

GIANTS OF CORNWALL.

CURIOUS STORIES TOLD OF THEIR DOINGS IN DAYS GONE BY.

Where Jack The Giant Killer Accomplished His Heroic Deeds—Moving a Bob Shaft—How Cornish Lads and Maidens are Betrothed—Mazard Fair.

Whatever Wesley and Whitfield, with the railway, the newspapers and the telegraph, may have done in altering the everyday lives of the Cornish folk, no power has yet been able to banish the endeared wraiths of the mysticisms and mysteries of a legendarily heroic past. To-day, as firmly as five centuries since, the inner heart of the Cornish man clings to his "droll" or tale of giant, hobgoblin and fairy with the greatest tenacity; and a few of these are interesting by way of illustration. Bellerian was formerly the name of the Land's End, as also the name of a mighty giant who made it his home. Cornmorant built St. Michael's Mount, but was slain by the redoubtable Jack the Giant-killer. Holburn of the Cairn defended ordinary mortals from other giants than himself. The Giant of Nancelledry principally subsisted upon little children. The giant Trebigan frightened bad children into virtuous lives, and dined off the incorrigible ones, which he usually tried upon a flat rock by his cave door. The giant Blunderbus, killed by little Tom Hickadrift with a cart-axe, was the embodiment of surly laziness and cruel greed. The giant Wrath, terror of the coast, walked out to sea a dozen miles or so, and, fastening the fishermen's boats to his girdle, strolled leisurely back to his cave to serve his prisoners up for food at will.

Gogmagog lost the kingdom of Cornwall to a Trojan giant, Corineus, in a wrestling match. Thunderbone walked the land everywhere inspiring terror by his awful ugliness. While the mighty Bolster, whom Cruikshank endeavored to depict, was so huge that he could stride from St. Agnes Beacon to the top of Carn Brae, a distance of six miles. This was the amorous giant who, while nearly killing his wife from overwork, was making love to St. Agnes, who, to rid herself of his importunities persuaded Bolster, as a test of affection, to bleed himself to death in an attempt at Chapel Porth to fill a hole, which had a secret outlet to the sea, with blood let from a vein in his massive arm.

To all Cornish folks these monsters still live in fireside tales, and the numberless monuments to a pagan past scattered over the rocky tops and wild moors, such as cromlechs, monoliths and other rude stone monuments, are the household goods and pastime implements of this vanished but not vanquished race. Every hill or crag has its cairn or cromlech; every gorge or glen its ghost or goblin. The knowledge of all this takes firm possession of the wanderer through Cornwall.

If these were not enough to keep alive all manner of weird superstitions, the chimneys of the deserted mines of Cornwall alone would furnish sufficient grooves of influence to create and foster spooks enough for an entire people. Any one who has ever looked upon the dreary round tower puzzles of Ireland will recall the feeling of dread and mysticism they always engender. But these lonely landmarks of former activities seem to possess more dire and forbidding aspect.

Away back in the vicinity of Liskeard they began to loom darkly upon the landscape. From this place they are everywhere seen, increasing in numbers as the Redruth district is approached, and decreasing in frequency towards St. Ives and Penzance. From the top of some high Cornish hill what seems to be hundreds can be seen; and on the road between Redruth and Camborn, a distance of but five miles, I counted upwards of forty "knacked" or abandoned mine stacks.

They usually comprise the tower-like chimney, the old engine-room and the lofty bob-shaft. Indescribable sterility and dreariness encompass them.

Moving a mine-bob is one of the curious performances in the Cornish mining districts I happened to witness. Turning from a hill lane into a wide highway I saw a great concourse of people following an enormous truck drawn by, at least, twenty teams of shaggy Welsh horses. Joining the crowd, I found that Cornish folk had come from miles around to see the "mine-bob movin'." This "mine-bob" is the great beam, the hugest piece in all huge Cornish mining machinery, which works like a steam engine, the man-engine and the man pumps. This one weighed upwards of 118 tons! A mine had been abandoned; a new one was being opened by the same company; and from the great force works at Hayle had come this iron truck forty feet long, with steel wheels like engine drivers, on which the tremendous casting was being conveyed. The earnest interest of miners, "keeps" (captains) and engineers who accompanied the ponderous beam; the curious excitement of hundreds of stragglers drawn together by the event; and the mischievous prayers of Cornish boys that something would "scat" or break, to increase the anxieties of the occasion, here very great, owing to the hilly nature of Cornish roads, furnished a most interesting opportunity for character study. The greatest personage on all the road that day was the teamster who drove those forty Welsh horses. Like the boys I envied him, and marveled with them at his handling of his whip, his powerful lungs and his glib and urgent tongue.

The marvelous whiteness of all Cornish housewives' floors, tables and chairs have been my constant admiration. I learned the secret one recent Friday, which day of every week is "growder-day" in Cornwall. You will see numberless donkey-carts hurrying up and down the hilly highways or halting before village doors. They are filled with some light and pumice-like substance dug from near hillside pits, and are in charge of women, cheery and stout and half dressed as men, or of boys already full of shrill whistling and the quiet philosophy of older tradesmen.

A handful of growder is scattered upon the soiled table and sprinkled with water. There is a "swish" of the housewife's brush, and in an instant more the whole top is foaming with lather. Once each week every square inch of the Cornish home is "scoobed" with growder that for

the time the entire interior foams and lathers like a turbulent geyser.

One of the most fascinating pleasures of the road in Cornwall will be found in loitering along side the groups of Cornish boys engaged in their various games. Chief of these are "toe-stones" and "cob-nutting." Both are played wherever the spirit of emulous battle overtakes these sturdy little embryo miners and fishermen; and their pluck, persistency and pertinacity are unsurpassed.

"Cob-nutting" is an all-the-year-round sport. Much of its zest comes from the dangers in securing the nuts necessary for the year's supply. Common hazel-nuts are used. These are got at great risks from the demesne copses and forest edges. The prizes, with the "shucks" still on, are stored away in the attic and dried with the greatest care, so that the nut-fibre becomes hard and horny. The hazel-nuts are allowed to literally fall out of their sheaths. All the round, smooth, ripe, shiny nuts are preserved sacredly for "cob-nutting." It is often a Cornish boy's entire winter employment and diversion to prepare the cob-nuts for the rest of the year's battle for superiority with his fellows. The sport takes its name from the "cob" or shell of the nut.

The cob-nuts are prepared by boring a hole through each side of the nut, removing the kernel and filling the hollow shell with lead or shoemaker's wax, the latter being preferred. The shoemaker of the village is consequently an almost revered personage with all Cornish boys. A "waxed-end" drawn through the loaded "cob" or shell, and held by a strong knot, completes the cob-nut; and you cannot find a boy in all Cornwall who has not one ready strung for contest, and a pocketful ready for stringing for reserve contingencies.

Ties are drawn for first "crack." The loser throws his hat upon the ground, and lays his cob-nut in a little hollow upon its top. Then the "cobber" or striker, holding his cob between the ends of his fingers of his left hand and the end of the attached waxed-end in his right, after many feints, motions and "sights," brings his cob with almost the force of a bullet upon his opponent's. One or the other is "scated" or broken. It is turn and turn about. Generally one of the lads has his entire stock of reserve cobs destroyed. Nor will he then yield. He borrows and begs of his companions to the limit of his power, until perhaps a superior cob is found and by his spirited "cracking" he at last triumphs over his adversary.

"Taking Sunday" a most interesting and ancient Cornish custom was observable in Clowance Park, on the St. Aubyn estate. The park and gardens are open to all on "Taking Sunday." One of the glories of this park is a magnificent mall, bordered with some of the noblest beech trees in all England.

On the afternoon of the Sunday two weeks before Mazard Fair—which derives its name from the mazard cherry fair annually held at Prazze in the latter part of June, when tons of this luscious fruit are disposed of by the farmers of the surrounding country—thousands of Cornish youths and maidens may be found promading in this Clowance Park mall. They sometimes come from a distance of ten and twenty miles. Cornish young men resort here to choose their "paintedners" or "company" for Mazard Fair; and here the blooming lasses come to be "taken," that is, pledged for Mazard Fair day.

Many an exultant or broken heart returns home that night, successful in its secretly cherished hope, or stinging from bitter disappointment. But Mazard Day came, the lad walks miles for the girl he has chosen on "Taking Sunday," and together they tramp away to Prazze. It is a glorious time to be chosen or "taken" at Clowance park; but her whole fate hangs upon a parcel of cookies and almonds at Prazze.

These constitute the "fairin" or pledge of betrothal; and it is asserted that half of the women of Cornwall have been married through this curious rite. If the maiden's "paintedner" buy her one pound of ginger cookies and a half pound of almonds, and she accept the same, the two are as sacredly betrothed as though bans had been read from the pulpit. The lucky maiden carefully preserves the "fairin" and triumphantly divides it with her relatives and friends, in token of her new relations to, and consequence in her own curious little world of affairs.

EDGAR WAKEMAN.

A Singular Machine.

A penny-in-the-slot machine has been fitted up at Charing Cross station for the collection of letters to be forwarded by the post office express service. It is in electrical connection with the postal telegraph office opposite the station. On dropping a penny into the slot, and pulling out the slide, a brown-colored envelope containing another envelope and a card appears. The communication is intended to be written on the card, which is then inclosed in the white envelope; and this, which the fees for delivery, which have been fixed at 3d. per mile, is re-inclosed in the outer envelope, and deposited in the box behind the flap which bears the printed instructions. The act of withdrawing the slide sends the call signal to the telegraph office, and a messenger is at once despatched to the station to take the message. A.T.B.

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THE CHINAMAN'S PIGTAIL.

How He Takes Care of It—Simplicity of Chinese Women in Matters of Dress.

In eastern countries the traveler is particularly impressed by the simplicity in dress, and of the various eastern nations China certainly leads in this particular, although falling far behind the Japanese and many of the peoples of India in grace and beauty. Ladies' costumes are stiff and conventional, for to hide the outline of the figure is the main aim. A Chinese lady is shocked at the immodest apparel of an English woman, the contour of whose figure is much too plainly seen to suit her notions of propriety. A man is dressed in simply jacket and trousers and these are multiplied according to the severity of the weather. No undergarments are worn. On cold days eleven or twelve suits are piled on and six or seven can frequently be counted on passers-by on account of the difference in their length and color. Leggings, overvest and gown are added according as they are desired or can be afforded. The coolies generally prefer nature's own garb when the temperature permits it, and an upper-class man ordinarily wears a long gown reaching to the ankles, a short jacket, white stockings, silk shoes and a little black skull cap. A lady's wardrobe differs from this only in substituting for the gown a skirt. This is a veritable divided skirt, for its component parts have never been joined together. A loose panel hangs down before and behind, and underneath is a scant skirt which button up at the side. Ladies do not wear bonnets of any kind. The hair is dressed elaborately to resemble dragons and butterflies and many fantastic figures and when decorated with fancy pins forms a sufficient head covering. It is plastered stiff with a kind of glue, and remains in these astonishing shapes for two or three days.

Men take as much pride in their hair as women, and the "pigtail" is a thing of no little moment. It enters into matter of etiquette which even the lowest coolie observes, and takes as much skill to manage as a lady's train. It is not true that a man would rather die than lose his queue, though, notwithstanding a popular supposition to that effect, for all the Buddhist priests shave their heads and baldness over the whole scalp is exceedingly common in both men and women. An occasional careless old man is seen without a queue, but usually if there is any hair at all it is carefully gathered into a braid, though the whole may not be any larger than a shoestring, and the owner feels happy. In making the queue the whole head is shaved except a circular patch upon the crown. The hair from this is braided, and strands of silk are added, which end in a tassel reaching to the heels. In descending stairs it is picked up as a lady picks up her skirts, and in sitting down the "attache" places it carefully at his side. In full mourning the black strands are replaced by white ones, and in second mourning by light blue or green. It is an unpardonable breach of etiquette for an interior to enter the presence of a superior with his queue wound round his neck or head as it is frequently disposed of during work, and the greatest insult one man can offer another is to pull his queue. It seems very odd to see sailors and soldiers on ships or in barracks combing each others' long tresses, or coolies at the street corners performing the same friendly office, and a barber's stall or shop is usually surrounded by a dozen or so men of all classes, sitting, gossiping in the sun while their long hair floats in the breeze, drying after a shampoo.

A gray beard is an object of great veneration, and the old fellows take a great deal of pride in the scanty growth which reluctantly sprouts from lip and chin, and old dandies commonly wear a little ivory comb suspended from the jacket by a silver chain, with which they coax and pet this hirsute growth with as much concern as any freshman in a medical college.—Detroit Free Press.

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Herr Noll, a mechanician of Berlingen in Germany, has constructed a clock, warranted by him to run for nine thousand years without winding. Mr. D. L. Goff, a wealthy American, has in his hall and old-fashioned clock which, so long as the house is occupied, never runs down. When ever the front door is opened or closed, the winding arrangements of the clock, which are connected with the door by a rod with gearing attachments, are given a turn, so that the persons entering and leaving the house keep the clock constantly wound up. Mr. T. G. Farrer, of Fresno, California, has invented a clock, the only motive-power of which, he alleges, is the gravitation of the earth, which will keep the clock running forever without winding. The clock consists of a plate glass dial suspended from the ceiling, and all the parts of it that are visible are the two hands, the pivot upon which they swing, and the dial. In 1840 Mr. J. Smith, Leeds, constructed a clock, the sole motor of which was electricity; he lived to see this clock go for fifty years. Clocks are now being made to run five years with one winding up. In 1881 the Belgian government placed one of these in a railway station and sealed it with the government seal. It has kept capital time, having been only once wound—in 1886. There is a clock in the church of St. Quintin, in Mayence, which has only stopped once during a period of 500 years.

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