

Next an account was given of the belief in people being captured by the fairies. On Hallow-e'en night one had to be particularly cautious and especially was it dangerous to cross then, in the moonlight, a bridge where three lairds' lands met at a burn; that was a favourite trysting-place for fairy revellers. The matter of fairy changelings was dealt with and reference was made to the various methods used to protect the mother and child, one of which was to throw the afterbirth on the fire and so prevent a chance of the fairy contacting the blood of mother or child. In view of a prevalent creed of olden times that the fairies were a metamorphosis of Satan, this is interesting when we remember how Goethe makes Mephistopheles demand that Faust shall sign his contract in his own blood, thereby Mephisto seeks to gain control over Faust's soul, for "blood is a very special fluid" and was held by some mediæval schools of thought to be the vehicle or dwelling-place of the ego. Here and in many other cases we touch deep problems in psychology which we do not understand but, as in the case of most things, if understood, their fascination would be gone.

It was not always considered to be an asset to have "the sight." People have been burnt for claiming to have encounters with the fairies, but before the reformed religion gave rise to such drastic measures, the fairies were somewhat of a nuisance at times. One woman complained that a little brownie constantly visited her to her annoyance and discontent—"a little hairy cratur in the shape of a famel child." But "by the blessing of God, the Reformation from popery and more pure preaching of the Gospel caused it to disappear."

On approaching the subject from a psychological aspect, we are met at once with the contention that if people do not see the fairies they cannot exist. A rough line of argument might suggest that comparatively few people have seen Mont Blanc or a red blood corpuscle, and yet these do exist. This is not an important or convincing type of argument, but in a way it leads on to a question, important and fundamental to the whole subject of the fairy tradition—did clairvoyance exist at certain stages of the evolution of mankind? Some hold clairvoyance to be mere charlatanry, others admit the psychological possibility of a kind of sixth sense and deep in the heart of the Highlands you can still meet people who claim to be seers and knowers of much that lies behind Nature, but they are silent in the presence of unbelievers. To others they will tell of fascinating and dainty happenings on the hillsides, of encounters with banshee, water kelpies and the like.

In considering the existence of an old clairvoyance and the possible lingering traces of it in those who live close to Nature it becomes a matter of scanning the whole of civilisation, for in every race and every religion you find records relating to supersensible matters. The powerful myths, in a culture that has never been transcended—that of ancient Greece—are these mere phantasy and dreaming or a kind of reproduction and pictorial interpretation of facts lying behind physical conceptions? The tale of the Rape of Persephone, for instance, is held by some to be one indicating in a great word picture the dragging down of the old clairvoyance into the subconscious, and in her mother, Demeter, the earthly intelligence, is depicted the terrible sorrowing of the Greeks for a faculty lost. The sadness that hangs about the Highlands and Ireland may have its relationship to a subconscious knowledge of something that has been lost. This question of whether the faculty of clairvoyance once existed is one of the most subtle problems of psychology, and in studying it, one must ever bear in mind how the consciousness changes from one age to another.

Yeats has trounced the Scotch soundly for their treatment of the fairies, and no doubt our theologians of the reformed religion played a great part in the extermination of the

fairy faith, but we have to remember that a great change in the psychology of the nations had commenced even before the Reformation. Intellectual development was progressing and the mind was becoming fixed upon the examination and conquest of the material world; science, too, came with Bacon to drive out the nebulous remains of tradition. Then, later still, what was practically the heel of the law was placed upon the Gaelic; children were punished in the schools half a century ago if they spoke it, and there is no surer way to get rid of a folk language than by making the children strangers to it. You may labour to bring it back now, but it cannot reappear in its old character. The spirit of a race lives in its language, and the banishment of the language means a change in the consciousness, the folk spirit, of the people. English grammar invaded the Highlands, and the fairies retired before it. Now the worst has happened—in the fairy glens is heard the horn of the motor car and, where the sheilings stood in the purple folds of the mountains, are large hotels where the wireless has replaced the whispering music about some green hillock or fairy ring nearby.

The lecturer said that reference must be made to a vast amount of nonsense that had grown up about the fairy tradition, accounts of happenings that no reasonable intelligence could credit. It might come from the common tendency of tales of all sorts to grow, but here, too, there is a psychological problem. If you grant a faculty that had to be sacrificed if intellect and education were to progress, was there a half-conscious effort to maintain belief in the old clairvoyance, a tendency to replace what was a pure quality with fictions rather than admit the loss? It is interesting, and analogous to this side of the question, that the history of the old civilisations only began to be written when such civilisations had reached a stage of decadence. The oral tradition sufficed until history was written just as it did in connection with the subject under discussion.

The value of the fairy tradition, in connection especially with keeping alive the powers of imagination in children, was dealt with. Goethe expresses his indebtedness to his little mother with her gift of phantasy. Burns confesses what he owed to an old woman who gave him a liberal education in the habits of "devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf candles, death lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantrips, giants and enchanted towns." Something was put into the child mind in this way that could live and grow. "The body is a place of many windows," says Robert Louis Stevenson, he "in whom the child never died" and who owed so much to his nurse and her tales in those suffering vigils the two kept through many a night above the lights of Auld Reekie. Let us see to it that the windows of imagination in children are not obscured altogether by such things as "practical common-sense" and a wealth of mechanically perfect toys that leave no possibility for the development of imagination, so that the strings of inspiration are muted. The last-named writer gave a lecture on psychology in a single sentence when he told us to beware of closing our second pair of eyes—desire and curiosity. If we have the courage to admit, in the face perhaps of derision, that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy, we may reach to a very important stage in psychological development referred to by him when he says, "There's aye a new horizon for onward looking men," and in this connection I might just as well have taken the more scientifically sounding title of "Desire and Curiosity" for to-day's consideration.

ISABEL MACDONALD,
Secretary to the Corporation.

194, Queen's Gate,
London, S.W.7.

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