

The Fairies of Merlin's Craig

Folk-Lore And Legends: Scotland

Scottish

Advanced
4 min read

Early in the seventeenth century, John Smith, a barn-man at a farm, was sent by his master to cast divots (turf) on the green immediately behind Merlin's Craig. After having laboured for a considerable time, there came round from the front of the rock a little woman, about eighteen inches in height, clad in a green gown and red stockings, with long yellow hair hanging down to her waist, who asked the astonished operator how he would feel were she to send her husband to tir (uncover) his house, at the same time commanding him to place every divot he had cast in statu quo. John obeyed with fear and trembling, and, returning to his master, told what had happened. The farmer laughed at his credulity, and, anxious to cure him of such idle superstition, ordered him to take a cart and fetch home the divots immediately.

John obeyed, although with much reluctance. Nothing happened to him in consequence till that day twelve months, when he left his master's work at the usual hour in the evening, with a small stoup p. 107of milk in his hand, but he did not reach home, nor was he ever heard of for years (I have forgotten how many), when, upon the anniversary of that unfortunate day, John walked into his house at the usual hour, with the milk-stoup in his hand.

The account that he gave of his captivity was that, on the evening of that eventful day, returning home from his labour, when passing Merlin's Craig, he felt himself suddenly taken ill, and sat down to rest a little. Soon after

he fell asleep, and awoke, as he supposed, about midnight, when there was a troop of male and female fairies dancing round him. They insisted upon his joining in the sport, and gave him the finest girl in the company as a partner. She took him by the hand; they danced three times round in a fairy ring, after which he became so happy that he felt no inclination to leave his new associates. Their amusements were protracted till he heard his master's cock crow, when the whole troop immediately rushed forward to the front of the craig, hurrying him along with them. A door opened to receive them, and he continued a prisoner until the evening on which he returned, when the same woman who had first appeared to him when casting divots came and told him that the grass was again green on the roof of her house, which he had tilled, and if he would swear an oath, which she dictated, never to discover what he had seen in fairyland, he should be at liberty to return to his family. p. 108 John took the oath, and observed it most religiously, although sadly teased and questioned by his helpmate, particularly about the "bonnie lassie" with whom he danced on the night of his departure. He was also observed to walk a mile out of his way rather than pass Merlin's Craig when the sun was below the horizon.

On a subsequent occasion the tiny inhabitants of Merlin's Craig surprised a shepherd when watching his fold at night; he was asleep, and his bonnet had fallen off and rolled to some little distance. He was awakened by the fairies dancing round him in a circle, and was induced to join them; but recollecting the fate of John Smith, he would not allow his female companion to take hold of his hands. In the midst of their gambols they came close to the hillock where the shepherd's bonnet lay,—he affected to stumble, fell upon his bonnet, which he immediately seized, clapping it on his head, when the whole troop instantly vanished. This exorcism was produced by the talismanic power of a Catechism containing the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed, which the shepherd most fortunately recollected was deposited in the crown of his bonnet.

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