

ART. VIII.—*On some Surviving Fairies.* By Mrs. HODGSON, Newby Grange.

Read at Carlisle, June 20th, 1900.

THE shyness of the British fairy in modern times has given rise to a widespread belief that the whole genus must be regarded as extinct. No doubt the great increase of the three R's, which are the natural enemies of fairies, has driven them to take refuge in the least accessible neighbourhoods; but occasional specimens are still to be obtained. The injudicious collector who hunts, so to say, with horn and hounds, will draw every cover blank; and even the aids to scouting formulated in folk-lore tracts may not always insure success. We have, however, found two or three living examples which I now exhibit, only withholding the precise *habitat*, as in the case of some rare ferns, which botanists are quite justified in protecting from the dangers of too fierce a light of publicity. Fairies, it is well known, thrive only in moonshine.

Of a certain place I had heard, many years back, that it was haunted, but without further details.

Lately we got the following information from a trustworthy source:—

“There used to be fairies at the spot, before the wood was cut down . . .”

Where was the wood?

“It was on the top of the Bank,”—where now no trace of it remains.

“Well; they went away when it was cut down; but once they set some Fairy Butter ready for a ploughman, when he was going to have his dinner. One of his horses ate it; the other did not. The one that did not eat it died. They used to be in the cottage yonder, that is now a cow-shed. It's lucky,” added the old man, “if you eat fairy butter.”

The exact nature of the article is described in the late Canon Atkinson's *Forty Years in a Moorland Parish*, and it used to be a well-known commodity in the North of England.

The next story is told in the same neighbourhood :—

“ There was a fairy that looked like a hare. *It was a real fairy*, but a man caught it for a hare, and put it in a bag, and thought he would have a nice Sunday dinner. While it was in the bag it saw its father outside, and he called to it ‘ Pork, pork ! ’ and it cried out ‘ Let me go to daddy ! ’ And then the man was angry, and said ‘ Thoo ga to thy daddy ! ’ and it went away to its daddy ; and he was very much disappointed at not getting his Sunday dinner.”

The same authority told another tale of a house just beyond the eastern border of Cumberland, mentioned as a haunt of the common Brownie or Hobthrush :—

“ Once there was a little fairy and it lived at a farmhouse in _____ that used to do all the work before they were down in the morning ; and so they found out about it, and they got up one morning to see it, and they saw a little fairy running across the yard. It had a green jacket and a little hood and a red skirt, and they thought it looked very ragged, and they got it a new suit of clothes and put them in the kitchen where it would be most likely to come to. And so it saw them in the morning, and it said :—

‘ A new coat, a new hood !
Now little Hobberst will do no more good ! ’

And it never came back any more, and they *were* sorry when they lost the little fairy ; and they called it Little Hobberst. It would sup porridge if they were set out for it, though it would not have the clothes.”

A few other gleanings that come under the head of fairy-lore may be added. The following are from Caldbeck :—

When soot or hail comes down the chimney they say “ There’s the
(*or an*) auld man coming down the chimney.”
If you throw a beetle over your shoulder it will be a fine day
to-morrow.

To turn back after starting from home is unlucky. The speaker added—"Father wouldn't turn back, whatever. If he missed anything, he'd stand in the road and shout on us, and tell us to bring him what he wanted."

To cure a sore-throat tie a *left-leg* stocking round it at bed-time.

The rhyme said by children on finishing their stint of knitting or crochet is:—

"Bulls at bay,
Kings at fay,
Over the hills and far away!"

Our Caldbeck informant had heard of sticks being rubbed together to kindle fire, and another from Scaleby knew of cattle being driven through the fire in West Cumberland during the cattle plague in 1865 or 1866. Mr. Hodgson heard a rumour of the "need-fire" being brought into Cumberland at that time. It was said to have been kindled in Northumberland.

The same girl said that her grandmother would never let them throw anything outside the door before sunrise, nor any water out of the house on New Year's Day; every one who went out on that day must bring in a piece of wood or coal. When the old folk were out of doors and saw the sun rise, or the new moon, the men used to turn their coats and shake them, and the women their aprons. If a coal flew out of the fire they "rattled for money,"* or said, "It shapes like a cradle, or "like a coffin." Moths were thought a sign of death or of letters, and it was unlucky to kill them. Shivers meant a dog walking over your grave.

A saying at Candlemas is reported from Dalston:—"If it is dull and snowy, the shepherds are dancing and singing; if it is fine, the shepherds are mending their mittens."

* I took this to mean turning or jingling the money that happened to be in their pockets, as on hearing the cuckoo; but I omitted to ask for an explanation.