MORE CELTIC FAIRY TALES

Illustrated

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Various

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MORE CELTIC
FAIRY TALES

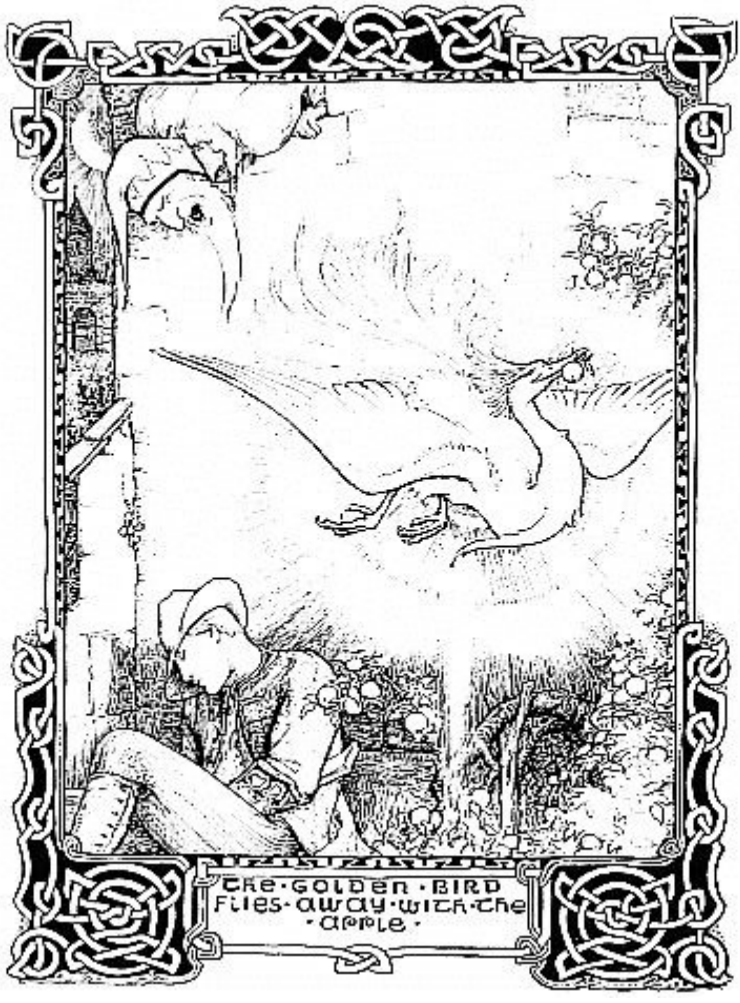
SAY THIS

Three times, with your eyes shut

Moṫuiġim bolaḋ an Éireannaiġ ḃinn ḃreugaiġ
faoi m'ḟóidín dúṫaiġ

And you will see

What you will see



To
THE MANY UNKNOWN
LITTLE FRIENDS
I HAVE MADE
BY THE FORMER BOOKS
OF THIS SERIES

PREFACE

or the last time, for the present, I give the children of the British Isles a selection of Fairy Tales once or still existing among them. The story store of Great Britain and Ireland is, I hope, now adequately represented in the four volumes which have won me so many little friends, and of which this is the last.

My collections have dealt with the two folk-lore regions of these Isles on different scales. The "English" region, including Lowland Scotland and running up to the Highland line, is, I fancy, as fully represented in "English" and "More English Fairy Tales" as it is ever likely to be. But the Celtic district, including the whole of Ireland and the Gaelic-speaking part of Scotland, still offers a rich harvest to the collector, and will not be exhausted for many a long day. The materials already collected are far richer than those which the "English" region afford, and it has accordingly been my aim in the two volumes devoted to the Celts, rather to offer specimens of the crop than to exhaust the field.

In the present volume I have proceeded on much the same lines as those which I laid down for myself in compiling its predecessor. In making my selection I have attempted to select the tales common both to Erin and Alba. I have included, as specimen of the Irish mediæval hero tales, one of the three sorrowful tales of Erin: "The Tale of the Children

of Lir." For the "drolls" or "comic relief" of the volume, I have again drawn upon the inexhaustible Kennedy, while the great J. F. Campbell still stands out as the most prominent figure in the history of the Celtic Fairy Tale.

In my method of telling I have continued the practice which I adopted in the previous volume: where I considered the language too complicated for children, I have simplified; where an incident from another parallel version seemed to add force to the narrative I have inserted it; and in each case mentioned the fact in the corresponding notes. As former statements of mine on this point have somewhat misled my folk-lore friends, I should, perhaps, add that the alterations on this score have been much slighter than they have seemed, and have not affected anything of value to the science of folk-lore.

I fear I am somewhat of a heretic with regard to the evidential value of folk-tales regarded as *capita mortua* of anthropology. The ready transit of a folk-tale from one district to another of the same linguistic area, robs it to my mind of any anthropological or ethnographical value; but on this high topic I have discoursed elsewhere.

This book, like the others of this series, has only been rendered possible by the courtesy and complaisance of the various collectors from whom I have culled my treasures. In particular, I have to thank Mr. Larminie and Mr. Eliot Stock for permission to include that fine tale "Morraha" from the former's "West Irish Folk-tales," the chief addition to the Celtic store since the appearance of my last volume. I have again to thank Dr. Hyde for permission to use another tale from his delightful collection. Mr. Curtin has been good enough to place at my disposal another of the tales collected by him in Connaught, and my colleague, Mr. Duncan, has

translated for me a droll from the Erse. Above all, I have to thank Mr. Alfred Nutt for constant supervision over my selection and over my comments upon it. Mr. Nutt, by his own researches, and by the encouragement and aid he has given to the researches of others on Celtic folk-lore, has done much to replace the otherwise irreparable loss of Campbell.

With this volume I part, at any rate for a time, from the pleasant task which has engaged my attention for the last four years. For the "English" folk-lore district I have attempted to do what the brothers Grimm did for Germany, so far as that was possible at this late day. But for the Celtic area I can claim no such high function; here the materials are so rich that it would tax the resources of a whole clan of Grimms to exhaust the field, and those Celtic Grimms must be Celts themselves, or at any rate fully familiar with the Gaelic. Here then is a task for the newly revived local patriotism of Ireland and the Highlands. I have done little more than spy the land, and bring back some specimen bunches from the Celtic vine. It must be for others, Celts themselves, to enter in and possess the promised land.

JOSEPH JACOBS.

THE FATE OF THE CHILDREN OF LIR



It happened that the five Kings of Ireland met to determine who should have the head kingship over them, and King Lir of the Hill of the White Field expected surely he would be elected. When the nobles went into council together they chose for head king, Dearg, son of Daghda, because his father had been so great a Druid and he was the eldest of his father's sons. But Lir left the Assembly of the Kings and went home to the Hill of the White Field.

The other kings would have followed after Lir to give him wounds of spear and wounds of sword for not yielding obedience to the man to whom they had given the over-lordship. But Dearg the king would not hear of it and said: "Rather let us bind him to us by the bonds of kinship, so that peace may dwell in the land. Send over to him for wife the choice of the three maidens of the fairest form and best repute in Erin, the three daughters of Oilell of Aran, my own three bosom-nurslings."

So the messengers brought word to Lir that Dearg the king would give him a foster-child of his foster-children. Lir thought well of it, and set out next day with fifty chariots from the Hill of the White Field. And he came to the Lake of the Red Eye near Killaloe. And when Lir saw the three daughters of Oilell, Dearg the king said to him: "Take thy choice of the maidens, Lir." "I know not," said Lir, "which is the choicest of them all; but the eldest of them is the noblest, it is she I had best take." "If so," said Dearg the king, "Ove is the eldest, and she shall be given to thee, if thou willest." So Lir and Ove were married and went back to the Hill of the White Field.

And after this there came to them twins, a son and a daughter, and they gave them for names Fingula and Aod. And two more sons came to them, Fiachra and Conn. When they came Ove died, and Lir mourned bitterly for her, and but for his great love for his children he would have died of his grief. And Dearg the king grieved for Lir and sent to him and said: "We grieve for Ove for thy sake; but, that our friendship may not be rent asunder, I will give unto thee her sister, Oifa, for a wife." So Lir agreed, and they were united, and he took her with him to his own house. And at first Oifa felt affection and honour for the children of Lir and her sister, and indeed

every one who saw the four children could not help giving them the love of his soul. Lir doted upon the children, and they always slept in beds in front of their father, who used to rise at early dawn every morning and lie down among his children. But thereupon the dart of jealousy passed into Oifa on account of this and she came to regard the children with hatred and enmity. One day her chariot was yoked for her and she took with her the four children of Lir in it. Fingula was not willing to go with her on the journey, for she had dreamed a dream in the night warning her against Oifa: but she was not to avoid her fate. And when the chariot came to the Lake of the Oaks, Oifa said to the people: "Kill the four children of Lir and I will give you your own reward of every kind in the world." But they refused and told her it was an evil thought she had. Then she would have raised a sword herself to kill and destroy the children, but her own womanhood and her weakness prevented her; so she drove the children of Lir into the lake to bathe, and they did as Oifa told them. As soon as they were upon the lake she struck them with a Druid's wand of spells and wizardry and put them into the forms of four beautiful, perfectly white swans, and she sang this song over them:

"Out with you upon the wild waves, children of the king!
Henceforth your cries shall be with the flocks of birds."

And Fingula answered:

"Thou witch! we know thee by thy right name!
Thou mayest drive us from wave to wave,
But sometimes we shall rest on the headlands;
We shall receive relief, but thou punishment.
Though our bodies may be upon the lake,

Our minds at least shall fly homewards."

And again she spoke: "Assign an end for the ruin and woe which thou hast brought upon us."

Oifa laughed and said: "Never shall ye be free until the woman from the south be united to the man from the north, until Lairgnen of Connaught wed Deoch of Munster; nor shall any have power to bring you out of these forms. Nine hundred years shall you wander over the lakes and streams of Erin. This only I will grant unto you: that you retain your own speech, and there shall be no music in the world equal to yours, the plaintive music you shall sing." This she said because repentance seized her for the evil she had done.

And then she spake this lay:

"Away from me, ye children of Lir,
Henceforth the sport of the wild winds
Until Lairgnen and Deoch come together,
Until ye are on the north-west of Red Erin.

"A sword of treachery is through the heart of Lir,
Of Lir the mighty champion,
Yet though I have driven a sword.
My victory cuts me to the heart."

Then she turned her steeds and went on to the Hall of Dearg the king. The nobles of the court asked her where were the children of Lir, and Oifa said: "Lir will not trust them to Dearg the king." But Dearg thought in his own mind that the woman had played some treachery upon them, and he accordingly sent messengers to the Hall of the White Field.

Lir asked the messengers: "Wherefore are ye come?"

"To fetch thy children, Lir," said they.

"Have they not reached you with Oifa?" said Lir.



CHILDREN OF LIR

"They have not," said the messengers; "and Oifa said it was you would not let the children go with her."

Then was Lir melancholy and sad at heart, hearing these things, for he knew that Oifa had done wrong upon his children, and he set out towards the Lake of the Red Eye. And when the children of Lir saw him coming Fingula sang the lay:

"Welcome the cavalcade of steeds
Approaching the Lake of the Red Eye,
A company dread and magical
Surely seek after us.

"Let us move to the shore, O Aod,
Fiachra and comely Conn,
No host under heaven can those horsemen be
But King Lir with his mighty household."

Now as she said this King Lir had come to the shores of the lake and heard the swans speaking with human voices. And he spake to the swans and asked them who they were. Fingula answered and said: "We are thy own children, ruined by thy wife, sister of our own mother, through her ill mind and her jealousy." "For how long is the spell to be upon you?" said Lir. "None can relieve us till the woman from the south and the man from the north come together, till Lairgnen of Connaught wed Deoch of Munster."

Then Lir and his people raised their shouts of grief, crying, and lamentation, and they stayed by the shore of the lake listening to the wild music of the swans until the swans flew away, and King Lir went on to the Hall of Dearg the king. He told Dearg the king what Oifa had done to his children. And Dearg put his power upon Oifa and bade her say what shape on earth she would think the worst of all. She said it would

be in the form of an air-demon. "It is into that form I shall put you," said Dearg the king, and he struck her with a Druid's wand of spells and wizardry and put her into the form of an air-demon. And she flew away at once, and she is still an air-demon, and shall be so for ever.

But the children of Lir continued to delight the Milesian clans with the very sweet fairy music of their songs, so that no delight was ever heard in Erin to compare with their music until the time came appointed for the leaving the Lake of the Red Eye.

Then Fingula sang this parting lay:

"Farewell to thee, Dearg the king,
Master of all Druid's lore!
Farewell to thee, our father dear,
Lir of the Hill of the White Field!

"We go to pass the appointed time
Away and apart from the haunts of men
In the current of the Moyle,
Our garb shall be bitter and briny,

"Until Deoch come to Lairgnen.
So come, ye brothers of once ruddy cheeks;
Let us depart from this Lake of the Red Eye,
Let us separate in sorrow from the tribe that has loved us."

And after they took to flight, flying highly, lightly, aerially till they reached the Moyle, between Erin and Albain.

The men of Erin were grieved at their leaving, and it was proclaimed throughout Erin that henceforth no swan should be killed. Then they stayed all solitary, all alone, filled with cold and grief and regret, until a thick tempest came upon them and Fingula said: "Brothers, let us appoint a place to meet again if the power of the winds separate us." And they said: "Let us appoint to meet, O sister, at the Rock of the Seals." Then the waves rose up and the thunder roared, the lightnings flashed, the sweeping tempest passed over the sea, so that the children of Lir were scattered from each other over the great sea. There came, however, a placid calm after the great tempest and Fingula found herself alone, and she said this lay:

"Woe upon me that I am alive!
My wings are frozen to my sides.
O beloved three, O beloved three,
Who hid under the shelter of my feathers,
Until the dead come back to the living
I and the three shall never meet again!"

And she flew to the Lake of the Seals and soon saw Conn coming towards her with heavy step and drenched feathers, and Fiachra also, cold and wet and faint, and no word could they tell, so cold and faint were they: but she nestled them under her wings and said: "If Aod could come to us now our happiness would be complete." But soon they saw Aod coming towards them with dry head and preened feathers: Fingula put him under the feathers of her breast, and Fiachra under her right wing, and Conn under her left: and they made this lay:

"Bad was our stepmother with us,
She played her magic on us,

Sending us north on the sea
In the shapes of magical swans.

"Our bath upon the shore's ridge
Is the foam of the brine-crested tide,
Our share of the ale feast
Is the brine of the blue-crested sea."

One day they saw a splendid cavalcade of pure white steeds coming towards them, and when they came near they were the two sons of Dearg the king who had been seeking for them to give them news of Dearg the king and Lir their father. "They are well," they said, "and live together happy in all except that ye are not with them, and for not knowing where ye have gone since the day ye left the Lake of the Red Eye." "Happy are not we," said Fingula, and she sang this song:

"Happy this night the household of Lir,
Abundant their meat and their wine.
But the children of Lir—what is their lot?
For bed-clothes we have our feathers,
And as for our food and our wine—
The white sand and the bitter brine,
Fiachra's bed and Conn's place
Under the cover of my wings on the Moyle,
Aod has the shelter of my breast,
And so side by side we rest."

So the sons of Dearg the king came to the Hall of Lir and told the king the condition of his children.

Then the time came for the children of Lir to fulfil their lot, and they flew in the current of the Moyle to the Bay of Erris, and remained there till the time of their fate, and then they flew to the Hill of the White Field and found all desolate and empty, with nothing but unroofed green raths and forests of nettles—no house, no fire, no dwelling-place. The four came close together, and they raised three shouts of lamentation aloud, and Fingula sang this lay:

"Uchone! it is bitterness to my heart
To see my father's place forlorn—
No hounds, no packs of dogs,
No women, and no valiant kings.

"No drinking-horns, no cups of wood,
No drinking in its lightsome halls.
Uchone! I see the state of this house
That its lord our father lives no more.

"Much have we suffered in our wandering years,
By winds buffeted, by cold frozen;
Now has come the greatest of our pain—
There lives no man who knoweth us in the house
where we were born."

So the children of Lir flew away to the Glory Isle of Brandan the saint, and they settled upon the Lake of the Birds until the holy Patrick came to Erin and the holy Mac Howg came to Glory Isle.

And the first night he came to the island the children of Lir heard the voice of his bell ringing for matins, so that they started and leaped about in terror at hearing it; and her brothers left Fingula alone. "What is it, beloved brothers?" said she. "We know not what faint, fearful voice it is we have heard." Then Fingula recited this lay:

"Listen to the Cleric's bell,
Poise your wings and raise
Thanks to God for his coming,
Be grateful that you hear him.

"He shall free you from pain,
And bring you from the rocks and stones.
Ye comely children of Lir
Listen to the bell of the Cleric."

And Mac Howg came down to the brink of the shore and said to them: "Are ye the children of Lir?" "We are indeed," said they. "Thanks be to God!" said the saint; "it is for your sakes I have come to this Isle beyond every other island in Erin. Come ye to land now and put your trust in me." So they came to land, and he made for them chains of bright white silver, and put a chain between Aod and Fingula and a chain between Conn and Fiachra.

It happened at this time that Lairgnen was prince of Connaught and he was to wed Deoch the daughter of the king of Munster. She had heard the account of the birds and she became filled with love and affection for them, and she said she would not wed till she had the wondrous birds of Glory Isle. Lairgnen sent for them to the Saint Mac Howg. But the Saint would not give them, and both Lairgnen and Deoch

went to Glory Isle. And Lairgnen went to seize the birds from the altar: but as soon as he had laid hands on them their feathery coats fell off, and the three sons of Lir became three withered bony old men, and Fingula, a lean withered old woman without blood or flesh. Lairgnen started at this and left the place hastily, but Fingula chanted this lay:

"Come and baptise us, O Cleric,
Clear away our stains!
This day I see our grave—
Fiachra and Conn on each side,
And in my lap, between my two arms,
Place Aod, my beauteous brother."

After this lay, the children of Lir were baptised. And they died, and were buried as Fingula had said, Fiachra and Conn on either side, and Aod before her face. A cairn was raised for them, and on it their names were written in runes. And that is the fate of the children of Lir.

JACK THE CUNNING THIEF



here was a poor farmer who had three sons, and on the same day the three boys went to seek their fortune. The eldest two were sensible, industrious young men; the youngest never did much at home that was any use. He loved to be setting snares for rabbits, and tracing hares in the snow, and inventing all sorts of funny tricks to annoy people at first and then set them laughing.

The three parted at cross-roads, and Jack took the lonesomest. The day turned out rainy, and he was wet and weary, you may depend, at nightfall, when he came to a lonesome house a little off the road.

"What do you want?" said a blear-eyed old woman, that was sitting at the fire.

"My supper and a bed to be sure," said he.

"You can't get it," said she.

"What's to hinder me?" said he.

"The owners of the house is," said she, "six honest men that does be out mostly till three or four o'clock in the morning, and if they find you here they'll skin you alive at the very least."

"Well, I think," said Jack, "that their very most couldn't be much worse. Come, give me something out of the cupboard,

for here I'll stay. Skinning is not much worse than catching your death of cold in a ditch or under a tree such a night as this."

Begonins she got afraid, and gave him a good supper; and when he was going to bed he said if she let any of the six honest men disturb him when they came home she'd sup sorrow for it. When he awoke in the morning, there were six ugly-looking spalpeens standing round his bed. He leaned on his elbow, and looked at them with great contempt.

"Who are you," said the chief, "and what's your business?"

"My name," says he, "is Master Thief, and my business just now is to find apprentices and workmen. If I find you any good, maybe I'll give you a few lessons."

Bedad they were a little cowed, and says the head man, "Well, get up, and after breakfast, we'll see who is to be the master, and who the journeyman."

They were just done breakfast, when what should they see but a farmer driving a fine large goat to market. "Will any of you," says Jack, "undertake to steal that goat from the owner before he gets out of the wood, and that without the smallest violence?"

"I couldn't do it," says one; and "I couldn't do it," says another.

"I'm your master," says Jack, "and I'll do it."

He slipped out, went through the trees to where there was a bend in the road, and laid down his right brogue in the very middle of it. Then he ran on to another bend, and laid down his left brogue and went and hid himself.

When the farmer sees the first brogue, he says to himself, "That would be worth something if it had the fellow, but it is worth nothing by itself."

He goes on till he comes to the second brogue.

"What a fool I was," says he, "not to pick up the other! I'll go back for it."

So he tied the goat to a sapling in the hedge, and returned for the brogue. But Jack, who was behind a tree had it already on his foot, and when the man was beyond the bend he picked up the other and loosened the goat, and led him off through the wood.

Ochone! the poor man couldn't find the first brogue, and when he came back he couldn't find the second, nor neither his goat.

"*Mile mollacht*!" says he, "what will I do after promising Johanna to buy her a shawl. I must only go and drive another beast to the market unknownst. I'd never hear the last of it if Joan found out what a fool I made of myself."

The thieves were in great admiration at Jack, and wanted him to tell them how he had done the farmer, but he wouldn't tell them.

By-and-by, they see the poor man driving a fine fat wether the same way.

"Who'll steal that wether," says Jack, "before it's out of the wood, and no roughness used?"

"I couldn't," says one; and "I couldn't," says another.

"I'll try," says Jack. "Give me a good rope."

The poor farmer was jogging along and thinking of his misfortune, when he sees a man hanging from the bough of