

Manx Notes 379 (2019)

FAIRY LEGENDS FROM THE ISLE OF MAN

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We prefer giving these stories as they were told to us, and without exaggeration, in order that our readers may obtain a just insight into the actual workings of this curious phase of credulity.

Henry Irwin Jenkinson, *Jenkinson's Practical Guide to the Isle of Man* (London: Edward Stanford, 1874).

MEETING THE FAIRIES AT NIGHT

Hearing that an old man residing at a farm some distance farther up the valley, near Injebreck, had seen the fairies with his own eyes, we went in search of him, and found the old gentleman in a field close to his house. He was hale and hearty, and soon showed that he was one who believed implicitly in the existence of fairies. He said that when a lad, he and a companion were travelling one fine moonlight night in the East Baldwin valley, and hearing something in a gill they stopped, and on looking up saw little creatures like small dogs, with red caps, running about. On asking him if he and his companion both saw the same sight, and if they were not afraid, he replied that the other youth, who is now dead, saw exactly the same, and they were not terrified, knowing that if the fairies were not disturbed, they would not hurt them.

THE FAIRY BRIDGE AT BALLALONA

The small stream is now crossed which enters the sea in the Greenwick bay, and presently the road runs over the railway, and crosses the river Santon Burn at the Ballalona, or Fairy Bridge, a spot where tradition has rendered sacred to the revels of the fairy elves, those tiny mischievous people who play so important a part in the domestic life of the Manxman.

THE FAIRIES ALSO KNOWN AS THE "GOOD PEOPLE"

There are still living hundreds of persons on the island who firmly believe that they have been the "good people," but the superstition is fast dying out and succumbing to the ridicule and scepticism of the rising generation. Now the railways are being made, and the land is being overrun every summer by tourists, the last haunts of the fairies will be invaded, and those interesting little folks will have to betake themselves to some more congenial sphere.

LEAVING CLEAN WATER AND FOOD OUT FOR THE FAIRIES AT NIGHT (1)

A very respectable farmer's wife told us that she was a girl her mother and family seldom retired to rest without first seeing that water was in the house, in the crock, ready for the fairies, and a thin cake broken and spread on the table for them. One night her mother could not sleep, being disturbed by disagreeable noises; but remembering she had forgotten to leave the cake, she went down stairs and threw it on the table, saying at the same time, "There, eat that;" and when she returned to bed she fell asleep in the happy consciousness that her nocturnal visitors were then satisfied.

THE APPEARANCE OF THE FAIRIES

She always maintained she had once actually seen the fairies, and described them as young girls, with scaly, fish-like hands and blue dresses.

LEAVING CLEAN WATER AND FOOD OUT FOR THE FAIRIES AT NIGHT (2)

The custom here described of leaving water and bread for the fairies, was common over the whole of the hilly part of the island until within the last few years.

THE FAIRY HILL AT CRONK MOOAR

A mound in the fields on the right hand is called Cronk Mooar, and sometimes Fairy Hill, as being traditionally the favourite resort of those elfin people—the natives supposing that the interior of the hill was formerly the palace of the fairy king.

THE FAIRY WELL AT THE CROGGA

The line now runs through the Crogga glen, a narrow and prettily-wooded glen, in which, on the right hand, about 20 yards distant, is the Fairy Well, much frequented by the natives in former times. This was a favourite haunt of the fairies, but as they love quiet and seclusion we suppose they will have been disturbed by the late desecration, and have had to remove to some more favoured nook.

THE FAIRIES AND FOOD

The fairies often come into the neighbourhood; and late one night, when two brothers were returning home, they saw through the window the unwelcome visitors in the kitchen eating the crowdy which had been left for their suppers. When the fairies had eaten the whole they spat on the empty plates, and instantly the suppers reappeared. One young man afterwards ate his meal, but the other objected; the consequence was, the former took no harm, but the latter died next day.

THE FAIRIES ATTEMPT TO ABDUCT A NEW BORN CHILD

Another person, a fisherman, who maintained that he had only a slight belief in the existence of ghosts and fairies, told us that his mother, who was a very pious person, and would on no account tell an untruth, was accustomed to relate that when a young woman, she went to sleep with an aunt, who had recently been confined, and whose husband was absent at sea. During the night she was lying awake, and saw something like the form of a human being enter the room. Her aunt immediately became uneasy, and exclaimed, "The Lord bless us," and then awoke, and said that something had wanted to tear the child out of her arms.

THE FAIRIES DRIVEN AWAY FROM GLEN DRINK

[105] On the right hand, close below, is the Agnaish stream, and near to a building connected with the mine a small glen is observed, called Glen Drink, which the inhabitants say was formerly a favourite resort of the fairies. About fifty years [106] a Primitive Methodist minister began to hold a service every other Sunday in a private house in the glen, and at this the fairies, not admiring Dissent, appear to have taken umbrage, for they then departed, and have not since revisited the neighbourhood.

THE FAIRIES TAKE THEIR LEAVE

We suppose their flitting would resemble that made by a troop of the little folk in another part of the island, and which is thus described:

"Early one spring morning, being employed in household duties, there came floating on the air a low murmuring wailing noise. When going to the door to see what occasioned it, behold there were multitudes of the good people passing over the stepping stones in the river, and wending their way up the side of the hill until they were lost in the mist that then enveloped the top of the mountain. They were dressed chiefly in Loaghtyn, with little pointed red caps, and most of them were employed in bearing on their shoulders articles of domestic use, such as kettles, pots, pans, the spinning-wheel, and such like, evidently having ben disturbed, and seeking fresh and more quiet quarters."

STEPHEN MILLER, 2019

