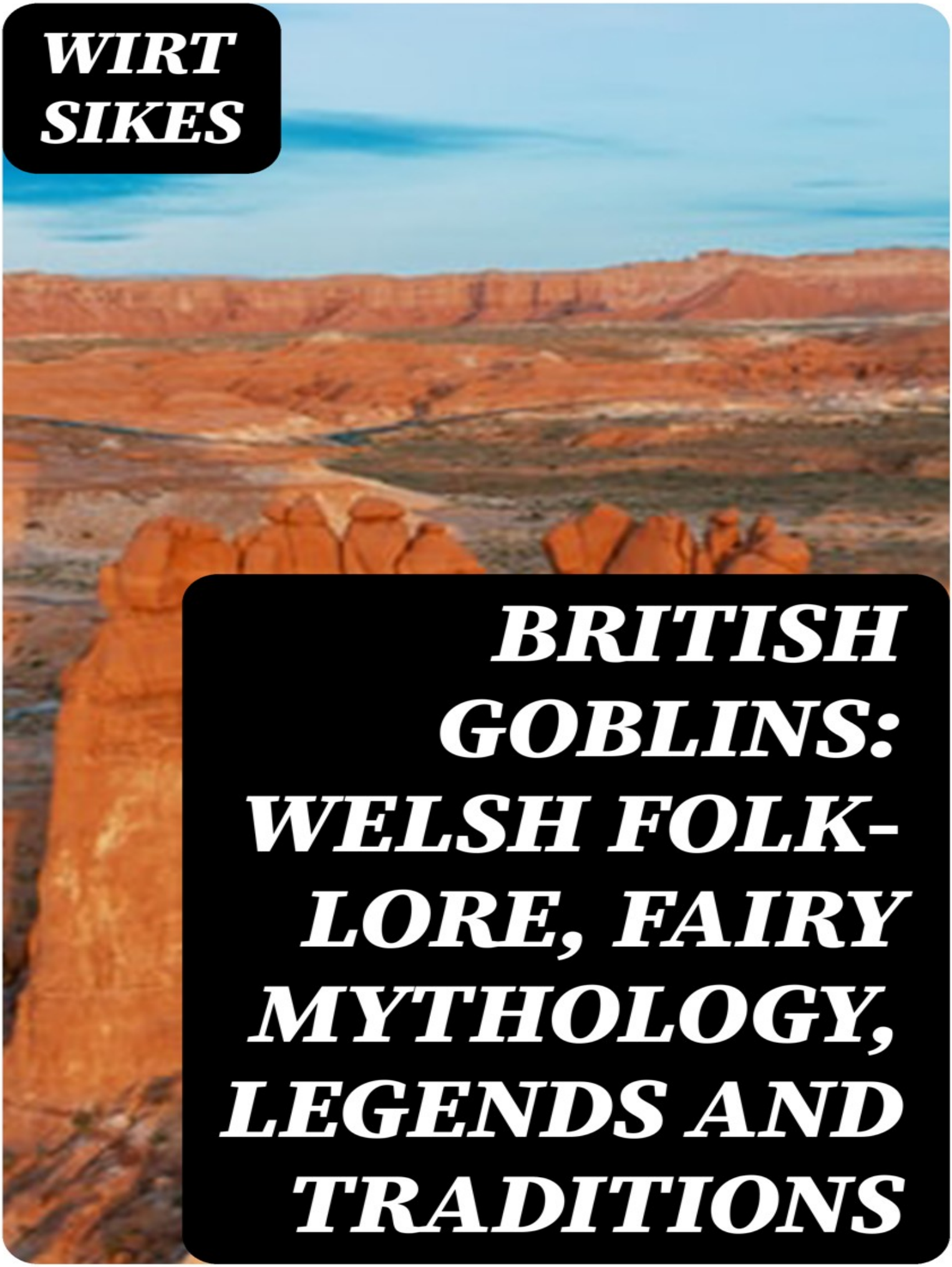

WIRT SIKES

BRITISH GOBLINS: WELSH FOLK-LORE, FAIRY MYTHOLOGY, LEGENDS AND TRADITIONS

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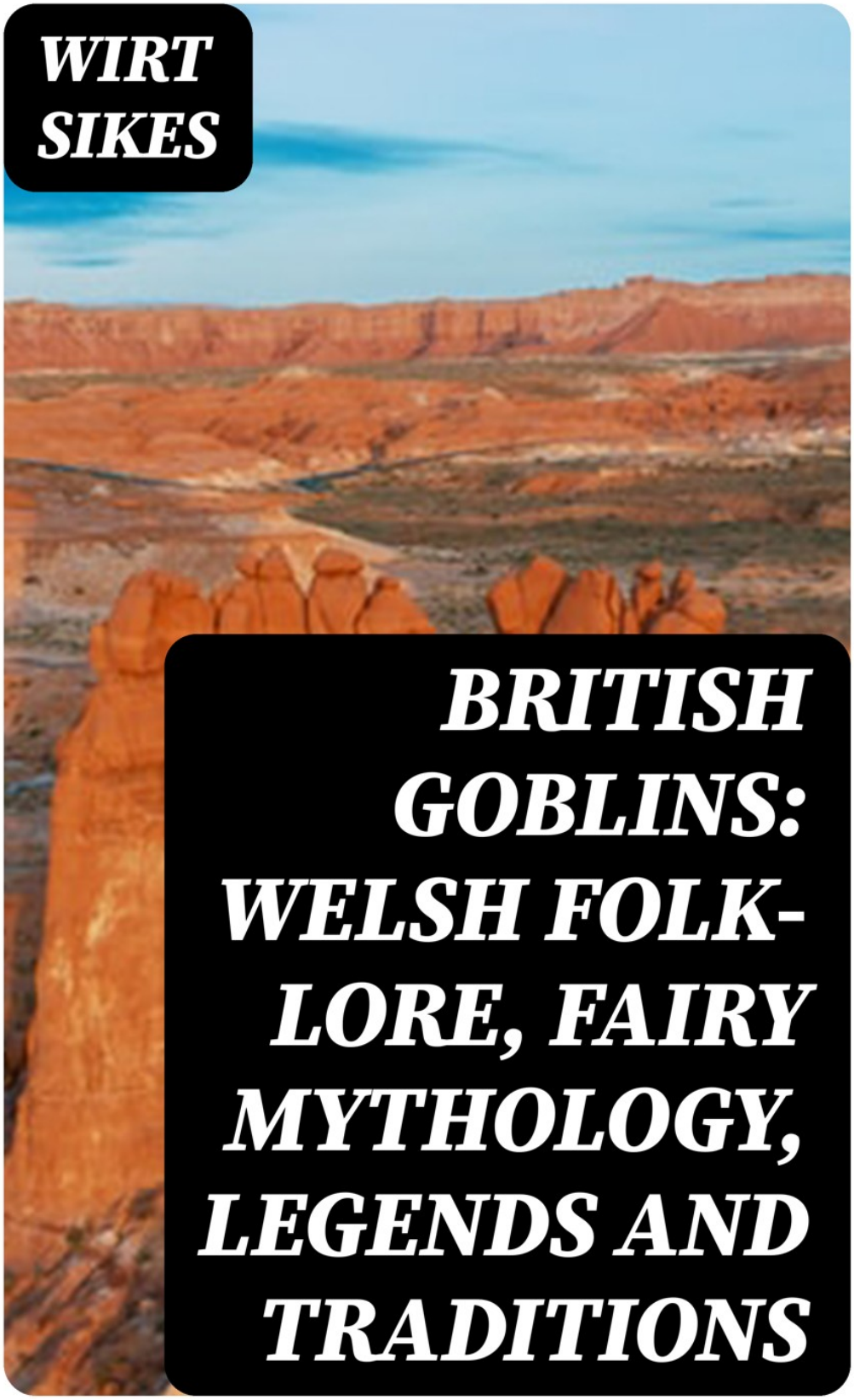

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Wirt Sikes

British Goblins: Welsh Folk-lore, Fairy Mythology, Legends and Traditions

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PREFACE.

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In the ground it covers, while this volume deals especially with Wales, and still more especially with South Wales—where there appear to have been human dwellers long before North Wales was peopled—it also includes the border counties, notably Monmouthshire, which, though severed from Wales by Act of Parliament, is really very Welsh in all that relates to the past. In Monmouthshire is the decayed cathedral city of Caerleon, where, according to tradition, Arthur was crowned king in 508, and where he set up his most dazzling court, as told in the ‘Morte d’Arthur.’

In a certain sense Wales may be spoken of as the cradle of fairy legend. It is not now disputed that from the Welsh were borrowed many of the first subjects of composition in the literature of all the cultivated peoples of Europe.

The Arthur of British history and tradition stands to Welshmen in much the same light that Alfred the Great stands to Englishmen. Around this historic or semi-historic Arthur have gathered a throng of shining legends of fabulous sort, with which English readers are more or less familiar. An even grander figure is the Arthur who existed in Welsh mythology before the birth of the warrior-king. The mythic Arthur, it is presumed, began his shadowy life in pre-historic ages, and grew progressively in mythologic story, absorbing at a certain period the personality of the real Arthur, and becoming the type of romantic chivalry. A similar state of things is indicated with regard to the

enchanter Merlin; there was a mythic Merlin before the real Merlin was born at Carmarthen.

With the rich mass of legendary lore to which these figures belong, the present volume is not intended to deal; nor do its pages treat, save in the most casual and passing manner, of the lineage and original significance of the lowly goblins which are its theme. The questions here involved, and the task of adequately treating them, belong to the comparative mythologist and the critical historian, rather than to the mere literary workman.

United States Consulate, Cardiff,
August, 1879.

BOOK I.

THE REALM OF FAERIE.

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At eve, the primrose path along,
The milkmaid shortens with a song
Her solitary way;
She sees the fairies with their queen
Trip hand-in-hand the circled green,
And hears them raise, at times unseen,
The ear-enchanting lay.

Rev. John Logan: *Ode to Spring*, 1780.

CHAPTER I.

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Fairy Tales and the Ancient Mythology—The Compensations of Science—Existing Belief in Fairies in Wales—The Faith of Culture—The Credulity of Ignorance—The Old-Time Welsh Fairyland—The Fairy King—The Legend of St. Collen and Gwyn ap Nudd—The Green Meadows of the Sea—Fairies at Market—The Land of Mystery.

I.

With regard to other divisions of the field of folk-lore, the views of scholars differ, but in the realm of faerie these

differences are reconciled; it is agreed that fairy tales are relics of the ancient mythology; and the philosophers stroll hand in hand harmoniously. This is as it should be, in a realm about which cluster such delightful memories of the most poetic period of life—childhood, before scepticism has crept in as ignorance slinks out. The knowledge which introduced scepticism is infinitely more valuable than the faith it displaced; but, in spite of that, there be few among us who have not felt evanescent regrets for the displacement by the *foi scientifique* of the old faith in fairies. There was something so peculiarly fascinating in that old belief, that ‘once upon a time’ the world was less practical in its facts than now, less commonplace and humdrum, less subject to the inexorable laws of gravitation, optics, and the like. What dramas it has yielded! What poems, what dreams, what delights!

But since the knowledge of our maturer years destroys all that, it is with a degree of satisfaction we can turn to the consolations of the fairy mythology. The beloved tales of old are ‘not true’—but at least they are not mere idle nonsense, and they have a good and sufficient reason for being in the world; we may continue to respect them. The wit who observed that the final cause of fairy legends is ‘to afford sport for people who ruthlessly track them to their origin,’[1] expressed a grave truth in jocular form. Since one can no longer rest in peace with one’s ignorance, it is a comfort to the lover of fairy legends to find that he need not sweep them into the grate as so much rubbish; on the contrary they become even more enchanting in the crucible of science than they were in their old character.

FOOTNOTE:

[1] ‘Saturday Review,’ October 20, 1877.

II.

Among the vulgar in Wales, the belief in fairies is less nearly extinct than casual observers would be likely to suppose. Even educated people who dwell in Wales, and have dwelt there all their lives, cannot always be classed as other than casual observers in this field. There are some such residents who have paid special attention to the subject, and have formed an opinion as to the extent of prevalence of popular credulity herein; but most Welsh people of the educated class, I find, have no opinion, beyond a vague surprise that the question should be raised at all. So lately as the year 1858, a learned writer in the ‘Archæologia Cambrensis’ declared that ‘the traveller may now pass from one end of the Principality to the other, without his being shocked or amused, as the case may be, by any of the fairy legends or popular tales which used to pass current from father to son.’ But in the same periodical, eighteen years later, I find Mr. John Walter Lukis (President of the Cardiff Naturalists’ Society), asserting with regard to the cromlechs, tumuli, and ancient camps in Glamorganshire: ‘There are always fairy tales and ghost stories connected with them; some, though *fully believed in* by the inhabitants of those localities, are often of the most absurd character; in fact, the more ridiculous they are, the more they are believed in.’[2] My own observation leads me to support the testimony of the last-named witness.

Educated Europeans generally conceive that this sort of belief is extinct in their own land, or, at least their own immediate section of that land. They accredit such degree of belief as may remain, in this enlightened age, to some remote part—to the south, if they dwell in the north; to the north, if they dwell in the south. But especially they accredit it to a previous age: in Wales, to last century, or the middle ages, or the days of King Arthur. The rector of Merthyr, being an elderly man, accredits it to his youth. ‘I am old enough to remember,’ he wrote me under date of January 30th, 1877, ‘that these tales were thoroughly believed in among country folk forty or fifty years ago.’ People of superior culture have held this kind of faith concerning fairy-lore, it seems to me, in every age, except the more remote. Chaucer held it, almost five centuries ago, and wrote:[3]

> In olde dayes of the Kyng Arthour, ...
> Al was this lond fulfilled of fayrie; ...
> I speke of many hundrid yer ago;
> But now can no man see non elves mo.

Dryden held it, two hundred years later, and said of the fairies:

> I speak of ancient times, for now the swain
> Returning late may pass the woods in vain,
> And never hope to see the nightly train.

In all later days, other authors have written the same sort of thing; it is not thus now, say they, but it was recently thus. The truth, probably, is that if you will but sink down to the level of common life, of ignorant life, especially in rural

neighbourhoods, there you will find the same old beliefs prevailing, in about the same degree to which they have ever prevailed, within the past five hundred years. To sink to this level successfully, one must become a living unit in that life, as I have done in Wales and elsewhere, from time to time. Then one will hear the truth from, or at least the true sentiments of, the class he seeks to know. The practice of every generation in thus relegating fairy belief to a date just previous to its own does not apply, however, to superstitious beliefs in general; for, concerning many such beliefs, their greater or less prevalence at certain dates (as in the history of witchcraft) is matter of well-ascertained fact. I confine the argument, for the present, strictly to the domain of faerie. In this domain, the prevalent belief in Wales may be said to rest with the ignorant, to be strongest in rural and mining districts, to be childlike and poetic, and to relate to anywhere except the spot where the speaker dwells—as to the next parish, to the next county, to the distant mountains, or to the shadow-land of Gwerddonau Llion, the green meadows of the sea.

FOOTNOTES:

[2] ‘Archæologia Cambrensis,’ 4th Se., vi., 174.

[3] ‘Wyf of Bathes Tale,’ ‘Canterbury Tales.’

III.

In Arthur’s day and before that, the people of South Wales regarded North Wales as pre-eminently the land of faerie. In the popular imagination, that distant country was

the chosen abode of giants, monsters, magicians, and all the creatures of enchantment. Out of it came the fairies, on their visits to the sunny land of the south. The chief philosopher of that enchanted region was a giant who sat on a mountain peak and watched the stars. It had a wizard monarch called Gwydion, who possessed the power of changing himself into the strangest possible forms. The peasant who dwelt on the shores of Dyfed (Demetia) saw in the distance, beyond the blue waves of the ocean, shadowy mountain summits piercing the clouds, and guarding this mystic region in solemn majesty. Thence rolled down upon him the storm-clouds from the home of the tempest; thence streamed up the winter sky the flaming banners of the Northern lights; thence rose through the illimitable darkness on high, the star-strewn pathway of the fairy king. These details are current in the Mabinogion, those brilliant stories of Welsh enchantment, so gracefully done into English by Lady Charlotte Guest,[4] and it is believed that all the Mabinogion in which these details were found were written in Dyfed. This was the region on the west, now covered by Pembroke, Carmarthen, and Cardigan shires.

More recently than the time above indicated, special traditions have located fairyland in the Vale of Neath, in Glamorganshire. Especially does a certain steep and rugged crag there, called Craig y Ddinas, bear a distinctly awful reputation as a stronghold of the fairy tribe.[5] Its caves and crevices have been their favourite haunt for many centuries, and upon this rock was held the court of the last fairies who have ever appeared in Wales. Needless to say there are men still living who remember the visits of the fairies to

Craig y Ddinas, although they aver the little folk are no longer seen there. It is a common remark that the Methodists drove them away; indeed, there are numberless stories which show the fairies to have been animated, when they were still numerous in Wales, by a cordial antipathy for all dissenting preachers. In this antipathy, it may be here observed, teetotallers were included.

FOOTNOTES:

[4] ‘The Mabinogion, from the Welsh of the Llyfr Coch o Hergest.’ Translated, with notes, by Lady Charlotte Guest. (New Edition, London, 1877.)

[5] There are two hills in Glamorganshire called by this name, and others elsewhere in Wales.

IV.

The sovereign of the fairies, and their especial guardian and protector, was one Gwyn ap Nudd. He was also ruler over the goblin tribe in general. His name often occurs in ancient Welsh poetry. An old bard of the fourteenth century, who, led away by the fairies, rode into a turf bog on a mountain one dark night, called it the ‘fish-pond of Gwyn ap Nudd, a palace for goblins and their tribe.’ The association of this legendary character with the goblin fame of the Vale of Neath will appear, when it is mentioned that Nudd in Welsh is pronounced simply Neath, and not otherwise. As for the fairy queen, she does not seem to have any existence among Cambrian goblins. It is nevertheless thought by Cambrian etymologists, that Morgana is derived from Mor Gwyn, the white maid; and the Welsh proper name Morgan

can hardly fail to be mentioned in this connection, though it is not necessarily significant.

The legend of St. Collen, in which Gwyn ap Nudd figures, represents him as king of Annwn (hell, or the shadow land) as well as of the fairies.[6] Collen was passing a period of mortification as a hermit, in a cell under a rock on a mountain. There he one day overheard two men talking about Gwyn ap Nudd, and giving him this twofold kingly character. Collen cried out to the men to go away and hold their tongues, instead of talking about devils. For this Collen was rebuked, as the king of fairyland had an objection to such language. The saint was summoned to meet the king on the hill-top at noon, and after repeated refusals, he finally went there; but he carried a flask of holy water with him. 'And when he came there he saw the fairest castle he had ever beheld, and around it the best appointed troops, and numbers of minstrels and every kind of music of voice and string, and steeds with youths upon them, the comeliest in the world, and maidens of elegant aspect, sprightly, light of foot, of graceful apparel, and in the bloom of youth; and every magnificence becoming the court of a puissant sovereign. And he beheld a courteous man on the top of the castle who bade him enter, saying that the king was waiting for him to come to meat. And Collen went into the castle, and when he came there the king was sitting in a golden chair. And he welcomed Collen honourably, and desired him to eat, assuring him that besides what he saw, he should have the most luxurious of every dainty and delicacy that the mind could desire, and should be supplied with every drink and liquor that the heart could wish; and

that there should be in readiness for him every luxury of courtesy and service, of banquet and of honourable entertainment, of rank and of presents, and every respect and welcome due to a man of his wisdom. “I will not eat the leaves of the trees,” said Collen. “Didst thou ever see men of better equipment than these of red and blue?” asked the king. “Their equipment is good enough,” said Collen, “for such equipment as it is.” “What kind of equipment is that?” said the king. Then said Collen, “The red on the one part signifies burning, and the blue on the other signifies coldness.” And with that Collen drew out his flask and threw the holy water on their heads, whereupon they vanished from his sight, so that there was neither castle nor troops, nor men, nor maidens, nor music, nor song, nor steeds, nor youths, nor banquet, nor the appearance of anything whatever but the green hillocks.’

FOOTNOTE:

[6] ‘Greal’ (8vo. London, 1805), p. 337.

V.

A third form of Welsh popular belief as to the whereabouts of fairyland corresponds with the Avalon of the Arthurian legends. The green meadows of the sea, called in the triads Gwerddonau Llion, are the

> Green fairy islands, reposing,
> In sunlight and beauty on ocean’s calm breast.[7]

Many extraordinary superstitions survive with regard to these islands. They were supposed to be the abode of the souls of certain Druids, who, not holy enough to enter the heaven of the Christians, were still not wicked enough to be condemned to the tortures of annwn, and so were accorded a place in this romantic sort of purgatorial paradise. In the fifth century a voyage was made, by the British king Gavran, in search of these enchanted islands; with his family he sailed away into the unknown waters, and was never heard of more. This voyage is commemorated in the triads as one of the Three Losses by Disappearance, the two others being Merlin’s and Madog’s. Merlin sailed away in a ship of glass; Madog sailed in search of America; and neither returned, but both disappeared for ever. In Pembrokeshire and southern Carmarthenshire are to be found traces of this belief. There are sailors on that romantic coast who still talk of the green meadows of enchantment lying in the Irish

channel to the west of Pembrokeshire. Sometimes they are visible to the eyes of mortals for a brief space, when suddenly they vanish. There are traditions of sailors who, in the early part of the present century, actually went ashore on the fairy islands—not knowing that they were such, until they returned to their boats, when they were filled with awe at seeing the islands disappear from their sight, neither sinking in the sea, nor floating away upon the waters, but simply vanishing suddenly. The fairies inhabiting these islands are said to have regularly attended the markets at Milford Haven and Laugharne. They made their purchases without speaking, laid down their money and departed, always leaving the exact sum required, which they seemed to know, without asking the price of anything. Sometimes they were invisible, but they were often seen, by sharp-eyed persons. There was always one special butcher at Milford Haven upon whom the fairies bestowed their patronage, instead of distributing their favours indiscriminately. The Milford Haven folk could see the green fairy islands distinctly, lying out a short distance from land; and the general belief was that they were densely peopled with fairies. It was also said that the latter went to and fro between the islands and the shore through a subterranean gallery under the bottom of the sea.

FAIRIES MARKETING AT LAUGHARNE.

That isolated cape which forms the county of Pembroke was looked upon as a land of mystery by the rest of Wales long after it had been settled by the Flemings in 1113. A secret veil was supposed to cover this sea-girt promontory; the inhabitants talked in an unintelligible jargon that was neither English, nor French, nor Welsh; and out of its misty darkness came fables of wondrous sort, and accounts of miracles marvellous beyond belief. Mythology and Christianity spoke together from this strange country, and one could not tell at which to be most amazed, the pagan or the priest.

FOOTNOTE:

[7] Parry’s ‘Welsh Melodies.’

CHAPTER II.

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Classification of Welsh Fairies—General Designation—Habits of the Tylwyth Teg—Ellyllon, or Elves—Shakspeare’s Use of Welsh Folk-Lore—Rowli Pugh and the Ellyll—Household Story Roots—The Ellylldan—The Pooka—Puck Valley, Breconshire—Where Shakspeare got his Puck—Pwca’r Trwyn—Usual Form of the Pooka Story—Coblynau, or Mine Fairies—The Knockers—Miners’ Superstitions—Basilisks and Fire Fiends—A Fairy Coal-mine—The Dwarfs of Cae Caled—Counterparts of the Coblynau—The Bwbach, or Household Fairy—Legend of the Bwbach and the Preacher—Bogies and Hobgoblins—Carrying Mortals through the Air—Counterparts and Originals.

I.

Fairies being creatures of the imagination, it is not possible to classify them by fixed and immutable rules. In the exact sciences, there are laws which never vary, or if they vary, their very eccentricity is governed by precise rules. Even in the largest sense, comparative mythology must demean itself modestly in order to be tolerated in the severe company of the sciences. In presenting his subjects, therefore, the writer in this field can only govern himself by the purpose of orderly arrangement. To secure the maximum of system, for the sake of the student who employs the work for reference and comparison, with the minimum of dullness, for the sake of the general reader, is perhaps the limit of a reasonable ambition. Keightley[8]

divides into four classes the Scandinavian elements of popular belief as to fairies, viz.: 1. The Elves; 2. The Dwarfs, or Trolls; 3. The Nisses; and 4. The Necks, Mermen, and Mermaids. How entirely arbitrary this division is, the student of Scandinavian folk-lore at once perceives. Yet it is perhaps as satisfactory as another. The fairies of Wales may be divided into five classes, if analogy be not too sharply insisted on. Thus we have, 1. The Ellyllon, or elves; 2. The Coblynau, or mine fairies; 3. The Bwbachod, or household fairies; 4. The Gwragedd Annwn, or fairies of the lakes and streams; and 5. The Gwyllion, or mountain fairies.

The modern Welsh name for fairies is y Tylwyth Teg, the fair folk or family. This is sometimes lengthened into y Tylwyth Teg yn y Coed, the fair family in the wood, or Tylwyth Teg y Mwn, the fair folk of the mine. They are seen dancing in moonlight nights on the velvety grass, clad in airy and flowing robes of blue, green, white, or scarlet—details as to colour not usually met, I think, in accounts of fairies. They are spoken of as bestowing blessings on those mortals whom they select to be thus favoured; and again are called Bendith y Mamau, or their mother’s blessing, that is to say, good little children whom it is a pleasure to know. To name the fairies by a harsh epithet is to invoke their anger; to speak of them in flattering phrase is to propitiate their good offices. The student of fairy mythology perceives in this propitiatory mode of speech a fact of wide significance. It can be traced in numberless lands, and back to the beginning of human history, among the cloud-hung peaks of Central Asia. The Greeks spoke of the furies as the Eumenides, or gracious ones; Highlanders mentioned by Sir

Walter Scott uncover to the gibbet and call it ‘the kind gallows;’ the Dayak will not name the small-pox, but calls it ‘the chief;’ the Laplander calls the bear ‘the old man with the fur coat;’ in Ammam the tiger is called ‘grandfather;’ and it is thought that the maxim, ‘Speak only good of the dead,’ came originally from the notion of propitiating the ghost of the departed,[9] who, in laying off this mortal garb, had become endowed with new powers of harming his late acquaintance.

FOOTNOTES:

[8] ‘Fairy Mythology’ (Bohn’s Ed.), 78.

[9] John Fiske, ‘Myths and Myth-makers,’ 223.

II.

The Ellyllon are the pigmy elves who haunt the groves and valleys, and correspond pretty closely with the English elves. The English name was probably derived from the Welsh *el*, a spirit, *elf*, an element; there is a whole brood of words of this class in the Welsh language, expressing every variety of flowing, gliding, spirituality, devilry, angelhood, and goblinism. Ellyllon (the plural of ellyll), is also doubtless allied with the Hebrew Elilim, having with it an identity both of origin and meaning.[10] The poet Davydd ab Gwilym, in a humorous account of his troubles in a mist, in the year 1340, says:

Yr ydoedd ym mhob gobant
Ellyllon mingeimion gant.

There was in every hollow
A hundred wrymouthed elves.

The hollows, or little dingles, are still the places where the peasant, belated on his homeward way from fair or market, looks for the ellyllon, but fails to find them. Their food is specified in Welsh folk-lore as fairy butter and fairy victuals, ymenyn tylwyth teg and bwyd ellyllon; the latter the toadstool, or poisonous mushroom, and the former a butter-resembling substance found at great depths in the crevices of limestone rocks, in sinking for lead ore. Their gloves, menyg ellyllon, are the bells of the digitalis, or fox-glove, the leaves of which are well known to be a strong sedative. Their queen—for though there is no fairy-queen in the large sense that Gwyn ap Nudd is the fairy-king, there is a queen of the elves—is none other than the Shakspearean fairy spoken of by Mercutio, who comes

In shape no bigger than an agate-stone
On the forefinger of an alderman.[11]

Shakspeare's use of Welsh folk-lore, it should be noted, was extensive and peculiarly faithful. Keightley in his 'Fairy Mythology' rates the bard soundly for his inaccurate use of English fairy superstitions; but the reproach will not apply as regards Wales. From his Welsh informant Shakspeare got Mab, which is simply the Cymric for a little child, and the root of numberless words signifying babyish, childish, love for children (mabgar), kitten (mabgath), prattling (mabiaith), and the like, most notable of all which in this connection is mabinogi, the singular of Mabinogion, the

romantic tales of enchantment told to the young in by-gone ages.

FOOTNOTES:

[10] Pughe's 'Welsh Dictionary.' (Denbigh, 1866.)

[11] 'Romeo and Juliet,' Act II., Sc. 4.

III.

In the Huntsman's Rest Inn at Peterstone-super-Ely, near Cardiff, sat a group of humble folk one afternoon, when I chanced to stop there to rest myself by the chimney-side, after a long walk through green lanes. The men were drinking their tankards of ale and smoking their long clay pipes; and they were talking about their dogs and horses, the crops, the hard times, and the prospect of bettering themselves by emigration to America. On this latter theme I was able to make myself interesting, and acquaintance was thereupon easily established on a friendly footing. I led the conversation into the domain of folk-lore; and this book is richer in illustration on many a page, in consequence. Among others, this tale was told:

On a certain farm in Glamorganshire lived Rowli Pugh, who was known far and wide for his evil luck. Nothing prospered that he turned his hand to; his crops proved poor, though his neighbours' might be good; his roof leaked in spite of all his mending; his walls remained damp when every one else's walls were dry; and above all, his wife was so feeble she could do no work. His fortunes at last seemed so hard that he resolved to sell out and clear out, no matter

at what loss, and try to better himself in another country—not by going to America, for there was no America in those days. Well, and if there was, the poor Welshman didn’t know it. So as Rowli was sitting on his wall one day, hard by his cottage, musing over his sad lot, he was accosted by a little man who asked him what was the matter. Rowli looked around in surprise, but before he could answer the ellyll said to him with a grin, ‘There, there, hold your tongue, I know more about you than you ever dreamed of knowing. You’re in trouble, and you’re going away. But you may stay, now I’ve spoken to you. Only bid your good wife leave the candle burning when she goes to bed, and say no more about it.’ With this the ellyll kicked up his heels and disappeared. Of course the farmer did as he was bid, and from that day he prospered. Every night Catti Jones, his wife,[12] set the candle out, swept the hearth, and went to bed; and every night the fairies would come and do her baking and brewing, her washing and mending, sometimes even furnishing their own tools and materials. The farmer was now always clean of linen and whole of garb; he had good bread and good beer; he felt like a new man, and worked like one. Everything prospered with him now as nothing had before. His crops were good, his barns were tidy, his cattle were sleek, his pigs the fattest in the parish. So things went on for three years. One night Catti Jones took it into her head that she must have a peep at the fair family who did her work for her; and curiosity conquering prudence, she arose while Rowli Pugh lay snoring, and peeped through a crack in the door. There they were, a jolly company of ellyllon, working away like mad, and laughing and dancing

as madly as they worked. Catti was so amused that in spite of herself she fell to laughing too; and at sound of her voice the ellyllon scattered like mist before the wind, leaving the room empty. They never came back any more; but the farmer was now prosperous, and his bad luck never returned to plague him.

ROWLI AND THE ELLYLL.

The resemblance of this tale to many he has encountered will at once be noted by the student of comparative folk-lore. He will also observe that it trenches on the domain of

another class in my own enumeration, viz., that of the Bwbach, or household fairy. This is the stone over which one is constantly stumbling in this field of scientific research. Mr. Baring-Gould's idea that all household tales are reducible to a primeval root (in the same or a similar manner that we trace words to their roots), though most ingeniously illustrated by him, is constantly involved in trouble of the sort mentioned. He encounters the obstacle which lies in the path of all who walk this way. His roots sometimes get inextricably gnarled and intertwisted with each other. But some effort of this sort is imperative, and we must do the best we can with our materials. Stories of the class of Grimm's Witchelmänner (Kinder und Hausmärchen) will be recalled by the legend of Rowli Pugh as here told. The German Hausmänner are elves of a domestic turn, sometimes mischievous and sometimes useful, but usually looking for some material reward for their labours. So with the English goblin named by Milton in 'L'Allegro,' which drudges,

To earn his cream-bowl duly set.

FOOTNOTE:

[12] Until recently, Welsh women retained their maiden names even after marriage.

IV.

The Ellylldan is a species of elf exactly corresponding to the English Will-o'-wisp, the Scandinavian Lyktgubhe, and the Breton Sand Yan y Tad. The Welsh word dan means fire;

dan also means a lure; the compound word suggests a luring elf-fire. The Breton Sand Yan y Tad (St. John and Father)[13] is a double ignis fatuus fairy, carrying at its finger-ends five lights, which spin round like a wheel. The negroes of the southern seaboard states of America invest this goblin with an exaggeration of the horrible peculiarly their own. They call it Jack-muh-lantern, and describe it as a hideous creature five feet in height, with goggle-eyes and huge mouth, its body covered with long hair, and which goes leaping and bounding through the air like a gigantic grasshopper. This frightful apparition is stronger than any man, and swifter than any horse, and compels its victims to follow it into the swamp, where it leaves them to die.

Like all goblins of this class, the Ellylldan was, of course, seen dancing about in marshy grounds, into which it led the belated wanderer; but, as a distinguished resident in Wales has wittily said, the poor elf ‘is now starved to death, and his breath is taken from him; his light is quenched for ever by the improving farmer, who has drained the bog; and, instead of the rank decaying vegetation of the autumn, where bitterns and snipes delighted to secrete themselves, crops of corn and potatoes are grown.’[14]

A poetic account by a modern character, called Iolo the Bard, is thus condensed: ‘One night, when the moon had gone down, as I was sitting on a hill-top, the Ellylldan passed by. I followed it into the valley. We crossed plashes of water where the tops of bulrushes peeped above, and where the lizards lay silently on the surface, looking at us with an unmoved stare. The frogs sat croaking and swelling their sides, but ceased as they raised a melancholy eye at the

Ellylldan. The wild fowl, sleeping with their heads under their wings, made a low cackle as we went by. A bittern awoke and rose with a scream into the air. I felt the trail of the eels and leeches peering about, as I waded through the pools. On a slimy stone a toad sat sucking poison from the night air. The Ellylldan glowed bravely in the slumbering vapours. It rose airily over the bushes that drooped in the ooze. When I lingered or stopped, it waited for me, but dwindled gradually away to a speck barely perceptible. But as soon as I moved on again, it would shoot up suddenly and glide before. A bat came flying round and round us, flapping its wings heavily. Screech-owls stared silently at us with their broad eyes. Snails and worms crawled about. The fine threads of a spider's web gleamed in the light of the Ellylldan. Suddenly it shot away from me, and in the distance joined a ring of its fellows, who went dancing slowly round and round in a goblin dance, which sent me off to sleep.'[15]

FOOTNOTES:

[13] Keightley, 'Fairy Mythology,' 441.

[14] Hon. W.O. Stanley, M.P., in 'Notes and Queries.'

[15] 'The Vale of Glamorgan.' (London, 1839.)

V.

Pwca, or Pooka, is but another name for the Ellylldan, as our Puck is another name for the Will-o'-wisp; but in both cases the shorter term has a more poetic flavour and a wider latitude. The name Puck was originally applied to the

whole race of English fairies, and there still be few of the realm who enjoy a wider popularity than Puck, in spite of his mischievous attributes. Part of this popularity is due to the poets, especially to Shakspeare. I have alluded to the bard's accurate knowledge of Welsh folk-lore; the subject is really one of unique interest, in view of the inaccuracy charged upon him as to the English fairyland. There is a Welsh tradition to the effect that Shakspeare received his knowledge of the Cambrian fairies from his friend Richard Price, son of Sir John Price, of the priory of Brecon. It is even claimed that Cwm Pwca, or Puck Valley, a part of the romantic glen of the Clydach, in Breconshire, is the original scene of the 'Midsummer Night's Dream'—a fancy as light and airy as Puck himself.[16] Anyhow, there Cwm Pwca is, and in the sylvan days, before Frere and Powell's ironworks were set up there, it is said to have been as full of goblins as a Methodist's head is of piety. And there are in Wales other places bearing like names, where Pwca's pranks are well remembered by old inhabitants. The range given to the popular fancy in Wales is expressed with fidelity by Shakspeare's words in the mouth of Puck:

> I'll follow you, I'll lead you about a round,
> Through bog, through bush, through brake, through brier,
> Sometime a horse I'll be, sometime a hound,
> A hog, a headless bear, sometime a fire;
> And neigh, and bark, and grunt, and roar, and burn,
> Like horse, hound, hog, bear, fire, at every turn.[17]