

A REMONSTRANCE WITH SCOTSMEN FOR HAVING SOURED THE DISPOSITION OF THEIR GHOSTS AND FAERIES

Not only in Ireland is faery belief still extant. It was only the other day I heard of a Scottish farmer who believed that the lake in front of his house was haunted by a water-horse. He was afraid of it, and dragged the lake with nets, and then tried to pump it empty. It would have been a bad thing for the water-horse had he found him. An Irish peasant would have long since come to terms with the creature. For in Ireland there is something of timid affection between men and spirits. They only ill-treat each other in reason. Each admits the other side to have feelings. There are points beyond which neither will go. No Irish peasant would treat a captured faery as did the man Campbell tells of. He caught a kelpie, and tied her behind him on his horse. She was fierce, but he kept her quiet by driving an awl and a needle into her. They came to a river, and she grew very restless, fearing to cross the water. Again he drove the awl and needle into her. She cried out, "Pierce me with the awl, but keep that slender, hair-like slave (the needle) out of me." They came to an inn. He turned the light of a lantern on her; immediately she dropped down like a falling star, and changed into a lump of jelly. She was dead. Nor would they treat the faeries as one is treated in an old Highland poem. A faery loved a little child who used to cut turf at the side of a faery hill. Every day the faery put out his hand from the hill with an enchanted knife. The child used to cut the turf with the knife. It did not take long, the knife being charmed. Her brothers wondered why she was done so quickly. At last they resolved to watch, and find out who helped her. They saw the small hand come out of the earth, and the little child take from it the knife. When the turf was all cut, they saw her make three taps on the ground with the handle. The small hand came out of the hill. Snatching the knife from the child, they cut the hand off with a blow. The faery was never again seen. He drew his bleeding arm into the earth, thinking, as it is recorded, he had lost his hand through the treachery of the child.

In Scotland you are too theological, too gloomy. You have made even the Devil religious. "Where do you live, good-wyf, and how is the minister?" he said to the witch when he met her on the high-road, as it came out in the trial. You have burnt all the witches. In Ireland we have left them alone. To be sure, the "loyal minority" knocked out the eye of one with a cabbage-stump on the 31st of March, 1711, in the town of Carrickfergus. But then the "loyal minority" is half Scottish. You have discovered the faeries to be pagan and wicked. You would like to have them all up before the magistrate. In Ireland warlike mortals have gone amongst them, and helped them in their battles, and they in turn have taught men great skill with herbs, and permitted some few to hear their tunes. Carolan slept upon a faery rath. Ever after their tunes ran in his head, and made him the great musician he was. In Scotland you have denounced them from the pulpit. In Ireland they have been permitted by the priests to consult them on the state of their souls. Unhappily the priests have decided that they have no souls, that they will dry up like so much bright vapour at the last day; but more in sadness than in anger they have said it. The Catholic religion likes to keep on good terms with its neighbours.

These two different ways of looking at things have influenced in each country the whole world of sprites and goblins. For their gay and graceful doings you must go to Ireland; for their deeds of terror to Scotland. Our Irish faery terrors have about them something of make-believe. When a peasant strays into an enchanted hovel, and is made to turn a corpse all night on a spit before the fire, we do

not feel anxious; we know he will wake in the midst of a green field, the dew on his old coat. In Scotland it is altogether different. You have soured the naturally excellent disposition of ghosts and goblins. The piper M'Crimmon, of the Hebrides, shouldered his pipes, and marched into a sea cavern, playing loudly, and followed by his dog. For a long time the people could hear the pipes. He must have gone nearly a mile, when they heard the sound of a struggle. Then the piping ceased suddenly. Some time went by, and then his dog came out of the cavern completely flayed, too weak even to howl. Nothing else ever came out of the cavern. Then there is the tale of the man who dived into a lake where treasure was thought to be. He saw a great coffer of iron. Close to the coffer lay a monster, who warned him to return whence he came. He rose to the surface; but the bystanders, when they heard he had seen the treasure, persuaded him to dive again. He dived. In a little while his heart and liver floated up, reddening the water. No man ever saw the rest of his body.

These water-goblins and water-monsters are common in Scottish folk-lore. We have them too, but take them much less dreadfully. Our tales turn all their doings to favour and to prettiness, or hopelessly humorize the creatures. A hole in the Sligo river is haunted by one of these monsters. He is ardently believed in by many, but that does not prevent the peasantry playing with the subject, and surrounding it with conscious fantasies. When I was a small boy I fished one day for congers in the monster hole. Returning home, a great eel on my shoulder, his head flapping down in front, his tail sweeping the ground behind, I met a fisherman of my acquaintance. I began a tale of an immense conger, three times larger than the one I carried, that had broken my line and escaped. "That was him," said the fisherman. "Did you ever hear how he made my brother emigrate? My brother was a diver, you know, and grubbed stones for the Harbour Board. One day the beast comes up to him, and says, 'What are you after?' 'Stones, sur,' says he. 'Don't you think you had better be going?' 'Yes, sur,' says he. And that's why my brother emigrated. The people said it was because he got poor, but that's not true."

You—you will make no terms with the spirits of fire and earth and air and water. You have made the Darkness your enemy. We—we exchange civilities with the world beyond.

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