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Publisher: Routledge
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Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T
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Folklore

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rfol20>

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Published online: 14 Feb 2012.

To cite this article: Mary Dendy (1896) Correspondence, *Folklore*, 7:4, 398-399, DOI: [10.1080/0015587X.1896.9720385](https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.1896.9720385)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.1896.9720385>

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CORRESPONDENCE.

STAFFORDSHIRE SUPERSTITIONS.

CAN anyone tell me more about the "Bee" and the "Hobthirst" mentioned in the following tales? They were told me by Mr. Elijah Cope, an itinerant preacher, who assures me that many such stories are current in the moorlands of Staffordshire. I give, as nearly as possible, exactly what he said.

"He is an old farmer. I was out walking and got on his land, and he took down the bars and took me through up to his house. I said to him: 'And how old are you, Mr. Miller?' 'Oh, I'm getting on. I'm none so young as I was.' 'But how old are you?' 'Well, I'm ninety-six.' 'And you've been living here a long time?' 'Oh, ay; my people have lived here seven hundred years.' 'And have you ever seen any fairies hereabouts?' 'Many and many, but not so many of late. There used to be a many, and they were good to folk, but folk were none so good to them. And so, by what I understand, they went away.' 'You'll soon be mowing?' 'Ay; but mowing's not what it was. My father would mow twenty acres in a day.' 'Twenty acres! One acre's good work.' 'Ah, but then he had a bee in his scythe.' I knew what a bee was, but I thought I'd ask him. 'What is a bee?' 'Oh, it's just a lost spirit.' 'And where did he get it?' 'He got it at Oxford. There was a man there kept them and fed them on the blood out of the veins of his arm. But I've one in the house. I'll show you.' He produced a slip of parchment about an inch broad by two long. 'And how did he use it?' 'He just fastened it on to his scythe and it went cutting through everything, staves driven into the field and all, and he had to keep running about to keep up with it. The people put these bees on their churns to make the butter come, but it's better to use a Hobthirst for the churn than a real fairy.'

"An old woman who comes to do a bit of cleaning in my house was telling me of a woman she knew who was a witch. She said the witch was a very wicked old woman and could change herself into a dog, or a cat, or a rabbit. She (my old woman) had noticed that when the cat was in her cottage she never could make her oat-cake right. It stuck to the pan and burned. One day she got into a temper and threw the leaven over the cat. The cat ran out and she after it, and it ran into

the witch's cottage, and when she got there there was the witch combing the heaven out of her hair.

"Would you like to know the results [? cause] of a family becoming poor? The mother had a baby, and she took it into the field and left it under an umbrella while she worked. And a fairy came—not a real fairy, a Hobthirst—and changed the child for her own. It was so like, the mother never knew, only that it never spoke, and so long as they had the child and were good to it money was everywhere in the house. They found it in drawers and corners everywhere. But the child died, and from that time not a penny did they get, and they were as poor as poor.

"Fairies! I went into a farmhouse to stay a night, and in the evening there came a knocking in the room as if some one had struck the table. I jumped up. My hostess got up and 'Good-night,' says she, 'I'm off.' 'But what was it?' says I. 'Just a poor old fairy,' says she, 'Old Nancy. She's a poor old thing; been here ever so long; lost her husband and her children; it's bad to be left like that, all alone. I leave a bit o' cake on the table for her, and sometimes she fetches it, and sometimes she don't.'

"I know many houses on the moors where they keep a vessel with salt in it by the fire and throw a pinch into the fire when any one enters who has the Evil Eye."

MARY DENDY.

140, Upper Brook Street, Manchester.

DOZZILS.

In the island of Sangir (Celebes) little dolls are hung up in cocoa-nut trees to protect them. Any one stealing a fruit from a tree thus guarded will become violently ill afterwards. An engraving of such an *urō* from Sangir is given in S. J. Hickson's *Naturalist in North Celebes*, 1889, p. 176.

Are the human and animal figures often seen on the apex of English cornstacks merely ornamental in origin, or do they represent ancient protecting powers?

In Lincolnshire they are called *dozzils*. By what other names are they known, and in what parts of Europe are they used?

MABEL PEACOCK.

[In Gloucestershire, I am informed, they were formerly well known, and called *hackles*. They are now fast disappearing.—ED.]