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Select Poetry.



CON O'KEEFE AND THE GOLDEN CUP.

BY R. SHELTON MACKENZIE.

In Ireland, as in Scotland, among the lower orders, there is a prevalent belief in the existence and supernatural powers of the gentry commonly called "fairies." Many and strange are the stories told of this mysterious and much dreaded race of beings. Loud and frequent have been the exclamations of surprise, and even anger of the hard incredulity which made me refuse, when I was young, to credit all that was narrated of the wonderful feats of Irish fairies—the most frolicsome of the entire genus. The more my disbelief was manifested, the more wonderful were the legends which were launched at me, to overthrow my matter-of-fact obstinacy.

I have forgotten many of the traditions which were thus made familiar to me in my boyhood, but my memory retains sufficient to convince me to what improbabilities superstition clung—and the more wonderful the story, the more implicit the belief. But in such cases the fanaticism was harmless—it was of the head rather than of the heart—of the imagination rather than the reason. It would be fortunate if all superstitions did as little mischief as this.

It is deeply to be lamented that the matter-of-factness of the Americans is not to be subdued or modified by any—even the slightest—belief in the old world superstitions, of which I speak. Of fairy-lore they do not possess the slightest item. They read of it, as if it were legendary but nothing more. They feel it not—they know it—they are, therefore, dreadfully actual. So much the worse for them!

Having imbibed a sovereign contempt for the wild and wonderful traditions which had been duly accredited in the neighborhood, time out of mind, I never particularly chary in expressing such contempt at every opportunity. When the mind of a boy soars above the ignorance, which besets his elders in an inferior station, he is apt to pride himself, as I did, on the "march of intellect" which has placed him superior to their vulgar crudity.

Many years have passed since I happened to be a temporary visitor beneath the hospitable roof of one of the better sort of farmers, in the county of Cork, during the Midsummer holidays. As usual, I there indulged in sarcasm against the crudity of the country. One evening, in particular, I was not a little tenacious in laughing at the very existence of "the fairy folk;" and, as sometimes happens, ridicule accomplished more than argument could have effected. My hosts could bear anything in the way of argument—at least of argument such as mine—they could even suffer their favorite legends and theories about the fairies to be abused; but to laugh at them—that was an act of unkindness which quite passed their comprehension, and grievously taxed their patience.

My host was quite in despair, and almost in anger at my boyish jokes upon his fairy-legends when the village schoolmaster came in, an uninvited but most welcome guest. A chair was soon provided for him in the warmest corner—whiskey was immediately on the table, and the schoolmaster, who was a pretty constant votary to Bacchus, lost no time in making himself acquainted with its flavor.

I had often seen him before. He combined in his character a mixture of shrewdness and simplicity; was a most excellent mathematician and a good classical scholar—but of the world he knew next to nothing. From youth to age had been spent within the limits of the parish over which, cane in hand, he had presided for more than a quarter of a century—at once a teacher and an oracle! He was deeply imbued with a belief in the superstitions of the district, but was more especially familiar with the wild legends of the rocky glen (the defile near Kilworth, commonly called Araglin, once famous for the extent of illicit distillation carried on there) in which he had passed away his life, usually, but humbly employed.

To this eccentric character my host triumphantly appealed for proof respecting the existence and vagaries of the fairies. He wasted no time in argument, but glancing triumphantly around, declared that he would convert me by a particularly well-attested story. Draining his tumbler, and incidentally mixing another, Mr. Patrick McCann plunged at once into the heart of his narration, as follows:

"You know the high hill that overlooks the town at Fernoy? Handsome and thriving place as it now is, I remember the time when there were only two houses in that same town, and one of them was then in course of building! Well, there lived on the other side Corran Tierna (the mountain in question, though Corriena is the true name) one of the Barrys, a gentleman who was both rich and good. I wish we had more of the stamp among us now—is little of the Whiteboys or Ribbonmen, who would trouble the country then. He had a fine fortune, kept up a fine house, and lived at a dashing rate. It does not matter, here nor there, how many servants he had: but I mention them, because one of them was a very remarkable fellow. His equal was not to be had, far or near, for love nor money."

A GRAVE JOKE.—Some years ago, Spurr kept a livery stable in Toledo. Spurr had his peculiarities, one of which was this: he never let a horse go out of the stable without requesting the lessee not to drive fast. One day there went to Spurr's stable a young man, to get a horse and carriage to attend a funeral. "Certainly" said Spurr, "but," he added, forgetting the solemn purpose for which the young man wanted the horse, "don't drive fast." "Why, just look a here, old feller," said the somewhat excited young man, "I want you to understand that I shall keep up with the procession if it kills the horse." Spurr instantly retired to a horse stall and swooned amongst the straw.

This servant was called Con O'Keeffe. He was a crabbed little man, with a face the very color and texture of old parchment, and he had lived in the family time out of mind. He was such a small, dwarfish, deony creature, that no one ever thought of putting him to hard work. All that they did was, now and again, from the want of a better messenger at the moment, to humor the old man, to send him to Rathcormac post-office for letters. But he was too weak and feeble to walk so far—though it was only a matter of three or four miles; so they got him a little ass, and he rode upon it, quite as pround as a general at the head of an army of conquerors. Twas as good as a play to see Con mounted upon his donkey—you could scarcely

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WHAT SCIENCE SAYS OF BREADMAKING.

KING.

It is a praiseworthy characteristic of the American people, that they are curious to know the philosophy of all things. Causality, as the phrenologist would say, is large among us. We analyze the smallest as well as the greatest objects. The reason why the stars keep to their orbits is hardly more interesting to our practical minds than the mysteries involved in bread-making.

For the making of good bread, to thousands and tens of thousands of housewives even, is a mystery. Cooks pride themselves on their success in the art; and naturally: for it is a distinction to be able to insure light bread. Yet of a hundred thousand bakers, how few understand why it is that the bread is sometimes good and sometimes bad! The proficient has a knack in kneading and baking her bread; and that is all she knows about it. The rival, whose bread is a failure, can only say that the baking went wrong, and is as much in the dark as the other.

To make bread the flour has first to be kneaded. But why knead it? Because a certain quantity of water, in addition to that existing in the flour, is necessary to produce those chemical changes, without which good bread can never be made. The water dissolves the sugar and albumen; combines with and hydrates the starch; and moistens the minute particles of gluten, so as to induce them to cement together, and thus bind the whole into a coherent mass. The good housewife knows, by practice, when this state of things has been brought about; in other words, when her dough is properly kneaded. For as only a certain limited quantity of water can be used to produce this effect, as too much or too little would wholly frustrate the end, it is plain that the water must be carefully and thoroughly worked into the flour; so as to bring every separate particle of the one into contact with the required amount of the other. Kneading, with the hand, is the sole way to do this. The competent housewife tells by the feeling when her dough is fit to put away to rise. No machinery can do it perfectly.

The next process is the fermentation. This is produced, generally, by yeast; and always more safely and perfectly by it. Yeast, as the microscope has proved, is a vegetable—a true plant belonging to the fungus tribe. It makes bread rise, by producing a change of the gluten albumen, which acts upon the sugar, breaking it up into alcohol and carbonic acid gas.

If the dough has been skillfully kneaded, and the fermentation is regular and equal, the gas is evolved evenly throughout the mass, so that the bread, when cut, will be honeycombed with numberless minute pores. Bad yeast, or a bad fermentation, makes the bread sour, which the experienced housewife corrects with a little alkali. Chemical substances are sometimes used to make bread rise. But Youmans, the chemist to whom we are indebted for most of these facts, says, that as such substances are not nutritive, but medicinal, they exert a disturbing action on the healthy organism, and, consequently, ought not to be employed habitually. Other writers, also, have attributed the increase of dyspepsia to the wide-spread introduction of these agents as a substitute for yeast.

The baking of the loaf, as every housewife knows, is not the least part of the "art and mystery" of bread-baking. The heat of the oven should be equal everywhere throughout it, and should continue constant for a considerable time. If the heat is insufficient, the bread will be soft, wet and pasty; if too great, the crust will be burnt, the inside raw dough. The baking temperature of an oven should range 350 deg. Fahrenheit, to 500 deg. An ordinary way of testing when an oven is proper for baking, is to strew fresh flour on the bottom, and if the flour chars, the heat is excessive. The loaf diminishes in weight and enlarges in size by baking, in consequence of the evaporation of the water, the expansion of its carbonic acid gas, and the vaporizing of its alcohol. The crust is caused by chemical changes in the outer surface of the loaf, producing an organic matter which chemists call assamar. Such is the scientific history of breadmaking.—*Phil. Ledger.*

DANIEL WEBSTER ON THE LOVE OF HOME.—It is only shallow-minded pretenders who make either distinguished origin a matter of personal merit or obscure origin a matter of personal reproach. A man who is not ashamed of himself need not be ashamed of his early condition. It did happen to me to be born in a log cabin, raised among the snow drifts of New Hampshire, at a period so early that when the smoke first rose from its rude chimney and curled over the frozen hills there was no similar evidence of white habitation between it and the settlements on the rivers of Canada. Its remains still exist: I make it an annual visit. I carry my children to it, and teach them the hardships endured by their relations before them. I love to dwell on the tender recollections, the kindred ties, the early affections, and the narrations and incidents which mingle with all I know of the primitive family abode; I weep no more for those who inhabited it, and I never fail in affectionate veneration for him who raised it, and defended it against savage violence and destruction, cherished all domestic comforts beneath its roof, and through the fire and blood of seven years revolutionary war shrunk from no toil, no sacrifice, to serve his country, and to raise his children to a condition better than his own, may my name and the name of my posterity be blotted from the memory of mankind.

—One cannot see the grand sepulchres of Egypt (says Emerson,) without feeling that for such a tomb one would almost wish to die.—Shelley said the high marble walls and ceilings so delicately carved, were not so much tombs as abounding chambers for immortal spirits. Dobbs' case was evidently past all surgery.

make out which had the most stupid look. But neither man nor beast can help his looks.

"At that time Rathcormac thought 'tis but a village now, was a borough, and sent two members to the Irish Parliament. Was not the great Curran, the orator and patriot, member for Rathcormac, when he was a young man? Did not Colonel Tonson get made an Irish peer, out of this very borough, which his son William is, to this day, by the title of Baron Riverdale of Rathcormac? Does not his shield bear an open hand between two castles, and is not the motto, 'Manus haec iuncta, tyrannis'—which means that it was the enemy of tyrants? Did not the Ulster King of arms make the Tonsons a grant of these lands in the time of Cromwell? But here I have left poor little Con mounted on his donkey all this time.

"Con O'Keeffe was not worth his keep, for any good he did; but, truth to say, he had the name of being hand and glove with the fairies; and, at that time Corran Tierna swarmed with them. They changed their quarters when the regiments from Fermoy barracks took to firing against targets stuck up at the foot of the mountain. Not that a ball could ever hit a fairy (except a silver one cast by a girl in her teens, who has never wished for a lover, or a widow under forty who has not sighed for a second husband)—so there's little chance that it would ever be cast); but they hate the noise of the firing and the smell of gunpowder quite as much as the devil hates holy water.

"It is reckoned lucky in these parts to have a friend of the fairies in the house with you, and that was partly the reason why Con O'Keeffe was kept at Barry's fort. Many and many a one could swear to hearing him and the "good folk" talk together at twilight on his return from Rathcormac with the letter-bag. My own notion is, that if he had anything to say to them, he had more sense than to hold conversation with them on the high road, for that might have led to a general discovery. Con was fond of a drop, and when he took it (which was in an ale-house way, that is, 'any given quantity'), he had such famous spirits, and his tongue went so glibly, that in the absence of other company, he was sometimes forced to talk to himself, as he trotted home.

"One night, as he was going along, rather the worse for liquor, he thought he heard a confused sound of voices in the air, directly over his head. He stopped, and sure enough it was the fairies, who were chattering away like a bevy of magpies, but he did not know this at the time.

"At first he thought it might be some of the neighbors wanting to play him a trick. So, to show that he was not afraid (for the drink had made him as bold as a lion), when the voices above and around him kept calling out, 'High up! high up!' he put in his spoke, and shouted as loud as any of them, 'High up! high up, with ye, my lads!' No sooner said than done. He was whisked off his donkey in a twinkling, and was high up in the air in the very middle of a crowd of 'good people'—for it happened to be one of their festival nights, and they that poor little Con heard was the summons for gathering them altogether. Although Con had the reputation at Barry's fort of being well acquainted with them all, you may well believe that he had made him free of the cellar—so he knew the taste of the liquor, and relished it too. There can be no doubt that there was a regular jollification in the chateau that night.

"Con remained in France for a month, and perfectly in clover, for, from the lord to the lackey, every one 'liked him.' When he returned he turned back his example, with all the pleasure in life. You may be certain that Con played away finely at the wine—you know the fairies had made him free of the cellar—so he knew the taste of the liquor, and relished it too. There can be no doubt that there was a regular jollification in the chateau that night.

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one of the Seigneurs of the Court—and bolted through the key-hole into his wine-cellar, with all leave or license. How little Con was squeezed through I never could understand, but it is as safe that he went into the cellar as he went into the room.

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