s doin’ on the *millish* (sweet)? Did he think Mammy had gone an’ lef’ him then, the *chree* (heart)? Mammy is goin’ to feed him, though.”

The tailor had been thinking mighty with himself what he ought to do, so he says,—“Look here, woman, give him nothing at all, but go out and get a creelful of good turf.”

She brought in the turf, and throws a big *bart* (bundle) of fern on it. The tailor give a leap off the table down to the floor, and it wasn’t long till he had the fine fire.

“Thou’ll have the house put on fire for me, Hom,” says Herself.

“No fear, but I’ll fire some of them,” says the tailor.

The child, with his two eyes going out of his head watching to see what the tailor would do then, was slowly turning his whining howl into a kind of call,—to his own sort to come and fetch him, as like.

“I’ll send thee home,” says the tailor, drawing near the cradle, and he stretches out his two hands to take the child and put him on the big red turf fire. Before he was able to lay a hand on him, the lil fella leaped out of the cradle and took for the door. “The back of me han’ an the sole of me fut to you!” says he, “if I would only ha’ had only another night I could have showed thee a trick or two more than that yet.”

Then the door flew open with a bang, as though some one had thrown it open, and he took off with himself like a shot. A hullabaloo of laughing and making fun was heard outside, and the noise of many running little feet. Out on the door of the house goes Herself, she saw no one, but she caught sight of a flock of low-lying clouds shaped like gulls chasing each other away up Glen Rushen, and then comes to her ears, as if afar off from the clouds, sharp whistles and wicked little laughs as if making mock of her. Then, as she was turning round and searching, she suddenly sees her own sweet rosy smiling child with thumb in mouth lying on the *bink* [stone bench] right before her. And she took all the joy in the worl’ of the child that he was home again safe and sound.

Sophia Morrison, “The Fairy Child and The Tailor: An Isle of Man Folk-Tale,” *Folk-Lore* xxi.4 (1910) 472–75.

CASHEN (1911)

5 A family at Dalby had a poor idiot baby, and when it was twenty years old it still sat by the fire just like a child. A tailor came to the house to work on a day when all the folks were out cutting corn, and the idiot was left with him. The tailor began to whistle as he sat on the table sewing, and the little idiot sitting by the fire said to him: "If you'll not tell anybody when they come in, I'll dance that tune for you." So the little fellow began to dance, and he could step it out splendidly. Then he said to the tailor: "If you'll not tell anybody when they come in, I'll play the fiddle for you." And the tailor and the idiot spent a very enjoyable afternoon together. But before the family came in from the fields, the poor idiot, as usual, was sitting in a chair by the fire, a big baby who couldn't hardly talk. When the mother came in she happened to say to the tailor, "You've a fine chap here," referring to the idiot. "Yes, indeed," said the tailor, "we've had a very fine afternoon together; but I think we had better make a good fire and put him on it." "Oh!" cried the mother, "the poor child could never even walk." "Ah, but he can dance and play the fiddle, too," replied the tailor. And the fire was made; but when the idiot saw that they were for putting him on it he pulled from his pocket a ball, and this ball went rolling on ahead of him, and he, going after it, was never seen again. After this strange story was finished I asked Mrs Moore where she had heard it, and she said: "I have heard this story ever since I was a girl. I knew the house and family, and so did my mother. The family's name was Cubbon."

W.Y. Evans Wentz, *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1911) 128.

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