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REVIEW

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REVIEW.

THE SCIENCE OF FAIRY TALES; an Inquiry into Fairy Mythology. By E. SIDNEY HARTLAND, F.S.A. (W. Scott.)

MR. HARTLAND'S volume would deserve notice, if for nothing else, as the work of the most learned English student of the Folk-tale. He has at command the whole literature of a subject which nowadays ranges over all languages, and makes its appearance in the most unexpected quarters. One consequence of this is, that, in his study of any particular tale or group of tales, Mr. Hartland deals with the whole mass of ascertainable facts; his inductions are of the widest, and consequently his inferences, according to the logician, should be of the soundest. Another point, too, which should be noticed in his method, is the constant criticism to which he submits his materials. No tale is allowed to rank as a genuine folk-tale that cannot give date and place for its existence among the folk. We poor caterers for the depraved taste of the juvenile public, who write at home at ease, are warned off from the very threshold of the inquiry. This is indeed as it should be: this is in truth a science of folk-tales.

It is, however, only with one department of that science that Mr. Hartland deals on the present occasion. When he speaks of fairy tales, he, strange to say, means what he says, and does not use the term in that vague and unscientific way that the aforesaid popular caterers indulge in. By fairy tales our writer means tales *about* fairies, and his work treats of five groups of tales that deal with the manners and ways of the fairy people as conceived by the folk. Fairies love their lords, and require the assistance of

human Mrs. Gamps. Fairies take fancies to human infants, and exchange their own brats for the babies. Humans obtain various gifts from Fairyland by stealth or gift. Humans can enter the land of Faerie, but find time passes only too pleasantly and swiftly within its confines. Human lovers can get fairy wives by robbing them of their fairy robes or "husks." These five *Topica*—Fairy Births and Human Midwives, Changelings, Robberies from Fairyland, the Supernatural Lapse of Time in Fairyland, and Swan-maidens—these form Mr. Hartland's themes. What has his science to say of them? This leads on to another question: What does he seek to find in them? What, in other words, is his problem?

Mr. Hartland seeks origins; we are all on the scent for origins nowadays. How did these curious ideas about a fairy world, where things are other than they seem, where no Newton has discovered a law of gravitation, where time has wings and clocks spell years for minutes, where human beings lose their sense of time, and fairy maidens doff their quaint garbs—how did mankind come to think such things? Mr. Hartland answers in short: men have been savages, and savages regard all these things as natural, just as much a part of the normal course of things as marrying many wives or eating human beings for food. Civilised men have grown out of all these things, but—here is the important point—civilised mankind has passed through them all. The fairy world is a survival of savage imagination, and the science of fairy tales consists in tracing these survivals.

So far, Mr. Hartland is only applying to a well-defined group of tales the method first suggested, as far as I know, by Mr. J. H. Farrer in his "Savage Life", but developed and made popular by the keen insight and literary skill of Mr. Andrew Lang. So far as this theory professes to explain the origin of ideas occurring in folk-tales that are manifestly absurd, yet equally manifestly believed in, it has won the battle all down the line. Men changed to beasts, beasts

turned to men, dead men resuscitated, human beings sleeping for centuries—these things never were on sea or land, and belief in them must be due to a state of mind which no longer exists among civilised folk—they are savage in origin. So far so good ; so far we are all, or nearly all, agreed. But when the further question is asked—Does the modern existence of tales embodying these ideas necessarily involve the existence of those beliefs among the nations where the tales are now found?—here we reach a point where we must distinguish. To invent such stories *au sérieux* requires no doubt a belief in the ideas underlying them. But merely to take them and hand them on as stories when once invented, does not necessarily involve such an active belief in metamorphosis, totemism, and the rest. The stories cannot, therefore, be used as archæological evidence of the beliefs in the countries where they are found, unless we can be certain that they originated there. In other words, the problem of diffusion is of prior urgency to that of origin.

Mr. Hartland does not think so. He does not consider it necessary to take into account the possibility of a story having been diffused from a single centre before discussing what it means. If stories are found alike, whether in adjacent or distant countries, it was the similarity of the human minds producing them that produced the similarity. Against this is the fact that adjacent countries do as a matter of fact have a larger common store of tales than distant ones. There are more tales in common between Denmark and Scotland, say, than between Scotland and Russia. Again, while single incidents may have arisen independently in different countries, the weaving of them into a connected story, with incident following incident in the same order, this cannot have happened casually, as Mr. Lang and Mr. Hartland would contend. And if they point to a few cases where such series of incidents—*e.g.*, the Jason and Medea type—occur in widely remote districts where diffusion by borrowing seems impossible, I would turn the tables,

and produce the same as proofs of the insidiousness of diffusion. Thus, to take an example from Mr. Hartland's book, if the celebrated test for the fairy changeling—laughter at water boiled in egg-shells—were found in Japan I should not be content to say that the similarity of the Japanese mind had produced a similar story. I should try and trace where the story first arose. That test, one may safely say, was never invented twice.

On the important subject of method—and it is a sign of youth and vigour in a science for its methods to be still undetermined—I venture therefore to disagree with Mr. Hartland. But this by no means causes me to overlook the grasp of material and skill of arrangement shown in his book. His choice of subject, too, argues great judgment. Fairy tales, properly so called, *i.e.*, tales about fairies, are not so much stories as incidents. Hence the Casual Method, as I would venture to call it, can deal with these anecdotes without raising the inconvenient question of diffusion. It would have been impossible, I should fancy, to deal with even any one of the types of story—*e.g.*, Puss-in-Boots—with anything like the same detail as is shown here, without raising the question of diffusion. Mr. Lang's sketches in his *Perrault* were only sketches after all, and scarcely touched the crucial problems of the subject.

Mr. Hartland dismisses rather cavalierly Mr. MacRitchie's "realistic" theory of the origin of fairies, rather too cavalierly, I think. His chief argument against it is, that where you find stories of fairies, you ought to find traces of Finns. To that there is a twofold answer. First, the stories may have been brought from places where there had been Finns. Secondly, in nearly all places where such stories are told the present inhabitants have been preceded by a shorter race, whom they have exterminated. Tradition about these autochthones might give rise to fairy tales in Mr. Hartland's sense of the word.

I have only touched on Mr. Hartland's main topics ; to

go into detail on his many interesting suggestions, notably that on Lady Godiva, which is somewhat dragged into the book, would be beyond the purpose of this notice. I desire to welcome, in as warm terms as possible, the first serious attempt in English to deal with fairy mythology in a sufficiently wide induction of the facts. Mr. Hartland's conclusions are, I think, only part of the truth; but his facts and his arrangement of them must form the basis of future investigation into the subject for a good while to come.

JOSEPH JACOBS.