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## A NEW SOLUTION OF THE FAIRY PROBLEM

DAVID MACRITCHIE

THE traditions relating to the people comprehensively although somewhat vaguely included under the denomination 'fairy' have been much discussed during the past two or three generations, and the cause of the existence of such traditions has been variously explained. A new solution of the problem—new, at any rate, in respect that its exponent is a modern man of scholarly attainments—is now offered to us by Mr. W. Y. Evans Wentz, A.M., of Stanford University, California, who is also a member of Jesus College, Oxford. These two qualifications indicate pretty clearly that his outlook is far from restricted, and this inference is further strengthened when one learns that the volume of fully three hundred pages in which he sets forth his opinions was published at Rennes (Imprimerie Oberthur, 1909), at the close of a residence of some months in Brittany, where he had been investigating the Breton forms of the beliefs in question. The result of all his studies may be gleaned from the title which he has given to his book: *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries: Its Psychological Origin and Nature*.

A number of the readers of the *Celtic Review*, including the present writer, have had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Wentz while he was engaged in his researches in various parts of Celtica, and all of these can testify to the ardour with which he has followed up his enquiry, and his manifest desire to consider the evidence before him in the most judicial and impartial fashion. That he has gone about his work in a very thorough way is evident. His Bibliographical Index contains the names of one hundred and twenty-six books and papers from which he has derived information, and this does not exhaust his list. But even more important, because it denotes original enquiry by a mind previously

free from bias, has been the investigation which he has personally carried out. He thus explains his method in the Introduction to his book :—

‘ In June 1908, after a year’s preparatory work in things Celtic under the direction of the Oxford Professor of Celtic, Sir John Rhys, I began to travel and to collect material at first-hand from the people who have shaped and who still keep alive the Fairy-Faith in Wales, Ireland, Scotland, and Brittany. . . . And with all this came the shaping of my own opinions ; for when I set out from Oxford in June, I had no certain nor any very clear ideas as to what fairies are, nor why there should be belief in them. By November I found myself committed to the Psychical Theory, which I am herein setting forth.’

Before beginning to define his own position, Mr. Wentz deals briefly with certain theories which seem to him unsatisfactory. His observations in this connection may be briefly summarized :—

‘ We make continual reference throughout this study to a Psychical Theory of the origin of the Celtic Fairy-Faith, and it is our purpose to demonstrate this theory as the root theory which includes or absorbs the four theories already advanced to account for the belief in fairies.

‘ The first of these may be called the Naturalistic Theory, which is, that in ancient and modern times man’s belief in gods, spirits, or fairies has been the direct results of his attempts to explain or to rationalize natural phenomena.

‘ The second theory may be called the Pygmy Theory, which Mr. David MacRitchie, who is definitely committed to it, has so clearly set forth in his well-known work entitled *The Testimony of Tradition*. This theory is that the whole fairy-belief has grown up out of a folk-memory of an actual pygmy race. This race is supposed to have been a very early, prehistoric, probably Mongolian race, which inhabited the British Islands and many parts of Continental Europe. When the Celtic nations appeared, these pygmies were driven into mountain-fastnesses and into the most inaccessible places, where a few of them may have survived until comparatively historical times. Sir John Rhys of Oxford, strongly inclined to the same theory, says this : “ The key to the fairy idea is that there was

once a real race of people to whom all kinds of attributes, possible and impossible, have been given in the course of uncounted centuries of story-telling by races endowed with a lively imagination."

'The Druid Theory to account for fairies is less widespread. It is that the folk-memory of the Druids and their magical practices is alone responsible for the Fairy-Faith. The first suggestion of this theory seems to have been made by Patrick Graham, in his *Sketches Descriptive of Picturesque Scenery on the Southern Confines of Perthshire*, published in 1806. [Slightly earlier is the Rev. Dr. Crie's reference in his *Scottish Scenery*, London, 1803, pp. 347-8.] Alfred Maury in *Les Fées du Moyen-Age*, published in 1843, at Paris, appears to have made liberal use of Patrick Graham's suggestions in setting up his theory that the *fées* or fairy-women of the Middle Ages are due to a folk-memory of druidesses. . . . As in the case of the Pygmy Theory, we maintain that the Druid Theory also is a partial and inadequate one.

'The fourth theory, the Mythological Theory, is of very great importance. It is that fairies are the diminished figures of the old pagan divinities of the early Celts; and many modern authorities on Celtic mythology and folk-lore hold it. To us the theory is an acceptable one so far as it goes. But it is not adequate in itself nor is it the root theory, because a belief in gods and goddesses must in turn be explained; and in making this explanation we arrive at the Psychical Theory, which this study—perhaps the first one of its kind—attempts to demonstrate.'

Deferring to a later page a consideration of the theory with which Mr. Wentz has, with good reason, associated my name, I shall proceed to make his own position as clear as it is possible to do in a condensed form.

'The new psychology or psychical research has been forced to admit—if only as a working hypothesis—the possibility of invisible intelligences or entities able to influence man and nature.' This observation (p. xvii) gives the keynote to his argument. 'Most of the evidence points so much in one direction,' he further states (p. 12), 'that the only verdict which seems reasonable is that the origin of the Fairy-Faith is psychical; that is to say, that fairyland is a state or condition, realm or place, very much like, if not the same as, that wherein civilized and uncivilized men equally locate the souls of the dead, in company with other invisibles such as gods, dæmons, and all sorts of good and bad spirits. As a premise, which perhaps cannot be

as scientifically proven as we should like it to be, let us go even further, and say that fairyland, being thought of as an invisible world within which the visible world is immersed as an island in an unexplored ocean, actually exists, and that it is peopled by more species of living beings than this world, because incomparably more vast and varied in its possibilities.'

Again (p. 13) :—

'It has become, perhaps always has been in modern times, a widespread opinion, even among some scholars, that the belief in fairies is the sole property of simple, uneducated country-folk, and that people who have had a touch of education and a little common-sense knocked into their heads, to use the ordinary language, wouldn't be caught believing in such nonsense. . . . But we shall say now, for we can say it truly, that there are men in Dublin, in other parts of Ireland, in Scotland too, whom all the world know as educated leaders in their respective fields of activity, who not only declare their belief that fairies were, but that fairies are ; and some of these men have the power to see fairies as real subjective existences at the psychic centres to which we have referred in the preceding chapter.' 'The Ben Bulbin country and Ross Point in County Sligo are among the very rare places in Ireland for seeing fairies, and it is no secret that more than one Dublin seer often make pilgrimages thither' (p. 45).

Nor is the area of these manifestations limited to Celtic lands :—

'I have been told by a friend in California, who is a student of psychical sciences, that there exists in certain parts of that state, notably in the Yosemite Valley, as the Red Men seem to have known, according to their traditions, invisible races exactly comparable to the " gentry " of this Ben Bulbin country as our seer-witness describes them and as other seers in Ireland have described them, and quite like the " people of peace " as described by Kirk, the seventh son, in his *Secret Commonwealth*. These California races are known to exist now, as the Irish and Scotch invisible races are known to exist now, by seers who can behold them ; and, like the latter races, are said to be a distinct order of beings who have never been in physical embodiments' (p. 48). 'There is scientific proof that spirits do exist, and that some of them are just like fairies of the pygmy kind' (p. 289).

One other statement by our author serves to define his attitude still more clearly. In referring to the Celtic Atlantis, or Gardens of the Hesperides, variously known as Hy Brasil, Avalon, and Glas Innis, he observes (p. 165) :—

‘ Even yet at rare intervals, like a phantom, Hy Brasil appears far out on the Atlantic. No later than last summer [1908] it was seen from West Ireland, just as that strange, invisible island near Innismurray, inhabited by the invisible “ gentry,” is seen—once in seven years. And Hy Brasil has been seen by too many men of intelligence, even together, or separated at the same moment, as during the summer of 1908, to explain it away as an illusion of the senses. Nor can it be due to a mirage such as we know, because neither its shape nor position conform to any known island or land mass.’

From a consideration of these extracts it becomes evident that Mr. Wentz’s ‘Psychical Theory’ is nothing less than a restatement in modern terms of the old belief that fairies are veritably supernatural (or, more correctly, non-human) beings, and that Fairyland has to-day a real existence. His assertion, already quoted, that there is ‘an invisible world within which the visible world is immersed as an island in an unexplored ocean, and that it is peopled by more species of living beings than this world, because incomparably more vast and varied in its possibilities’—that assertion is one which forms an article of belief in most religions; and no one can prove that it is erroneous. But in saying that I am very far from admitting that Mr. Wentz’s interpretation of fairy story is the most convincing of the five theories specified by him. In a great number of the tales of this class a much more commonplace explanation seems to me preferable.

Let us glance, for example, at the stories of vanishing or enchanted islands. To this category belonged, at one time, the little island of Eynhallow, which lies between Rousay and the mainland of Orkney. ‘Once upon a time,’ says Mr. Duncan J. Robertson,<sup>1</sup> ‘the isle was enchanted, and visible

<sup>1</sup> *The Orkney Book*, p. 392 : Edinburgh, 1909.

to human eyes only at rare intervals. It would rise suddenly out of the sea, and vanish as suddenly before any mortal could reach it.' But the spell was broken one day; and now it is down on the Ordnance Survey Maps, and an ever-present danger to seafarers in that stormy 'roost.' How is one to account for the genesis of such a belief? In our foggy climate the intermittent disappearance and re-appearance of coasts and islands is a very familiar phenomenon, and not distinctive of any one island. Where the island lay very far out from land, however, this circumstance might give rise to the superstition, among an ignorant people. But the situation of Eynhallow, with land close to it on either side, will not allow of this explanation. The fact that Eynhallow is traditionally regarded as having been the last refuge of the Finnmen, a people said to have had the power of casting magic spells, has probably a close bearing upon the alleged enchantment of the island.

Inis-Bofin, off the coast of County Mayo, has a similar history to Eynhallow. In this case, the spell was broken by the lighting of a fire on the beach; the Orkney islet having been disenchanted by a man bringing steel in his hand.

In referring to those magic islands which may be sought for in vain on modern charts, Mr. T. J. Westropp, M.R.I.A., suggests that the tradition may be a far-off memory of actual land, submerged long ago. 'For Atlantis and Brasil and St. Brendan's Island were, perhaps, no myth; and the earthquake-wave that split Inisfitae in three in 802 was but one of a thousand other cataclysms in the all-powerful Atlantic.'<sup>1</sup> It is not necessary to go back an immense period of time to find such geological changes; and it is permissible to suppose that Celtic tradition may contain references to the sunken island which is nowadays represented only by the islet-crag of Rockall; the date of the subsidence of that island being possibly as recent as the year 802.

We need not indulge further in surmises as to why

<sup>1</sup> *The Islands and Coast of Ireland*, p. 24: Dublin, 1905.



Inis-Bofin and Eynhallow were at one time supposed to come and go. They have long since settled down into steady, well-behaved islands, as permanent as any other part of the world. As for the uncharted land of Hy Brasil, I prefer to think with Mr. Westropp that it only now exists as a memory ; unless Rockall be held to be its topmost pinnacle. With all deference to Mr. Wentz and his friends, I am unable to believe that any intangible island is ever seen from our shores, although certain individuals are honestly convinced that such an island has at times been made visible to them.

Nor does the Psychical Theory appear to me to offer a satisfactory solution of the groundwork of the fairy stories. In some of their phases these stories can be explained by means of the theories denominated Naturalistic and Mythological. But their real groundwork is, in my opinion, of a much more simple and matter-of-fact description. One of Mr. Wentz's witnesses states (p. 62) that ' the fairies of any one race are the people of the preceding race ; the Fomors for the Fir Bolgs, the Fir Bolgs for the Dananns, and the Dananns for us.' To a certain extent I am in agreement with this opinion ; for several different races appear to have become telescoped together in these traditional tales. But the dominant note in Celtic folk-lore is that of a small-sized people who lived in hollow hillocks or in underground houses, and who appear to have differed in many ways from the neighbouring races whose habitations, of wood or stone, were built on the surface of the ground. Such were the *daoine-sidhe*, or mound-folk, of Gaelic story. And the recognition of the *daoine-sidhe* as a real people, imperfectly remembered, constitutes the theories known to Mr. Wentz as ' Pygmy ' and ' Druid.' For the two theories are one in substance, whether they are in agreement with each other or not.

As one of the advocates of the Pygmy Theory, I may explain that the term ' pygmy ' is here used to denote a race of a stature presumably approximating that of the Congo



pygmies who visited this country two or three years ago. Or, to speak more definitely, a race in which the average male stature does not exceed four feet nine inches.<sup>1</sup> This explanation is necessary, because some misapprehension appears to exist with regard to the meaning conveyed by the term. 'Dwarf' is probably a more suitable word. It may be added that the conception of fairies as delicate, aerial beings, of almost microscopic dimensions, is dismissed from consideration, as a comparatively recent creation of fancy. And the erroneous interpretations of *daoine-sidhe* as 'people of peace,' so much at variance with the attributes with which they are credited, is also left out of view. Dr. Thomas M'Lauchlan, in pointing out the fallacy of this interpretation, insisted on the fact that *sid* or (later) *sidh* denotes a conical mountain, hill, or hillock, and that the *daoine-sidhe* were so named because they were understood to inhabit certain hillocks. The word came to be often applied indifferently to the hillocks and to their inhabitants, without the explanatory *daoine*, *fir*, and *muathan*. Thus, we frequently read of the people themselves as 'the *side*,' or 'the *sidhe*.' Even the compound *sid-brug* (or *brog*), aspirated into *sidh-bhroch*, literally 'hillock-burgh,' had the same double application. One Irish writer Anglicises the latter form as *she frogh*, 'a fairy.' In Gaelic, it has been corrupted into *sia-bra* and *sibhreach*. This usage is paralleled in English in the twofold application of 'bluejacket' and 'redcoat' to these garments themselves and to the men whom they cover.<sup>2</sup>

As adverse critics of the views expressed by myself and others in relation to the mound-dwellers of tradition, Mr. Wentz cites Dr. Bertram C. A. Windle, and Mr. Andrew Lang. I have replied at considerable length to the objec-

<sup>1</sup> This is the upward limit recognized by Dr. Windle in his Introduction to Tyson's *Pygmies of the Ancients*, edition of 1894 (London), p. xv. In some instances a considerably lower limit might be taken; one tribe, for example, being recorded as having a maximum stature of four feet.

<sup>2</sup> This etymological detail is more fully discussed in my 'Notes on the word *Sidh*,' in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, December 1893.

tions urged by these writers, in the undernoted publications,<sup>1</sup> to which I refer any reader specially interested in this subject. It is enough to say here that two of the chief objections are thus summarized : ‘(1) So far as our present knowledge teaches us, there never was a really pygmy race inhabiting the northern parts of Scotland ; (2) the mounds with which the tales of little people are associated have not, in many cases, been habitations, but were natural or sepulchral in their nature.’

With reference to the first of these objections, it may be said that the whole question of a dwarf race in Scotland would be removed altogether out of the realm of theory, if the evidence in favour of that belief were so convincing in all respects as to leave no room for doubt in the mind of any reasonable person. It is a good deal an affair of mental bias. Nothing less than the discovery of a large number of skeletons, denoting an actual dwarf race, is requisite for those who can only be satisfied with tangible proof. On the other hand, it appears to myself and a considerable number of those who have examined this question, that the existence of such a race is so strongly indicated by several separate deductions that any further evidence would be regarded rather as confirmation of a conclusion already arrived at than as something essential to the solution of a previously doubtful problem.

Of the existence and world-wide distribution of pygmy or dwarf races, there is no question whatever ; although the study of these people is still so comparatively recent that the fact of their existence, past and present, has scarcely yet been grasped by the general mind. It is yet quite customary to speak of the ‘ fable ’ which recounts the wars between the pygmies and the cranes. The late Sir William Flower’s suggestion that this fable is merely a confused memory of the ostrich-hunting dwarf tribes of the Nile region is, however, generally accepted by specialists. Those

<sup>1</sup> *The Academy*, London, 12th June 1895, pp. 37-38, and *The Monthly Review*, London, January 1901, pp. 131-148.

now extinct dwarfs of Northern Africa are referred to by many classic writers <sup>1</sup> and Brugsch cites an inscription at Karnak which states how 'the dwarfs of the southern countries come to him [the reigning Ptolemy], bringing their tributes to his treasury.' M. Edouard Naville further infers, from a picture in the great temple of Bubastis, that the vergers of the temple were specially selected from that race; a custom possibly derived from the dwarf-worship of Egypt and Phœnicia. The *Gammadin* of the Jewish Scriptures,<sup>2</sup> rendered *Pygmæi* in the Vulgate, were presumably of the same stock.

The observations of Sir Harry Johnston, who has encountered many of the African dwarfs, are so germane to the present theme, that one of his most suggestive passages may well be quoted here. He remarks as follows: 'Other dwarf races of humanity [than the Congo pygmies] belonging to the white or the Mongolian species may have inhabited Northern Europe in ancient times, or it is just possible that this type of Pygmy Negro, which survives to-day in the recesses of Inner Africa, may even have overspread Europe in remote times. If it did, then the conclusion is irresistible that it gave rise to most of the myths and beliefs connected with gnomes, kobolds, and fairies. The demeanour and actions of the little Congo dwarfs at the present day remind one, over and over again, of the traits attributed to the brownies and goblins of our fairy stories. Their remarkable power of becoming invisible by adroit hiding in herbage and behind rocks, their probable habits in sterile or open countries of making their homes in holes and caverns, their mischievousness and their prankish good-nature, all seem to suggest that it was some race like this which inspired most of the stories of Teuton and Celt regarding a dwarfish people of quasi-supernatural attributes.'<sup>3</sup>

It will be seen that Sir Harry Johnston, postulating the

<sup>1</sup> Pliny, Pomponius Mela, Aristotle, Ctesias, Herodotus, and Homer.

<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel xxvii. 11.

<sup>3</sup> *Pall Mall Magazine*, February 1902, p. 178.

existence of a negrito race in early Europe, regards as a conclusion quite irresistible the ascription to them of the majority of the stories relating to 'brownies.' He further suggests that other dwarf races of humanity, belonging to the white or the Mongolian species, may have formerly inhabited Northern Europe. That all these surmises are well founded is being steadily established by the researches of European anatomists; and Professor Julius Kollmann, of the University of Basle, who has studied this question for many years, has arrived at the conviction that the dwarf races represent the primitive stock from which all the taller races have been evolved. Thus science, by rational deduction, is to-day confirming what the sagas have told us long ago, that the dwarfs were created before 'men,'—i.e. the taller races.

Many specimens of the extinct European pygmy have now been examined by the anatomists of various countries. As early as 1892, Dr. Nüesch, of the College of Schaffhausen, in Switzerland, described the osseous remains of dwarfs which he had discovered at Schweizersbild, lying side by side with the remains of people of ordinary stature. The average stature of these Swiss dwarfs was 1424 mm., or about 4 feet 8 inches. Professor Kollmann points out that the bones were pronounced by Professor R. Virchow to be of normal structure, and not those of pathologically degenerated people. It must be clearly understood that in all the instances here referred to, the skeletal remains examined by anatomists were those of a dwarf *race*, and did not represent abnormal specimens of a race of ordinary stature. The numerous pygmy remains found in cemeteries in Silesia and France, described by Professor Thilenius of Breslau<sup>1</sup> and others, and those recorded at Mentone by Verneau and De Villeneuve, all afford parallel evidence. In several instances, the bones of these two different types of man have been found together, thus implying that, in these cases, at least, the two races had lived together in amity.

<sup>1</sup> Now of Hamburg.

Tradition, however, while it often endorses this belief, speaks also of frequent conflicts between the dwarfs and their taller neighbours. Such a state of matters in the Netherlands is indicated by a modern Flemish writer,<sup>1</sup> in these words: 'The Fenlanders, a race dwelling in our country prior to the Celts, were little people, but strong, dexterous, and good swimmers; living by hunting and fishing. Adam of Bremen in the eleventh century thus pictures their descendants or race: "They had large heads, flat faces, flat noses, and large mouths. They lived in caves of the rocks, which they quitted in the night-time for the purpose of committing sanguinary outrages." The Celtic people, and later those of German race, so tall and strong,' observes our modern commentator, 'could hardly look upon such little folk as human beings. They must have regarded them as strange, mysterious creatures. And when these negroes, or Fenlanders, had lived for a long enough time hidden in their grottoes, for fear of the new people, especially when they at length fell into decay through poverty, or died out, they became changed in the imagination of the dreamy Germans into mysterious beings, a kind of ghosts or gods.'

This traditional account of a race of black dwarfs inhabiting the Netherlands is, it will be noticed, singularly in agreement with Sir Harry Johnston's hypothesis. But he also assumes that the yellow and white races may have had similar precursors in Europe. There is plenty of room for conjecture as to the complexion of these races, and as to the various periods when they may have flourished. The much-used adjective 'prehistoric' is often employed with little warrant. Indeed, the Italian anthropologists, Sergi, Mantia, and Pullé, have deduced an early 'Mediterranean race' of pygmy stature from a study of existing types.

The following brief extracts from a very instructive paper published this autumn<sup>2</sup> are much to the purpose: 'In an

<sup>1</sup> In the Flemish folk-lore journal, *Ons Volksleven*, June 1895, p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> 'Traditions of Dwarf Races in Ireland and Switzerland,' by Miss Elizabeth Andrews; *The Antiquary*. London: Elliot Stock, October 1909.

article on "The Fairy Mythology of Europe in its Relation to Early History" (*Nineteenth Century and After*, February 1908), Mr. A. S. Herbert identifies the early dwarf race with Palæolithic men, and states that from such skeletons as have been unearthed, "it is believed that they were a people of Mongolian or Turanian origin, short, squat, yellow-skinned, and swarthy." Professor J. Kollmann of Basle, speaking of dwarf races, describes "the flat, broad face, with a flat, broad, low nose and large nose roots." Compare these statements with the description given by Harris in the eighteenth century of the native inhabitants of the northern and eastern coasts of Ireland. "They are," he says, "of a squat sett Stature, have short, broad Faces, thick Lips, hollow Eyes, and Noses cocked up, and seem to be a distinct people from the Western Irish, by whom they are called Clan-galls—i.e. the offspring of the Galls."

As a pendant to this modern instance may be taken the description of a certain part of the commonalty of Caithness in the year 1750 as 'pitifull half-starved Creatures, of a Low Dwarfish Stature, whom a Stranger would hardly believe to be Inhabitants of Great Britain.'<sup>1</sup> In both of these cases, a community is indicated which differs much from the prevailing type, and is characterized by low stature.

Just across the narrow firth which separates Caithness from Orkney, the tradition of a previous dwarfish race still survives. This tradition, to use the more modest term, although much that passes as 'history' has no better authority, was placed upon record in the year 1443 by the then Governor and Bishop of Orkney, Thomas Tulloch, in his Latin account *De Orcadibus Insulis*. Tulloch was Governor of Orkney (1422-48) under the Scandinavian monarch, Eric VII. of Denmark, Orkney being at that time a Danish possession. His account naturally goes back to the ninth century, when the Scandinavians, under Harold Haarfagr, conquered and colonized the archipelago. At

<sup>1</sup> *The Highlands of Scotland in 1750*, edited by Mr. Andrew Lang, p. 7. Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1898.



that time, says Tulloch, the islands were occupied by two races—one that of the *papæ*, or priests, now generally assumed to have been Gaelic missionaries, and the other the *Peti*. Of the *Peti* he asserts that they were ‘not much bigger than pygmies in stature, and worked wonderfully in the construction of their burghs,’<sup>1</sup> taking refuge at other times in ‘little underground houses.’ These *Peti* are generally identified with the Picts of history, but Mr. W. C. Mackenzie is of opinion that the countryfolk have confused the latter people with an earlier dwarf race of *Peti* or *Pehts*.<sup>2</sup> The common belief, however, is strongly endorsed by Mr. Charles H. Chambers, who, writing to the *Anthropological Review* in 1864, observes: ‘I believe the race which inhabited the northern shores of Europe to have been akin to the Laps, Fins, and Esquimaux, and the Pickets or Pechts of Scotland, and to have given rise to many of the dwarf, troll, and fairy stories extant among the sagas and elsewhere.’ One thing certain is that the builders and occupants of the little underground houses of Orkney must have been a small people. The entrance passage to one of these dwellings, on the north-west side of Wideford Hill, near Kirkwall, is only 15 inches high and 22 inches broad, its length being 15 feet. ‘What size could the people have been who crawled in through such rabbit holes as the passages of this eirde house are?’ asks Mr. J. R. Tudor.<sup>3</sup> ‘No wonder the popular idea is that the Pechts or Picts were an uncanny race.’ Of nearly the same dimensions were the two passages leading into a ‘Fairy Knowe’ near Stromness, which I assisted in exploring in 1902, except that they were only 4 feet in length. It might be thought that, when it comes to crawling along such a passage, there is no deduction possible as to stature. But the experiences of Danish colonists among the Greenland Eskimos have shown, if proof were

<sup>1</sup> *In structuris urbium mira operantes.*

<sup>2</sup> See his article, ‘The Picts and Pets,’ in *The Antiquary*. London: Elliot Stock, May 1906.

<sup>3</sup> *The Orkneys and Shetland*, pp. 284-286: London, 1883.



necessary, that the small man can creep along a passage where the man of longer limbs finds progress impracticable.

Although many of the underground structures of Scotland and Ireland are spacious enough for ordinary men, the significant fact remains that a certain proportion of them cannot be so used. 'The entrances are small, but the tiny doorways between one chamber and another are even of more diminutive dimensions—great numbers being too small to admit the average-sized man—a person having to lie down flat in order to get through, and even then the width will not allow other than the shoulders of a woman or a boy to pass through.' These are the words of one who has made a long and precise study of the Irish souterrains,<sup>1</sup> and they apply with equal force to several of the kindred structures in Scotland.

In considering the Irish mound-dwellings and souterrains we again find the Pict equation brought before us. 'In an ancient genealogy,' observes the late Mr. Herbert Hore,<sup>2</sup> 'we read of a wife who was obtained from the mounds of the son of Scal Balbh, or King of Pictland.' Possibly this refers to Nar, daughter of Lotan of the Pict-folk, who is chronicled as having come 'out of the mound-dwellings,' *a sidaib no do Chruithentuaith*.<sup>3</sup> There is some reason for supposing that this Nar lived in the sixth century of our era, and that her father ruled over the Picts of Meath, and perhaps of Ulster. She is again mentioned in a Gaelic MS., which formerly belonged to the M'Lauchlans of Kilbride (Argyll), and is now in the Advocates' Library; and again in a folio vellum MS., now in the Royal Irish Academy.<sup>4</sup> Nar

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Mary Hobson, in 'An Account of some Souterrains in Ulster,' read before the British Association at Leicester in 1907. See also her paper, 'Some Ulster Souterrains,' in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. xxxix., January-June, 1909.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, June 1895, p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> *Book of Ballymote*, 250 a, b, as quoted in Dr. Hayes O'Grady's *Silva Gadelica*, English volume, pp. 495, 544.

<sup>4</sup> See, respectively, Kilbride MS. No. 3, 5 (as quoted in *Silva Gadelica*, English volume, pp. 495, 544), and Petrie's *Round Towers of Ireland*, pp. 97, 99: Dublin, 1845.

was married to Crimthann, of the royal race of Tara, who became known as 'Nar's Champion' (Niadh-Náir). The kings of Tara had been accustomed to bury at Cruachan in Connaught, but Nar induced her husband to abandon this practice, and to agree to be buried in the Cemetery of the Brugh (*Relec in Broga*), in the Boyne valley, where all her forefathers had been buried. In due time, therefore, this was done, and 'the Barc [cairn] of Crimthann Niadh-Náir, in which he was interred,' is mentioned in the *Dinnsenchus* as one of the many notable monuments in the Cemetery of the Brugh. Now, in stating that Nar's forefathers had all been buried in this cemetery, it is also stated that she and her people were members of the Tuatha Dea, or Dananns, or followers of Danu; a people frequently spoken of as the *daoine-sidhe*, or mound-dwellers. That part of the Boyne Valley, the Brugh, was specially associated with them. There was the Cemetery of the Brugh, with its many pillar-stones, cairns, cashels, cumots, and fulachts, which marked the burial-places of the famous heroes of the race. There was presumably a large settlement of people, occupying, in winter, although probably not in summer, various souterrains and mound-dwellings. And, lastly, there was the large mound which archaeologists associate in name with the neighbouring farm of New Grange. This mound is likely the place spoken of as *Sid an Broga*, or the Mound of the Brugh. It figures prominently in traditional lore, which pronounced it to be a home of 'the little people.' Re-opened in 1695, this mound contains (in one part, for its exploration has never been completed) a stone-built room and entrance passage, exactly corresponding with the ground-plan of the stone-built winter-huts used by the Eskimos of North Greenland at the present day <sup>1</sup>

From the statements made in the three preceding paragraphs it will be seen that what Mr. Wentz calls the Pygmy Theory is really much more than a theory. There may be a

<sup>1</sup> See illustration at p. 236 of Eivind Astrup's *Blandt Nordpolens Naboer*: Christiania, 1895.

difference of opinion as to whether the Gaelic and Norse chroniclers were right in associating the Picts with the little underground houses to which I have referred with a brevity unworthy of the theme. In a future paper I hope to discuss this question more fully, not omitting to consider the 'Druid Theory.' What is quite clear is that the small souterrains of the British Isles must have been constructed by a small race. And it appears to me and to many others that these structures and their occupants form the basis of the tales which relate to the intercourse, often quite homely and matter-of-fact, between people of ordinary stature and a small race living underground.

### PAN-CELTIC NOTES

A CONFERENCE of Celtic societies in London convened by the Celtic Association (London Branch) was held on 14th July last at 64 Chancery Lane, by permission of Mr. Vincent Evans. The chair was taken by the Right Hon. Lord Castletown of Upper Ossory, P.C., K.P., ('MacGiolla Phadruic'), President of the Celtic Association, and eleven Celtic organisations were represented, either officially or by individual members. The conference resolved that an association be created upon lines suggested by Mr. Henry Jenner (Cornwall), to which all the other Celtic Societies should be affiliated, or, in the alternative, or as a sequent idea, that a permanent Celtic Club on lines indicated by Mr. A. Perceval Graves, junior (Ireland), be established in London. Mr. Jenner's proposal is:—

'That a Central Celtic Association be formed (or perhaps the present Celtic Association be adapted) with the object of promoting Celtic Congresses, concerts, lectures, and other entertainments, and perhaps eventually of obtaining some building in which the offices of existing London Celtic Societies might be collected. Such association to consist of:—

- (1) Members joining individually.
- (2) National or Sectional Celtic Societies (Breton, Cornish, Irish, Manx, Scottish and Welsh) joining collectively as members, individual members of such societies to be Associates of the Celtic Association.

The terms of subscription of individual and collective members, and the comparative privileges of members and associates, are left to be settled later.

Mr. Graves's proposal for a Club contains these provisions:—