



The Duergar

Folk-Lore And Legends: English

English

Advanced
5 min read

The following encounters with the duergar, a species of mischievous elves, are said to have taken place on Simonside Hills, a mountainous district between Rothbury and Elsdon in Northumberland.

A person well acquainted with the locality went out one night to amuse himself with the pranks of these mysterious beings. When he had wandered a considerable time, he shouted loudly—

“Tint! tint!” and a light appeared before him, like a burning candle in the window of a shepherd’s cottage. Thither, with great caution, he bent his steps, and speedily approached a deep slough, from whence a quantity of moss or peat had been excavated, and which was now filled with mud and water. Into this he threw a piece of turf which he raised at his feet, and when the sound of the splash echoed throughout the surrounding stillness, the decoying light was extinguished. The adventurer retraced his steps, overjoyed at his dexterity in outwitting the fiendish imps, and in a moment of exultation, as if he held all the powers of darkness in defiance, he again cried to the full extent of his voice—

“Tint! tint!”

His egotism subsided, however, more quickly than it arose, when he observed three of the little demons, with hideous visages, approach him, carrying torches in their diminutive hands, as if they wished to inspect the

figure of their enemy. He now betook himself to the speed of his heels for safety, but found that an innumerable multitude of the same species were gathering round him, each with a torch in one hand and a short club in the other, which they brandished with such gestures, as if they were resolved to oppose his flight, and drive him back into the morass. Like a knight of romance he charged with his oaken staff the foremost of his foes, striking them, as it seemed, to the earth, for they disappeared, but his offensive weapon encountered in its descent no substance of flesh or bone, and beyond its sweep the demons appeared to augment both in size and number. On witnessing so much of the unearthly, his heart failed him. He sank down in a state of stupor, nor was he himself again till the gray light of the morning dispersed his unhallowed opponents, and revealed before him the direct way to his own dwelling.

Another time, a traveller, wandering over these mountain solitudes, had the misfortune to be benighted, and, perceiving near him a glimmering light, he hastened thither and found what appeared to be a hut, on the floor of which, between two rough, gray stones, the embers of a fire, which had been supplied with wood, were still glowing and unconsumed. He entered, and the impression on his mind was that the place had been deserted an hour or two previously by gipsies, for on one side lay a couple of old gate-posts ready to be split up for fuel, and a quantity of refuse brush-wood, such as is left from besom making, was strewn upon the floor. With this material he trimmed the fire, and had just seated himself on one of the stones, when a diminutive figure in human shape, not higher than his knee, came waddling in at the door, and took possession of the other. The traveller, being acquainted with the manner in which things of this description ought to be regarded, retained his self-possession, kept his seat, and remained silent, knowing that if he rose up or spoke, his danger would be redoubled, and as the flame blazed up he examined minutely the hollow eyes, the stern vindictive features, and the short, strong limbs of the visitor before him. By degrees he perceived that the hut afforded little or no shelter from the cold night air, and as the energy of the fire subsided he lifted from the floor a piece of wood, broke it over his knee, and laid the fragments upon the red-hot embers. Whether this operation was regarded by his strange neighbour as a species of insult we cannot say, but the demon seized, as if in bitter mockery, one of the gate-posts, broke it likewise over its knee, and laid the pieces on the embers in the same manner. The other having no wish to witness a further display of such marvellous agency, thenceforth permitted the fire to die away, and kept his position in darkness and silence, till the fair dawn of returning day made him aware of the extreme danger to which he was exposed. He saw a quantity of white ashes before him, but the grim dwarfish intruder, with the roof and walls of the hut, were gone, and he himself, sat upon a stone, sure

enough, but it formed one of the points of a deep, rugged precipice, over which the slightest inadvertent movement had been the means of dashing him to pieces.

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