

Three Scottish Fairy Tales:

The Smith and the Fairies

Years ago there lived in Crossbrig a smith of the name of MacEachern. This man had an only child, a boy of about thirteen or fourteen years of age, cheerful, strong, and healthy. All of a sudden he fell ill, took to his bed, and moped whole days away. No one could tell what the matter with him was, and the boy himself could not, or would not, tell how he felt. He was wasting away fast, getting thin, old, and yellow, and his father and all his friends were afraid that he would die.

After the boy had been lying in this condition for a long time, getting neither better nor worse, always confined to bed, but with an extraordinary appetite, something happened. While sadly considering these things and standing idly at his forge, with no heart to work, the smith was agreeably surprised to see an old man, well known to him for his sagacity and knowledge of out-of-the-way things, walk into his workshop. Forthwith he told him the Occurrence which had clouded his life.

The old man looked grave as he listened; and after sitting a long time pondering over all he had heard, gave his opinion thus- "It is not your son you have got. The boy has been carried away by the `Daoine Sith´ and they have left a Sibhreach in his place." "Alas! And what then am I to do?" said the smith. "How am I ever to see my own son again?" "I will tell you how," answered the old man. "But, first, to make sure that it is not your own son you have got, take as many empty egg-shells as you can get, go with them into the room, spread them out carefully before his sight, then proceed to draw water with them, carrying them two and two in your hands as if they were a great weight, and arrange when full, with every sort of earnestness, round the fire." The smith accordingly gathered as many broken egg-shells as he could get, went into the room, and proceeded to carry out all his instructions.

He had not been long at work before there arose from the bed a shout of laughter, and the voice of the seeming sick boy exclaimed, "I am now 800 years of age, and I have never seen the like of that before."

The smith returned and told the old man. "Well, now," said the sage to him, "did I not tell you that it was not your

son you had: your son is in Brorra-cheill in a digh (= a round green hill frequented by fairies) there. Get rid as soon as possible of this intruder, and I think I may promise you your son."

"You must light a very large and bright fire before the bed on which this stranger is lying. He will ask you, "What is the use of such a fire as that?" Answer him at once, "You will see that presently!" and then seize him, and throw him into the middle of it. If it is your own son you have got, he will call out to save him; but if not, this thing will fly through the roof."

The smith again followed the old man's advice; kindled a large fire, answered the question put to him as he had been directed to do, and seizing the child flung him in without hesitation. The "Sibhreach" gave an awful yell, and sprung through the roof, where a hole was left to let the smoke out.

On a certain night the old man told him the green round hill, where the fairies kept the boy, would be open. And on that night the smith, having provided himself with a Bible, a dirk (= a short dagger carried by Scottish clansmen), and a crowing cock, was to proceed to the hill. He would hear singing and dancing and much merriment going on, but he was to advance boldly; the Bible he carried would be a certain safeguard to him against any danger from the fairies. On entering the hill he was to stick the dirk in the threshold, to prevent the hill from closing upon him; "and then," continued the old man, "on entering you will see a spacious apartment before you, beautifully clean, and there, standing far within, working at a forge, you will also see your own son. When you are questioned, say you come to seek him, and will not go without him."

Not long after this the time came round, and the smith sallied forth, prepared as instructed. Sure enough, as he approached the hill, there was a light where light was seldom seen before. Soon after, a sound of piping, dancing, and joyous merriment reached the anxious father on the night wind.

Overcoming every impulse to fear, the smith approached the threshold steadily, stuck the dirk into it as directed, and entered. Protected by the Bible he carried at his breast, the fairies could not touch him; but they asked him with a good deal of displeasure, what he wanted there. He answered, "I want my son, whom I see down there, and will not go without him."

Upon hearing this the whole company before him gave a loud laugh, which awakened the cock he carried dozing in his arms, who at once leaped up on his shoulders, clapped his wings lustily, and crowed loud and long.

The fairies, incensed, seized the smith and his son, and, throwing them out of the hill, flung the dirk after them, and in an instant all was dark.

For a year and a day the boy never did a turn of work, and hardly ever spoke a word; but at last one day, sitting by his father and watching him finishing a sword he was making for some chief, and which he was very particular about, he suddenly exclaimed, "That is not the way to do it," and, taking the tools from his father's hands, he set to work himself in his place, and soon fashioned a sword the like of which was never seen in the country before.

From that day the young man wrought constantly with his father, and became the inventor of a peculiarly fine and well-tempered weapon, the making of which kept the two smiths, father and son, in constant employment, spread their fame far and wide, and gave them the means in abundance to live content with all the world and very happily with one another.

Sir Godfrey MacCulloch

As this Gallovidian gentleman was taking the air on horseback, near his own house, he was suddenly accosted by a little old man arrayed in green, and mounted upon a white palfrey (= horse). After mutual salutation, the old man gave Sir Godfrey to understand that he resided on Godfrey's estate, and that he had great reason to complain of the direction of a drain, or common sewer, which emptied itself directly into his chamber. Sir Godfrey MacCulloch was a good deal startled at this extraordinary complaint; but, guessing the nature of the being he had to deal with, he assured the old man, with great courtesy, that the direction of the drain should be altered; and caused it to be done accordingly. Many years afterwards Sir Godfrey had the misfortune to kill, in a fray, a gentleman of the neighbourhood. He was apprehended, tried, and condemned. The scaffold upon

which his head was to be struck off was erected on the Castle Hill of Edinburgh; but hardly had he reached the fatal spot when the old man, upon his white palfrey, pressed through the crowd with the rapidity of lightning. Sir Godfrey, at his command, sprung on behind him; the "good neighbour" spurred his horse down the steep bank, and neither he nor the criminal was ever again seen.

The young Laird of Lorntie

The young Laird of Lorntie, in Forfarshire, was returning from a hunting excursion one evening, attended by a single servant and two greyhounds, when, in passing a solitary lake, which lies about three miles south from Lorntie and was in those times closely surrounded with natural wood, his ears were suddenly assailed by the shrieks of a female apparently drowning. Being of a fearless character, he instantly spurred his horse forward to the side of the lake, and there saw a beautiful female struggling with the water, and, as it seemed to him, just in the act of sinking. "Help, help, Lorntie!" she exclaimed. "Help, Lorntie- help, Lor-," and the waters seemed to choke the last sounds of her voice as they gurgled in her throat. The laird, unable to resist the impulse of humanity, rushed into the lake, and was about to grasp the long yellow locks of the lady, which lay like banks of gold upon the water, when he was suddenly seized behind, and forced out of the lake by his servant, who farther-sighted than his master, perceived the whole affair to be the feint of a water-spirit. "Bide, Lorntie - bide a blink!" cried the faithful creature, as the laird was about to dash him to the earth; "that wauling madam was nae other, God sauf us!, than the mermaid." Lorntie instantly acknowledged the truth of this assertion, which, as he was preparing to mount his horse, was confirmed by the mermaid raising herself half out of the water, and exclaiming, in a voice of fiendish disappointment and ferocity,-

"Lorntie, Lorntie,
Were it na your man,
I had gart your heart's bluid
Skirl in my pan."

(= ...if it hadn't been for your servant,
I would have had your heart's blood
howling [= noise made by bagpipes] in my pan!)