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THE ANNUAL MEETING.

The Annual Meeting of the Royal British Nurses' Association took place at 194, Queen's Gate, S.W.7, on Friday June 4th, when a very successful Annual Report was presented for the year up to December 31st, 1936. It was followed by a very happy gathering of members.

LECTURE.

FAIRY FAITH IN THE HIGHLANDS AND SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS.

By Miss Isabel Macdonald, S.R.N.

In commencing her lecture, Miss Macdonald said that few subjects had endured with a greater persistence in literature than what is known as the Fairy Tradition, and there are still places in these Islands where the habits of modern life and its speed, education, its materialistic and scientific aspects, have failed to eradicate the belief in nature spirits of one sort and another. English, Scotch and Irish writers in great numbers have found in the Fairy Faith a theme worthy of their genius and have thus placed their testimony in literature. But there is something less tangible and more enduring which has served to keep alive the Fairy Faith, and that is what we can describe as the folk wisdom and folklore of the different peoples. It is one of the psychological problems of race development, the coming and going of a tradition or mystery knowledge such as this throughout the ages, a knowledge questioned, disbelieved, yet treasured. The best line of approach to a study of it is to adopt the attitude compassed in one short sentence yet applicable to many aspects of life besides the fairies: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." It is from that point of view that there is justification for making a study like this.

The lecturer then referred to the wealth of imagery in connection with supersensible things (whether merely phantasy or having at its root real clairvoyance), which have done so much to inspire the culture of the Celtic races and to educate their perception of beauty, especially beauty in literature. The study of the subject was linked up with psychology in order to make it more interesting to an audience of nurses and it was *problems* and not psychological *facts* that were to be presented for consideration; the whole subject was so large that a study of the fairy tradition would be confined to the Highlands only. A learned divine, writing in the seventeenth century, and no friend of the fairies, says that the fairy lore "could not all come of naught," and held that probably about a tenth part of it is true. Many clergymen of about that time busied themselves in examining the faith in the fairies, and peasant-born Martin Luther admitted the existence of these.

The classically minded may like to divide the fairies into four classes—the gnomes, active, ever derisive of the stupidity of mankind, are said to live in the earth; the sylphs find their home in the woods and meadows; the

undines in the streams and waterfalls; and the salamanders in fire; but in the Highlands the community is much more heterogeneous. The "good folk" and "the wee folk" are common titles for it, and the clergyman already referred to says that these were used to placate the fairies and "prevent the dint of their ill effects." Just as, says he, "the Irish blesse all that they feel harme (*i.e.* fear) of." It is not a psychological trait of the Highlands to flatter their enemies, and we may seek a deeper explanation. It was held that these supersensible beings, when Lucifer fell from Heaven, dared neither to be on the side of the Almighty nor that of the fallen angels, and so Providence condemned them to reap the fruit of their indecision and had them bewitched into the elements.

There is a trail of very vague tradition indicating how these beings sought relationship with mankind to gain "individuality" and, some suggest, a soul, and so it may be that it was a certain kindness, characteristic of the rugged Highlanders, more than fear of the fairies, that led to their friendliness towards the latter.

Examples of acts of benevolence shown by the fairies towards mankind were related, and references were made to the artistic faculties attributed to the "aerie hoards." The Fairy Banner of the Macleods was the outstanding example of what was regarded as a piece of their work in solid material, but more often we are told of rainbow-like web of invisible texture which, it is claimed, inspired the design of some of the tartans; this is not complimentary to the artistic sense of the fairies and would probably be regarded by them as an affront and punished in the fairy fashion. Other fairies were credited with musical talent and their voices were like a soft whistling; they are said to have inspired the lilting, eerie, tender rhythms of much of the Highland song. Still another fairy was regarded as a poetess and put her "nimble metre" into the mouth of a lassie incapable hitherto of grammatical or metrical phraseology. The old writer who retails the episode vouches that "he has seen the lines himself," and evidently considers such evidence as conclusive! David of Scotland had a silver cup made by the fairies, and this is in keeping with the tradition, for they were expert smiths and they loved to work in gold and silver especially. An amusing story was told of a smith's encounter with some of them, and there is a carving on his old house near Nairn illustrating the episode. Next particulars were given of the fairies' interest in the baking and the milking and of how they repaid the courtesy and hospitality of Highland housewives and punished the untidy ones.

An account was given of what were supposed to be the abodes of the fairies and of the green hillocks and fairy rings so often pointed out in the Highlands and especially numerous in "Skye where the fairies are." But the Government houses have replaced the fairy dwellings there, the motor cars fly across the island where once were seen the elfin bands, floating in shimmering garments of green, blue caps and "silver shoon" (*i.e.* shoes).

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