WILLIAM CROSSING

TALES OF THE DARTMOOR PIXIES

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Preface

THE tales related in the following pages, I have gathered from the peasantry of Dartmoor, and they may be accepted as representative of the class of stories told of the elves of superstition--the pixies.

Had my design been simply to have presented the reader with a collection of these, I might have filled a greater number of pages, but I have had a different aim in view. What I have endeavoured to do has been to give, by means of these tales, as clear an idea as possible of the pixy superstition as it formerly existed, believing that the fanciful notions of our forefathers should not be regarded as altogether unworthy of attention, but that upon investigation they will probably be found to yield something of value to the student of folk-lore.

To this end I have chosen such tales as I considered would best give the reader an acquaintance with the kind of actions in which the pixies were said to indulge, at the same time refraining from including any that are found in the pages of other writers.

That the ideas respecting the elfin race here treated of are of very different character from what they were a generation or two since is most true; but it is none the less interesting to note that though the existence of ‘the little goblins is looked upon by the peasant as being more than doubtful, and in many cases regarded with actual scepticism, the deeds with which they were formerly credited are not yet entirely forgotten.

Splatton,

South Brent, Devon,

11th June. 1890.

1. The Moorland Haunts Of The Pixies

AMONG the superstitions of bygone times which still linger in Devonshire, the ideas regarding the pixies are undoubtedly the most interesting and romantic. Although the faith of the peasantry in the ability of these "little people" to exercise a control over their domestic arrangements is less firm than of yore, yet a notion still prevails that ill-luck will certainly overtake the hapless wight who is so unfortunate as to offend any of these diminutive elves. While instances are frequently related of help having been given to the farmer by these little sprites at night, the peasant who has only "heerd tell" of them, naturally looks upon them with some slight suspicion, and this lack of ocular demonstration on the part of the pixies it is that has somewhat shaken the faith of Hodge and Giles in their doings. However, let them be out late at night and hear some unusual sound at a lonely part of their road, or see, in the hollow below, the Will-o'-the-Wisp hovering about, and straightway they will begin to fancy the "little people" have something to do with it, and although they may be inclined to combat the idea, yet they will not be able to quite rid themselves of the impression that what they heard and saw was the pixies indulging in their midnight revels.

But it is to Dartmoor. we must go if we would hear fully of the fantastic tricks and antics of this elfin race, for there, and amid the combes which run far up into its borders, we shall find many a nook where they have often been observed dancing at night, according to old Uncle So-and-so, and in many an ancient farm-house shall be told how the -butter has been made, and the corn in the barn been threshed by these industrious little goblins.

Not far from the point of confluence of the two branches of the Mew rises "Sheepstor's dark-browed rock," and on the slope of the tor, on the side on which the village lies, is a vast clatter of boulders. Amid this is a narrow opening between two upright rocks, which will admit the visitor, though not without a little difficulty, into a small grotto, celebrated in local legend, and known as the Pixies' Cave. On entering the cleft we shall find that the passage, which is only a few feet in length, turns abruptly to the left, and we shall also have to descend a little, as the floor of the cave is several feet lower than the rock at the entrance. This turning leads immediately into the cave which we shall find to be a small square apartment capable of containing several persons, but scarcely high enough to permit us to stand upright. On our left as we enter is a rude stone seat, and in the furthest corner a low narrow passage, extending for some little distance, is discoverable. According to a note in Polwhele's *Devon*, this cavern became the retreat during the Civil Wars of one of the Elford family, who here successfully hid himself from Cromwell's soldiers, and it is related that he beguiled the time by painting on the rocky walls of the cavern, traces of the pictures remaining long afterwards, hut nothing of the sort is discoverable now. Mrs. Bray in her romance of *Warleigh* has introduced with good effect this story of the fugitive royalist, and indeed it was this tradition, so she tells us in her Borders *of the Tamar and the Tavy*, which first awakened a desire in her mind to search out the legendary lore of the neighbourhood, and which she afterwards presented to the public in so agreeable a form.

As its name indicates, the grotto is one of the haunts of the pixies, and according to local tradition these little fairy elves have made it their resort from time immemorial. Doubtless in days gone by the old people of Sheepstor saw--or fancied they saw--the

"Litt'e pixy fair and slim
Without a rag to cover him."

busy clambering over the rocks by moonlight as he issued forth from his retreat to visit some farm-house to help forward the good yeoman's work, or to wait until sunrise to pinch the lazy maid-servants should they fail to leave their beds at the proper time.

But there is one thing which we must not forget ere we leave the cave. Do not let us go thoughtlessly away without leaving an offering for the pixies, or piskies, as the country people more frequently call them. They are not extravagant in their expectations, so we shall not be taxed very highly. A pin will suffice, or a piece of rag, provided it is sufficiently large to make a garment for one of these little folks, for though sometimes seen in a state of nudity, they would seem to be proud of possessing a suit of clothes. Indeed a sort of weakness for finery exists among them, and a piece of ribbon appears to be as highly prized by them, as a gaudy coloured shawl or string of heads would be by an African savage.

The cave is rather difficult to find, and one might pass and re-pass the crevice which forms its opening, without ever dreaming that such a place existed there, so narrow does the entrance look. The clatter is a perfect wilderness of boulders, and stretches around to the eastern side of the tor, where the rocks rise perpendicularly, forming a precipice of great height.

As we stand at the entrance to the grotto we may look down upon the little village of Sheepstor and its church with sturdy granite tower, nestling in the sheltered combe, while the grey tor rises high behind us, exposed to all the buffetings of the wild moorland storm.

The tradition connecting the cavern on Sheeps Tor with the Elford family has, of course, rendered it more celebrated than it otherwise would have become had it depended on the pixies alone for its; notoriety, for though most people in this part of Devonshire have heard of the cave, few beyond the borders of Dartmoor have any knowledge of a larger and more striking retreat of these little people.''

This is known to the dwellers on the moor as the Piskies' Holt, and is situated in Huccaby Cleave, not far from Dartmeet.[1]

The West Dart makes a sweep round the hill between Hexworthy Bridge and the point: where it meets its sister stream as it comes rolling down by the plantations of Brimpts, and after leaving Week Ford passes the cleave. Among the tangled bushes and underwood growing here, may be seen four rather large sycamore trees, at some distance from the left bank of the river, and it is beneath these that we shall discover the Piskies' Holt.[2] It is a long narrow passage formed by large slabs of granite resting on two natural walls of the same. It is curved in form and extends for a distance of thirty-seven feet. its width is about four feet, and it is of sufficient height for a man to stand upright in it. The entrance, which is but two-and-a-half feet in height, is at the eastern cud, and at time other extremity is a small aperture through which it is possible to climb out of the cave. The floor is thickly covered with decayed leaves, blown in by the wind.

In summer time the knoll beneath which runs the bolt, is a most charming spot. The sycamore trees cast a cool and refreshing shade around, and the ferns with their bright green fronds, and the tall fox-gloves which lift their heads amid them, cover the ground near time fairy haunt,

[1] At this delightful spot. one of the best known of any on Dartmoor, the East and West Dart unite. These are both fine streams, and give name to the wild district in which they rise

[2] On the moor the word *holt* is used to signify a hole, or hollow among rocks,--the retreating place of a fox or a badger.--a hold, as it were. The ancient meaning of the word was a wood, or grove, and Risdon (*Survey of Devon*, p. 315, Edit. 1811) in noticing the parish of High Bickington, in North Devn, quotes the following ancient grant by King Athelstane. where the word, is used. Athelstane king, grome of this home, geve and graunt to the preist of this chirch, one yoke of mye land frelith to holde, woode in my holt house to buyld, bitt grass for all hys beasts. fuel for hys hearth, pannage for his sowe and piggs world without end."

and force upon us the conviction that the pixies at all events have exhibited a deal of taste in their choice of an abode. Below, the West Dart hurries away to mingle its waters with time companion who never deserts it, but flows onward with it to the ocean, forcing its way over huge boulders, its banks overhung with foliage, and on the opposite hill-side are numerous enclosures which the hand of industry has rescued from the desert, with the brown moor stretching away beyond.

Truly it is a delightful spot, and as we throw ourselves back on the soft moss with the bright sun-rays streaming through the leafy canopy overhead, we can imagine that we are at the court of Oberon and Queen Titania. Did we visit the haunt by moonlight, perchance we should see the little elves coming stealthily forth from their retreat, and forming a fairy ring, indulge in their merry gambols on the sward.

Oh, these be Fancy's revellers by night
Stealthy companions of the downy moth--
Diana's motes, that flit in her pale light.
Shunners of sunbeams in diurnal sloth
These be the feasters on night's silver cloth
The gnat with shrilly trump is their convener.
Forth from their flowery chambers, nothing loth,
With lulling times to charm the air serener.
Or dance upon the grass to make it greener. "[3]

Many are the tales related of the doings of the pixies in this romantic neighbourhood, and in my note-book I have stored up more than one curious story, as I have gathered them from the Dartmoor peasants, to relate some of which shall presently be my pleasing task.

The two grottoes that I have noticed are the principal haunts of the pixies of Dartmoor, but there is not a tor near any of the moorland farms that has not been visited by them occasionally, and every homestead has at some time or other been the scene of the pranks of these merry elves. If we ask an old house-wife who and what the pixies are, she will tell us they are the souls of unbaptized children, and if we enquire as to their appearance, we shall be informed that they sometimes present themselves to human vision under the semblance of a small bundle of rags, but more frequently are seen in the form of little beings dressed in fantastic garments.

We shall find that beyond an excessive fondness for leading travellers astray, and for curiously riding on the Dartmoor colts much to the annoyance of the farmers, they seldom interfere with, or seek to bring trouble upon anyone, unless injury has been inflicted upon them. liven the practice in which they indulge of misleading travellers, we are told, may not be simply one of mischief, but may be for the purpose of leading the wayfarer from their secret haunts when he is unconsciously approaching too near diem, or may perhaps be intended as a punishment for some slight shown to them. It is true that lazy servants, and greedy and indolent masters suffer occasionally at their hands, but who can find fault with this? As a rule these "little people" seem to desire to do kind actions to the country folk, rather than cause them annoyance and inconvenience.

If perchance one should happen to be "pixy-led," as it is termed, and should find it impossible to discover the desired track, an infallible remedy for this state of things is to divest oneself of some outer garment, turn it inside out, and put it on again, when the charm will be at once broken. Only a few years since an instance o this being tried came tinder my notice, but

[3] Hood. *Plea of the Midsummer Fairies*

although it may have prevented the pixies from continuing their spell, it certainly did not have the effect of enabling the wanderers to find their road, when they had been once turned aside from it. Some young people set out from Hexworthy with The intention of going to Princetown by way of Swincombe, and across Tor Royal New-take. When they reached the latter enclosure, which is a very extensive one, a Dartmoor mist utterly prevented them from finding their way across it, and they wandered about for some time, totally unable to discover the wall of the new-take, and so gain the gate. They concluded they must be "pixy-led," and the remedy in question was called into requisition. A short time after having done this they came upon an old kistvaen, known to the moor people as the "Crock of Gold," and which they had already stumbled upon several times in their wandering. This is close beside the green path that leads across the new-take, but night being far advanced and the mist being still very dense they determined to wait until the morning broke, when their friends, who had made up a search party, discovered them.

Sometimes these merry little elves have been seen dancing in a circle on the sides of the hills, as the peasant has made his way homeward after night-fall; but as such sights have generally been witnessed when the beholder has been returning from a merry-making, a sheep-shearing feast, perhaps, or a Christmas revel, I am reluctantly obliged to confess that I am of opinion that the appearance of these spirits must have had some connection with the spirits of the hospitable farmer, and that a nodding thistle, or a bunch of gorse, may have been, in the heated imagination of the rustic, set down as a dancing elf.

Such tricks hath strong imagination;
That if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy
Or, in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush suppos'd a bear!"[4]

These merry little folks though credited with many a frolicsome gambol, are seemingly very shy of disporting themselves at the present day, being much more retiring in their disposition than we are informed was the case "years agone;" but their curious pranks still form a theme for conversation when, the labours of the day being over, and darkness covers the moor, the cottagers gather round to spend the evening hour by the comfortable peat fire.

[4] Midsummers Nights Dream, Act V., Sc. 1

2. The Pixies' Trysting Place

HAVING given a brief description of the two more important places traditionally regarded as haunts of the pixies, we shall now proceed to notice a spot which is said to have been formerly much favoured by them as a trysting-place. This is New Bridge, on the Dart, and an examination of its charming surroundings will compel us to admit that the fairy elves most certainly displayed a keen appreciation of the beauties of nature in selecting such a spot for their place of rendezvous.

The course of the noble riser after leaving the bridge at Dartmeet lies down a deep valley, overhung with rugged tors, the sides with coppices of oak. On one hand rise the rugged summits of Sharp Tor and Mil Tor, and on the other the granite piles of Bench Tor, overlooking the hollow known as Langamarsh. Beneath the first two, and very near to the river's brink, is Lug Tor, not crowning an eminence as is usually the case, but being situated on a comparatively level piece of ground in the bottom of the valley. At a short distance it presents the appearance of a ruin, the dark ivy which clothes some portions of its perpendicular sides, tending considerably to produce this effect, while the jackdaws which build their nests in its crevices, and are frequently to be seen circling around it, keep up the illusion. The Dart rushes down through the narrow valley with impetuous course, leaping out, ever and anon, in fine cascades, its path being marked with foam. On emerging from this valley the river becomes more tranquil, and the scenery on its banks of a softer nature. On one side cultivation has taken the place of the barren rock-strewn bank, though on the other the heathery moor still rises from its brink. And so it pursues its course, until a little further on it sweeps beneath the grey arches of a picturesque bridge, and glides onward between thickly fringed banks.

This is New Bridge, and the piece of sward between it and the foot of the steep gorse-covered hill, is the ground whereon the pixies in the days of our grandfathers were wont to meet and indulge in moonlight revelry.

Growing between the stones on the outside of the parapets the wall rue and the *ceterach* may be observed, and on the right bank, below the bridge, when the summer breezes blow, the waving fronds of the stately *Osmunda regalis* may be seen.

On the side on which the common sweeps down to the water's edge, and at some distance up the slope, the fantastically piled rocks of Leigh Tor are prominent objects, and will commend themselves at once to the beholder as most excellent points of vantage, from which to observe the beauties which nature has here given with so free a hand. The tor itself will be found to be of an extremely interesting character, and on a fine, clear day the visitor to its hoary rocks will see displayed a picture which will detain him long in its contemplation, and from which he will turn away with regret.

The Buckland Woods, on the opposite side of the Dart to which Home Chase is situated, clothe the steep side of the valley down which we lose the stream, and high above them the bare commons are seen, with more than one tor lifting its head to the sky. The one seemingly not far above the edge of the woods is Buckland Beacon, and beyond it, and towering considerably higher, is Rippon Tor. Those rocky eminences more to the left, almost mountainous in their outline, are the fine group of tors overlooking the vale of Widecombe, which runs far up into the moor,--a sheltered spot, where smiling fields may be seen in close

proximity to barren slopes, the contrast of cultivation with wild nature producing an interesting effect.

Behind Leigh Tar the hill rises yet higher, and the road from New Bridge winds up this and passes not far from the rocks leading shortly to the hamlet of Pound's Gate. Many a visit have the pixies paid to the ancient cottages of that moorland settlement in the days that are flown, and often have the house-wives had to be thankful--or otherwise--for the attention bestowed upon them by the "little people." If their conduct had been such as to gain the approbation of the pixies they were rewarded, but if they had done aught to merit their displeasure, could they wonder if matters went rather cross with them?

"If ye will with Mab find grace.
Set each platter in his place;
Rake the fire up, and get
Water in, ere sun be set.
Wash your pails and cleanse your dairies,
Sluts are loathsome to the fairies:
Sweep your house; who doth not so,
Mab will pinch her by the toe."[1]

Was it to be thought that untidy folk should he regarded with pleasure by a race which had always been noted for the exercise of order and regularity in their own concerns? Dirt and dust were abominations to the pixies, and those careful house-wives and servants who used every means in their power to banish such from their dwellings became the favourites of the little elves.

The hostelry at Pound's Gate is connected with a tradition relating to the great thunder-storm at Widecombe in 1638, when on a Sunday afternoon in October the church was struck by lightning and considerably damaged, many people being injured and some killed. It is related how a mysterious rider stopped at the door of this inn on the Sunday afternoon, and called for drink, and how the landlady remarked that as he drank, the liquor went hissing down his throat, and that on looking at him more narrowly she perceived the cloven foot, and knew it was his Satanic Majesty upon whom she was waiting. The horseman after enquiring the way to Widecombe town rides off, hut, as one writer remarks, no mention is made as to whether he paid for the drink or not. However, from the following, which was told me on Dartmoor some years since, and which I have never seen recorded, it appears that the dark visitor did not neglect this important matter, hut whether that which he tendered in payment for his drink was, as it at first appeared, true coin of the realm, is not so certain. It seems that the mysterious visitor on returning the cup to the hostess, gave her at the same time a handful of coins, and the direction he was to take to reach Widecombe church being pointed out to him, he rode rapidly from the door of the inn. The good dame looked at the money. It was by far too great a sum for the cup of drink which the rider had taken, and she scarce knew what to think of it. The hissing sound that came from the throat of the stranger, and the cloven foot which his riding boot could not conceal, told her but too plainly who it was that had stopped at her door, and her first impulse was to throw away the money which had been given her. However, she reflected that it was easier to throw money away than to earn it, and after all, though she was ready to admit that the Devil was undoubtedly a had lot, she had no reason to think that his money was not good. She, therefore, determined upon keeping the cash and saying nothing to anyone about the matter, so deposited it carefully in a basin, with the intention of placing it upon the shelf in her kitchen. As she was about doing so, she cast her

[1] Herrick. *Hesperides*

eyes into the basin again, in order to have one more look at the money, when what was her surprise to see that it had vanished, and that a handful of dried leaves had taken its place! This transformation of the coins will remind readers of the *Arabian Nights* of the story of the *Barber's Fourth Brother*, where Alcouz finds the money which he received from a magician in payment for some meat, changed in a somewhat similar manner.

Now, whether the fiend by means of magic arts made these leaves appear at first to the Landlady's eyes to be coins, or whether that which lie gave her actually was money, and that the pixies transformed it in order to prevent such a sad state of affairs occurring as the landlady of the little hostelry, near which they so often met, receiving money from the Devil, is a point I cannot determine; but, however this may be, it is certain that the landlady of Pound's Gate reaped no pecuniary benefit from the visit of the dark horseman.

In the sequel it appears that the Devil soon after reached Widecombe Church, and raised the great thunderstorm by his evil power.

The Reverend George Lyde was the vicar of Widecombe at the period of the occurrence, and the calm and heroic manner in which he comported himself in the midst of the danger--for he was in the pulpit conducting the afternoon service at the time the tower was struck--show him to have been endowed with true courage, and possessed of faith in the Master of whose word he was the expounder.

An account of the storm was given in a pamphlet printed not long after it occurred, and Prince in his *Worthies of Devon* has also detailed the circumstances.

From amid the trees of Buckland Woods springs the romantic looking cliff known as the Lovers' Leap, while further from the river may be seen Auswell Rock, or, as it is generally termed, Hazel Rock. The little church of Buckland-in-the-Moor is discernible from some points, seemingly embosomed in the thick foliage, its low grey tower looking over the leafy vale where Dart's swift waters run.

Through this lovely valley, with the trees of Buckland Woods and Home Chase almost kissing its crystal wavelets, the Dart leaves the wild steeps of the moor and seeks the meads of the lowlands.

Beautiful river, how calm is thy way,
Lingering fondly, ere winding away;
Winding away to the Ocean, whose sigh
Comes, in low murmurs, imploringly by.
Fairy-like river, how long Is thy way.
Timidly coying In haven and bay;
Musical wanderer, haste to depart,
Child of the wilderness, beautiful Dart.

Go to thy home in the Ocean, and be
Bride of the Infinite, bride of the Free!
Yet, from thy crown of enchantment, unbind
Treasures that linger, like music, behind.
Leave to the Post his dreams from above,
Leave to the lovely their visions of love,
Blend them in rapture, and be to their heart
Bright as the Sun to thee, beautiful Dart."[2]

[2] To the River Dart, from Rambles in Devonshire, by the Rev. H. J. Whitfield M.A

One can well imagine, leaning on the parapet of the bridge, why such a spot, where all around is so charming, should he given to the pixies as the place of their trysts. The very character of the little elves demands that their surroundings should be romantic, and that tradition should bestow upon them the velvety swards near New Bridge as the spot on which they should meet by moonlight is not to be wondered at. Often so the stories say, have they been seen dancing here, and many a belated traveller, the ancient gossips will relate, has been almost scared nut of his wits at hearing the chorus raised by the elves, when at their revels here in the silent night. To-day the visitor must be content to feast his eyes upon the beauties of the scene, and will not he disappointed at the non-appearance of the elfin sprites, for nature has here offered that which will not fail to he regarded as ample compensation for the absence of the pixies.

3. By The Peat Filled Hearth

WHEN the labours of the day are over, and darkness has fallen upon the moor, the dwellers in the lonely hill-farms gather round the hearth upon which the peat fire is burning, oblivious of the cold without, and the winter winds which are howling over the heath. At the present day, when communication with the outer world is frequent, and the local weekly paper finds its way into many of the farm-houses, the doings in the market towns and villages bordering the moor, and even what is transpiring further afield, form, next to such matters as immediately concern them, the principal topics of conversation. But before the advent of the telegraph and railways this was not so. Outside the moorland settlement hut little of what was passing was known. The news of events taking place in the great towns frequently never reached the lonely farm-house on the moor until several weeks after their occurrence, and often matters of great moment, arid affecting all the people of the land, had arisen arid been settled ere those dwelling in remote districts had learnt anything of what was going forward. The belief in charms and witchcraft was fostered by this isolation from the world, and ancient superstitions retained their hold of the country folk. The doings of the pixies were diligently related, and the rustic listened with eagerness to the details of various wonderful deeds, with the performance of which the elfin tribe was credited.

But we will lift the curtain upon the past, and witness, unseen, what is taking place in the kitchen of a moor-land farm-house. "'Tis sixty years since," and a dark winter night, and there by the peat-piled hearth the good folks of the house are gathered, so if we listen we shall perchance learn from them something of what the pixies are said to do.

Let us first describe this old-fashioned farm-kitchen, and then look around upon the little company within it.

It is a low apartment, paved with large flags of granite, and the walls are plastered and coated with whitewash. Overhead the beams supporting the floor of the room above are seen, for there is no ceiling, and these, too, were originally whitened, but the smoke from the peat fire has changed the colour to a dirty yellow. Pieces of wood roughly nailed across the beams, form racks, which contain several large flitches of bacon, dry and brown, and though they may perhaps be not particularly ornamental, are an immediate assurance to the beholder that he need be in no fear of dying from starvation should he chance to be "snowed up" within the house at any time during the winter. At one end of the kitchen a "dresser" stands, upon which are arranged a goodly number of plates and dishes, with jugs and cups of an antique pattern, and beside it, in a worm-eaten oaken case, stands the clock, ticking with a loud, solemn tick. A long deal table, scrupulously clean, is placed on the side where is the window, the latter being closed with shutters, and fastened by a thick bar. On the wooden chimney-piece are a pair of brass candlesticks, and a brass pestal and mortar, all very bright, a tinder box, and two white china dogs, with black ears and gilt collars, and various other small articles. Above the shelf, supported on nails driven into the wall, is a gun, and hanging to another nail is an odd spur, while along one of the beams a fishing rod finds a place, resting also on nails, and looking as if it had seen a great deal of service. One corner of the room is occupied by a cupboard, with a glazed door, inside which are seen some china articles, but these are only brought out on particular occasions, when, perhaps, "quality" may chance to pay a visit to the house, and he entertained at the hospitable hoard. A " settle " is placed obliquely in front of the hearth, springing from one corner of it, and acts a partition, dividing the main portion of the room from the fireside. A lighted candle is set upon the table in a tin candlestick with an

immense flat stand, but the kitchen is illuminated chiefly by the cheerful blaze from a faggot thrown on the top of the peat, over which a large kettle is suspended by an iron "crook" hanging down from the vast chimney. The slow and solemn tick, tick, of the old fashioned clock, with the incessant chirping of a cricket in the chimney corner, are plainly heard when time conversation occasionally ceases, and above all is the sound of the howling wind, blowing in violent gusts around the corners of the house.

Seated on the "settle" are the farmer and his eldest son, while two younger ones occupy stools in the corner of the spacious hearth, and quite close to the glowing pile of peat, evidently enjoying the genial warmth. On a low chair, on the opposite side of the fire to the ' settle," sits the white-haired old grandfather, and at one end of the long table, engaged in knitting, is the farmer's wife, the other being occupied by a rosy checked damsel who is ironing some small linen articles.

A footstep is heard without, causing the little company to look towards the door, which opens and admits a neighbour--a moor-man[1] --for an hour or two's chat with the good people. He is at once welcomed, and without any ceremony takes a seat on the " settle," seemingly not at all sorry to find himself by the cosy fireside.

" 'Tis mortal cold tonight, sure 'nuff,'' he exclaims; 'the wind's a blawin' that strong I was a most carried off my legs, comin' along.''

"Ees, 'tis brave and stormy, sure,' replies the farmer; " I would'n covet to go far 'pon such a night. Us ant got auver the winter cet."

"No, us ant," says the new-corner. "Farmer Frainch's missis is a gone to Ashburton, and as it's com' in so dark like, he's a gone out against her; I don't envy he he's job."

"Gone to Ashburton, has her ' " says the farmer, '' Ah-a.''

A short pause ensues, which is broken by the old grandfather. "Only hark to that now," he exclaims, calling attention to the chirping of the cricket; "if the pisgies could only heer't, how they would dance to It, to be sure, for that be the music for they''

You be right, uncle," says the moor-man, " they be gert hands for dancin', by all account, and like the cricket's music as well as anything. Anyway they tell mite that's the cause." [2]

"Is it? " asks one of the lads in time chimney corner, looking eagerly up, while the other glances around the kitchen, as if almost expecting to see the little elves appear.

"Zo they zay,'' answers the moor-man, " though I never zeed wan, for all that.''

"Nor I didn' never zee wan, nither," remarks the farmer, " but I b'leve feyther hev,--hev'n ee feyther?"

"I've a heerd mun," replies the grandfather," an I've a zeed specks a floatin' about like, in the air, but I can't zay that I ever actually catched sight of a pisgie, though I've a known they that hev."

"They be mortal curious little vokes, they be," exclaims the moor-man, with the air of a man who is stating something which he is confident cannot be disputed, "mortal curious."

"Ees, they'm zackly like that," acquiesces the grandfather;" they'll craip droo any little cranny. Why, I've a heerd of mun gettin droo key-holes and hidin' away in cracks you

[1] Moor-men are those whose business it is to look after cattle and sheep pastured upon Dartmoor during the summer months
[2] Cause, ie. Care

couldn't put your little finger in. They'll zometimes com' and blaw out the candle you've got in your hand, and you can't zee mun do it."

" But they do do it fast enough," exclaims the rosy cheeked girl, pausing in her work, " vur 'twas only the other night one blawed out mine, just as I got to the chamber door."

"Did ee zee un? " enquires the moor-man.

No, I didn', but I knawed 'twas a pisgie, cause there wudn' nobody else there to do it, and the light went out zackly as I got to the door."

"Bless your saul! " says the moor-man.

"They'll play all sorts o' may games" continues the ancient authority upon the doings of the elfin race. Zometimes they'll com' and kiss the maidens behind the door. "--

"Did ee ever hev 'em do that, 'Liza? '' enquires the moor-man, looking slyly at the farmer.

"T for tellin'," replies the girl, her cheeks growing redder, if such be possible. "I bant gwain to say nothin' about that."

The farmer's son on the "settle," who has been greatly interested in the conversation, suddenly seems to be impressed with the conviction that the fire needs attending to, for he stoops down and busies himself with piling several slabs of peal upon it, and which seems to take some time for him to accomplish to his satisfaction.

"The pisgies bant no good for nort like that, be um, 'Liza? '' continues the moorman, winking at the farmer beside him.

" No, they bant," replies 'Liza.

"But you knaw who is, though, don't ee now? insinuates the bantering visitor, glancing towards the farmer's son, who with a shamefaced look is still occupied in heaping peat on the fire, a proceeding which appears perfectly unnecessary.

"Get along with ee, do," cries 'Liza, working hard with her flat iron; " you ought for to knaw better."

The moor-man's only reply is a loud laugh, followed by an admonition to the damsel relative to getting herself into a "tantrum," and an expression of his firm conviction that such will by no means be conducive to her comfort.

This is followed by a few moment's silence, during which the white-haired grandfather has apparently been deeply absorbed in thought, and the farmer's son has left the fire alone, and now seems to be getting more comfortable. The old man at length re-commences his talk about the pixies, and it is evident that he has been trying to recollect something of their antics during the pause in the conversation.

"They there pisgies,'' be begins, '' 'II talk up the queerest old trade you ever heerd. Zometimes you cant make it out at all. But they'll work all the time, though, at what they've com' upon, vur they do say that they be sent out to do arrants, and that nothin'll stop mun from carrin' mun out, unless you spy 'em.''

"Ees, I've heerd that, too,'' says the moor-man.

"But you can soon frighten 'em, if you only catch a sight o' mun,--they don't like to be spied at.''

"Nither doth 'Liza when she's behind the door,'' exclaims the moor-man, with a grin; "and I don't blame her."

‘Liza pretends to be very much annoyed at the remark, but it is easy to perceive that the banter of the visitor is not unpleasing to her.

They be mortal fond of water, they pisgies,” the old man goes on, not heeding the interruption, ‘‘ and they’ll do lots of cures for ee if you only set a basin full o’t somewhere handy for mun. Trait mun well, and they’ll never do no harm to nobody, but if you don’t, they’ll pay ee out vur’t .’’

“I’ve a heerd my missis tell,” says the moor-man, “that her’ve a knawed mun to upset the saucepan out o’ spite, when they’ve a been traited in a manner they didn’ like, and to turn the milk sour, too.”

“Way they’ve a done that here,” cries ‘Liza, “lots o’ times, thought what us have done to vex the little toads, I dun knaw.”

“You hadn’ better let mun hear ee spaik of mun like that, ‘Liza,’’ remarks the grandfather, ‘‘ vur they’ll sure to make ee smart vur’t.’’

“I don’t want to spaik no harm about mun, but they’ve a plagued us here many times, as missis knaws, and I could never tell what us had a done to mun to make mun spiteful. I’ve a zeed a lot o’ their antics.”

“Way you’ve a knawd mun at all their pranks,’Liza, cepts the kissin’,’’ exclaims the moor-man; ‘‘ but there, you bant no loser by that, ‘cause you’ve a got somebody else to do that for ee.” And the speaker again bursts out into a loud laugh, while the farmer’s son all at once conceives the idea that the fire will be greatly improved by the addition of a huge bundle of furze, but seems to be somewhat unfortunate in his endeavours to place it in position--at all events as long a time is consumed in doing so as was taken up by his efforts to pile the peat.

Again time cricket is heard upon the hearth, and the chock goes off with its solemn tick, tick, while the hiimniug fmmr crat-kics mierrily up the chimney.

“At wan time the pisgies used to com’ about more’n they do now,” the grandfather continues, “and thought I can’t call home half of what l’ve heerd about mun, yet I do mind how they used to be knawed to be up to their pranks a most every night. I’ve a heerd tell about mun poundin’ apples and makin’ butter, and doing all sorts o’ things, and zometimes us used to put a penny ‘pon the table as wages vur mun, of a night time, and they’d com’ and put the house to rights vur us, and take the money away with mun’’

“To think o’ that, now,” says the moor-man.

“Aw, ees, us was nivr against doin’ that when I was a boy, home wi’ feyther and mothmer,--but that more’n seventy year agone.”

“You’m a brave age now, uncle,” the moor-man remarks.

“I shall be eighty-four com’ Michaelmas, If I live,” answers the old man; “and l’ve got zome work in me eet, as John knaws.”

That you hey, feyther,” says the farmer, “ but I don’t wish ee to do nort, vur all that. You’ve a had your share, and ‘tis time vur ee now to sit down and be comfortable.”

“Law bless ee, what’s that?” suddenly cries ‘Liza, dropping her flat iron, and glancing with a scared look towards time door. “ I heerd zomething like zinging just outside!”

“ ‘Tis the pisgies, ‘Liza, an’ if they com’, mind ‘tis only ou who’ve called mun names,” exclaims the moor-man. The two lads in the chimney corner look rather frightened, and draw chose to one another.

“Way I never said nothin’ against mun,” says ‘Liza, evidently rather alarmed. “ I’m sure I would’n hurt wan for the world.”

“I’ll go and zee what ‘tis,” says the farmer, rising and going towards the door; “ here, Shep!” This latter exclamation causes an old sheep dog to pull himself, yawning and stretching, from underneath the table, where he has been comfortably sleeping. ‘Liza picks up her flat iron, and edges back further into the room, getting much nearer to the farmer’s son, who feeling himself under the obligation of saying something to quiet the damsel’s fears, hastens to assure her that he will not suffer the pixies to ‘‘tich’’ her. With such a protector, ‘Liza is almost enabled to forget her dread of the “little people, “ and plucking up courage looks towards the door with some degree of composure.

This the farmer has now thrown open, and is peering out into the darkness. ‘The wind comes in great gusts, roaring across the moor, and it seems in vain to listen for the sounds of voices in such a tempest. At last he ventures out a few steps, but almost immediately returns, and the alacrity which he displays in stepping across the threshold causes the inmates of the kitchen to look anxiously towards him. The roses on ‘Liza’s cheeks begin to grow pale again.

“What is it? “ asks the moor-man.

“I can’t tell ee,” replies the farmer, ‘‘ I can heer zomething like zomebody calling or singing, but I can’t zee nort.”

“Well,” says the old grandfather, who has caught the reply, “I can’t make et out. ‘Tis zackly like the pisgies; you can hear mun, hut they can’t he zeed; but I zim they’d never be out ‘pon such a night as this. They always choose bright moonlight nights if they can.”

“May be ‘tis the black dog that haunts the moor,” suggests the moor-man.

“Do ee think ‘tis? “ exclaims ‘Liza, getting still closer to the farmer’s son.

“I’ll go out and zee what’s there,” says the farmer, ‘‘ I bant feared. Come on Shep.’’

“Don’t thee make a fool of thyself, and go rinnin into danger, when there’s no call for’t,” says his wife, putting down her knitting.

But the farmer heeds her not, and disappears into the darkness, while the curiosity of each member of the little party being thoroughly aroused, they anxiously await his return. The howling of the wind prevents them from hearing the sounds which had struck upon the ear of the master of the house, but their imagination easily supplies them, and they look at one another without opening their lips. The moor-man has got up, and stands by the open door.

Suddenly Shep commences to bark, and his master is heard calling to him, and bidding him be quiet.

“It bant no pisgies,” says the grandfather; “it be too stormy for they.”

“Gran’fer knaws,” says the farmer’s son, hoping by such an assurance to still any lingering apprehensions on ‘Liza’s part.

“Hark! ‘ cries the moor-man, ‘‘ I hear maister hollerin’ again.”

“He must be mazed to go out ‘pon such a arrant,” says his wife; if he don’t mind he’ll meet with wishtness.”

The farmer is now heard approaching the door, and it is evident that he is not unaccompanied. A moment later he appears with a buxom dame wrapped in a heavy cloak.

“Way ‘tis Mrs. Frainch! “ cries the moor-man, as he recognizes who it is the farmer brings with him, and us thought ‘twas--aw! aw! aw! But where’s maister? ‘‘ he asks, alluding to the good woman’s husband, “outside?”

“I ant zeed nort of ‘m,’’ answers the buxom female, taking a seat near the farmer’s wife “ he ant come out, I reckon.’

“Ees, he hev,’’ the moor-man asserts, ‘‘ I knaw he hev. An you ‘ant a zeed un?”

“No, I ant. But you don’t really main what you say?”

“I do, sure,’’ replies the moor-man; ‘‘ he went out against ee a good bit agone. I can’t make out how ‘tis you ant zeed nort of un.’’

The farmer’s son, who upon the entrance of the dame had gone to see after her horse, now enters the kitchen, and takes his seat once more upon the “settle,” ‘Liza, all cause for fear being now removed, resumes her ironing.

“What a night ‘tis to be sure,” exclaims the dame, throwing off her heavy cloak; “and what a ride I’ve a had across Hole Moor. ‘Tis so dark as a baig, and brave and windy.”

“Ees you be right,’’ the moor-man observes; ‘‘but I can’t help thinking about your man. I’m zartin sure he’s a gone to mait ee.”

“However could he ha’ missed me, then? ‘‘ asks the good dame. I’ve a keeped in the track all the way along,--or as near as I was able to,--and can’t make out how ‘tis us have’n a mait. How long’s he bin gone, Dick?”

“Aw a brave long time. Why he must a got into Hole avaur now,” replies the moor-man.

“I stopped there comin’ along, zo they’ll tell’n I’m gone homeward,” says the dame.

“I was thinkin’ zo. A pooty tantrum he’ll be in when he vinds he’s a had he’s walk for nothin’, and ‘pon such a night, too.”

“Aw, I dun knaw,--it takes a good bit to put ee out.”

“Well, ees, I zim he’s always very pleasant tempered.”

“I s’pose I’d better wait fer’n a bit,” remarks the dame, “ perhaps he wan’t be long, now.”

Half-an-hour elapses, and the inmates are still wondering what can keep the dame’s husband away so long, when suddenly the door is opened, and he makes his appearance. He is a tall, portly man, and his jolly red face wears a most cheery look, and he seems altogether a most suitable mate for the buxom dame who awaits his arrival.

‘‘Well, did ee think I was lost?” he exclaims in a hearty tone. ‘‘I’ve had a round, sure nuff. How be’ varmer?” he asks, addressing the master of the house and you too, missis; you’m very well, I haup,’’--and then, without waiting to hear the reply, he turns to his good dame, and says in a tone which evinces the pleasure he feels at seeing her, “well, mother, you’m got back, I zee, and a good thing too; if you’d a bin where I hev, we should hev had a pooty job.’

“Where hev ee bin too, then?’’ asks his dame how comed he to be so stupid as to go an’ miss me like that.’’

“Well, I can’t tell ee more’n this. I’ve a bin pisgie-laid.”

“An’ did mun laid ee into Hole?’’ asks his wife in a somewhat sceptical tone, and looking meaningly at the farmer’s wife by her side.

“Hole? I ant a bin to Hole; I’ve a bin wanderin’ and wanderin’ ‘bout ‘pon the moor, all the aivlin.’’

“Bless your life! “ exclaims Dick the moor-man, then you’ve a mait wi’ et, sure nuff.’

“An’ you’ve a bin out ‘pon the moor all the time, hev ee,” says his wife. Well, I never.”

“I’ve a bin pisgie-laid, as sure as I’m a zittin here,” says the good man, throwing himself into a corner of the “ settle,” and looking round upon the company, “and a pooty dance I’ve had ov et, too.”

‘‘Well now,’’ observes the grandfather “you may think zo, but I would’n be too sure about et. I never knawed pisgies to he out ‘pon the moor such a night as this is.”

This remark seems to comfort ‘Liza, who had grown quite nervous again on hearing the farmer affirm that he had been led astray by the pixy elves. She has now put away her ironing, and is seated on the long form near the end of the table.

“All I can tell, ee, uncle,” says the cheery visitor in answer to the grandfather’s observation, “ is this. I must either a bin pisgie-laid or bewitched, vur I could’n vind the track mure’n nothin’.’

“Where did ee lose un? ‘‘ asks the master of the house.

“Way gwain down the hill to Wenaver[3] Brook. I took the short cut straight to the crossin’, but I never hit pon un. I got auver the brook, though, an’ went on up the hill, thinkin’ I was gwain on right enough, when all at once I vound myself home by Benjie Tar. ‘Twas mortal dark, to be sure, but still I can’t zee how I should a got out o’ my way like that. Well, I walked to where I was thinkin’ the Hole road was, and in less than no time I vound myself gwain down hill. That wud’n right, I knawed, zo I turned and keep’t on, and twud’n long avaur I heerd water, a long way down belaw me. ‘Where be I too? ‘ I thought, ‘ this wan’t do, Zo I stapped still to think. Well, I could zee nort, but I guessed I must be right a-top of the staip, behind Benjie Tar, again. A few steps more and I should a gone auver, but I turned, and zoon zeed the tar close by me, and on I went wance more. Thinks I, ‘when I raich home--though I don’t knaw when that’ll be--there’ll be Bobs-a-die wi’ mother-----’.”

“I don’t b’lieve you thought any sich thing,’’ interrupts his dame.

“Well, I knawed you was expectin’ me to mait ee, an I fancied you’d wonder why I had’n din so. Well, you’d hardly b’leve et, I but I actually come to Benjie Tar twice arter that, and vind the road I could’n. At last, by turnin’ my coat inside out, I throwed off they pisgies, and vound the track. Then, thinks I, ‘tis no use o’ my gwain to Hole now, for mother hev gone home for zartin’, zo I com’d away heer, and heer I be.”

“If you’d a bin a maid,” says the moor-man, “ p’raps you’d a had mun round ee, kissin’ ov cc. They do that sometimes, don’t um, ‘Liza?”

“Here, Mawsey,” cries out the farmer’s son to one of his younger brothers in the chimney corner, “ rin out and fetch a yafful o’ turve’[4] It is evident that he considers the fire once more needs his attention, for he kneels down and busies himself with breaking up a slab of peat and placing the pieces upon the glowing heap on the hearth.

“An’ you wndn’ feared you’d be laid into any danger? “ asks the moor-man of the hero of the adventure.

[3] Wennaford. [d] Bench Tor
[4] Handful of turf, i.e. peat.

“No, taniby! All I thought about was what missis would think,” he replies, with a sly wink at his questioner.

“You troubled a pooty lot ‘bout that, I reckon,” says his better-half, in a tone that indicates her disbelief of the assertion.

‘Tis surprisin’ how they pisgies will laid a body, though,” says the moor-man.

“Aw, ees, when they’m ‘bout,” says the grandfather, “that’s true enough. And then they can change their-selves, too. Zometimes they be in wan shape, and zometimes in another.”

“I s’pose they be, uncle,” remarks the stout farmer.

“To be sure. An’ they’m dressed brave and vine, zometimes, all in green,--though I’ve also heerd tell ov they who’ve a seed mun dressed out in rags, an’ often wi’ nort on, at all. They can get about from place to place, too, mortal quick, vur they’ve only got to wish where they want to go too, and there they be. They like most, though, zome quiet place, down by water, vur carrin’ on their sports,--’tes thackey spots they fancy.”

“Zackly,” acquiesces the moor-man.

“Zometimes they heer mun down wells,” continues the grandfather “a chatterin’ and makin’ a pooty hollabaloo. They’ve a got their own ways ‘bout everything, an’ us can’t understand mun.”

“No, us can’t,” observes the moor-man, with the air of a philosopher.

The conversation then turns upon matters connected with their occupations, and the moor-man seems never tired of speaking of Farmer Mann’s “bootiful bullocks,” which he had in his charge last summer, or of “maister’s” sheep, now pastured in the ‘in-country,”[5] and of the colts which he” zeed up the new-take[6] this mornin’.”

At length the stout farmer, of whose wanderings over the moor the pixies have been accused of being the cause, rises to go.

“Come, mother,” he says’ “tis most time for us to be gwain home.”

“An’ I must zee ‘bout movin’, too,” says the moor-man, getting up from the “settle,” and following the master of the house to the door, in order to assist in fetching the dame’s horse from the stable.

The animal is soon brought, and the good woman helped by her husband to mount, while the farmer stands by with a lantern in his hand. The farmer’s wife, on the doorstep, is bidding the dame good-bye, when the moor-man suddenly slips slily back into the kitchen, a sound, very like the smack of a whip, having struck upon his ear, and aroused his curiosity. The two lads in the chimney corner have fallen asleep, and the old grandfather dozes quietly in his chair; but where are the farmer’s son and ‘Liza? The moor-man peeps behind the “settle.”

“I knawed I was right,” he exclaims, as the young couple come forward, looking very much confused, “I knawed I was right when I said thee didn’ need no pisgies to do that for ee’ ‘Liza! Well, I wish ee good night, both,” and with this he once more makes for the door.

[5] The cultivated country around the moor is so called by the Dartmoor people. Sheep are generally pastured during winter in the lowlands, the Dartmoor climate not being suitable for the Devon breed in their season

[6] Portions of moor, enclosed by rough granite walls to prevent the cattle from straying, are termed new-takes

A few minutes later the kitchen is empty, the inmates have retired to rest, and the only sounds heard are the chirp, chirp of tile little cricket, and the slow ticking of time old-fashioned clock.

4. Lough Tor Hole. The Huccaby Courting

THE retreats of the pixies at Sheeps Tor and Huccaby Cleave, and their place of rendezvous at New Bridge, having been described, and the kind of actions with which they have been credited made known to us by the people at the farmhouse we have in imagination visited, I have now to relate some stories of these little elves, which I have gleaned from time to time on the moor.

It is true that a great deal of confidence in their authenticity is not manifested by those who still narrate these doings of the little folks, but yet the Dartmoor peasant delights to relate what he has heard about them. These "fictions of our fathers," as we have seen, often point the moral that when not interfered with the pixies have frequently been great benefactors to the farmer, their favourite mode of helping him being by threshing his corn, and have also rendered considerable assistance to his good wife by churning the butter occasionally, and by otherwise taking upon themselves the execution of various household duties. The maid-servants, too, have had their labours lessened, when they have shown themselves deserving of it, the tiny sprites seeing to the sweeping of the kitchen, and keeping the cupboards free from cobwebs. But should any inquisitive feelings be exhibited, and the proceedings of the fairy elves be watched by prying eyes, the accounts which we have of them invariably agree in stating that from that time forth the pixies abstain from doing the would-be observer of their actions any further service.

As we have gathered, they have also a habit of visiting in another fashion those who have spoken lightly of them, or who have doubted their power, for we find the wayfarer on the moor is oft-times pixy-led, and becomes so bewildered that he in vain endeavours to find the desired path; or it is found to be impossible for the good dame at the farm to make her butter, and the contents of the churn are rendered useless. These and a hundred other tricks are played upon the hapless wight who has chanced to gain the displeasure of the little elves.

But these things are only told on the moor now as what "old people used to say," and while there is yet lingering a kind of belief that there may have born some sort of truth in them, it is not sufficiently strong to assail in any great degree the scepticism that now exists, or to induce the belief that the pixies are ever likely to be seen again; while for many of the effects which were wont to be ascribed to their agency, explanations in natural causes are found. A workman who lives near Gobbet Mine, on the moor, once told me of an adventure that befel him--a kind of "Fakenham Ghost "experience--which, happening to a rustic prone to believe in the supernatural, might not improbably have been regarded as a genuine appearance of the Arch Enemy of mankind, but which our workman, quickly recovering from his fright, discovered to be caused by something of a very innocent character. He was--to use his own expression--returning from "courting" one dark night, when he suddenly found himself sprawling at full length on the ground, and a dusky form with two immense ears bending over him. His first impression was that it was "wishtness," but this was quickly dispelled when on scrambling to his knees and boldly facing it, he discovered it to be a *black donkey*, which, having lain down to rest in his path, he had stumbled over.

A fruitful source of stories of pixies having been observed leaping about at night is the *ignis fatuus*, or Will-o'-the-Wisp, but which, though its appearance is not always understood by the peasants, is not now looked upon by them as anything other than a natural phenomenon. You will sometimes be told on the moor that this luminous meteor will rise wherever a mineral lode occurs, and that many have been discovered by means of it. "Old Billy Williams," a

mine captain of former days, and a man of some renown on the moor, I have been informed was a firm believer in this, and stated that its appearance was due to the heat of the lode beneath the surface.

The amusements of the pixies seem principally to have consisted in dancing in a ring on the green sward in the moonlight, New Bridge, as already stated, having been a favourite resort of theirs when indulging in this diversion. But the spot is deserted now, and the times of the pixies have passed away. They have vanished one and all, and on the old moor, so long the scene of their merry freaks and gambols, the memory of them is alone retained. The tor is still pointed out where their fairy ring was often found at dewy morn, the grot where they dwelt may yet be seen amid the rocks or overhung by the shady sycamores, and the cottage and the farm-house where they practised their vagaries are yet remembered in the gossip's tale, but the elves themselves are gone. Dartmoor, where old customs and old superstitions linger yet, has been deserted by this elfin tribe, and the stillness of the night will never more be broken by the sounds of fairy revelry.

"They are flown,
Beautiful fictions! Hills, and vales, and woods,
Mountains and moors of Devon, ye have lost
The enchantments, the delights, the visions all--
The elfin visions that so blessed the sight
In the old days, romantic."[1]

That the peasants are not slow to perceive that many circumstances which were formerly looked upon as mysterious may be accounted for in a simple manner, is evidenced by the fact that they are ready to offer explanations of many. of the seemingly perplexing incidents which they relate. The following, which was told me by old George Caunter, of Dartmeet (Uncle George), may be given as an instance of this, for the solution of what had appeared strange and for which the pixies were made responsible, was readily forthcoming from the old man. A man named Hannaford, together with his wife, once lived at Lough Tor Hole,[2] which is situated on the East Dart, at no great distance below Bellaford Bridge. The few dwellers in the neighbourhood had often heard them speak of their children, but no one, when chancing to call at the house, had ever seen anything of them there. Sometimes as they approached it a troop of ragged little imps would appear for a moment to their view, and immediately vanish among the bracken as if by magic. Occasionally a farmer or a moor-man seeking his cattle near the place, would see several little forms scrambling among the boulders of granite, but on the slightest attempt to get near them they disappeared. At length it was hinted among the people round about that what Hannaford and his wife called their children were nothing more nor less than a troop of pixies, for they disappeared in the same extraordinary fashion, on the approach of anyone, that those little elves were said to do. This belief continued to grow, and in a short time there were none who doubted that Hannaford and his wife were connected in some mysterious manner with that tribe of little goblins, and folks began to shun passing that way. But of witchery there was none, for, as Uncle George explained, Lough Tor Hole is a very out-of-the-way place, and those who visited it but few, and the young children being accustomed to see scarce anyone but their parents became frightened on the approach of a stranger, and hid themselves with all speed, keeping out of the way until they had departed.

[1] Carrington, *The Pixies of Devon*

[2] I am not sure as to the correct mode of spelling the name of this place. The tor above it is sometimes rendered Laugh Tor, and sometimes Lough Tor. The old spelling of the name is Lafter Hole, and it is often so pronounced at present n the moor, though more frequently spoken of as Larter Hall.

But it is not explanations of the stories of the pixies with which we have to deal, but simply to record them as they now exist, and in furtherance of this we will, without longer preface, beg the reader's attention to the story of

THE HUCCABY COURTING.

On the left bank of the West Dart, just above Hexworthy Bridge, stands Huccaby Farmhouse, where, several years ago, the presiding genius of the dairy was a buxom lass, whose attractions were not unheeded by the youthful swains of the neighbourhood.

But the rivalry for the smiles of the damsel was of a friendly nature, and the passion of her admirers, though in all probability not deficient in ardour, was not of so deep-rooted a character but that they were able to bear up against the disappointment of losing her, for when at last it became known that Tom White, of Post Bridge, was the favoured suitor, the others took a very philosophical view of the matter, and instead of straightway rushing off and hanging themselves to the nearest tree, or--as trees are scarce objects on the moor--taking a fatal plunge in the waters of the Dart, they thought no more about it, but quietly left Tom with the field to himself.

Post Bridge, where, it has been remarked, Tom resided, is nearly five miles from Huccaby, and as the farm duties of our "gay Lothario" would not permit him to visit the lady of his love by day, he was forced to content himself with seeing her at eventide, when labour was over. After a hearty evening meal--for Tom did not believe in making love upon an empty stomach--he would set out to walk the five miles like a man, and at the close of the interview with his fair "Dulcinea" would trudge back again to his home. A walk of ten miles after a day spent in labour is an undertaking that many men would shrink from: but what is it to a man in love? And the plucky way in which Tom accomplished it, several evenings a week, proved the ardour of his passion. Boldly would he set forth from his home, and his walk over Lakehead Hill and by the rugged rocks of Bellaford Tor was rendered light and easy by the anticipation of the blissful time in store for him, and his journey back was made cheerful by the recollection of it.

One would suppose that a man who could look with equanimity upon a walk of this kind would be so firm in his determination of winning the hand of the mistress of his heart, that nothing would turn him from it. But, alas I it was not to be so. One summer night Tom had stayed rather later than usual, and as he strode onward, after having mounted the slope behind the house, he saw that the stars were beginning to pale before the coming dawn. He walked rapidly on, for he began to think that he should have but a short time in bed before the hour when he must rise to go to his labour would arrive, and he was anxious to get home as soon as he could.

Plodding onward, the slope of Bellaford Tor was shortly reached, and as Tom passed by the walls of the new-takes, and approached the tor itself, he fancied he heard sounds as of merry voices in the distance. Once or twice he paused to listen, but the sounds were so very faint, and the probability of anyone being abroad at that early hour in such a spot so very slight, that he came to the conclusion that he had mistaken the sighing of the wind for voices, and pressed on his way.

And now the rocks of the tar began to rise dimly. before him, assuming, in that uncertain light, uncouth and fantastic shapes. The ground over which he was passing was strewn with granite blocks, and he was fain to proceed more cautiously. Arrived at the tor, he was threading his way among the scattered rocks with the intention of passing on one side of it, when suddenly sounds similar to those he had previously heard struck upon his ear, but so plainly as to convince him that he was certainly now labouring under no delusion. Ere he

could look around him to discover whence they proceeded the sounds increased tenfold, and it was evident that a very merry party was somewhere close at hand. Instantaneously it flashed into his mind that he had approached a pixy gathering, and stepping at that instant round a huge granite block, he came upon a strange and bewildering sight.

On a small level piece of velvety turf, entirely surrounded by boulders, a throng of little creatures were assembled, dressed in most fantastic costumes. A great number of them had joined hands, and were dancing merrily in a ring, while many were perched upon the rocks around, and all were laughing and shouting with glee. Poor Tom was frightened beyond measure, and knew not whether it was better to proceed or endeavour to retreat. If he could steal away unobserved he might pass on the opposite side of the tor, and this he determined upon doing. But no sooner had he made up his mind to pursue this course, than the little folks observed him, and instantly forming a ring round him, danced more furiously than ever. As they whirled around, Tom was constrained to turn around with them, although, so rapid was their pace. that he was utterly unable to keep up with their frantic movements. Each one, too, was joining in the elfin chorus as loud as his little lungs would enable him, and although they danced and sting with all their might they never seemed to tire. In vain Tom called upon them to stop--his cries only causing the pixies to laugh the merrier--while they seemed to have no intention whatever of discontinuing their antics. Tom's head began to swim round; he put out his arms wildly, his legs felt as if they would give way under him; but yet he could not avoid spinning around in a mad whirl. He would have given worlds to stop, and endeavoured in vain to throw himself on the grass: the mazy gallop still continued, and poor Tom was compelled to take his part in it.

In the height of the din the sun began to rise above the ridge of Hameldon, and at the first sight of the bright orb the noise suddenly ceased, the little folks instantly vanished among the crevices of the rocks, and Turn found himself lying alone on the moor.

Plucking up his courage, he made his way towards home as fast as he was able, devoutly hoping he might reach it without encountering any more pixies. This he fortunately did, and got to rest without delay.

But, alas! the pixies had done more harm than merely worrying a poor mortal: they were the means of the buxom damsel of Huccaby losing her lover. Poor Tom was so frightened at his nocturnal adventure that he made a vow he would never go courting anymore--and he kept it. It is probable there were not wanting those who were ready to doubt that Tom White ever saw the pixies at all, and were prepared to assign as a reason for his belief that he did so the probability of his having been regaled on something a little stronger than water, ere leaving his lady-love, and this would account for the *spirits* getting into his head. Be that as it may, Tom stoutly declared it was all as he said, and resolutely stuck to his determination of eschewing the fascinations of the fair sex in the future. We are told that "faint heart never won fair lady"; it was certainly so in Tom's case. The fear that he might again encounter the pixies proved stronger than the affection he bore for the damsel who had so often lured him by her charms. On the subject of the fortunes of the rustic beauty, history is silent. We know not whether she bestowed her hand on any of the swains of the moor, or whether fate destined her to a life of "single blessedness "; but we shall be perfectly safe in believing that, unlike Tom, she never made any vow after he left her that she would never go courting again!

5. The Pixie At The Ockerry. Jimmy Townsend And His Sister Grace

SOMETIMES we hear of the capture of a pixy, and of its being consigned to a place of security whence it would be imagined impossible for it to escape; but the little prisoner generally contrives to regain its liberty, either through its custodian relaxing his vigilance, or in some totally inexplicable and miraculous manner. The following story of the capture of one of these little elves is illustrative of this.

THE PIXY AT THE OCKERRY.

One evening a woman who dwelt upon the moor was pursuing her homeward way, and as the darkness began to gather round her she found herself nearing the bridge which spans the Blackabrook at the Ockerry, between Princetown and Two Bridges. When within a few score yards of it a small figure suddenly bounded into the road, and ran leaping and gambolling in front of her towards the stream. She was very much startled at first, and paused, scarce knowing whether it was better to continue on her way or to turn back. She had almost resolved upon the latter course, deeming it very probable that unless she avoided the frisky little fellow before her she would he pixy-led, when the recollection that there were those at home awaiting her arrival determined her to proceed. To prevent any such misfortune as being drawn aside from her path by the pixy, she turned her pockets inside out, and also reversed the shawl she was wearing, and plucking up her courage, walked boldly on. The pixy had now reached the bridge, and remained jumping from side to side and performing a variety of antics upon it, as if to prevent her from crossing. But the dame's courage did not fail her, and having made up her mind not to be deterred from pursuing her way, she stepped fearlessly towards the spot where the pixy was, who continued his grotesque movements, leaping about with the greatest agility. As the stout-hearted women gained the bridge, the little fellow hopped towards her, when suddenly stooping down, she seized the pixy in her hand, popped him into the basket she was carrying, and secured the cover, resolving that instead of running any risk of being pixy-led she would turn the tables, and lead the pixy.

The basket was a large one, but the captive being, as she afterwards said, fully eighteen inches in height, there was not much room in it for him to display his agility, so he was forced to lie still. But though still, he was not silent, for immediately the cover of the basket was fastened upon him, he commenced talking in a very rapid manner, but in so strange a jargon that the good dame was utterly unable to comprehend a word. She, however, with the basket on her arm, continued her way, determined not to allow the pixy to frighten her by his gibberish. After a time the little fellow's voice ceased, and his captor imagined he might possibly be tired of talking, or had grown sulky, or perhaps had fallen asleep. She felt curious to know what he was doing, and determined upon taking a peep at her prize. Cautiously raising the cover of the basket about an inch or so, she looked in, when strange to relate, she found it to be perfectly empty. How the pixy had effected his escape was a mystery, and she could only conjecture that it possessed the power of changing its shape, and had contrived to squeeze itself out through the wicker-work. Though unable long to retain her prize in her possession, the good dame was always able to boast that she had had the courage to capture a pixy.

We not infrequently meet with stories of babes having been removed from their cradles by the pixies, and one of their own fairy infants left in its stead. In such cases it is necessary to

be careful not to act unkindly towards the changeling, as the pixies will not fail to mete out the same treatment to the stolen child as that received by the one they leave behind them. An instance of the belief in a change of this kind having been effected, is afforded by the tale of:

JIMMY TOWNSEND AND HIS SISTER GRACE.

In a cottage on the moor lived Jimmy Townsend, a merry fellow, who was always ready when meeting any of his acquaintances at a sheep-shearing feast, or at the market town on the borders, to join them in a carouse; and was never tired of telling them long stories of his various adventures. Though Jimmy was not particularly fond of labour, he was perfectly oblivious of the fact himself, and it was no uncommon thing to hear him make his boast of an evening that he had again "chayted a 'oss of a day's work." He was always well received wherever he went, and the party was sure to be of the merriest where he was present. He never allowed anything to trouble him, and was fond of assuring his friends that he "ded'n want for nothin' "--in fact, he said he was as happy as a king, "*although he did live with a pisgie*."

Jimmy Townsend had a sister named Grace--at least everybody spoke of her as his sister, but Jimmy knew better--who lived with him and kept his house tidy; and though Jimmy treated her very familiarly, as if she had been his sister, yet he always maintained that she was "not a Christian at all, but nothin' but a pisgie."

Jimmy was many years older than Grace, and said he remembered well when his sister was born, and a "swait little thing her was." "But," said Jimmy, "her wasn' a twelve-month old avor her was stole away, an' a pisgie put in her cradle in her plaace. I knaw 'tis so," he averred," vor her grawed up sich across tempered little mortal as you ever zeed, an' whoever's got anything to do wi' her will sure to come to some harm."

Nothing could shake Jimmy's belief in what he stated.

Every little mishap in the household was attributed by him to the" pisgie," and while he tolerated the presence of Grace, and even felt glad to have her to look after his home, he never regarded her in any other light than as one of that elfin race. "I never cross her," he would say, "vor I knaw I should be wuss off. I let her do as her minds to, and doan't never meddle wi' nothin' in the ouze."

Jimmy Townsend made no secret of his belief, but stoutly maintained, wherever he was, that he "lived wi' a pisgie."

But pixy or not, one thing was certain--the charms of Grace were potent enough to gain the admiration of one Sam Campin, who, disdainful of the warnings offered by Jimmy, boldly pleaded his suit, declaring, in his own way, that Grace was his ideal of perfection, and it she was a pixy, " it dedn' make no odds!" So it was at last all settled that Sam should marry Grace, and one bright morning he tripped off with her to the church, and the parson having performed his office, they returned man and wife.

Jimmy Townsend vowed that it would not be long ere the bridegroom discovered that his life was not likely to wear the rosy hue he had fondly anticipated, for, he said "he's got a pisgie for his wive, an' I knaw et!" At first, however, things went on pretty well, and Sam Campin had nothing to complain of, and many there were who jeered at Jimmy, calling him a false prophet. But he was not to be shaken in his belief that matters would not turn out well for Sam. "Wait a bit, wait a bit, an' you'll zee," he said.

Two or three months passed away, and Sam Campin's cow fell sick and died; a short time after a litter of pigs were found dead one morning, and a flock of geese had mysteriously disappeared. "Dedn' I tell 'ee so?" asked Jimmy of those who had been quizzing him about

his prognostications of coming evil. “Her’s a pisgie, an’ her’s sure to bring harm to whoever’s got anything to do wi’ her. Bless your saul! I had to keep from meddlin’ when I was with her, or I should have been in a purty mess o ‘t avor now. But when a man’s got her vor a wive, how can he help o’ cumin’ to a squabblin’ sometimes?”

Things continued to grow worse, and after a time poor Sam Campin found himself bereft of all his worldly possessions, and want was staring him in the face. Casting about him for some means of subsistence, he at length decided upon adopting the calling of a chimney-sweep, as one that would not require a great deal of practice in order to be proficient in. The people in the few farm-houses around were not likely to become customers, certainly, for the plan in favour with them for keeping their chimneys free from soot was the very simple one of drawing a bunch of furze up and down them occasionally--a proceeding perfectly efficacious, and possessing the great merit of being unattended with expense. But in the villages on the borders of the moor--Widecombe church-town, and Holne, and such like--where might be found a few houses of the better class, Sam considered there would be work enough to keep one sweep employed, and so he set manfully about preparing himself for his new avocation.

Jimmy Townsend said nothing--merely shaking his head when the subject was mentioned in his presence, as if to intimate that he had no faith in the undertaking.

And now the day arrived on which our sweep was to make his first essay. Armed with his brushes, he made for the house where his services were required, and, on arriving, at once set to work. Those were not the days of brushes with a handle jointed like a fishing-rod and capable of reaching through any chimney, no matter what its height, and a great deal of work had to be done by the operator climbing up into the chimney and sweeping down the soot with a brush whose handle was only a few feet long. This plan had to be adopted on the occasion we speak of, and Sam prepared to mount.

It was with some amount of trepidation that he looked up the black and uninviting cavity, but, shaking this feeling off, up he climbed. Down came the soot as Sam vigorously wielded his brush, and all seemed to be going on well. Suddenly his movements ceased. They called to him from below. There was no answer. They called again, and a faint groan was the response. Procuring a light, and peering up, it was found that *poor Sam had stuck fast in the chimney!*

“I told ‘ee so! I told ‘ee so!” exclaimed Jimmy Townsend, when the unfortunate circumstance was made known to him, “I knawed how et would be. No good ‘II ever come to anybody who’s got ort to do wi’ the pisgies!”

And so it proved, for though rescued from his uncomfortable position, Sam was never afterwards able to undertake anything whatever without meeting with some mishap.

6. The Ungrateful Farmer.--The Pixy Threshers.--Rewarding A Pixy

NOTWITHSTANDING the assertion of our acquaintance, Jimmy Townsend, it has been the experience of many, according to the tales related of the pixies, that they have often proved of great benefit to those whom they visited. But when they take upon themselves to render assistance to mortals, they seem to desire, as we have already stated, to do their work in strict privacy, and therefore those who seek to observe them have only themselves to thank if the pixies resent the intrusion by declining to assist them further in their labours. Instances of this, however, are not wanting, inquisitiveness seeming to overcome discretion; and as an example I cannot do better than relate the story of:

THE UNGRATEFUL FARMER.

A small farmer once lived on the moor, who was so very poor that he had as much as he could do to keep himself and family from want, He cultivated a few fields which had been reclaimed from the waste, but his crops were seldom of much value. One day, on approaching his barn he heard the sounds of laughter and merriment proceeding from within. Going cautiously to the door, he put his ear to a crevice, and heard what seemed to be a company of little people busily engaged in threshing corn. After having listened for some time he stepped quietly away, and remained at work at the further end of the yard, until he judged the pixies--for such he knew the little labourers to be--had finished their task. Then proceeding to the barn once more, he was mightily pleased at discovering what the merry little troop of workers had accomplished for him. They had threshed a goodly quantity of his corn, and having relieved him from the trouble of doing it himself, had given him leisure for other matters which it was necessary for him to attend to, and by nightfall he found there was as much work done as would have taken him nearly two days to perform by himself.

This put him in a good humour, and he determined not to go near the barn on the next morning, but let the pixies have it all their own way. He carried out this resolution, and abstained from approaching the barn until the after part of the day, when on entering it he was gratified by the same pleasing sight that had presented itself to him on the preceding morning. Curiosity now took possession of his mind, and he began to think he should like to see the little people at work. He knew it would be necessary to exercise caution, so he determined upon going very early to the barn on the following morning, and awaiting in some place of concealment the arrival of time pixies. This he did, and after a time was delighted at seeing a troop of little people run merrily into the barn, some of them carrying flails (or “dreshels,” as they are called in Devonshire vernacular) on their shoulders. Soon all was bustle and noise. The strokes of the flails resounded on the floor, and peals of laughter rang through the old barn, as the active little goblins bent to their task.

The farmer looked on with amazement from his station behind the bundles of oaten straw, eagerly gazing at the astonishing scene before him. On a sudden one of the pixies--a sharp pert-looking little fellow--dropped his flail, and exclaimed in a shrill voice, “ I twit, you twit,” when the others looked up and threw down their flails too. Now the farmer, although he had not been discovered, imagined that such was the case, and remembering that when once the pixies learn that they are overlooked they cease to return to the spot again, was filled with vexation, and as the pert little fellow on the floor once more raised his tiny voice and

called out “I twit, you twit,” he rushed forth in a temper, exclaiming, “I’ll twit ‘ee!” upon which the pixies immediately vanished, and never came near his barn any more.

Unlike this farmer, however, the good man of the tale which follows restrained any desire that might have arisen to pry into the doings of the elves who came to assist him, and in addition to this observance of the understood conditions on which they laboured made them some return for their kindness to himself.

THE PIXY THRESHERS.

One morning a farmer of the moorland borders was working in his field, when his man came running hastily to him with the information that the pixies were at work threshing in the barn. He had approached the door with the intention of entering, when, hearing sounds within, he listened. He then plainly distinguished the noise of the flails, and heard a number of voices raised in a merry chatter. Guessing it was the pixies, he had not dared to peep into the barn, but had rushed hastily away to inform his master of what he had heard.

The farmer impressed upon him the necessity of keeping at a distance from the barn, if he would not drive the pixies away, and that was not to be thought of. Accordingly they allowed the busy little threshers to do as they pleased within the building, and only approached it when the sounds of labour had ceased. What was their delight on entering to find a large quantity of corn threshed, and the straw placed on one side in neat bundles. The farmer being desirous of rewarding the elfin labourers, sent his man for some bread and cheese, which was placed in the barn as an offering to them. He strictly enjoined his servant not to attempt to enter the building when he heard the pixies at work there, determining that he would not allow them to be interfered with--a somewhat unnecessary caution, for as they relieved the man of some portion of his work, it was not very likely that he had any desire to do anything that might hive the effect of causing them to cease their visits.

On the next afternoon, after the little people had again been heard in the barn, the farmer and his man made their way to it, and on entering perceived that a good morning’s work had been accomplished, and that, as on the previous day, the corn was gathered up into a heap ready for them to remove. The bread and cheese had disappeared, so the good man ordered a fresh quantity to be deposited and the barn door to be closed.

A week passed away, during which time the pixies never failed to visit the farmer’s barn every day, and thresh a goodly quantity of corn, and the latter never omitted placing the bread and cheese for his good little friends. By this time, however, all the corn had been threshed, and the farmer imagined lie should now see no more of them, since their voluntary labour was completed. But in this he was mistaken, for the next morning, although no corn had been left in the barn overnight--the farmer having not, however, forgotten to place some food as usual--the sounds of labour were again heard, and on the barn being inspected after the merry little crew had taken their departure, what was the farmer’s amazement at beholding a large heap of corn standing on the floor. Where it had come from was a mystery, but there it was. Some bread and cheese were again placed for the little elves, and the farmer closed his barn once more; but only to find on opening it next day another heap of corn. And so this state of things continued, and never afterwards could the farmer clear all the corn out of his barn. Every day a heap was there, ready for him to remove, the grateful little goblins spiriting it there in return for the farmer’s hospitality. The latter, it is scarcely necessary to say, rapidly made his fortune, affording in all probability the only instance on record of such a thing being accomplished by a Dartmoor farmer.

We cannot but applaud the gratitude which the farmer evinced for the favours conferred upon him by the pixies, and should naturally suppose it right for all to follow his example under

similar circumstances; yet it does not appear that kindness exercised towards them is always productive of the good fortune which happened to him, as our next story will show. It is certainly true that the farmer whose adventure we are about to relate had watched the pixy at work, but as he had not himself been observed this would not seem to have been the cause of the fairy labourer deserting him. It is evidently to be ascribed to pride on the part of the pixy, which the farmer undesignedly fostered.

REWARDING A PIXY.

On going one morning to his barn for the purpose of threshing some corn, a moor farmer found that it would not be necessary for him to perform that task, for a sufficient quantity was already threshed and placed in the centre of the floor in readiness for removal. The good man gazed around him in perplexity utterly unable to comprehend the meaning of what he beheld. The straw was made neatly up into bundles, and placed on one side, and the floor all around the heap of corn swept clean, and everything was looking in a perfectly tidy condition.

Not being able to imagine who had done him this piece of service, he hastily proceeded across the yard to his house to acquaint his wife with what he had seen, and learn from her whether she could throw any light upon the circumstance. His dame, on hearing what he had to say, unhesitatingly gave it as her opinion that it was the work of the pixies, in which the husbandman, seeing no other probable explanation, acquiesced. He felt mightily obliged to the little folks, as their labour had entirely relieved him of the necessity of threshing any corn that day.

The next morning, being in want of more corn, he again proceeded to his barn with his flail across his shoulder, with the intention of working on the threshing floor until dinner time. On opening the door, what was his surprise to find that he had again been helped in his labours, and that on this day, as on the preceding one, there would be no need for him to use his flail. There stood a large heap of corn ready for him to take away, and as he looked at it he was filled with surprise and pleasure, and also with feelings of thankfulness to the kind little pixies who had again lightened his labours so considerably. He hastened once more to the house and informed his wife that his experience of the previous day had been repeated, on hearing which, she was as pleased as himself, and as thankful to the pixies.

The good farmer pondered the matter over all that day, and at last determined that he would keep a watch in the barn, and endeavour to discover in what manner the little people performed their self-imposed task, for that it was to the labours of the pixies he was indebted for what had been accomplished he never doubted,

Accordingly he sat up late that night, and in the small hours of the morning stole .out cautiously, and going to his barn, hid himself in the straw. Here he waited very patiently until daylight began to appear, when lie heard a rustling sound in one corner of the barn, and peeping out from his hiding-place beheld on the floor a little figure, who at once commenced spreading the corn ready for threshing with great rapidity. The tiny sprite then took up the flail which he had brought with him, and used it with such lusty good will that very quickly a quantity of corn was threshed. This he swept up into a heap in the centre of the floor, and rapidly making up the straw into bundles, placed them against the wall of the barn, and disappeared. The astonished farmer hastened from his place of concealment, and rushed hurriedly to his house to acquaint his better half that he had seen the pixy at work, and the honest couple talked of nothing else during the whole of the time they sat over their breakfast.

And now the farmer and his wife bethought them how they should reward the little sprite for his kindness of thus assisting them by his work in the barn. The good man had remarked that

the pixy wore very dilapidated clothes--in fact they could scarcely be called clothes at all, for the worn out garments were hanging about him in tatters--so it was decided that an appropriate gift to the little fellow would be some new habiliments. In accordance with this decision the good dame brought forth some pieces of stuff of the most gaudy colours she could find, and a selection was made from them for the pixy's clothes. So busily did she ply her needle that by the time supper was set upon the hoard she had made a complete suit, and brought them to her good man to hear what he would say about them. He approved of them very much, praised her skill, and feeling glad to think he would now he able to provide his little thresher with decent raiment, fell to supper.

After the dame had retired to rest the farmer sat himself down by the hearth until it was time to go to the barn. Knowing now that the pixy would not be likely to appear till dawn, he waited until he judged it to he about an hour before the day would break, when he again quietly made his way to it, and concealed himself in the same spot as he had before chosen, taking care, ere doing so, to place the little suit of clothes on the floor, where he knew the pixy would be sure to see them.

Daylight at length began to appear, and at the first faint sign of it the little sprite was seen to make his way from the corner of the barn. The farmer eagerly watched him, picturing to himself the pleasure the little fellow would manifest at seeing his labours were appreciated and acknowledged, and anxiously looking forward to see him working his flail with, perchance, redoubled zeal. The pixy no sooner stepped across the floor than he espied the attractive garments, and pouncing upon them in an eager manner, cast off his fluttering rags, and rapidly arrayed himself in the new clothes. Glancing down with a look of pride at his little figure, he exclaimed, "New toat, new waist-toat, new breeches; you proud, I proud; I shan't work any more I" and, almost before the astonished watcher could comprehend what had occurred, he vanished.

He never appeared again, and the farmer was always afterwards obliged to thresh his corn himself, but he never ceased to regret that he had unwittingly been the cause of making a pixy too proud to work.

7. Nanny Norrish And The Pixies.--The Ploughman's Breakfast.--The Pixy Riders.--Jan Coo

IT has been observed that the pixies will sometimes visit with punishment those who have spoken contemptuously of them, or who have dared to doubt the power they are capable of exercising. And these visitations have invariably compelled the scoffers to acknowledge themselves to be in the wrong, and to be careful how they spoke of the fairy elves in the future. Numerous are the instances of folks having been pixy-led and obliged to wander about on the moor until the spell, under the influence of which they were, has been withdrawn; and many are the incidents related of people having been plagued or frightened in various ways, who have gained the displeasure of the goblins. But the following adventure of Nanny Norrish will suffice to show the folly of treating the pixies with disdain.

NANNY NORRISH AND THE PIXIES.

In the days when the oldest man now living on the moor was but a child, a village pedagogue dwelt in the parish of Widecombe whose name was John Norrish.

His abode, which also served as his school-house, was at Dunstone Cottage, near Widecombe church-town, and here honest John, who was unfortunately a cripple, wielded the birch for the benefit (?) of the youth of that moorland village.

The education to he acquired at John's establishment was of a most elementary character, but while the good schoolmaster had not much learning to impart to his pupils he was perfectly honest towards their parents, for he took but little fee or reward; so little, indeed, that had it not been for the earnings of his wife Nanny, he would have found it an impossibility to "make the two ends meet." But her exertions were such that they produced wherewith to supplement what the parents of John's scholars paid him to such an extent as to enable them to live very comfortably.

And in what manner was it that Nanny was able to contribute to the income of the pedagogue? While his time was devoted to training the young ideas, and instilling into their minds good moral precepts, she found employment for hers at the wash-tub, visiting many farm-houses in the course of a week, for the purpose of pursuing her very necessary avocation.

A good-tempered old creature was Nanny. Never afraid of work, and never grumbling if on her arrival at the scene of her day's labour she found that a greater number of articles than usual needed the application of her soap and water, but always entering heartily upon her duties, and ceasing not until everything that had passed through her hands had been spread out on the furze bushes to bleach. And then Nanny, after her supper, would take the small wage she had earned by her day's labour and trudge merrily homeward. Sometimes her walk would lead her for several miles over the moor, but so well did old Nanny know her way about that she never minded it, and whether it was summer or winter was all one to her.

Often would the neighbours ask her whether she was not afraid of being pixy-led when out so late at night, and on more than one occasion, when she chanced to arrive home later than usual, her husband had exclaimed as she entered the door, "Good gracious, Nanny, I'm mortal glad thou art back safe; I was beginning to think thou hadst met with the pixies.' But

Nanny always laughed at such fears, and declared she knew how to take care of herself, and was not to be frightened. “Pisgies, indeed,” she would say, “I can’t believe what they say about mun; I never zeed wan, an’ what’s more, if I ded I should’n be afeared.” And so Nanny continued her lonely walks after dark, and laughed at the pixies.

One evening, after having finished her day’s work at a farm-house called Dockwell, in the parish of Widecombe, she prepared to set off on her homeward journey. The people of the house, who were in the kitchen’ when she left, bade her “Good night,” and told her to be careful not to be led away by the pixies. “Oh, drat the pisgies,” exclaimed Nanny, as she tied her bonnet strings, “I don’t believe there’s wan left. I’ve heerd tell of yolks havin’ zeed mun, but I can’t believe it, till I zee wan vor myself; but I knaw I shall never do that;” and bidding those assembled “Good night,” she stepped out into the yard, and gaining the road, walked boldly on.

The stars were shining brightly, and as Nanny strode forward she very soon forgot all about the pixies, and began thinking how pleased her good man would be to see her home so early, for she was rather before the time she had told him she should return.

But the pixies had not forgotten Nanny. Often had they heard her jeering at them, but they had suffered her to go unmolested, for she had done them no personal injury. On this particular night, however, she had actually gone so far as to express her belief that none of the elfin tribe remained, and they decided it was time that old Nanny should be taught better, and should be made to speak more respectfully of them in the future; so they determined upon giving her an ocular demonstration of their existence.

Nanny trudged on, and when her thoughts were far away from the pixies and all their works, she was suddenly startled by a loud hubbub, as of numberless voices close to her, chattering in a shrill key, and as she afterwards declared, “makin’ sich a clatter, as you never heerd.”

She stopped--and before she could well collect her senses she saw before her an immense crowd of little people, standing on one another’s heads, and forming a living pyramid, reaching to an immense height--”piled up,” as my informant of the circumstance put it, “tower high.” (I remember how the old man’s eyes would sparkle when he spoke of the pixies assembling in such numbers and reaching to such a height, and pictured to himself Nanny’s discomfiture.) But there the little creatures were, perched one upon the other, “tower high,” chattering with all their might--a veritable tower of Babel--and Nanny Norrish knew she had met the pixies at last.

The records do not tell us how poor Nanny reached her home. We hope in safety, for we would fain believe that the pixies only desired to frighten her, and had no wish to do her harm. The moral, however, is plain. If you would avoid being molested by these little fairies don’t pretend to despise their power.

The following instance of the pixies’ benevolence is worth recording, as showing us that these merry little goblins are always ready to do an act of kindness to the cheerful labouring man.

THE PLOUGHMAN’S BREAKFAST.

One beautiful morning a labourer on one of the Dartmoor farms was engaged in ploughing a field. He had commenced his task at break of day, and with his team and wooden plough--still called by its old name of “sull” or “soil,” on the moor--had completed many furrows, as the hour for breakfast drew near. The keen moor air had sharpened his appetite to such an extent that he more than once looked wistfully towards the gate of the field, in order to see whether his little son was making his appearance with his morning meal. But the boy was not

to be seen, and our labourer, trying to forget his hunger, determined to wait patiently, continuing to plough steadily on, whistling merrily, and ever and anon calling cheerfully to his team.

In the middle of the field in which he was engaged at work was a huge granite block, which when the enclosure had been reclaimed from the moor had been left where it stood, its size forbidding any attempts to clear it away. As the ploughman passed near this rock on his way across the field, he was startled at hearing voices, apparently proceeding from beneath it. He listened, and distinctly heard one, in a louder tone than the rest, exclaim, “The oven’s hot!”

“Bake me a cake, then,” instantly cried the hungry ploughman, in whose mind the very mention of an oven had conjured up thoughts of appetising cheer; “Bake me a cake, then.”

He continued the furrow to the end of the field, when, turning his plough, he set out on his return journey. When he approached the rock, what was his surprise and delight at seeing, placed on its surface, a nice cake, smoking hot. He knew at once that this was the work of the obliging little pixies, who evidently had a resort under the rock, and who had taken pity upon his hunger, and provided him with a morning meal. Seizing the dainty morsel, and seating himself upon the stone, the ploughman was almost as expeditious in causing it to disappear as the pixies had been in providing it for him, but while satisfying his hunger he failed not to feel grateful to the kind little people who, about to enjoy their own breakfast, were not unmindful of the wants of the poor labourer.

It is not an unusual thing for the manes of the Dartmoor ponies--or colts, as they are always termed--to be found tangled in a most intricate manner, and oft-times looped in such a curious fashion as to very closely resemble the form of stirrups. This has been looked upon by the peasants as the work of the pixies, and has helped to give rise to various stories of the fondness of that diminutive race for riding the wild colts at a rapid pace over the moor. Ponies have been known to get their hinder legs entangled in these loops, which, preventing them from rising, has caused their death.

Of the many tales related of these fairy riders, the following one will suffice as an illustration.

THE PIXY RIDERS.

Some colts belonging to a farmer on the moor, which were running in a large new-take, being required, a boy was despatched to fetch them. When he reached the spot where the animals were, he was astonished to find them galloping madly over the ground, while sitting astride on the neck of each, was a diminutive rider, urging them on their wild career, and shouting uproariously. In vain the boy attempted to stop them. Faster and faster the terrified animals flew over the new-take, while their riders twisted their manes, and forced them onward among the boulders of granite in a most reckless manner.

At length the pixies, on gaining a corner of the new-take, suddenly threw themselves off their steeds, which, covered with sweat and foam, gathered closely together, gazing fearfully around them. Where the pixies went to the boy could not tell, but the skilful manner in which they managed the animals they bestrode convinced him, as he afterwards said, that “twudn’ the fust time that they piskies had been up to thackey!”

Instances are recorded of persons having been spirited away by the pixies in a manner most mysterious. These elves have probably some good reason for this, although it has not at all times been discoverable. In certain cases it has been known that the missing one had somehow contrived to render himself obnoxious to the little goblins, but in others, as in that of the boy at Rowbrook, whose fate we are about to relate, no reasons for the pixies’ interference have been apparent.

JAN COO.

At Dartmeet, the east and west branches of the river from which the great moor derives its name mingle their waters, and the course of the united stream, until it leaves the uplands, is through the deep and narrow valley, overhung with rugged tors, which we have already briefly described. An observer from one of the eminences crowning the sides of this valley marks the course of the river, as it rushes along its rocky channel, by the white flashes of foam. The grey granite sides of the tors contrast: strikingly with the coppices of oak, and the whole scene is one of great wildness.

On the left bank of the river rises the bold, conical pile of Sharp Tor, and on the slope of this hill stands a solitary farm-house called Rowbrook, overlooking the valley below. At this farm a boy was once employed to tend the cattle--a quiet, inoffensive lad, who fulfilled his duties to the satisfaction of his master. One evening in the winter season, when he had been nearly twelve months on the farm, he came hurriedly into the kitchen, exclaiming that he had heard someone calling, and imagined it must be a person in distress. The farm labourers who were gathered around the cheerful peat fire arose with alacrity, supposing it not unlikely that some wayfarer had lost his way in the valley. They quickly gained the spot where the boy said he had heard the voice, and paused to listen. Nothing but the sound of the rushing river below met their ears, and the men declared the boy must have been mistaken. He, however, stoutly asserted that he was not, and as if to bear him out in what he said, a voice was suddenly heard, seemingly at no great distance, calling out, “Jan Coo! Jan Coo!”

The men shouted in reply, when the voice ceased. Lights were procured, and they searched around the spot, but no traces of anyone could be seen, so after spending some further time in calling, but without obtaining any response, they re-entered the house, not knowing what to think of the perplexing circumstance.

The next night came; the men were gathered around the hearth as on the preceding evening, when the second time the boy rushed in with the information that the voice might again be heard. Up jumped the men, and running to the spot to which they had been directed on the occasion of the first alarm, intently listened. Out on the stillness of the night came the voice, calling again, “Jan Coo! Jan Coo!” They looked at one another, but shouted not in reply, waiting until the voice should be heard once more, ere doing so. And again upon the night air came the cry, “Jan Coo! Jan Coo!” at which they gave a lusty shout, but waited in vain for any response. All was silent, and after endeavouring by repeated calls to get an answer from the mysterious visitor, they once more sought the warmth of the chimney corner.

“Tis the pisgies, I’ll warn,” said an old man, as he settled down on his low seat by the fire; “I’ve heerd mun say that you can’t tell mun, when they be callin’, from a Christian.”

“Ees, that’s what that is, vor sartin; an’ us had better let ‘em bide, and not meddle wi’ em,” said another, and it was consequently determined to take no further notice of the strange voice, should it again be heard.

And heard again it was. Not a night passed but, as soon as the men were gathered around the fire after their evening meal, the mysterious voice again rang through the valley--”Jan Coo! Jan Coo!”

The winter had nearly passed away, and the people at the farm were looking forward to the fast-approaching spring, when the lad, with one of the labourers, was mounting the slope that stretched from the house down to the river. It was dusk, and they were returning home to their supper, having finished their work for the day. Suddenly the voice was heard in Langamarsh Pit, on the opposite side of the river, calling as before, “Jan Coo! Jan Coo!” The

boy instantly shouted in reply, when, instead of the calls ceasing, as on the occasion when the men had replied to them, they were heard again--”Jan Coo! Jan Coo!”

Once more the lad shouted, and again came forth the same cry--this time louder than before.

“I’ll go and see what ‘tis,” exclaimed the boy; and before his companion could attempt to dissuade him from it he had commenced to run down the hill towards the river. The many boulders in its rocky bed afforded crossing places at certain points--when the stream was not swollen with the rains--known to those living in the vicinity, and towards one of these the boy made his way. His companion watched him but a short distance, for in the deepening twilight he was speedily lost to view, but as the man continued his ascent of the bill the voice still came from Langamarsh Pit--”Jan Coo! Jan Coo!” Again, as he approached the farm-house, could he hear it, and as he neared the door the sounds yet rang through the valley--”Jan Coo! Jan Coo!” Gaining the threshold, he paused before entering, with his hand holding the string which raised the latch, and listened for the voice once more. It had ceased.

He waited, but no sound broke the stillness of the evening, and seeking the kitchen he related what had happened to those gathered there, who wondered what the lad would have to tell them when he came back. Hour after hour passed away; the boy came not. The men went down to the river and called him by name, but they received no reply; they waited in the expectation of seeing him return, but he did not appear, and as no tidings of him were ever obtained, and the mysterious voice ceased its nightly calls, they came to the conclusion that he had been .spirited away by the pixies.

There may be those whose scepticism will not permit them to admit the agency of the pixies in this matter, but who will be ready to recognise in the mysterious sounds the hooting of an owl, and in the disappearance of the boy another proof of the truth of the rhyme:--

“River of Dart, Oh, River of Dart!
Every year thou claimest a heart,”

It is not for me, as the chronicler of a pixy story, to say how this is:--

“I cannot tell how the truth may be,
I say the tale as ‘twas said to me.”

I can only aver from what I have been informed that, however much the pixies’ agency may be discredited, it was, at all events, firmly believed in at the lonely farm of Rowbrook.

8. The Borrowed Colts.--The Boulder In The Room.--Vickeytoad.--Modilla And Podilla

A STORY is related by Mrs. BRAY in her *Tamar and Tavy* of a "wise woman," who was summoned by a pixy--as it afterwards turned out--to attend his wife, and who was given some ointment wherewith to annoint the eyes of the child of which the woman was delivered. The nurse out of curiosity touching one of her own eyes with it, beheld a wonderful transformation, and saw that she had been attending upon a pixy. This coming to the knowledge of the pixy father some few days after, he asked her with which eye she saw him, he being invisible to other people at the time, and on being told it was the right, he struck it a violent blow, and she was from that time forth blind in that optic. This story, or variants of it, I have had related to me more than once, the locale of the catastrophe sometimes being Tavistock, sometimes Moreton, while some narrators do not profess to say precisely where the old pixy actually met the woman and destroyed the sight of her eye, though all agree in stating it to have been in the market-place.

One elderly man in the parish of Brent, who has been a good deal upon Dartmoor, still relates the story but, I may add, does not believe it, characterizing all pixy lore as a "passel 'o ole crams."

Many of these tales, if not actually invented to account for matters which could not otherwise be satisfactorily explained, have, like the Three Black Crows, lost nothing in their narration. As already observed, many things, purely the effects of natural causes, but not understood by the peasantry to he so, have been attributed to the pixies and to their agency also have the misdeeds of mortals sometimes been ascribed. The thunder has turned the milk sour, and in! the pixies have been blamed for it; a depredation has been committed in the hen-roost, and this has been laid to their charge, for was there not a green ring in the meadow, close to the poultry yard, to be seen plainly enough, where the elves had been dancing? In such a case as the latter we can readily imagine that the real culprits would be eager to foster the belief that supernatural agencies had been at work, in order to divert suspicion from themselves. Sometimes, however, these stories seem to owe their origin to little other than pure invention. An inhabitant of the parish in which I reside--South Brent--has told me that he very well remembers how, in his youth, the people used to believe implicitly in the pixy riders, or, at all events, some of the people did. Farmers' horses which were kept on Aish Ridge, a common adjoining the moor, were frequently found in the morning in a very exhausted condition, having, apparently, been ridden hard during the night. This was set down as the work of the pixies, and it was, of course, very easy for those who desired that such a belief should be accepted to go so far as to actually aver that they had seen the little goblins riding them. And that there were those who had such a desire is true enough. It appears that some of the more adventurous spirits in the neighbourhood were, at this time, engaged in the not unprofitable practice of smuggling, and on the expected arrival of a cargo of contraband goods on the coast--generally somewhere about Tor Cross--would make their way across country through the night, in order to assist at the landing, and afterwards to bear away the kegs of cognac. Now, the horses employed upon these midnight journeys were borrowed (without going through the form of making an application for them to their owners) from those kept on Aish Ridge, and were duly returned before daybreak. Such good people as were totally oblivious of the fact that there were men engaged in "deeds of daring" living in their midst, saw the condition of the animals, and not being able to account for their tired and jaded appearance in

any other way, straightway supposed that they had been ridden by the pixies. Though their surmises were incorrect, it is still true enough that the steeds would never have been found in such a state, were it not for the *spirits*.

More than one story is related of the narrow escapes from capture by the coastguard, which the contrabandists experienced, having been chased by them, on several occasions, far inland.

Stories are sometimes told of pixy doings to account for eccentricities in the construction of buildings, such as a hole in a wall--said to have been left for the little sprites to go in and out of--or a piece of the natural rock awkwardly showing itself in a corner of the farm kitchen. This latter, though it may seem a rather strange object to find in a living apartment, is, in some of the rougher built of the moorland cottages, not such a very uncommon thing after all. If a big lump of granite rock happened to lie within the area designed by the builder of a house to be enclosed by his walls, he didn't seem to mind it, but proceeded with his erection, knocking off as much of the protruding rock as he conveniently could, and allowing the rest to remain, to excuse which slovenly mode of building stories of the supernatural were invented.

But the consequences of interfering with such things are no longer dreaded. Old Daniel Leaman, of Dart-meet, in order to rid his cottage of such an obstacle to the proper disposition of his furniture, sought the aid of gunpowder, determined upon clearing his room of the rock, in spite of all the pixies on Dartmoor. Like Mrs. Brown, the washerwoman, who, desirous of curing a smoky chimney, poured the contents of a powder-horn into the fire "to burn up by degrees," Daniel was not so well acquainted with the power of the agent he employed as he imagined, and the contents of his room, and window glass, suffered in consequence.

An unweeded garden has been shown as an example of a spot on which no plants would grow, and for the reason that having originally been laid out and planted with flowers for the special delectation of the pixie's, it was afterwards taken away from them, and sought to be put to other uses.

On the banks of the Teign, not far from Holy Street, near Chagford, is a rock, known as the Puggie or Puckie Stone, in the midst of wild and romantic scenery. The name of this rock has been thought to be equivalent to Pixy Stone, and that the word pixy is derived from *puck* or *pwc*, meaning *sprite* or *goblin*, there does not seem much reason to doubt. Shakespeare's Puck is our pixy exactly. The Fairy asks him:--

Are you not he,

That frights the maidens of the villagery;
Skim milk; and sometimes labour in the quern;
And bootless make the breathless housewife churn;
And sometime make the drink to bear no barm;
Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm?
Those that Hobgoblin call you, and sweet Puck,
You do their work, and they shall have good luck:
Are not you he?"

To which Puck replies:

Thou speak'st aright;
I am that merry wanderer of the night."[1]

[1] Midsummer Night's Dream, Act II., Sc. I

The Puckie Stone is not the only object in that neighbourhood connected by tradition with the elfin race, for a group of rocks further down the river, near the gorge of the Teign, is known as the Pixies' Parlour.

Though it is generally in the barn or pound-house that the pixy takes it upon himself to assist the farmer, yet there are not wanting instances when he has meddled in his out-of-door concerns, as the following story will show. It will be seen, however, that in this case there is a doubt whether the goblins were bent on mischief, or were endeavouring to help forward the good man's labour.

VICKEYTOAD.

It was harvest time, and the sun had not long risen, when a yeoman, whose farm was situated on the borders of the moor, betook himself to the field where, on the previous day, the sickle had been busy among the golden grain. What was his surprise on arriving there to find that a great number of the sheaves, which had been left standing in shocks, had been dragged to one corner of the field, and there piled in a confused heap, while others were lying about time ground. He was completely mystified at first, but upon turning the matter over in his mind, came to the conclusion, that it was nothing less than the work of the pixies, though what cause they had for acting in such a manner he could not readily divine. He could scarcely bring himself to believe that they had done it out of mischief, for he had always heard that they seldom played such pranks upon those who had never given them any cause for it, and he had certainly no recollection of having done aught to incur their displeasure.

His surmises were of course of no avail. It was perfectly plain what had been done, and all that now remained was to put the sheaves up again in shocks, and this he accordingly set about doing without wasting any more time, and with no little labour accomplished the task.

But when evening drew nigh, the farmer began to reflect that it was extremely probable that the pixies would visit his field again, and being desirous of preventing a repetition of their mischievous pranks, determined upon keeping watch.

The sun went down, and time shades of evening began to creep over the face of nature, till at last the big harvest moon mounted into the heavens, and shed around a light of such silvery brightness that every object was plainly discernible. The farmer stepped out upon the threshold and looked about him. Everything was calm and peaceful, and with the exception of an occasional bark of some sheep-dog, no sound broke the quiet of the night. The moon mounted higher and higher, bathing in its beams the old house, and the barn across the yard, and plainly revealing the path which led to the harvest field. This was but a short distance from the house, and on time very edge of the common that rose beyond it, where the grey granite rocks cast dark shadows upon the tall patches of fern that almost covered the surface of time ground.

The good yeoman approached the field very cautiously, and peeping through the interstices of the rough moorstone wail, beheld a sight, which, though partially prepared for, filled him with astonishment.

A considerable number of diminutive elves were busily engaged in pulling down the sheaves of corn, and dragging them to the corner of the field. They were all working very hard indeed, and it was evidently as much as several of them could do, to remove a sheaf. They did not, however, appear to be at all dismayed at the magnitude of the task they had set themselves to do, but all worked with a hearty good will, chattering incessantly to one another, though what they were saying the farmer was not close enough to hear. So interested was he in what was going forward, that he almost forgot he had come to prevent any such proceedings, and could

not for the life of him bring himself to frighten the pixies away, but stood for a long time behind the wall, watching them at their self-imposed labours.

Here, a group of several were endeavouring to raise a sheaf upon their shoulders, and at every fruitless attempt to do so would chatter rapidly to one another in a very excited manner. There, a knot of six or eight in number were slowly dragging a sheaf across the field, towards the corner where they had taken so many on the previous night., and at that spot the commotion and uproar was tremendous. Quite a crowd of little elves were calling and gesticulating, and running hither and thither, some pulling the sheaves this way, and some that, but all endeavouring to pile them in a heap. On the wall close by, many of the pixies were perched, and their features, upon which were self-satisfied looking grins, were plainly to be seen in the bright light of the moon.

The farmer looked on with amazement. What the object of the goblins could be, he was unable to comprehend, for he could scarcely imagine they would put themselves to so much trouble merely to cause him annoyance. Then it struck him all at once that possibly their intention was to help him by stacking his sheaves for him into a mow, but that being unable to accomplish it on the preceding night, they were obliged to leave them in the disordered heap in which he had found them at early morn. All this passed rapidly through his mind as he surveyed the busy groups, the interest he felt in watching them preventing him from taking any action.

At length beginning to realize what a deal of extra work the elves would give him to put things straight again, he considered it was high time for him to interfere. Just as he had made up his mind to this, one of time pixies, an odd-looking little fellow, with a cunning leer on his face, and a most horrible squint, came up very near to where he was hidden, and laying hold of a sheaf of corn, began tugging at it with all his might, at the same time calling to some others, who were near for assistance, and crying, “I twit! I twit I “ The sight of the sheaf being pulled about in such a rough fashion almost under his very nose, irritated the farmer, who sprang suddenly over the wail, and running towards the pixie, cried out loudly, “Leave alone my corn, thee little toad.” instantly the goblins dropped the sheaves, and ceased their chatter, and ere the farmer had time to look around him, had disappeared over the wall at the further end of the field. The farmer ran towards it, and as he neared it, he heard a low, mocking laugh. He paused, and looked about him. There on the gate, with the same grin on his countenance, and his little squint eyes turned towards him, sat the pixy who had approached so near to him as he watched from behind the wall. Two others were perched on the rail by his side, and to these the squint-eyed pixy said, pointing to the fanner, “Little doth that old man know my name is Vickeytoad,” and immediately he and his companions vanished.

Possibly we see in the first syllable of the pixy’s name a corruption of *fach*, (f. pron. as v), meaning *little*. Unless this is so the remark of the goblin appears to be quite meaningless, but if it be the case, we can understand that he is referring to the farmer having, when calling to him, unwittingly given him his name.

It is not often that we hear of a pixy entering a room where there are occupants, and yes: being unconscious of their presence. The little rogues generally keep a sharper look-out, but an instance of this kind is nevertheless afforded by the following story.

MODILLA AND PODILLA.

One winter evening the female inmates of a lonely farm-house, on the borders of the moor near Brent, were seated at the large kitchen table, busily engaged in preparing some good things for supper, for they were about to celebrate some family festival. A huge joint was

slowly turning on the spit before the fire, and a most appetizing odour pervaded the apartment. The work was going forward briskly, the women being intent upon their employment, when the door was pushed gently open, and a little figure made its appearance.

The occupants of the room remained perfectly silent, watching with a great degree of curiosity the actions of the intruding pixy, who was a slim little fellow, clad in tight pantaloons and a neat jacket of green. He approached the hearth, and looked closely at the joint of meat revolving on the spit, and then, as if satisfied with his examination, turned away, and commenced to scrutinize the various objects within the chimney corner. At length he stood up before the fire, and plucking a single hair out of his head, let it fall into the blaze. This he repeated a number of times, but in a very slow and deliberate manner, the women looking on, quite at a loss to understand the meaning of so strange a proceeding. It was evident that time pixy was unaware of their presence, and, quite at his ease, he continued his hair-pulling before the fire.

In the midst of this a tiny voice was beard, calling from without, in a tone of warning, as though danger was near, “ Modilla! Modilla!

The pixy started, and instantly cried out, “Podilla! Podilla!”

“Modilla;” repeated the voice, this time in a very peremptory manner.

“Podilla! “responded the elf by the fire, and instantly darted through the door-way.

The women rose and rushed cut after him, but the pixy was nowhere to be seen, though the outer door was securely fastened. His companion without had by some means become aware of the presence of the people in the kitchen, and had at once called him away from a spot where he was likely to run into danger.

9. The Lost Path.--The Pixies' Revel.--Conclusion

OF all the superstitions connected with the pixies, that, already remarked upon, of wayfarers being liable to be led astray by them, seems to be the one which has longest continued to keep a hold upon the country-people. There are many now in our villages, who while they would not admit that they believed in the pixies' doings, yet are full of instances of folks having missed their way in the most mysterious manner, and are more ready to incline to the idea that supernatural agencies were at work, than to seek the actual causes of such mishaps.

Two instances occur to me at the moment, of villagers of Brent having lost themselves in a neighbourhood with which they were thoroughly acquainted, and being unable for a very long time to discover their road. One of these was on his way homeward from Ugborough, which is some three miles distant from Brent, and somehow found himself at fault in the lanes near Sandowl Cross, wandering about in them during the greater part of the night. The other was merely proceeding from the village to the hamlet of Aish, only half a mile away, and got mystified in the same manner. Now positively they say that if this was not the work of the pixies, they are unable to account for it. The toads were known to them, but by some means they constantly took the wrong turning, and seemed to be entirely at fault. We had better perhaps, be not too inquisitive about the matter; the true cause may not he far to seek. I mention the circumstance in order to show that the belief in this liability to be drawn away from one's path by supernatural means is not yet extinct.[1]

The tradition connected with Fitz's, or Fice's Well, near Princetown, is of pixy-led travellers, and affords an instance of the virtue of water in all such cases.

John Fitz and his lady falling under the spell of the goblins, when riding over Dartmoor, were utterly at a loss to find their way home, but chancing to light upon a spring, they had no sooner tasted of the water, than all difficulty about the matter vanished, and they were able to proceed without difficulty. The erection over the well, which has inscribed upon it the initials of John Fitz, and the date 1568, was erected by him out of gratitude at having been delivered from so perplexing a predicament.[2]

That such a superstition as the belief in the efficacy of water to destroy the spells cast over the traveller should obtain on Dartmoor, is not much to be wondered at, for there is no doubt

[1] While these sheets were passing through the press, an instance of superstitious belief was reported in the *Western Daily Mercury*, of 6th June, 1890. It appears that a few days previous to that date, some labourers were engaged in ripping bark in a wood at a short distance from Torrington, in North Devon. When the time arrived for them to leave their work, one of them separating himself from his companions went to another part of the wood, in order to fetch a tool which he had left there. As he stooped to pick it up, a most strange feeling came over him, and he felt himself utterly unable to regain an upright position. Around him he heard peals of discordant laughter, and became seized with the conviction that he had fallen under a spell of the pixies. In this uncomfortable predicament he averred that he remained for the space of five hours, and was even then only able to crawl away on his hands and knees. Not knowing in what direction he was proceeding, he fell at length into a stream, and on pulling himself out of it, recognized his whereabouts, and made the best of his way home. Here he was remonstrated with by his wife for not having turned his pocket inside out, a charm which could not fail to counteract the magic power of the pixies. It is stated that a man named Short--a tailor--was a few years since pixy-led in the same wood, and continued under the spells of the goblins until morning.

[2] It is somewhat interesting to note that in the story which comes to us from Torrington. the man was unable to find his way home until he met with a *stream*.

that many a wanderer, lost in a mist, and believing himself to be pixy-led, has found his way off the moor by coming upon a stream of water and following its course.

And that the mists are responsible for a great deal is certain. Often do we hear of farmers being unable to find the gate by which they have entered a field or new-take, and of their great perplexity in consequence; and it is more than probable that such misadventures have happened during one of these mists, which frequently arise very suddenly, but the pixies have nevertheless had to bear the blame.

But if the elfin sprites occasionally mislead the traveller, they more than make up for it, if it be true as we are sometimes told, that they indicate spots where metals may be found. Beneath the fairy rings where they dance and sing by night, the miner has only to dig and he will be sure to hit upon a precious lode; that the goblins themselves occasionally engage in such a pursuit almost seems to be the case, for it is told how they may be heard knocking within the rocks. And if you apply your ear to the granite sides of some of the tors of the moor, it is said you may hear the pixies ringing their bells within; the "pixies " in this case probably being the faint echo of some distant village peal.

We have seen how these goblins delight to dance in the moonlight, on the turf, and how the little fellows throw themselves right heartily into their merry-makings. We shall now see that they sometimes choose the farmhouses to be the scene of their meetings for indulging in the dance, and after the inmates have retired to rest, enjoy themselves to their hearts' content in the kitchen.

THE PIXIES' REVEL.

Once upon a time--we will begin the story in the orthodox fashion--an old farmer and his wife dwelt in a lonely house on the moor. Fortune could not exactly be said to have frowned upon them, for the couple might have been very much worse off than they were, but yet she had not turned towards them her brightest of smiles, they having rather more than their full share of toil. The farmer was out in his fields from morning till night, and when he reached the house was glad, after his supper and a short rest by the fire, to take himself off to his bed. But unfortunately, although he so much needed sleep, he was at length unable to obtain it, in consequence of the pixies having suddenly taken a fancy to visiting his house at night, and keeping up an incessant chattering in the kitchen, which was situated immediately underneath his bedroom. And so he frequently lay tossing about, not able to get a wink of sleep until far into the night, and sometimes never closed his eyes at all. He was reluctant to incur the enmity of the "little people" by driving them away, and so he bore this state of things for some time, till one night the noise was so great, that he jumped out of bed, determined to put a stop to it.

"What be the matter?" asked his dame, to whom he had not communicated his intention.

"'Way, these here pisgies be a makin' sich a rattle that I want put up wi't no more. I'll zee what they he up to; I can zee mun droo the 'all in the planchin'."

The farmer peeped down through the hole in the floor, and unobserved by the pixies was able to become a spectator of their proceedings. In the middle of the kitchen a number of them were dancing in a ring, while others were running and jumping about the room, at the same time all were shouting and making a great noise. On the shelves of the dresser several were perched, to the imminent danger of the good wife's cups and plates, while some were climbing up the clock-case, and mounting the deal table, and jumping again to the floor, to run in and out of the circle of merry dancers. They were evidently enjoying themselves heartily, and the farmer felt almost inclined to let them alone, till the many sleepless nights he had endured came to his recollection. As he was considering the best means of ridding

himself of his unwelcome company, he observed a pixy perched upon a stool immediately beneath him, and thinking how greatly he should frighten the noisy party if he could but strike one of them, he took up a steel-pronged fork which lay near him, and noiselessly putting his arm through the hole in the floor, let it drop right on to the pixy. The little fellow happened to commence capering about just as the farmer did this, and luckily for him the fork did not enter his body, but pinned him by the leg to the stool. He set up a great cry, and the pixies seeing what had happened, flew towards the door and rapidly made their exit through the keyhole. The unfortunate victim of the farmer's vengeance attempted to follow, but while he was able to reduce his own size so as to go through the smallest of crevices without difficulty, he had no power to alter that of the stool, and consequently he stuck fast in the keyhole. Here he was captured by the master of the house, who had hurried down stairs when he saw the effect of his aim, and speedily released from his encumbrance.

The rural narrator from whom I had this story was unable to say what the farmer did with his prize, but let us hope that he merely intimated to him his desire to be permitted to sheep quietly in the future, and let him go.

The foregoing are but a few examples of the many tales that are related of the pixies, but they will serve to illustrate the various parts played by that fairy race when interesting themselves in the affairs of mortals. While they often manifest a readiness to assist in the work of the farmer, their actions were certainly somewhat erratic. A spirit of mischief seems not infrequently to have ruled them, though it would generally appear that unless some cause had been given them to tease or punish those who dwelt near their haunts, the latter were more likely to receive good than harm at their hands.

We have said that the age of the pixies is gone. And that they have almost disappeared before "the march of intellect " is indeed the case; but while this is so, the exploits which are yet related of them remain as a not uninteresting portion of our folk-lore.

THE END

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