



FAIRY MYTHOLOGY

Romance and Superstition
of Various Countries 2

Thomas Keightley

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Original publication: *The Fairy Mythology, Illustrative of the Romance and Superstition of Various Countries* (1870)

Cover image: *Lily Fairy* (1888), Luis Ricardo Falero (1851 – 1896)

Lay-out: www.burokd.nl

ISBN 978-94-92355-10-2

© 2015 Revised publication by:



VAMzzz Publishing

P.O. Box 3340

1001 AC Amsterdam

The Netherlands

www.vamzzz.com

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GREAT BRITIAN

In old wives dates that in old time did live,
To whose odde tales much credit men did give,
Great store of goblins, fairies, bugs, nightmares,
Urchins and elves to many a house repaires.
Old Poem.

WE USE the term Great Britain in a very limited sense, as merely inclusive of those parts of the island whose inhabitants are of Gotho-German origin—England and the Lowlands of Scotland.

We have already seen that the Anglo-Saxon conquerors of Britain had in their language the terms from which are derived Elf and Dwarf, and the inference is natural that their ideas respecting these beings corresponded with those of the Scandinavians and Germans. The same may be said. of the Picts, who, akin to the Scandinavians, early seized on the Scottish Lowlands. We therefore close our survey of the Fairy Mythology of the Gotho-German race with Great Britain.

ENGLAND

Merry elves, their morrice pacing,
 To aërial minstrelsy,
 Emerald rings on brown heath tracing,
 Trip it deft and merrily.
 –SCOTT.

The Fairy Mythology of England divides itself into two branches, that of the people and that of the poets. Under the former head will be comprised the few scattered traditions which we have been able to collect respecting a system, the belief in which is usually thought to be nearly extinct; the latter will contain a selection of passages, treating of fairies and their exploits, from our principal poets.

The Fairies of England are evidently the Dwarfs of Germany and the North, though they do not appear to have been ever so denominated. ^[a] Their appellation was Elves, subsequently Fairies; but there would seem to have been formerly other terms expressive of them, of which hardly a vestige is now remaining in the English language.

They were, like their northern kindred, divided into two classes—the rural Elves, inhabiting the woods, fields, mountains, and caverns; and the domestic or house-spirits, usually called Hobgoblins and Robin Goodfellows. But the Thames, the Avon, and the other English streams, never seem to have been the abode of a Neck or Kelpie.

The following curious instances of English superstition, occur in the twelfth century.

NOTE

[a] The Anglo-Saxon *Dweorg*, *Dworh*, and the English Dwarf; do not seem ever to have had any other sense than that of the Latin *nanus*.

The Green Children

“Another wonderful thing,” says Ralph of Coggeshall, ^[a] “happened in Suffolk, at St. Mary’s of the Wolf-pits. A boy and his sister were found by the inhabitants of that place near the mouth of a pit which is there, who had the form of all their limbs like to those of other men, but they differed in the colour of their skin from all the people of our habitable world; for the whole surface of their skin was tinged of a green colour. No one could understand their speech. When they were brought as curiosities to the house of a certain knight, Sir Richard de Caine, at Wikes, they wept bitterly. Bread and other victuals were set before them, but they would touch none of them, though they were tormented by great hunger, as the girl afterwards acknowledged. At length, when some beans just cut, with their stalks, were brought into the house, they made signs, with great avidity, that they should be given to them. When they were brought, they opened the stalks instead of the pods, thinking the beans were in the hollow of them; but not finding them there, they began to weep anew. When those who were present saw this, they opened the pods, and showed them the naked beans. They fed on these with great delight, and for a long time tasted no other food. The boy, however, was always languid and depressed, and he died within a short time. The girl enjoyed continual good health; and becoming accustomed to various kinds of food, lost completely that green colour, and gradually recovered the sanguine habit of her entire body. She was afterwards regenerated by the layer of holy baptism, and lived for many years in the service of that knight (as I have frequently heard from him and his

The Fairy world of the British Isles, Ireland, Southern and Eastern Europe

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 1 covers Scandinavia, Iceland, Feroer, the Orkneys, Shetland Islands, Rugen, Germany and Switzerland.

Volume 2 deals with Great Britain, the Scottish Highlands and Lowlands, England, Wales, the Isle of Man, Brittany, France, Greece, Italy, Spain, stories of the Finns and Slavonic people and some Jewish and African Fairylore. We encounter Fairies in many varieties, Pixies, Brownies, Leprechauns, Chancelings, the Boggard, Puck, the Phynodderie, Kobold, Urisk, Korrigan, the Korred, Tylwyth Teg and more. Just like volume 1, volume 2 displays a precious collection of ancient folklore directly based on the realm of the hidden Elemental nature.

