

# MIRAGE 8

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# SOME BACK- GROUNDS OF FAIRYLAND

The term fairy has in modern times been applied to so wide a variety of imaginary entities, that its original meaning is almost lost in favour of a more inclusive significance. The true fairy, as developed by early Celtic folklore, was undoubtedly a female nature-spirit equivalent to the dryads, naiads, and other local nymphs of classical antiquity. Such a spirit is, in essence, a personification of some aspect of the natural world, and every branch of Aryan Mythology teems with examples. Dawn-maidens, cloud-maidens, fountain-maidens, tree-maidens, and the like exist abundantly, under various names, in the legends of all Aryan peoples; and it is not remarkable that the highly imaginative Celts should have evolved one of the most notable of all systems of such beings.

Evidence seems to indicate that the pre-classical Gauls -- and, by inference, other Celts -- possessed an active belief in beings corresponding to what we recognize as true fairies. After the coming of Roman influences many classical features were undoubtedly woven into this belief, though not so many as to destroy its distinctiveness.

The true Celtic fairy was originally a female of graceful human aspect and average size, dwelling in some specific environment and possessing such supernatural attributes as the power to change form, control the sea and the wind, heal sickness, and divine future events. From these powers the name of fay, fee, or fairy was derived in mediaeval times from the Low Latin verb fatare, to enchant; itself derived from the standard Latin fatum, fate.

True fairies were generally benignant rather than malignant, though when wronged their revenges were ample and certain. They were frequently loved and married by mortal men, and always exacted heavy penalties when such favoured mortals broke faith with them. Fairies often took it upon themselves to preside at the birth of individuals, over whom they would retain a protective guardianship throughout life. This linkage of the beings with human destiny or fate may have been instrumental in the choice of

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their final name -- derived indirectly from fatum.

Such are the original fairies commonly met with in pre-Elizabethian tradition and literature. Parallel to them, however, had always existed a wholly separate line of mythological creation whose attributes were eventually to become mixed with those of the fairy world -- just as the attributes of both were likewise to become mixed with a third element derived from actual experience. This separate line of myth was also one of natural personification, albeit of a far different and darker cast; having to do with those night-daemons or personifications of darkness which appear in all Aryan mythologies as thieves or mischief-working entities more or less inimical to man. The element of thievery or mischief-making symbolises the theft of daylight by darkness.

Typical examples of the Aryan night-daemon are the Panis of the Hindoos; the characters Cacus, Polyphemus, Cerberus, and Orthros (Geryon's dog) in classical mythology; the Genii and AFRITS (to cite a Semetic borrowing) of the Arabians, and the elves, daergar, or trolls of the Teutonic north. As time progresses, and antiquity fades into mediævalism, we see many of the traits of these night-daemons transferred to the fairy species -- causing the latter to become mischevious, predatory, nocturnal, and sometimes hostile to mankind. Discrepancies in fairy nature increase with the years, so that eventually different groups and orders of fairies -- good and bad, large and small, male and female -- came to be recognised. Finally we reach a point where all sorts of dissimilar beings of air, earth, sea, and nether caves are lumped together in the popular mind under the single and erroneously collective term of "fairies." There are sylphs of the air, gnomes of the earth, undines of the sea, and salamanders of the fire. Each element and region has its especial sort of fairy, till the list includes such things as pixies, leprechauns, kobolds, brownies, goblins, mermaids, banshees, little people, and countless other variants. In many of these beings the attributes of different lines of myth are blended complexly and inextricably, creating extreme types of mongrelism.

So much for the purely mythical side. It is now time to consider an antipodally diverse side of the fairy's ancestry which has no connections with the primal legends of our Aryan heritage -- a side which from the earliest ages had tended to mix itself with the lore of night-daemons, and which consequently became adopted into fairyland along with the contact of Aryan races with some alien stock of darker colouring and diminutive physique encountered during the struggle for the settlement of Europe. That such a contact occurred can for many reasons scarcely be doubted; and we see reflections of it in all the traditional descriptions of such "fairies" as embody chiefly the attributes of night-daemons.

Such earthy or underground spirits have, in European folklore, a peculiar set of fixed, special qualities in no way traced to the general night-daemon myth. They are conspicuously small, conspicuously repulsive, consistently subterranean in habitat, generally primitive in their arts and crafts, usually hostile or fearful toward human beings, and given to certain definite practices such as the theft of human infants accompanied by the

substitution of their own. They have a profound lore connected with nature, and indulge in secret communal rites varying from the merely grotesque to the unutterably repulsive. Their weapons are generally bows with primitive stone-headed arrows.

Viewing all the evidence, anthropologists have for many generations felt certain that these persistent elfin or fairy characteristics are due to historic memory rather than to mythological imagination. That is, the traditional elf, troll, gnome, kobold, leprechaun, brownie, or imp is not purely an Aryan night-daemon, but a synthesis of the night-daemon and a very genuine dwarf or pigmy race of men whom the Aryans at one time or another displaced or drove into underground hiding, and who afterward kept up a furtive and vindictive course of reprisals against their conquerors.

Driven underground, decimated in numbers, and hunted down whenever seen, the vanquished dwarfs became sly creatures of the night -- sallying forth by stealth to waylay lone travellers, steal infants for nameless sacrifices, despoil lonely farm houses, shoot from ambush, and otherwise vent their hatred of their Aryan conquerors. In time it is certain that many Aryan renegades went over to them and joined their number -- as men in savage places "go native" today -- and that they succeeded in inculcating their repulsive system of fertility worship amongst a decadent stratum of the Aryans, thus giving rise to the furtive witch-cult with its sinister organisation and ceremonies, and its obscene and orgiastic Sabbat.

Memories of these waspish, uncouth, and miniature enemies could not but be extremely vivid among the conquerors of Europe; and it is not remarkable that the creatures -- so unlike men as the tall, blond Aryans conceived humanity -- became blended with the ancient hereditary lore of night-daemons which antedated our ancestors' entrance to the region. Had the Aryans not encountered this squat, dark race, it is probable that their night-daemon myths would have continued to remain in a more or less ambiguous and plastic form. To the conquered little people we undoubtedly owe the existence of elves, duergars, trolls, gnomes, and kobolds as our forefathers conceived them.

It now remains to enquire who those conquered dwarfs really were, where they lived, and when and where our invading forefathers encountered them. Also, whether the whole body of Aryans found such beings in their path, or whether the conflict was limited to a part of the Aryan people and merely reported by hearsay to the rest. We must remember that the presence of a certain legend among a certain people in a certain region by no means proves that the events of that legend really happened to that people in that particular place. The legend may have been borrowed outright from some other people -- either of that region or of another region -- or it may concern something which happened to the given people in another place -- perhaps a very distant place -- which the people occupied at some earlier stage of its racial history.

In the opinion of the older mythologists, and of many modern ones, the little people of elfin lore represent none other than the squat Mongolian stocks of northern Europe -- Lapps and Finns -- whom the Aryans found upon their entrance to that region. The

size, colour, accomplishments, and manners of these stocks in their purest form lend much plausibility to the hypothesis; and it is highly probable that they covered a much larger area of the European continent than is now the case. Another argument is the fact that most of the legends of small underground beings seem to come primarily from the North -- from those Teutons who most directly encountered the squat Mongols in the battle for the continent.

A more modern and much bolder theory identifies our dwarfish foes of prehistoric times with the Neanderthaloid sub-men who shambled over Europe about 30,000 B.C., and which were exterminated by the successive waves of true human beings who swept into the region after that date. This theory, while vastly interesting, has much less standing than the one previously mentioned.

A third theory -- taking into account the existence of evil-dwarf legends in regions remote from the Lapp-Finn belt -- (for example, the Little People of the British Isles; and the Kalli Kanzori of modern Greece, which are not wholly traceable to nature -- spirits of the faun-satyr order) postulates some hitherto unknown race of dwarfs (either Mongoloid or otherwise) which populated wide areas of Europe at a very remote though not palaeolithic period. This theory has considerable vogue at the present time, and is upheld by the existence of certain prehistoric excavations in Southern Austria which seem to have been made by men of less than normal stature. At the same time it would not do to make too much of the idea, since an originally wider diffusion of the Lapp-Finn (or easterly Hunnish) stocks might easily account for the dwarf architecture and artifacts in areas remote from their historic habitat. Most conservative anthropologists think it unlikely that -- despite the vivid legends of diminutive Picts and elfin brownies in Scotland, sinister underground "little people" in Wales, and Robin Goodfellow's merry crew in England -- any miniature race has ever actually inhabited the British Isles. We derive such tales entirely from the experience of our ancestors at a former stage of migration on the European continent.

A fourth theory -- the least probable of all -- holds that the small, dark opponents of the Aryans were merely members of those less blond Caucasian stocks which disputed the possession of Europe at the dawn of history -- Mediterranean and Iberian races whose stature and pigmentation would naturally seem aberrant to a pure Nordic. This view would of course provide for an actual meeting of Celts and "little people" in the British Isles. However, it is easy to detect the weakness of such a theory. To begin with, Mediterraneans are not small enough to be called dwarfish -- certainly not small enough to inhabit the subterranean erdstalle of Southern Austria. Secondly, they are not enough unlike Nordics to give rise to the tremendous sense of alienage and repulsion evident in most legends. It is ridiculous to imagine normal, regular-featured Iberians as the models for trolls and kobolds. The most that can be said is that possibly some episodes of conflict betwixt Nordics and Mediterraneans may have been confused in Nordic folklore with other tales dealing with encounters with the older dwarf race. Such complexities must always

be reckoned with in anthropology -- indeed, we cannot swear that two, three, or four wholly different dwarf races, encountered at different times, did not play a part in forming the traditional picture of the elf, kobold, or mischevous fairy. Lapp-Finns of the north, Hunnish stocks of the southeast, unknown stocks of various habitats, and even dark Iberians of later times may all have figured in the composite legend-building -- later encounters being interpreted in terms of earlier ones, and battles on one terrain being twisted into connection with bygone battles in far different regions. Nor should it be forgotten that the purely mythical element of the night-daemon, with which the early Aryans confused their strange opponents, must always be looked for.

Recent discoveries of large numbers of Erdestalle in Austria make it likely that the Danube region was at least a leading seat of the prehistoric dwarf-Aryan conflict. These artificial caverns, plainly constructed by a race not over five feet tall, and holding artifacts indicating a late stone, copper, and early bronze age date, are occasionally of great elaborateness; some apparently being temples, while others are clearly refuges (like the burrows of small animals) from enemies of larger physique. About 700 of them are known, many of which have been used for centuries as cellars by the inhabitants of the region. The artifacts betray considerable skill -- as indeed does the engineering of the caves. Occasional skeletons found nearby reveal a race of about the size of the degenerate Ainos of Japan, the Veddahs of Ceylon (whom Haeckel placed lowest in the human scale), or certain pigmy races of Africa. Ethnologists hesitate to name racial affiliations, but there is nothing to prove that these Erdstallerbauer (as the Austrians call them) were not of the same Mongoloid stock as the Lapp-Finn and Hunnish races. Much research remains to be performed in both the archaeological and ethnological field.

Meanwhile, however, there is no dispute concerning the part played by some small, dark race in shaping the hostile, mischievous, diminutive and subterranean side of the later traditional fairy. Added to the myth of the night-daemon, this element has thoroughly mongrelised the earlier genuine fairy of Celtic nature-myth.

That many other elements, mythical, legendary, and historical, have gone into the makings of many types of elf or fairy, it would be absurd to deny. All natural legend-building is infinitely mixed and complex, involving numerous borrowings from every conceivable source; so that we may justly regard the three main fairy origins -- nature-spirit, night-daemon, and earthly dwarf -- as merely the essential or dominant backgrounds in a field of limitless variety and compositeness.

Fairyland as a whole -- the differing superstitions of different nations, and the various streams of myth or memory entering into the weird folk of various regions -- is a profound study in itself, and one which has received much attention from scholars such as the Grimms, Keightley, and Lang. The Celt has no monopoly -- even of the true fairy which he created. Needless to say, each race and country adds to its traditional elves and fairies an abundance of local and family traits all apart from the more generalised heritage of the elusive creatures. Racial and national temperament, too, plays a large part in any country's selection of a favourite fairy type. Thus some countries may lay emphasis on

a mythic being close to the pure fairy of Coltic antiquity, whilst others may specialise in beings derived mostly from the dwarf and night-daemon elements. Early English fairy-lore includes some examples of the pure type -- as in the legend of Thomas of Ercol-donee and his seven years in the domain of the fairy queen -- though a larger number of legends depicts a miniature, good-natured, prankish race of pleasing aspect. Welsh, Scottish, and Irish fairies are less genial on the whole -- the complimentary terms "good folk" or "gentry" being euphemisms designed to placate a somewhat feared element. Continental fairies vary widely, those of Germany being perhaps best developed. Germanic legend includes magnificent examples both of the pure fairy and of the impish troll and gnome. In the more southerly nations, the importance of the grotesque elf seems to diminish. Many nations assign to the fairies a definite social and political organisation, with King, Queen, and other dignitaries -- this the Mab, Titania, and Oberon of popular legend. Fairy lore in the East, as developed by the Islamic nations, is an extensive separate study; as is the elaborate world of classified elemental spirits described by Paracelsus and the Comte de Gabalis.

Another separate topic for research is the manner in which each nation correlates its fairy lore with its more formal and serious religious beliefs. Thus in rural England a fairy is held to be the wandering spirit of a dead person, too earth-bound for heaven, yet not lost enough for assignment to the realm of Lucifer.

Belief in fairyland is today largely a matter of history in most parts of the world, though in Ireland many surprisingly literate persons still profess to retain faith in the "good folk." To such devout disciples, our present survey will no doubt appear equally blasphemous and unnecessary.

...H.P. LOVECRAFT...  
(September 23, 1932)

NOTE: The above essay is extremely dated archaeologically, and its premise was somewhat questionable in 1932. However, by a careful reading of the essay one may find excellent examples of Lovecraft's prejudices, and at least two cases of his highly subtle humor! JLC