

FAIRY LEGENDS

AND

TRADITIONS

OF THE

South of Ireland.

BY

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A NEW AND COMPLETE EDITION,

EDITED BY

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WITH

A MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR,

BY HIS SON,

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LONDON: WILLIAM TEGG.

1862.

1828 CROKER selected

Thomas Crofton **Croker**, *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* (London: Thomas Davison, 1827), p. 155 -206.

<<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044014345045;view=1up;seq=593>>

p. 158, footnote

• In 1825, Dr. Owen Pughe issued the following prospectus for the publication of the Mabinogion, so soon as subscribers should be obtained sufficient to defray the expense of printing :
"In three volumes, demy octavo, price 2*l.* inboards; fifty copies will be on large superfine paper, price 4*l.*, The Mabinogion ; or, the Ancient Romances of 14 ralea, in the original language, and a literal translation into English. By W. Owen Pughe, LL.D. F.A.S.

another footnote

It is presumed, by the editor, that these interesting remains of British lore will be considered a valuable acquisition by the literary world, exhibiting a faithful and unique portraiture of the ancient manners and customs that prevailed among the Cymmry, through the middle ages. They may also assist in deciding a long-disputed question respecting the origin of all tales of a similar character diffused over Europe, and form an important accession to the curious and valuable illustrations of the subject, elicited by the learned researches of [George] Ellis, in 'The early English Romances'

p.167 The tales thus announced are known under the title of Mabinogion, which implies matters interesting to youth

Footnote. The Welsh word Mabinogion (in the singular Mabinogi) may be rendered by juvenilia, and signifies any thing that appertains to youth. It is, however, commonly used in a limited acceptation, and understood to mean certain romantic fictions, or stories for children, which were in former ages the popular legends of the country. These legends are sometimes/ alluded to under the name of *Ystoria*, or Tales, and *Hen Ystoriau*, or old stories.

p. 169 Footnote • In the tale of Pwyll, the real pasonages are Pwyll, Pryderi, Teyrnnon, Twrv, Bliant, and Hyfaid Hen. Rhianon, the Dynion Mwyn, or Fairy, is a mythological creature; and Arawn, Havcan, and Gwawl mab Clud are imaginary beings.

Rhianon was a character in the bardic mythology, the song of whose birds so entranced any one who heard them, that they listened unconscious of years passing away. The name Rhianon implies the queen, or paragon of the fair sex; and the Welsh poets complimented a lady for superior endowments by comparing her to Rhianon:

"Gwenhwyvar! Ei pryd a cudiwyd a prid:/ Dygn covion Rhianon rod!" "Gwenhwyvar! Her countenance has been covered with earth:/ severe the recollections of her having the gift of Rhianon."—Goronwy Cyriog. 1300.

Arawn signifies eloquent one; Havcan, the splendour of summer, or summershine ; and Gwawl mab Chid means, light son of transit.

pp.170–71 Three classes, the first is the Mabinogi

Pwyll, Prince of Dimetia; Bran's Expedition to Ireland ; Manawydan's Destruction of the Enchantment that was over Dimetia [note] ; and The Magical Ad/ ventures of Gwdion, under Math, the son of Mathonwy, ... with many allusions to mythological persons and things of remote antiquity. (pp.170–71) The second group is Arthurian, the third miscellaneous. (p.172)

Mythological Persons (subtitle) 'disembodied apirits and supernatural beings' (p. 192)

Gwyn ap Nudd (p.197 ff)

GWYN AP NUDD, a mythological person, often mentioned by the ancient poets ; Davydd ab Gwilym, in a poem composed 1346, makes him to be the king of fairy-land. "Among the extensive mountains about the junction of the counties of Brecon, Monmouth, and Glamorgan," writes an intelligent but unknown

correspondent, " there is a considerable eminence, known by the name of *Gwyn ap Nudd*, generally corrupted into *Gwyneb y Nyth*, which, though nearly alike in sound, yet, as applied to mountain, is absolutely unintelligible. The real name of the mountain seems derived from Gwyn ap Nudd (pronounced Gwyr ap Neeth), a mythological personage, well known in old British legends, as the king of those aerial beings who frequent the tops of mountains. [Craig y Ddinas?] It is likewise stated in the Triads, that there was in former times a real chieftain of this name, who was also a great astronomer [quotes a triplet about Gwyn, p.198]

"*Gwyn ap Mad budd buddinawr*

Cynt i syrthiai cadoedd rhag Carneddawr

Dy fraich no brwyn briw i iolor."

Gwyn ap Neeth ! victorious warrior !

How fell the hosts before the dweller of the Cairn !

Thy arm, like rushes hew'd them down.

p. 200 ff. FAIRY LEGENDS OF WALES.

THE Fairies were the *Dynion Mwyn*, or kind people of the Mabinogion. They were also called *Y tylwyth teg*, the fair family, and in some parts of Wales, *Y Teulu*, the family, also *Bendith eu Mamau*, the blessings of their mothers ; and *Gwreigedth Anwyl*, or dear wives. The idea of the Fairies being diminutive is only current in Pembrokeshire and the adjoining districts, where they are called *Y dynon bac teg*, the small fair people. In the poems of the bards, and in the traditionary tales of the country, they had other names, such as *Elod*, intelligences; and *Ellyllon*, /p. 202 goblins or wandering spirits. The term *ellyll*, with its plural *ellyllon*, corresponds with the Hebrew *elil* and *elilim*.

[Footnote:*El-Elod*, an intelligence, a spirit, an angel, a fairy. The queen of the fairies is called *Tywysoges yr Elod*.]

Bwyd Ellyllon, Elves' food, is the poisonous mushroom; *menyg ellyllon*, are the flowers of the foxglove. (*Llyr Mawr*, great herb), and *Ceubren yr Ellyll*, the Elves' hollow tree. The popular stories /p. 203 of their friendly, and at the same time mischievous, intercourse with the inhabitants of Wales are endless. They are supposed to be the manes of the ancient Druids, suffered to remain in a middle state ; not worthy of the felicity of heaven, but too good to associate with evil spirits, and therefore permitted to wander among men until the day of doom, when they are to be elevated to a higher state of being; hence the adage, "*Byw dr dir y tylwyth teg*," to live in the land of the fair family; that is, to subsist by unknown means. Though the fairies are generally represented as inoffensive, yet they sometimes discover a mischievous propensity in seizing an unwary traveller on the mountains, and giving him a trip through the region of air. See note on the story of Master and Man, in the first part of this work (p. 171, second edition), which is illustrated by a quotation from Day ab Gwilym ... /p. 204 who gives a very humorous account of his journey in a mist.

The fairies are believed to comb the beards of the goats on Friday night, which is said to be the reason for the shining and silky appearance of the beard on Saturday, " made decent for Sunday." When a person happens to find a piece of money, he will always find another in the same place so long as he keeps it a secret.

In Wales, as in other pastoral districts," says a note on Mr. Llwyd's *Can y tylwyth tag*, " the Fairy Tales are not erased from the traditional tablet; and age seldom neglects to inform youth, that if on retiring to rest, the hearth is made clean, the floor swept, and the pails left full of water, the fairies will come at midnight, continue their revels till day-break, sing the well-known strain of *Torriad y Dydd*, leave a piece of money upon the hob and disappear.

[Mr. Edward? Llwyd's *Can y tylwyth tag* Footnote Or Fairy Song, published in Thomson's British Melodies.]

"The suggestion of intellect and the precaution of prudence are easily discernible p.205. under this fiction a safety from fire in the neatness of the hearth ; a provision for its extinction in replenished pails, and a motive to perseverance in the promised boon." The fairies have concerts of delicious music upon calm summer nights, which mortals are often permitted to hear. They are also extremely fond of dancing in circles by the light of the moon, and are much addicted to the stealing of children, sometimes even en-ticing grown-up people away. ' In submitting stories illustrative of Welsh superstition," writes the lady who has collected them, ' I cannot help expressing my surprise at finding so many labouring under delusions which seem inexplicable. Many of my old friends are highly

respectable in their line of life, farmers and farmers' wives, of strict veracity on all other topics save supernatural agencies ; and they relate these stories with an earnestness and an air of truth that is perfectly confounding. Some have actually seen the fairies, and among this number is old Shane of Blaenllanby, in the vale of Neath. She says, " that several years ago she saw the fairies to the amount of p. 206. several hundreds. It was almost dusk, and they were not a quarter of a mile from her. They were very diminutive persons, riding four a-breast, and mounted upon small white horses, not bigger than dogs. They formed a long cavalcade, and passing on towards the mountain, at a place called Clwydau'r Banwen, they disappeared behind the high ground, and seemed to be traversing the Sarn, or ancient Roman road, which crosses that mountain. " Many old people have told me," continues the fair writer, " that when they were young, and had occasion to go to the mountains to look after sheep, or to fetch the cows, their parents always cautioned them to avoid treading near the fairies' ring, or they would be lost."

SKETCH OF THE TALE OF BRAN.

BRAN, the son of Llyr, with his brothers, and the attendants of his court, are described as sitting on a large stone at Harlech *, when they perceive

* The vicinity of Harlech abounds in Druidical remains : At the ebb of the tide part of a great stone wall, four-and-twenty feet in thickness, may be seen, extending into the sea for about two-and-twenty miles in a serpentine manner, from the coast of Merionethshire, midway between Harlech and Barmouth. This extraordinary work is called Sarn Badrig, or St. Patrick's Causeway. Sarn Badrhwyg, or the Ship Breaking Causeway, remarks Pennant, it ought to be more properly called, from the numbers of ships lost on it. Its principal city is supposed to have been Caer Wyddno, or Gwyddno's City. Gwyddno flourished from about the year 460 to 520. He was surnamed Garanhir, and was father to Elphin, the patron of Taliesin the bard. At the end of Sarn Badrig are sixteen large stones, one of which is four yards in breadth. Sarn y Bwlch runs from a point N. W. of Harlech, and is supposed to meet the end of this. It appears at low water near the mouth of the Dysynni. The space between these formed, several centuries ago, a habitable hundred of Merionethshire, called Cantref Gwaelod, the lowland hundred. There appears little reason to doubt that these Sarns, or Causeways, were the work of art ; according to monkish legends, Sarn Badrig was miraculously formed by St. Patrick, to expedite his passage to Ireland. That this part of the sea was formerly dry land seems to be

thirteen ships steering towards them from the south of Ireland. They go down to the strand, and the ships offer tokens of peace. The Irish king, Maltholwç, is on board one of these ships; and he says, that he has made the voyage for the purpose of obtaining the hand of Bronwen*, Llyr's daughter, and so create a union between the two islands. Bran invites him on shore, and Maltholwç lands. The next morning a council is held, when the Irish king's request is complied with, and he is married to Bronwen.

Bran's half brother Ewnisien (the man of strife) becomes angry at not being consulted respecting this marriage, and, as an insult to Maltholwç, mutilates his horses by cutting off their ears and their lips close to the teeth. Intelligence of the insult is conveyed to Maltholwç, who immediately orders his ships to prepare for departure. Bran

well attested both by written and oral tradition. The catastrophe of its being deluged is recorded in a very old MS., written between the ninth and twelfth centuries, called the Black Book of Caermarthen (preserved in the Hengwrt collection), page 53. The inundation is believed to have happened about the year 500, owing to the negligence of a drunkard named Seithennin, who left the sluices of the embankment open. Vide Welsh Archaïologia, vol. ii. p. 64.

* Bronwen means white bosom. In Jones's Relics of the Bards, p. 124, it is stated that the highest turret of Harlech Castle is called Bronwen's Tower.

demands the reason of his so doing, and expresses his regret at the insult which has been offered to him by Ebnisien : he at length proposes not only to replace the horses, but also to give Maltholwç a bar of silver equal in compass and height to himself, and a plate of gold as large as his face. On these terms the matter is made up, and a banquet of reconciliation takes place.

At this feast the appearance of Maltholwç is pensive, instead of his usual gay manner. Bran makes a farther apology, and offers him, as an additional remuneration, a magic cauldron, into which any man who may be slain to-day shall, if thrown, be on the morrow as well as ever ; but he shall not have the use of speech*. The horses are given the next day, and in the evening there is another banquet, at which Maltholwç inquires of Bran where he had obtained this wonderful

* Taliesin more than once, in his mysterious verses, speaks of magic cauldrons. In his poem of *Preiddeu Annwn*, the spoils of Annwn (translated the deep?), Welsh Archaïol. p. 45, he styles it the cauldron of the ruler of the deep, which first began to be warmed by the breast of nine damsels (the Gwilion). He describes it as having a ridge of pearls round the border :

“ *Neu pair pen Annwn ! Pwy y vynud ?
Gwrym am ei oror a mererid.*”

“ Is not this the cauldron of the ruler of the deep ? What is its quality, with the ridge of pearls round its border ?” &c.

cauldron. Bran replies, that he believes it came from Ireland, and expresses his wonder that Maltholwç should be ignorant of its history. Maltholwç, thus reminded, says, that he remembers something of it ; for that, as he was one day hunting on a mountain above a lake in Erin, called the Lake of the Cauldron, he saw a hideous, gigantic, tawny man come out of the lake with a cauldron on his back, followed by a woman who was twice his size, being large with child. That he took them home with him ; but they were of so mischievous a nature, and so riotous, that, to get rid of them, he had recourse to the plan of forming an iron house, in which he induced them to live ; and having made them drunk, he had caused coals to be piled about it and blown into an ardent glow. The heat becoming white, and inconvenient to the inmates, the gigantic man put his shoulder to the side of the iron house, and forced it out ; his wife followed him, and they escaped from Ireland over to Wales.

Bran then says, that he received them kindly ; in gratitude they gave him the cauldron, and afterwards became excellent warriors.

After this conversation, Maltholwç and his thirteen ships depart for Ireland, taking with him his wife Bronwen. They are received with great joy in Ireland ; and a son is born, who is named

Gwern ab Maltholwç, and who is put out upon fosterage. The Irish, however, on learning the insult which had been offered to their king in Wales, become indignant. To mark their anger, they cut off all communication with that country, and insist on Maltholwç's putting away his wife Bronwen, and making her perform all menial offices. Bronwen, thus disgraced, rears a starling, whom she teaches to speak ; and having completed her tuition of the bird, ties a letter under its wings, with which it flies over to Wales. The bird at length contrives to discover Bran, "the blessed*," alights on his shoulder, ruffles its wings, and discovers the letter. Bran immediately assembles his forces; a temporary government is formed, and with his host he proceeds to invade Ireland; "where there were then only two rivers called Lli and Arçan †."

* Bran was the father of Caradawg (Caractacus), and according to the Triads, he with all his family were carried to Rome, and remained there seven years as hostages for the son. Bran having met there with some Christians, and being converted, he prevailed on two Christians to accompany him to Britain, by which means the faith was introduced. Hence was the epithet "blessed" given to him.

† O'Flaherty's Ogygia, as well as Keating's History of Ireland, (which profound works may be considered of about equal historical value with the Mabinogion), record that, on the landing of Partholan, the first inhabitant of Ireland after

Some swineherds, who were on the sea shore, discover his approach, and go with all possible

the flood, there were three lakes, and ten rivers in that island ; which the old poem, beginning, “*Ádamh ácair rruic ár riuad,*” (Adam, the reverend sire of all our race), thus enumerates :

“*Ní uairiobair loç no linn,
 Án éirinn air a ccionn,
 Ác eir loca ionnab zann;
 Ár deic Sroca Seán-abann.
 Sloinneabair zo fionn iadinn,
 Ánmanh na eir Seán-loçinn;
 Fionn-loç Iruir ac zlan,
 Loç Lurgan, loç Fordremanh.
 Laoi, buair, bannh, beairda buan,
 Samh, Sligac, Moarh, Muad,
 Fionn, bife a bairinn zo zleç,
 Iriab rih na Seánairne.”*

“ Nor lake expanded, nor a rapid stream
 Found they in Ireland, on their first arrival,
 Besides three lucid lakes of obscure fame,
 And ten bright streams of ancient high renown.
 In truth-declaring verse I'll now record
 The names of these three ancient, smooth, wide lakes :
 Irrus, fair lake of soft expanded bosom ;
 Loch-lurgan, and Fordreman's lake.
 The Lee, the Bois, the Barrow bright, and Erne ;
 The Sligo fair, the Moarne, and the Moy ;
 The Finn, the Liffy, watering Leinster's plain,
 Are the fair rivers of high ancient fame.”

Both Keating and O'Flaherty mention, in the course of their history, the bursting out of various other lakes and rivers in Ireland.

speed to Maltholwç, when the following dialogue takes place :

“ Sir,” they said, “ health to thee !”

“ Heaven grant you success !” was his reply ;
“ and have you any news ?”

“ Sir, we have most wonderful news,” they said in answer ; “ we have certainly seen a wood on the sea, where we never beheld a single tree before.”

“ Truly, that is a strange thing,” said the king ;
“ did you see any thing besides ?”

“ O yes ; we could perceive a great mountain by the side of the wood, sir,” they replied ; “ and that mountain was moving, and there was a very high ridge on the mountain, with a lake on each side of the ridge. The wood, the mountain, the whole seemed in motion.”

“ Well,” said the king, “ there is no body here who knows any thing of all this unless it be Bronwen ; inquire if she knows ?”

Thereupon messengers repaired to Bronwen.

“ Madam,” said they, “ what dost thou suppose those things can be ?”

“ The men of the Isle of the Mighty, who are coming over, from having heard of my affliction and disgrace.”

“ What can be the wood that was seen on the sea ?” said the messengers.

“ The masts of ships, and their sail-yards,”
Bronwen replied.

“ Mercy on us !” they cried ; “ but what was
the mountain that was seen on one side of the
ships ?”

“ That was Bran, my brother, coming into
shallow water,” she replied ; “ there was no ship
that could contain him.”

“ But what could be that tremendous ridge, and
the lake on each side of the ridge ?”

“ It is he surveying this island,” said Bronwen :
“ he is full of wrath ; his two eyes on either side
of his nose, are what seem the two lakes on either
side of the ridge.”

The Irish warriors hold a council, and retreat
over the river Llivon, breaking down all the
bridges. Bran advances with his troops, but they
find the river impassable.

“ There is only this to be done,” Bran replied,
“ that whosoever would be the top, let him be
the bottom ; I will be a bridge.” And then was
that saying first made use of, and still is it pro-
verbial from that event.

Bran laid himself across the river, and hurdles
being placed upon him, his troops pass over. A
negotiation ensues ; when Bronwen suggests, that
a house should be built of sufficient size to contain
Bran, who, as he never had one before large

enough for him, will feel the honour so great, that he will accede to a peace.

To proceed with a more rapid analysis of the tale. Only seven return from this expedition to Ireland, after having destroyed nearly all the people of the country. Bran is mortally wounded, and orders his companions who survive to carry his head to be interred in the White Hill in London, as a protection against all future invasions, so long as the head remained there. The sequel of the tale recites their progress to London to bury the head. At Harlech, in their way, they are kept seven years listening to the birds of Rhianon, singing in the air, and in Dyved (Dimetia) by attending to the last words of Bran, they stay in a grand hall for eighty years, enjoying every kind of pleasure; all their misfortunes, and the object of their further progress being kept out of their minds: but upon opening a door looking towards Cornwall, their real condition

breaks in upon their memory, and they pursue their journey.