



FAIRY MYTHOLOGY

Romance and Superstition
of Various Countries 1

Thomas Keightley

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contents

PREFACE 9

INTRODUCTION 15

Origin of the belief in Fairies—15 Origin of the word Fairy—19

ORIENTAL ROMANCE 35

Persian Romance —35 The Peri-Wife—43 Arabian Romance—48

MIDDLE-AGE ROMANCE 55

FAIRY-LAND 75

SPENSER'S FÆRIE QUEENE 89

EDDAS AND SAGAS 97

The Alfár—102 The Duergar—106

Loki and the Dwarf—108 Thorston and the Dwarf—112

The Dwarf-Sword Tirfing—114

SCANDINAVIA 119

Elves 122

Sir Olof in the Elve-Dance—128 The Elf Woman and Sir Olof—130

The Young Swain and the Elves—133

Svend Faelling and the Elle-Maid—135

The Elle-Maids—136 Maid Va—137

The Elle-Maid near Ebeltoft—138 Hans Puntleder—140

Dwarfs or Trolls 144

Sir Thynnè—148 Proud Margeret—154 The Troll Wife—159

The Altar-Cup in Agerup—161 Origin of this Lake—164

A Farmer Tricks a Troll—166 Skotte in the Fire—167

The legend of Bodeys—169 Kallundborg Church—171

The Hill-Man invited to the Christening—174

The Troll turned Cat—177 Kirsten's-hill—179

The Troll-Labourer—180 The Hill Smith—182

The Girl at the Troll-Dance—184 The Changeling—185

The Tile-Stove jumping over the Brook —187

Departure of the Trolls from Vendsyssel—188

Svend Faelling—189 The Dwarfs' Banquet—191

Nisses 203

The Nis Removing—205 The Penitent Nis—206

The Nis and the Boy—207 The Nis stealing Corn—209

The Nis and the Mare—210 The Nis Riding—212

The Nisses in Vosborg—213

Necks, Mermen and Mermaids 215

The Power of the Harp —219

Duke Magnus and the Mermaid —223

NORTHERN ISLANDS 225

Iceland 227

Feroes 234

Shetland 236

Gioga's Son—241 The Mermaid Wife—243

Orkneys 246

Isle of Rugen 250

Adventures of John Dietrich—256 The Little Glass Shoe—276

The Wonderful Plough—281 The Lost Bell —285

The Black Dwarfs of Granitz—290

GERMANY 293

Dwarfs 306

The Hill-Man at the Dance —308 The Dwarf's Feast—310

The Friendly Dwarfs —312 Wedding Feast of the Little People—313

Smith Riechert—315 Dwarfs stealing Corn—316

Journey of Dwarfs over the Mountain—318

The Dwarfs borrowing Bread—322 The Changeling—324

The Dwarf-Husband—330 Inge of Rantum—331

The Wild-Women—333 The Oldenburg Horn—337

The Kobolds 339

Hinzemann—341 Hödeken—360 King Goldemar—362

The Heinzelmänchen—364

Nixes 366

The Peasant and the Waterman—367 The Water-Smith—368

The Working Waterman—370 The Nix-Labour—371

SWITZERLAND 373

Gertrude and Rosy—376 The Chamois-Hunter—382

The Dwarfs on the Tree—384 Curiosity punished—385

The Rejected Gift—387 The Wonderful Little Pouch—389

Aid and Punishment—390 The Dwarf in search of Lodging—391

INDEX 395

To
the Right Honourable
Francis Earl of Ellesmere,
in Testimony of
Esteem and Respect for Public and Private Virtue,
Literary Taste, Talent, and Acquirements,
and Patronage of Literature and the Arts.

Preface



A **PREFACE** is to a book what a prologue is to a play—a usual, often agreeable, but by no means necessary precursor. It may therefore be altered or omitted at pleasure. I have at times exercised this right, and this is the third I have written for the present work.

In the first, after briefly stating what had given occasion to it, I gave the germs of the theory which I afterwards developed in the *Tales and Popular Fictions*. The second contained the following paragraph:

“I never heard of any one who read it that was not pleased with it. It was translated into German as soon as it appeared, and was very favourably received. Goethe thought well of it. Dr. Jacob Grimm—perhaps the first authority on these matters in Europe—wrote me a letter commending it, and assuring me that even to *him* it offered something new; and I was one Christmas most agreeably surprised

by the receipt of a letter from Vienna, from the celebrated orientalist, Jos Von Hammer, informing me that it had been the companion of a journey he had lately made to his native province of Styria, and had afforded much pleasure and information to himself and to some ladies of high rank and cultivated minds in that country. The initials at the end of the preface, he said, led him to suppose it was a work of mine. So far for the Continent. In this country, when I mention the name of Robert Southey as that of one who has more than once expressed his decided approbation of this performance, I am sure I shall have said quite enough to satisfy any one that the work is not devoid of merit.”

I could now add many names of distinguished persons who have been pleased with this work and its pendant, the *Tales and Popular Fictions*. I shall only mention that of the late Mr. Douce, who, very shortly before his death, on the occasion of the publication of this last work, called on me to assure me that “it was many, many years indeed, since he had read a book which had yielded him so much delight.”

The contents of the work which gave such pleasure to this learned antiquary are as follows:—

I. Introduction—Similarity of Arts and Customs—Similarity of Names—Origin of the Work—Imitation—Casual Coincidence—Milton—Dante.

II. The Thousand and One Nights—Bedoween Audience around a Story-teller—Cleomades and Claremond—Enchanted Horses—Peter of Provence and the fair Maguelone.

III. The Pleasant Nights—The Dancing Water, the Singing Ap-

ple, and the Beautiful Green Bird—The Three Little Birds—Lactantius—Ulysses and Sindbad.

IV. The Shah-Nameh—Roostem and Soohrab—Conloch and Cuchullin—Macpherson's Ossian—Irish Antiquities.

V. The Pentamerone—Tale of the Serpent—Hindoo Legend.

VI. Jack the Giant-killer—The Brave Tailoring—Thor's Journey to Utgard—Ameen of Isfshan and the Ghool—The Lion and the Goat—The Lion and the Ass.

VII. Whittington and his Cat—Danish Legends—Italian Stories—Persian Legend.

VIII. The Edda—Sigurd and Brynhilda—Volund—Helgi—Holger—Danske—Ogier le Danois—Toko—William Tell.

IX. Peruonto—Peter the Fool—Emelyan the Fool—Conclusion.
Appendix.

Never, I am convinced, did any one enter on a literary career with more reluctance than I did when I found it to be my only resource—fortune being gone, ill health and delicacy of constitution excluding me from the learned professions, want of interest from every thing else. As I journeyed to the metropolis, I might have sung with the page whom Don Quixote met going a-soldiering:

A la guerra me lieva—mi necesidad,
Si tuviera dineros—no fuera en verdad:

For of all arts and professions in this country, that of literature is the least respected and the worst remunerated. There is something actually degrading in the expression “an author by trade,” which I

have seen used even of Southey, and that by one who did not mean to disparage him in the slightest degree. My advice to those who may read these pages is to shun literature, if not already blest with competence.

One of my earliest literary friends in London was T. Crofton Croker, who was then engaged in collecting materials for the *Fairy Legends of the South of Ireland*. He of course applied to his friends for aid and information; and I, having most leisure, and, I may add, most knowledge, was able to give him the greatest amount of assistance. My inquiries on the subject led, to the writing of the present work, which was succeeded by the *Mythology of Ancient Greece and Italy*, and the *Tales and Popular Fictions*; so that, in effect, if Mr. Croker had not planned the *Fairy Legends*, these works, be their value what it may, would in all probability never have been written.

Writing and reading about Fairies some may deem to be the mark of a trilling turn of mind. On this subject I have given my ideas in the Conclusion; here I will only remind such critics, that as soon as this work was completed, I commenced, and wrote in the space of a few weeks, my *Outlines of History*; and whatever the faults of that work may be, no one has ever reckoned among them want of vigour in either thought or expression.. It was also necessary, in order to write this work and its pendent, to be able to read, perhaps, as many as eighteen or twenty different languages, dialects, and modes of orthography, and to employ different styles both in prose and verse. At all events, even if it were trifling, *dulce est despere in loco*; and I shall never forget the happy hours it caused me, especially those spent over the black-letter pages of the French romances of chivalry,

in the old reading-room of the British Museum.

Many years have elapsed since this work was first published. In that period much new matter has appeared in various works, especially in the valuable *Deutsche Mythologie* of Dr. Grimm. Hence it will be found to be greatly enlarged, particularly in the sections of England and Prance. I have also inserted much which want of space obliged me to omit in the former edition. In its present form, I am presumptuous enough to expect that it may live for many years, and be an authority on the subject of popular lore. The active industry of the Grimms, of Thiele, and others, had collected the popular traditions of various countries. I came then and gathered in the harvest, leaving little, I apprehend, but gleanings for future writers on this subject. The legends will probably fade fast away from the popular memory; it is not likely that any one will relate those which I have given over again; and it therefore seems more probable that this volume may in future be reprinted, with notes and additions. For human nature will ever remain unchanged; the love of gain and of material enjoyments, omnipotent as it appears to be at present, will never totally extinguish the higher and purer aspirations of mind; and there will always be those, however limited in number, who will desire to know how the former dwellers of earth thought, felt, and acted. For these mythology, as connected with religion and history, will always have attractions.

—Thomas Keightley, *England*

Introduction



(Scene from the medieval drama: The Fairy of Bosc/ell)

In olde days of the King Artour,
Of which that Bretons spoken gret honour,
All was this lond fulfilled of faërie;
The elf-qrene with hir jolts companie
Danced full oft in many a grene mede.
CHAUCER.

Origin of the belief in Fairies

ACCORDING to a well-known law of our nature, effects suggest causes; and another law, perhaps equally general, impels us to ascribe to the actual and efficient cause the attribute of intelligence. The mind of the deepest philosopher is thus acted upon equally with that of the peasant or the savage; the only difference lies in the nature of the intelligent cause at which they respectively stop. The one pursues the chain of cause and effect, and traces out its various links till he arrives at the great intelligent cause of all, however he

The Fairy world of Northern Europe and Germany

The term “Fairy” covers all kinds of nature spirits and Elementals all over the world. Not just the tiny sugar sweet creatures hovering around flowers. Thomas Keightley collected an impressive amount of mostly European, and nowadays often “extinct” folklorist data on these invisible realm’s inhabitants, and compiled these in *Fairy Mythology* (1870).

In its revised edition, this massive work of over 800 pages, is republished in two volumes to meet modern reading standards. Volume 2 covers the Fairy-lore of the British Isles, Ireland, Southern Europe, Eastern Europe and some Jewish and African lore. Volume 1 deals extensively with Scandinavia, Iceland, Feroer, the Orkneys, Shetland Islands, Rugen, Germany and Switzerland.

In volume 1 the origins of the term Fairy are traced and oriental and medieval romance, Eddas and Sagas, are examined before we explore Fairy-species as Elle-maids, Trolls, Nisses, Elves, Dwarfs, Necks, Mermaids, Nixes, Heinzelmännchen, Watermen or Wassermännchen, Hödeken, Changeling, Wild women and Little people. An invaluable work of resource for those interested in old European folklore or nature magic.

