

Literature, &c.

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TALES OF IRISH SUPERSTITION.
THE FAIRY CIRCLE.

BY JOHN BROUGHAM.

"CORNEY; avic!"
"Mam to you."
"What the mischief are you thinking so tremendous hard about?"
"Me thoughts is me own, any way, Missis O'Carrol."
"Unless, may be, you borrowed them from some one else; an' that's most likely, Mr O'Carrol; for the nivr an original idaya did I observe imatin from your own sinsabilities, sence here I've been."
"Exceptin' once."
"An' whin was that, may I ax?"
"Whin I tuk it into my foolish head to marry you."

"An' have you the owdshious vanity to suppose that nobody thought that before you."
"Not to me knowledge, Mrs O'C."
"The saints be good to us! There's a dale of ignorance in the world; but come now, tell me, what is it that makes you lave off your work, ivry now an' thin, lookin' for all the world, as cute as a concealed gander."
"Why, thin, Moll ma-chree, I'll tell you, but you must promise not to make fun o' me, for its your good that's ever foremost in me heart."
"The blessin's on your lovin' soul! I know it is."

"Well thin, Moll, come an' sit near me, an' lave off polishin' up that owd copper kittle: for I want to spake mighty serious to you. Haven't you noticed that big, slated house that's just builded up, fornest our very nose."
"Of course I have."

"Yes, but do you know who's livin' in it? Who, but young Phil Blake, that was as poor as a THRANZEN an' as ragged as a mountain goat, in his ivry day clothes, not more nor six months ago?"

"You don't say."
"It's the mortal truth; did'nt. I see him a while ago, struttin' up an' down the place, as proud as any other paycock, wid a BLEW coat on his back, covered over wid brass buttons, a most as big as fryin' pans, enough to dazzle the eyes out of a Christian's head; and he orderin' the min about as important as you please. Phil Blake, of all fellows in the world, that niver had the ghost of a fippenny bit to bless himself wid, to see him now, crammn' his fists into his breeches pockets, an' jinkin' the good and the silver about, in the most agravat' way!"

"But where did he get it all?"
"That's the chat—where? Guess, won't you?"

"I don't know, may be some rich ould lady fell in love wid him."

"Is it wid Phil? Small chance of that, I'm thinkin'. Guess again."

"May be he had a lawshuit!"
"Be my sowkins, you're further in the mud than iver, Moll-shae. Lawshuits isn't the stuff goold mines is made off; if so, it's only the lawyers that's licensed to dig. I'll tell you. Last night, meself an' a few boys was takin' a jug of punch, at the "Cross Kays," whin one of them up and towd us all about it. Moll, as thrue as you're here, it was neither more nor less than a fairy gift."

"No!"
"Gospel! He catch one of the little schamers, (savin' their prinsice, for I suppose there's a lot of them listenin'), if we knew where they were perched, an' so, he wouldn't let him go until he gave him hapes of money. Why, they say Phil's as rich as an archbishop."

"But, Corney, darlin', don't you know that fairy money nivr thrives; let us wish Blake good luck, and think no more about it."

"Pooh! Nonsense! He has luck enough; we had better wish ourselves a slice. Money's money, Moll; a fairy groat would pay for a pot of porther just as aasily as Falhe Fogarty's. It isn't that I'm over covetious, but I can't help envyin' Phil."

"An' you see what harm even the first beginnin' of such a feelin' does. All this blessed day, you've hardly done a stitch of work; instead of makin' the lapstone echo with the sound of your merry voice, you've been lookin' as distracted as a stray pig; why, you have't even kissed the bubby sence dinner. Go to work, Corney, while I get a cup of tay ready. Thank God, we've never wanted for a male's vittles yet, and have always a plenty in the house agin we do!"

"Yes, I know that; but have't I to work for it, day after day? No rest; nothin' but slave, slave, slave, from year's end to year's end, while gintlefolks, like Phil, bad cess to him, can stroll up and down the sunny side of the street, smoke as many pipes of tibbacky as they please, have roast beef ev'ry Sunday, an' wear top boots. Murder alive! It's a grate thing to be one of the quality."

"Well, the mischief has got into you, I believe. Corney, you niver tuk such a fit as this afore."

"Nivor mind, Moll, I know what I know; luck's like a fox; you've to hunt it hard afore you catch it; the devil a toe will it come to you. There's plenty of faries about, an' who knows but there may be as lucky chaps as Phil Blake in the world."

At the conclusion of the above conversation, Corney ateadly resumed his work, endeavoring

to add another piece to a wonderfully patched brogue, while Mary busied herself at the little bright turf fire, boiling the water for tea—a few scanty grains of some apocryphal herb, representing that indispensable delicacy. She holds a rasher of exceedingly fat bacon on the end of a fork, which screws and twists itself about like some living thing enduring fierce agony, while a sleepy-looking puss, with her tail twisted comfortably around her paws like a muff, sits intently watching the operation, evidently wondering in her own mind what it can possibly be that spits so cat-like and so spitefully into the fire. The walls of the little room are comfortably whitewashed, only one broken pane of glass in the window, and that neatly mended with a piece of old newspaper; the dresser is as white as soap and sand applied by tidy hands can make it, while the few household utensils that adorn it shine to the utmost extent of their capability. It is hardly necessary to say, that a good, cleanly, homely, sensible wife was Mary O'Carrol; and our friend Corney was an ungrateful rascal to be dissatisfied with his condition. The mistake he made was this, (and it is by no means confined to Corney) he contrasted his situation in life with the FEW who were better off than himself, instead of with the MANY who were infinitely worse.

And now dear, domestic, tidy Mary spreads her little cloth, coarse, 'tis true, but scrupulously clean and ironed, every fold showing like a printed line; she opens the little cupboard and produces an enormous home-baked loaf so close and dense, that a dyspeptic individual would feel an oppression by merely looking at it, but which our toil-hungered friends can dispose of by the pound, without the assistance of tonics; then, the small black tea pot, having stood the conventional time, is carefully wiped, and placed on the table, and the whole fragal but comfortable meal arrayed with that appetizing neatness without which it becomes a mere matter of feeding and not of enjoyment.

"Now, Corney dear," said Mary, "tay's ready."

"Faix, an' there's a pair of us," replied Corney, "I'm jist about as hungry as a dragin."

And no gourmet, even after he had lashed his appetite with stimulants, which would otherwise have sneaked away from the laborious work it had to undergo, ever sat down with so keen a palate, or rose from table with so capital a sense of satisfaction as did Corney on this particular occasion.

"Well, Molly-machree," he cried, "I don't know that I iver had a greater thrate nor that same rasher; if the fat of it wasn't, for all the worrid, like double distilled marra, may I nivr use another tooth: an' that tay! Gogs bleakey, Molly, if you have't a recait for squeezein' the parliamentary flavour out of the herrib! regard the color of it!"

"An' after three wathers," replied Mary, with pardonable vanity.

"Thre for you, darlin'; why, the bread seems lighter, an' the butter sweeter, an' the crame thicker. I'll be judged by the cat—look at the baste; if she hasn't been thryin to lick the last drop off of her hushkers, for as good as a quarter of an hour, an' it's stickin' there, still, as tight as a carbuncle to a Christian's nose; an' may be I ain't goin' to enjoy this," he continued, as drawing his chair close to the fire, out came his use-blackened pipe. He took just as much time in preparation, cutting his tobacco and rolling it about in his hand, as Mary did to clear away the tea-things, in order that nothing should interfere with that great source of comfort—his smoke. Having placed a small piece of lighted turf on top of his pipe he threw himself back into his chair. With eyes half closed, and an expression of the most profound gratification creeping over his features, he sent forth several voluminous whiffs—what he called "sizzonin' his mouth;" but very soon, as though the sensation was too delicious to be hurried over, he subsided into a slow, dignified and lazy smoke, saying, between puffs—

"Blessin's on the fellow that first invented baccy; it's mate and drink to the poor man; I'd be on me oath, if I wouldn't rather lose me dinner nor my pipe, any day in the week."

"Where did baccy come from, Corney?" inquired Mary.

"Why, from 'Meriky; where else?" he replied. "that sent us the first pitaty. Long life to it, for both, say I!"

"What sort of a place is that, I wonder?"

"'Meriky, is it? They tell me it's mighty sizable, Moll, darlin'. I am towd that you might rowl England through it, an' it would hardly make a dent in the ground; there is fresh wather oceans inside of it that you might dround Ireland in and save Father Mathew a wonderful sight of trouble; and as for Schotchland, you might stick it in a corner of one of their forests, an' you'd niver be able to find it out, except, maybe, it might be by the smell of the whiskey. If I had only a thrifle of money, I'd go an' seek me fortune there."

"Arrah thin, what for Corney?"

"Oh! I don't know; I'm not aisy in my mind if we were only as rich now as Phil Blake would happy we might be."

There was the cloud that shut out content from Corney's heart—far-sighted envy, that looks with longing eyes on distant objects, regardless of the comforts near. Most stupid envy which relinquishes the good within its grasp to reach at something better unattainable, and only becomes conscious of its folly when time has swept away the substance and the shadow.

"It was the faries that gave it to him," resumed Corney, as though communing with himself, while poor Mary, with a fond wife's prescience, mourned, as she foresaw that the indulgence of this new feeling would, most pro-

bably, change her hitherto industrious mate into an idle visionary.

"The Fairies!—An why the devil shouldn't they give one man a taste of good luck as well as another? I'll do it—I will—this very blessed night—I'll do it!"

"Do what?" interrupted Mary, in alarm.
"Oh, nothing, nothing!—an yet, I've niver kept anything from you, Molly, an I dont know why I should now! Sure, its you that'll have the benefit of it, if it comes to good."

"Dear Corney," replied Mary, "I'm happy enough as it is so long as Heaven gives us strength to provide for each other's wants, an you continue to be what you always have been, a good husband to me. I'd rather not be troubled with any more."

"Its nothin but right for you to say so, Mary, darlin'," returned Corney; "but now, supposin that I could make a lady of you—eh! Think of bein able to wear a fine silken gown and a beautiful sthraw bonnet, wid a rale feather stuck in it; wouldnt you jerk your sholders to show off the silk, an toss your party head for to humour the feather?"

I must confess Mary's heart did flutter a little at the mention of the silk gown and the feather. Corney saw his advantage, and continued,

"You know how it was Phil got his money; it was by sleepin in a fairy circle. I know where there is one, an wid a blessin I will thry it meself."

"You wont be so foolish, Corney?"

"May I niver taste glory, if I dont do it!"

Of course, after that solemn, though doubtful obligation, Mary dared not endeavor to dissuade him from following out his intention, notwithstanding the most melancholy forebodings of kidnapping, fairy-blighting, and all the terrors associated with supernatural agency, filled her imagination.

The evening was now far advanced, and Corney having finished his pipe rose to go.

"Come, Molly," he exclaimed, gaily, "kiss me before I go, an wish me iligant luck."

Mary with tearful eyes replied, "Dear Corney, if you had all the luck I wish you, you wouldnt have to go out into the cowlid to hunt for it."

"Well, God bless you darlin, if I don't come back to you Cornelius O'Carrol, Esquire."

"You will come home my own dear contented husband."

"We will see," said Corney, and away he went.

It was nothing but reasonable that he should pay a visit to the "Cross Kays" before he went on his fairy hunt, and it was nothing but natural upon his arriving there to find his resolution had receded so far that it took sundry pots of beer to float it up again. At last, brimful of that unthinking recklessness, which the intoxicated generally mistake for courage, off he started on his expedition, singing remarkably loud, in order to persuade any lurking feeling of cowardice that might be within him, that he would not be influenced by it a morsel. As he heard the village church clock, however, his voice unconsciously subsided into utter silence; there was a short cut through the church yard to the place of his destination, but he made a full stop at the little stile; many and many a time had he crossed it night and morning without a thought, and now it seemed to call up ghostly images; the wind as it moaned through the trees, appeared to address itself particularly to him; it was not more than a stone's throw to the other side, and he wanted to clear it with a bound. At this moment the rusty old clock suddenly squeaked and boomed out upon the startled air. The first stroke so sharp and unexpected shattered his nerves like a stroke of paralysis; recovering from his fright he laughed at his folly, but the sound of his own voice terrified him still more. It was not familiar to him—he did not know it! A fancy came into his head that somebody was laughing for him, and he fairly shivered!

A sudden thought relieved him: there was no occasion to go through the church yard at all!

"What a fool I am," thought he, "it isn't so far round and there is plenty of time. Devil take me if I would not go home agin only Mary would think me such a coward, besides did not Phil do it. That's enough; faint heart never won anything worth speakin of—so here goes."

About half an hour's walk brought him to the meadow in which lay the object of his search—a fairy circle. Now this same fairy circle is nothing more nor less than a ring of grass, which from some cause or another, probably known to botanists, but certainly a mystery to most people, is of a different shade of colour to that which surrounds it. Tradition celebrates such places as the favorite resort of fairies, by whom they were formed, that they might pursue their midnight revelry without fear of danger from inimical powers. The Irish peasantry carefully avoid trespassing on those sacred precincts, and indeed scarcely ever pass them without making a reverential bow.

Our ambitious friend hesitated for some time before he entered the magic inclosure, exceedingly doubtful as to the treatment he should receive; at last, swallowing his trepidation with a spasmodic gulp, he placed one foot within the circle, taking care to propitiate the invisibles on whose exclusive property he was so unceremoniously intruding.

"The blessins on all here," said he, "an I hope I am not disturbin any frolic or business that yer may be indulgin in. Its mighty sleepy that I am, an if yer honors would give me lave to recline meself atop of the grass, an make it convanient not to stick any rheumatics into me for takin such a liberty, I'd recieve it as a compliment. If it's a thing that I happen promisiously to thread on any body's toes, I have no mania whatever in it. By your lave, I'm goin

to lie down, an I'll drop aisy in order that I mayn't hurt any thing."

So saying, he let himself down very gingerly, and lay full length within the fairy circle; he was one of those weather-proof individuals to whom the meadow grass was as good as a feather bed. Consequently what with the walk and the beer, it was not many minutes before he was snoring fast.

He had not been asleep as he thought an instant, before he felt an innumerable quantity of tiny feet traversing him all over; with regular step they marched up his throat, scaled his chin; making two divisions up his cheeks, they arrived at his eyes, where they commenced tugging at the lids until they were forced open; the sight that met his view filled him with dreadful wonder. The circle of meadows, in which he had barely room to stretch himself out, formed all he could see of earth. Church, village, country, all had vanished; he rubbed his eyes and looked again, but there was nothing; with an inexpressible sensation of awe he turned round, and creeping cautiously to the edge of the circle, gazed downward, and could just discover the village he had quitted about a mile below; with still increasing dread he was now aware that he was gradually mounting higher and higher. One more look, villages, cities, countries, were blended into an unextinguishable mass, and soon the globular form of the earth appeared thoroughly defined, swinging in the air.

He then became sensible of a tremendous heat, which increased in intensity until he found to his dismay that he was rapidly shrinking in size; his flesh dried up, shriveled, cracked, and clasped his diminishing bones tighter, until at last he was not bigger than a respectable fly. "This is mighty quare," thought he, "there's a grate lot of things like me frolicin about. I feel as light as a feather. I wonder if I couldnt make one among them." So saying he bounded up, and to his great amazement found that he had literally jumped out of his skin. He perched upon his own head, which had resumed its natural size, and flying off, found himself floating securely in the air, while the carcass he had just deserted fell, fairy circle and all, rapidly towards the earth, and finally, also disappeared. Oh! the pranks that Corney played in the first delight of being able to fly; he dived down, he creered up, he threw mad summersets like a tumbler pigeon—so light and buoyant had he become that the passing vapors served him for a resting place; he was happy; intoxicated with glee, thousands upon thousands of atoms gambled around him like gnats in a sunbeam, the whole surrounding expanse was instinct with joyous life.

And they knew Corney and saluted him as he passed by with a compliment.

"Hallo," said they, "here's Corney O'Carrol; how are you Corney? It's well you are looking; and he was astonished at the extensive nature of his atmospheric acquaintance.

"How do you like a fairy's life?" said one slim midge-waisted chup.

"Iligant, your fairyship, iligant," replied he. "Then I would advise you to make the most of it, while it lasts. You will soon have to appear before our king, and if you do not give a satisfactory reason for seeking him, wo betide you."

"Don't be frightened, sir," said he, "I have rayzon enough for comin, to satisfy any dacint disposed fairy."

"Doubtful," said the good-natured elf, and off he flew.

"Stupid sperrit," thought Corney, and over he tumbled in mad recklessness, enjoying actually that delicious sensation which sometimes occurs to people in dreams, the ability to skim through the air with the speed and safety of a bird.

What struck him most particularly was the universal expression of glee which prevailed; nothing could he hear but a universal hum which rose and fell on the ear with a purr-like undulation such as one might imagine would proceed from a paradise of remarkably happy cats.

While he was thus revelling in his new found elements, he was suddenly accosted by two very genteel fairies. "Mr Cornelius O'Carrol, we presume," said they.

"There's not a doubt of it, gintlemen," replied Corney.

"We are come to have the honor of conductin you into the presence of our king," they continued.

"With a heart and a half," said Corney, "where might his majesty domesticate?"

"In yonder gold-tinted cloud, a few seconds fly from this; follow us."

Upon nearing the regal abode, Corney observed sundry small substances, like duck shot dropping downward. "What's that?" inquired he of his conductors.

"Oh," answered one, "only a few discontented souls, who, like you, have sought our king, and havn't given sufficient reason for troubling him with their complaints."

Corney began to feel nervous, but coming to the conclusion that he had as good a right to be enriched through fairy agency as ever Phil Blake had, he put on a bold front, and was ushered into the presence of the fairy potentate. There, a sight of such dazzling splendor presented itself to his view; that, as he said himself, "You might as well try to count the stars of a frosty night, or look right into the sun's heart of a summers day, as to give the slightest notion of the grandeur that surrounded me." All he could compare it to was a multitude of LIVING JEWELS of every variety of hue, sparkling and flashing in perpetual light.

As soon as he could collect his scattered senses, he heard a voice exclaim, "What ho! soul of O'Carrol, approach!"

"So I'm travelin without my trunk this