LETTER V

Those who dealt in fortune-telling, mystical cures by charms, and the like, often claimed an intercourse with Fairyland--Hudhart or Hudikin--Pitcairn's "Scottish Criminal Trials"--Story of Bessie Dunlop and her Adviser--Her Practice of Medicine--And of Discovery of Theft--Account of her Familiar, Thome Reid--Trial of Alison Pearson--Account of her Familiar, William Sympson--Trial of the Lady Fowlis, and of Hector Munro, her Stepson--Extraordinary species of Charm used by the latter--Confession of John Stewart, a Juggler, of his Intercourse with the Fairies--Trial and Confession of Isobel Gowdie--Use of Elf-arrow Heads--Parish of Aberfoyle--Mr. Kirke, the Minister of Aberfoyle's Work on Fairy Superstitions--He is himself taken to Fairyland--Dr. Grahame's interesting Work, and his Information on Fairy Superstitions--Story of a Female in East Lothian carried off by the Fairies--Another instance from Pennant.

To return to Thomas the Rhymer, with an account of whose legend I concluded last letter, it would seem that the example which it afforded of obtaining the gift of prescience, and other supernatural powers, by means of the fairy people, became the common apology of those who attempted to cure diseases, to tell fortunes, to revenge injuries, or to engage in traffic with the invisible world, for the purpose of satisfying their own wishes, curiosity, or revenge, or those of others. Those who practised the petty arts of deception in such mystic cases, being naturally desirous to screen their own impostures, were willing to be supposed to derive from the fairies, or from mortals transported to fairyland the power necessary to effect the displays of art which they pretended to exhibit. A confession of direct communication and league with Satan, though the accused were too frequently compelled by torture to admit and avow such horrors, might, the poor wretches hoped, be avoided by the avowal of a less disgusting intercourse with sublunary spirits, a race which might be described by negatives, being neither angels, devils, nor the souls of deceased men; nor would it, they might flatter themselves, be considered as any criminal alliance, that they held communion with a race not properly hostile to man, and willing, on certain conditions, to be useful and friendly to him. Such an intercourse was certainly far short of the witch's renouncing her salvation, delivering herself personally to the devil, and at once ensuring condemnation in this world, together with the like doom in the next.

Accordingly, the credulous, who, in search of health, knowledge, greatness, or moved by any of the numberless causes for which men seek to look into futurity, were anxious to obtain superhuman assistance, as well as the numbers who had it in view to dupe such willing clients, became both cheated and cheaters, alike anxious to establish the possibility of a harmless process of research into futurity, for laudable, or at least innocent objects, as healing diseases and the like; in short, of the existence of white magic, as it was called, in opposition to that black art exclusively and directly derived from intercourse with Satan. Some endeavoured to predict a man's fortune in marriage or his success in life by the aspect of the stars; others pretended to possess spells, by which they could reduce and compel an elementary spirit to enter within a stone, a looking-glass, or some other local place of abode, and confine her there by the power of an especial charm, conjuring her to abide and answer the questions of her master. Of these we shall afterwards say something; but the species of evasion now under our investigation is that of the fanatics or impostors who pretended to
draw information from the equivocal spirits called fairies; and the number of instances before us is so great as induces us to believe that the pretence of communicating with Elfland, and not with the actual demon, was the manner in which the persons accused of witchcraft most frequently endeavoured to excuse themselves, or at least to alleviate the charges brought against them of practising sorcery. But the Scottish law did not acquit those who accomplished even praiseworthy actions, such as remarkable cures by mysterious remedies; and the proprietor of a patent medicine who should in those days have attested his having wrought such miracles as we see sometimes advertised, might perhaps have forfeited his life before he established the reputation of his drop, elixir, or pill.

Sometimes the soothsayers, who pretended to act on this information from sublunary spirits, soared to higher matters than the practice of physic, and interfered in the fate of nations. When James I. was murdered at Perth in 1437, a Highland woman prophesied the course and purpose of the conspiracy, and had she been listened to, it might have been disconcerted. Being asked her source of knowledge, she answered Hudhart had told her; which might either be the same with Hudkin, a Dutch spirit somewhat similar to Friar Rush or Robin Goodfellow,(32) or with the red-capped demon so powerful in the case of Lord Soulis, and other wizards, to whom the Scots assigned rather more serious influence.

(Footnote 32: Hudkin is a very familiar devil, who will do nobody hurt, except he receive injury; but he cannot abide that, nor yet be mocked. He talketh with men friendly, sometimes visibly, sometimes invisibly. There go as many tales upon this Hudkin in some parts of Germany as there did in England on Robin Goodfellow.--"Discourse concerning Devils," annexed to "The Discovery of Witchcraft," by Reginald Scot, book i. chap. 21.)

The most special account which I have found of the intercourse between Fairyland and a female professing to have some influence in that court, combined with a strong desire to be useful to the distressed of both sexes, occurs in the early part of a work to which I have been exceedingly obliged in the present and other publications.(33) The details of the evidence, which consists chiefly of the unfortunate woman's own confession, are more full than usual, and comprehend some curious particulars. To spare technical repetitions, I must endeavour to select the principal facts in evidence in detail, so far as they bear upon the present subject.

(Footnote 33: The curious collection of trials, from "The Criminal Records of Scotland," now in the course of publication, by Robert Pitcairn, Esq., affords so singular a picture of the manners and habits of our ancestors, while yet a semibarbarous people, that it is equally worth the attention of the historian, the antiquary, the philosopher, and the poet.)

On the 8th November, 1576, Elizabeth or Bessie Dunlop, spouse to Andro Jak, in Lyne, in the Barony of Dalry, Ayrshire, was accused of sorcery and witchcraft and abuse of the people. Her answers to the interrogatories of the judges or prosecutors ran thus: It being required of her by what art she could tell of lost goods or prophesy the event of illness, she replied that of herself she had no knowledge or science of such matters, but that when questions were asked at her concerning such matters, she was in the habit of applying to one Thome Reid, who died at the battle of Pinkie (10th September, 1547), as he himself affirmed, and who resolved her any questions which she asked at him. This person she described as a respectable elderly-looking man, grey-bearded, and wearing a grey coat, with Lombard sleeves of the auld fashion. A pair of grey breeches and white stockings gartered above the knee, a black bonnet on his head, close behind and plain before, with silken laces drawn through the lips thereof, and a white wand in his hand, completed the description of what we may suppose a respectable-looking man of the province and period. Being demanded concerning her first interview with this mysterious Thome Reid, she gave rather an affecting account of the disasters with which she was then afflicted, and a sense of which perhaps aided to conjure up the imaginary counsellor. She was walking between her own house and the yard of Monkcastle, driving her cows to the common pasture, and making heavy moan with herself, weeping bitterly for her cow that was dead, her husband and child that were sick of the land-ill (some contagious sickness of the time), while she herself was in a very infirm state, having lately borne a child. On this occasion she met Thome Reid for the first time, who saluted her courteously, which she returned. "Sancta Maria, Bessie!" said the apparition, "why must thou make such dole and weeping for any earthly thing?" "Have I not reason for great sorrow," said she, "since our property is going to destruction, my husband is on the point of death, my baby will not live, and I am myself at a weak point? Have I not cause to have a sore heart?" "Bessie," answered the
spirit, "thou hast displeased God in asking something that thou should not, and I counsel you to amend your fault. I tell thee, thy child shall die ere thou get home; thy two sheep shall also die; but thy husband shall recover, and be as well and feir as ever he was." The good woman was something comforted to hear that her husband was to be spared in such her general calamity, but was rather alarmed to see her ghostly counsellor pass from her and disappear through a hole in the garden wall, seemingly too narrow to admit of any living person passing through it. Another time he met her at the Thorn of Dawnstarnik, and showed his ultimate purpose by offering her plenty of every thing if she would but deny Christendom and the faith she took at the font-stone. She answered, that rather than do that she would be torn at horses' heels, but that she would be conformable to his advice in less matters. He parted with her in some displeasure. Shortly afterwards he appeared in her own house about noon, which was at the time occupied by her husband and three tailors. But neither Andrew Jak nor the three tailors were sensible of the presence of the phantom warrior who was slain at Pinkie; so that, without attracting their observation, he led out the good-wife to the end of the house near the kiln. Here he showed her a company of eight women and four men. The women were busked in their plaids, and very seemly. The strangers saluted her, and said, "Welcome, Bessie; wilt thou go with us?" But Bessie was silent, as Thome Reid had previously recommended. After this she saw their lips move, but did not understand what they said; and in a short time they removed from thence with a hideous ugly howling sound, like that of a hurricane. Thome Reid then acquainted her that these were the good wrights (fairies) dwelling in the court of Elfland, who came to invite her to go thither with them. Bessie answered that, before she went that road, it would require some consideration. Thome answered, "Seest thou not me both meat-worth, clothes-worth, and well enough in person?" and engaged she should be easier than ever she was. But she replied, she dwelt with her husband and children, and would not leave them; to which Thome Reid replied, in very ill-humour, that if such were her sentiments, she would get little good of him.

Although they thus disagreed on the principal object of Thome Reid's visits, Bessie Dunlop affirmed he continued to come to her frequently, and assist her with his counsel; and that if any one consulted her about the ailments of human beings or of cattle, or the recovery of things lost and stolen, she was, by the advice of Thome Reid, always able to answer the querists. She was also taught by her (literally ghostly) adviser how to watch the operation of the ointments he gave her, and to presage from them the recovery or death of the patient. She said Thome gave her herbs with his own hand, with which she cured John Jack's bairn and Wilson's of the Townhead. She also was helpful to a waiting-woman of the young Lady Stanlie, daughter of the Lady Johnstone, whose disease, according to the opinion of the infallible Thome Reid, was "a cauld blood that came about her heart," and frequently caused her to swoon away. For this Thome mixed a remedy as generous as the balm of Gilead itself. It was composed of the most potent ale, concocted with spices and a little white sugar, to be drunk every morning before taking food. For these prescriptions Bessie Dunlop's fee was a peck of meal and some cheese. The young woman recovered. But the poor old Lady Kilbowie could get no help for her leg, which had been crooked for years; for Thome Reid said the marrow of the limb was perished and the blood benumbed, so that she would never recover, and if she sought further assistance, it would be the worse for her. These opinions indicate common sense and prudence at least, whether we consider them as originating with the _umquhile Thome Reid, or with the culprit whom he patronized. The judgments given in the case of stolen goods were also well chosen; for though they seldom led to recovering the property, they generally alleged such satisfactory reasons for its not being found as effectually to cover the credit of the prophetess. Thus Hugh Scott's cloak could not be returned, because the thieves had gained time to make it into a kirtle. James Jamieson and James Baird would, by her advice, have recovered their plough-irons, which had been stolen, had it not been the will of fate that William Dougal, sheriff's officer, one of the parties searching for them, should accept a bribe of three pounds not to find them. In short, although she lost a lace which Thome Reid gave her out of his own hand, which, tied round women in childbirth, had the power of helping their delivery, Bessie Dunlop's profession of a wise woman seems to have flourished indifferently well till it drew the evil eye of the law upon her.

More minutely pressed upon the subject of her familiar, she said she had never known him while among the living, but was aware that the person so calling himself was one who had, in his lifetime, actually been known in middle earth as Thome Reid, officer to the Laird of Blair, and who died at Pinkie. Of this she was made certain, because he sent her on errands to his son, who had succeeded in his office, and to others his relatives, whom he named, and commanded them to amend certain trespasses which he had done while alive, furnishing her with sure tokens by which they should know that it was he who had sent her. One of these errands was somewhat remarkable. She was to remind a neighbour of
some particular which she was to recall to his memory by the token that Thome Reid and he had set out together to go to the battle which took place on the Black Saturday; that the person to whom the message was sent was inclined rather to move in a different direction, but that Thome Reid heartened him to pursue his journey, and brought him to the Kirk of Dalry, where he bought a parcel of figs, and made a present of them to his companion, tying them in his handkerchief; after which they kept company till they came to the field upon the fatal Black Saturday, as the battle of Pinkie was long called.

Of Thome's other habits, she said that he always behaved with the strictest propriety, only that he pressed her to go to Elfland with him, and took hold of her apron as if to pull her along. Again, she said she had seen him in public places, both in the churchyard at Dalry and on the street of Edinburgh, where he walked about among other people, and handled goods that were exposed to sale, without attracting any notice. She herself did not then speak to him, for it was his command that, upon such occasions, she should never address him unless he spoke first to her. In his theological opinions, Mr. Reid appeared to lean to the Church of Rome, which, indeed, was most indulgent to the fairy folk. He said that the _new law, i.e., the Reformation, was not good, and that the old faith should return again, but not exactly as it had been before. Being questioned why this visionary sage attached himself to her more than to others, the accused person replied, that when she was confined in childbirth of one of her boys, a stout woman came into her hut, and sat down on a bench by her bed, like a mere earthly gossip; that she demanded a drink, and was accommodated accordingly; and thereafter told the invalid that the child should die, but that her husband, who was then ailing, should recover. This visit seems to have been previous to her meeting Thome Reid near Monkcastle garden, for that worthy explained to her that her stout visitant was Queen of Fairies, and that he had since attended her by the express command of that lady, his queen and mistress. This reminds us of the extreme doting attachment which the Queen of the Fairies is represented to have taken for Dapper in "The Alchemist." Thome Reid attended her, it would seem, on being summoned thrice, and appeared to her very often within four years. He often requested her to go with him on his return to Fairyland, and when she refused, he shook his head, and said she would repent it.

If the delicacy of the reader's imagination be a little hurt at imagining the elegant Titania in the disguise of a _stout woman, a heavy burden for a clumsy bench, drinking what Christopher Sly would have called very sufficient small-beer with a peasant's wife, the following description of the fairy host may come more near the idea he has formed of that invisible company:--Bessie Dunlop declared that as she went to tether her nag by the side of Restalrig Loch (Lochend, near the eastern port of Edinburgh), she heard a tremendous sound of a body of riders rushing past her with such a noise as if heaven and earth would come together; that the sound swept past her and seemed to rush into the lake with a hideous rumbling noise. All this while she saw nothing; but Thome Reid showed her that the noise was occasioned by the wights, who were performing one of their cavalcades upon earth.

The intervention of Thome Reid as a partner in her trade of petty sorcery did not avail poor Bessie Dunlop, although his affection to her was apparently entirely platonic--the greatest familiarity on which he ventured was taking hold of her gown as he pressed her to go with him to Elfland. Neither did it avail her that the petty sorcery which she practised was directed to venial or even beneficial purposes. The sad words on the margin of the record, "Convict and burnt," sufficiently express the tragic conclusion of a curious tale.

Alison Pearson, in Byrehill, was, 28th May, 1588, tried for invocation of the spirits of the devil, specially in the vision of one Mr. William Sympson, her cousin and her mother's brother's son, who she affirmed was a great scholar and doctor of medicine, dealing with charms and abusing the ignorant people. Against this poor woman her own confession, as in the case of Bessie Dunlop, was the principal evidence.

As Bessie Dunlop had Thome Reid, Alison Pearson had also a familiar in the court of Elfland. This was her relative, William Sympson aforesaid, born in Stirling, whose father was king's smith in that town. William had been taken away, she said, by a man of Egypt (a Gipsy), who carried him to Egypt along with him; that he remained there twelve years, and that his father died in the meantime for opening a priest's book and looking upon it. She declared that she had renewed her acquaintance with her kinsman so soon as he returned. She further confessed that one day as she passed through Grange Muir she lay down in a fit of sickness, and that a green man came to her, and said if she would be faithful he might do her good. In reply she charged him, in the name of God and by the law he lived upon, if he
came for her soul's good to tell his errand. On this the green man departed. But he afterwards appeared to her with many men and women with him, and against her will she was obliged to pass with them farther than she could tell, with piping, mirth, and good cheer; also that she accompanied them into Lothian, where she saw puncheons of wine with tasses or drinking-cups. She declared that when she told of these things she was sorely tormented, and received a blow that took away the power of her left side, and left on it an ugly mark which had no feeling. She also confessed that she had seen before sunrise the good neighbours make their salves with pans and fires. Sometimes, she said, they came in such fearful forms as frightened her very much. At other times they spoke her fair, and promised her that she should never want if faithful, but if she told of them and their doings, they threatened to martyr her. She also boasted of her favour with the Queen of Elfland and the good friends she had at that court, notwithstanding that she was sometimes in disgrace there, and had not seen the queen for seven years. She said William Sympson is with the fairies, and that he lets her know when they are coming; and that he taught her what remedies to use, and how to apply them. She declared that when a whirlwind blew the fairies were commonly there, and that her cousin Sympson confessed that every year the tithe of them were taken away to hell. The celebrated Patrick Adamson, an excellent divine and accomplished scholar, created by James VI. Archbishop of St. Andrews, swallowed the prescriptions of this poor hypochondriac with good faith and will, eating a stewed fowl, and drinking out at two draughts a quart of claret, medicated with the drugs she recommended. According to the belief of the time, this Alison Pearson transferred the bishop's indisposition from himself to a white palfrey, which died in consequence. There is a very severe libel on him for this and other things unbecoming his order, with which he was charged, and from which we learn that Lethington and Buccleuch were seen by Dame Pearson in the Fairyland.(34) This poor woman's kinsman, Sympson, did not give better shelter to her than Thome Reid had done to her predecessor. The margin of the court-book again bears the melancholy and brief record, "_Convicta et combusta_."

(Footnote 34: See "Scottish Poems," edited by John G. Dalzell, p. 321.)

The two poor women last mentioned are the more to be pitied as, whether enthusiasts or impostors, they practised their supposed art exclusively for the advantage of mankind. The following extraordinary detail involves persons of far higher quality, and who sought to familiars for more baneful purposes.

Katherine Munro, Lady Fowlis, by birth Katherine Ross of Balnagowan, of high rank, both by her own family and that of her husband, who was the fifteenth Baron of Fowlis, and chief of the warlike clan of Munro, had a stepmother's quarrel with Robert Munro, eldest son of her husband, which she gratified by forming a scheme for compassing his death by unlawful arts. Her proposed advantage in this was, that the widow of Robert, when he was thus removed, should marry with her brother, George Ross of Balnagowan; and for this purpose, her sister-in-law, the present Lady Balnagowan, was also to be removed. Lady Fowlis, if the indictment had a syllable of truth, carried on her practices with the least possible disguise. She assembled persons of the lowest order, stamped with an infamous celebrity as witches; and, besides making pictures or models in clay, by which they hoped to bewitch Robert Munro and Lady Balnagowan, they brewed, upon one occasion, poison so strong that a page tasting of it immediately took sickness. Another earthen jar (Scottice _pig_) of the same deleterious liquor was prepared by the Lady Fowlis, and sent with her own nurse for the purpose of administering it to Robert Munro. The messenger having stumbled in the dark, broke the jar, and a rank grass grew on the spot where it fell, which sheep and cattle abhorred to touch; but the nurse, having less sense than the brute beasts, and tasting of the liquor which had been spilled, presently died. What is more to our present purpose, Lady Fowlis made use of the artillery of Elfland in order to destroy her stepson and sister-in-law. Laskie Loncart, one of the assistant hags, produced two of what the common people call elf-arrow heads, being, in fact, the points of flint used for arming the ends of arrow-shafts in the most ancient times, but accounted by the superstitious the weapons by which the fairies were wont to destroy both man and beast. The pictures of the intended victims were then set up at the north end of the apartment, and Christian Ross Malcolmson, an assistant hag, shot two shafts at the image of Lady Balnagowan, and three against the picture of Robert Munro, by which shots they were broken, and Lady Fowlis commanded new figures to be modelled. Many similar acts of witchcraft and of preparing poisons were alleged against Lady Fowlis.

Her son-in-law, Hector Munro, one of his stepmother's prosecutors, was, for reasons of his own, active in a similar conspiracy against the life of his own brother. The rites that he practised were of an uncouth, barbarous, and unusual
nature. Hector, being taken ill, consulted on his case some of the witches or soothsayers, to whom this family appears to have been partial. The answer was unanimous that he must die unless the principal man of his blood should suffer death in his stead. It was agreed that the vicarious substitute for Hector must mean George Munro, brother to him by the half-blood (the son of the Katharine Lady Fowlis before commemorated). Hector sent at least seven messengers for this young man, refusing to receive any of his other friends till he saw the substitute whom he destined to take his place in the grave. When George at length arrived, Hector, by advice of a notorious witch, called Marion MacIngarach, and of his own foster-mother, Christian Neil Dalyell, received him with peculiar coldness and restraint. He did not speak for the space of an hour, till his brother broke silence and asked, "How he did?" Hector replied, "That he was the better George had come to visit him," and relapsed into silence, which seemed singular when compared with the anxiety he had displayed to see his brother; but it was, it seems, a necessary part of the spell. After midnight the sorceress Marion MacIngarach, the chief priestess or Nicneven of the company, went forth with her accomplices, carrying spades with them. They then proceeded to dig a grave not far from the seaside, upon a piece of land which formed the boundary betwixt two proprietors. The grave was made as nearly as possible to the size of their patient Hector Munro, the earth dug out of the grave being laid aside for the time. After ascertaining that the operation of the charm on George Munro, the destined victim, should be suspended for a time, to avoid suspicion, the conspirators proceeded to work their spell in a singular, impressive, and, I believe, unique manner. The time being January, 1588, the patient, Hector Munro, was borne forth in a pair of blankets, accompanied with all who were entrusted with the secret, who were warned to be strictly silent till the chief sorceress should have received her information from the angel whom they served. Hector Munro was carried to his grave and laid therein, the earth being filled in on him, and the grave secured with stakes as at a real funeral. Marion MacIngarach, the Hecate of the night, then sat down by the grave, while Christian Neil Dalyell, the foster-mother, ran the breadth of about nine ridges distant, leading a boy in her hand, and, coming again to the grave where Hector Munro was interred alive, demanded of the witch which victim she would choose, who replied that she chose Hector to live and George to die in his stead. This form of incantation was thrice repeated ere Mr. Hector was removed from his chilling bed in a January grave and carried home, all remaining mute as before. The consequence of a process which seems ill-adapted to produce the former effect was that Hector Munro recovered, and after the intervention of twelve months George Munro, his brother, died. Hector took the principal witch into high favour, made her keeper of his sheep, and evaded, it is said, to present her to trial when charged at Aberdeen to produce her. Though one or two inferior persons suffered death on account of the sorceries practised in the house of Fowlis, the Lady Katharine and her stepson Hector had both the unusual good fortune to be found not guilty. Mr. Pitcairn remarks that the juries, being composed of subordinate persons not suitable to the rank or family of the person tried, has all the appearance of having been packed on purpose for acquittal. It might also, in some interval of good sense, creep into the heads of Hector Munro's assize that the enchantment being performed in January, 1588, and the deceased being only taken ill of his fatal disease in April, 1590, the distance between the events might seem too great to admit the former being regarded as the cause of the latter. (35)

(Footnote 35: Pitcairn's "Trials," vol. i. pp. 191-201.)

Another instance of the skill of a sorcerer being traced to the instructions of the elves is found in the confession of John Stewart, called a vagabond, but professing skill in palmistry and jugglery, and accused of having assisted Margaret Barclay, or Dein, to sink or cast away a vessel belonging to her own good brother. It being demanded of him by what means he professed himself to have knowledge of things to come, the said John confessed that the space of twenty-six years ago, he being travelling on All-Hallow Even night, between the towns of Monygoif (so spelled) and Clary, in Galway, he met with the King of the Fairies and his company, and that the King of the Fairies gave him a stroke with a white rod over the forehead, which took from him the power of speech and the use of one eye, which he wanted for the space of three years. He declared that the use of speech and eyesight was restored to him by the King of Fairies and his company, on an Hallowe'en night, at the town of Dublin, in Ireland, and that since that time he had joined these people every Saturday at seven o'clock, and remained with them all the night; also, that they met every Hallow-tide, sometimes on Lanark Hill (Tintock, perhaps), sometimes on Kilmours Hill, and that he was then taught by them. He pointed out the spot of his forehead on which, he said, the King of the Fairies struck him with a white rod, whereupon the prisoner, being blindfolded, they pricked the spot with a large pin, whereof he expressed no sense or feeling. He made the usual declaration, that he had seen many persons at the Court of Fairy, whose names he rehearsed
particularly, and declared that all such persons as are taken away by sudden death go with the King of Elfland. With this man's evidence we have at present no more to do, though we may revert to the execrable proceedings which then took place against this miserable juggler and the poor women who were accused of the same crime. At present it is quoted as another instance of a fortune-teller referring to Elfland as the source of his knowledge.

At Auldearn, a parish and burgh of barony in the county of Nairne, the epidemic terror of witches seems to have gone very far. The confession of a woman called Isobel Gowdie, of date April, 1662, implicates, as usual, the Court of Fairy, and blends the operations of witchcraft with the facilities afforded by the fairies. These need be the less insisted upon in this place, as the arch-fiend, and not the elves, had the immediate agency in the abominations which she narrates. Yet she had been, she said, in the Dinnie Hills, and got meat there from the Queen of Fairies more than she could eat. She added, that the queen is bravely clothed in white linen and in white and brown cloth, that the King of Fairy is a brave man; and there were elf-bulls roaring and _skoilling_ at the entrance of their palace, which frightened her much. On another occasion this frank penitent confesses her presence at a rendezvous of witches, Lammas, 1659, where, after they had rambled through the country in different shapes—of cats, hares, and the like—eating, drinking, and wasting the goods of their neighbours into whose houses they could penetrate, they at length came to the dinnie Hills, where the mountain opened to receive them, and they entered a fair big room, as bright as day. At the entrance ramped and roared the large fairy bulls, which always alarmed Isobel Gowdie. These animals are probably the water-bulls, famous both in Scottish and Irish tradition, which are not supposed to be themselves altogether _canny_ or safe to have concern with. In their caverns the fairies manufactured those elf-arrow heads with which the witches and they wrought so much evil. The elves and the arch-fiend laboured jointly at this task, the former forming and sharpening the dart from the rough flint, and the latter perfecting and finishing (or, as it is called, _dighting_) it. Then came the sport of the meeting. The witches bestrode either corn-straws, bean-stalks, or rushes, and calling, "Horse and Hattock, in the Devil's name!" which is the elfin signal for mounting, they flew wherever they listed. If the little whirlwind which accompanies their transportation passed any mortal who neglected to bless himself, all such fell under the witches' power, and they acquired the right of shooting at him. The penitent prisoner gives the names of many whom she and her sisters had so slain, the death for which she was most sorry being that of William Brown, in the Milntown of Mains. A shaft was also aimed at the Reverend Harrie Forbes, a minister who was present at the examination of Isobel, the confessing party. The arrow fell short, and the witch would have taken aim again, but her master forbade her, saying the reverend gentleman's life was not subject to their power. To this strange and very particular confession we shall have occasion to recur when witchcraft is the more immediate subject. What is above narrated marks the manner in which the belief in that crime was blended with the fairy superstition.

To proceed to more modern instances of persons supposed to have fallen under the power of the fairy race, we must not forget the Reverend Robert Kirke, minister of the Gospel, the first translator of the Psalms into Gaelic verse. He was, in the end of the seventeenth century, successively minister of the Highland parishes of Balquidder and Aberfoyle, lying in the most romantic district of Perthshire, and within the Highland line. These beautiful and wild regions, comprehending so many lakes, rocks, sequestered valleys, and dim copsewoods, are not even yet quite abandoned by the fairies, who have resolutely maintained secure footing in a region so well suited for their residence. Indeed, so much was this the case formerly, that Mr. Kirke, while in his latter charge of Aberfoyle, found materials for collecting and compiling his Essay on the "Subterranean and for the most part Invisible People heretofore going under the name of Elves, Fawnes, and Fairies, or the like."(36) In this discourse, the author, "with undoubting mind," describes the fairy race as a sort of astral spirits, of a kind betwixt humanity and angels—says, that they have children, nurses, marriages, deaths, and burials, like mortals in appearance; that, in some respect, they represent mortal men, and that individual apparitions, or double-men, are found among them, corresponding with mortals existing on earth. Mr. Kirke accuses them of stealing the milk from the cows, and of carrying away, what is more material, the women in pregnancy, and new-born children from their nurses. The remedy is easy in both cases. The milk cannot be stolen if the mouth of the calf, before he is permitted to suck, be rubbed with a certain balsam, very easily come by; and the woman in travail is safe if a piece of cold iron is put into the bed. Mr. Kirke accounts for this by informing us that the great northern mines of iron, lying adjacent to the place of eternal punishment, have a savour odious to these "fascinating creatures." They have, says the reverend author, what one would not expect, many light toyish books (novels and plays, doubtless), others on Rosycrucian subjects, and of an abstruse mystical character; but they have no Bibles or works of
devotion. The essayist fails not to mention the elf-arrow heads, which have something of the subtlety of thunderbolts, and can mortally wound the vital parts without breaking the skin. These wounds, he says, he has himself observed in beasts, and felt the fatal lacerations which he could not see.

(Footnote 36: The title continues:--"Among the Low Country Scots, as they are described by those who have the second sight, and now, to occasion farther enquiry, collected and compared by a circumspect enquirer residing among the Scottish-Irish (_i.e._, the Gael, or Highlanders) in Scotland." It was printed with the author's name in 1691, and reprinted, Edinburgh, 1815, for Longman & Co.)

It was by no means to be supposed that the elves, so jealous and irritable a race as to be incensed against those who spoke of them under their proper names, should be less than mortally offended at the temerity of the reverend author, who had pryed so deeply into their mysteries, for the purpose of giving them to the public. Although, therefore, the learned divine's monument, with his name duly inscribed, is to be seen at the east end of the churchyard at Aberfoyle, yet those acquainted with his real history do not believe that he enjoys the natural repose of the tomb. His successor, the Rev. Dr. Grahame, has informed us of the general belief that, as Mr. Kirke was walking one evening in his night-gown upon a _Dun-shi, or fairy mount, in the vicinity of the manse or parsonage, behold! he sunk down in what seemed to be a fit of apoplexy, which the unenlightened took for death, while the more understanding knew it to be a swoon produced by the supernatural influence of the people whose precincts he had violated. After the ceremony of a seeming funeral, the form of the Rev. Robert Kirke appeared to a relation, and commanded him to go to Grahame of Duchray, ancestor of the present General Graham Stirling. "Say to Duchray, who is my cousin as well as your own, that I am not dead, but a captive in Fairyland, and only one chance remains for my liberation. When the posthumous child, of which my wife has been delivered since my disappearance, shall be brought to baptism, I will appear in the room, when, if Duchray shall throw over my head the knife or dirk which he holds in his hand, I may be restored to society; but if this opportunity is neglected, I am lost for ever." Duchray was apprised of what was to be done. The ceremony took place, and the apparition of Mr. Kirke was visibly seen while they were seated at table; but Grahame of Duchray, in his astonishment, failed to perform the ceremony enjoined, and it is to be feared that Mr. Kirke still "drees his weird in Fairyland," the Elfin state declaring to him, as the Ocean to poor Falconer, who perished at sea after having written his popular poem of "The Shipwreck"--

"Thou hast proclaimed our power--be thou our prey!"

Upon this subject the reader may consult a very entertaining little volume, called "Sketches of Perthshire,"(37) by the Rev. Dr. Grahame of Aberfoyle. The terrible visitation of fairy vengeance which has lighted upon Mr. Kirke has not intimidated his successor, an excellent man and good antiquary, from affording us some curious information on fairy superstition. He tells us that these capricious elves are chiefly dangerous on a Friday, when, as the day of the Crucifixion, evil spirits have most power, and mentions their displeasure at any one who assumes their accustomed livery of green, a colour fatal to several families in Scotland, to the whole race of the gallant Grahames in particular; insomuch that we have heard that in battle a Grahame is generally shot through the green check of his plaid; moreover, that a veteran sportsman of the name, having come by a bad fall, he thought it sufficient to account for it, that he had a piece of green whip-cord to complete the lash of his hunting-whip. I remember, also, that my late amiable friend, James Grahame, author of "The Sabbath," would not break through this ancient prejudice of his clan, but had his library table covered with blue or black cloth, rather than use the fated colour commonly employed on such occasions.

(Footnote 37: Edinburgh, 1812.)

To return from the Perthshire fairies, I may quote a story of a nature somewhat similar to that of Mas Robert Kirke. The life of the excellent person who told it was, for the benefit of her friends and the poor, protracted to an unusual duration; so I conceive that this adventure, which took place in her childhood, might happen before the middle of last century. She was residing with some relations near the small seaport town of North Berwick, when the place and its vicinity were alarmed by the following story:--

An industrious man, a weaver in the little town, was married to a beautiful woman, who, after bearing two or three
children, was so unfortunate as to die during the birth of a fourth child. The infant was saved, but the mother had expired in convulsions; and as she was much disfigured after death, it became an opinion among her gossips that, from some neglect of those who ought to have watched the sick woman, she must have been carried off by the elves, and this ghastly corpse substituted in the place of the body. The widower paid little attention to these rumours, and, after bitterly lamenting his wife for a year of mourning, began to think on the prudence of forming a new marriage, which, to a poor artisan with so young a family, and without the assistance of a housewife, was almost a matter of necessity. He readily found a neighbour with whose good looks he was satisfied, whilst her character for temper seemed to warrant her good usage of his children. He proposed himself and was accepted, and carried the names of the parties to the clergyman (called, I believe, Mr. Matthew Reid) for the due proclamation of banns. As the man had really loved his late partner, it is likely that this proposed decisive alteration of his condition brought back many reflections concerning the period of their union, and with these recalled the extraordinary rumours which were afloat at the time of her decease, so that the whole forced upon him the following lively dream:--As he lay in his bed, awake as he thought, he beheld, at the ghostly hour of midnight, the figure of a female dressed in white, who entered his hut, stood by the side of his bed, and appeared to him the very likeness of his late wife. He conjured her to speak, and with astonishment heard her say, like the minister of Aberfoyle, that she was not dead, but the unwilling captive of the Good Neighbours. Like Mr. Kirke, too, she told him that if all the love which he once had for her was not entirely gone, an opportunity still remained of recovering her, or _winning her back_, as it was usually termed, from the comfortless realms of Elfland. She charged him on a certain day of the ensuing week that he should convene the most respectable housekeepers in the town, with the clergyman at their head, and should disinter the coffin in which she was supposed to have been buried. "The clergyman is to recite certain prayers, upon which," said the apparition, "I will start from the coffin and fly with great speed round the church, and you must have the fleetest runner of the parish (naming a man famed for swiftness) to pursue me, and such a one, the smith, renowned for his strength, to hold me fast after I am overtaken; and in that case I shall, by the prayers of the church, and the efforts of my loving husband and neighbours, again recover my station in human society." In the morning the poor widower was distressed with the recollection of his dream, but, ashamed and puzzled, took no measures in consequence. A second night, as is not very surprising, the visitation was again repeated. On the third night she appeared with a sorrowful and displeased countenance, upbraided him with want of love and affection, and conjured him, for the last time, to attend to her instructions, which, if he now neglected, she would never have power to visit earth or communicate with him again. In order to convince him there was no delusion, he "saw in his dream" that she took up the nursling at whose birth she had died, and gave it suck; she spilled also a drop or two of her milk on the poor man's bed-clothes, as if to assure him of the reality of the vision.

The next morning the terrified widower carried a statement of his perplexity to Mr. Matthew Reid, the clergyman. This reverend person, besides being an excellent divine in other respects, was at the same time a man of sagacity, who understood the human passions. He did not attempt to combat the reality of the vision which had thrown his parishioner into this tribulation, but he contended it could be only an illusion of the devil. He explained to the widower that no created being could have the right or power to imprison or detain the soul of a Christian--conjured him not to believe that his wife was otherwise disposed of than according to God's pleasure--assured him that Protestant doctrine utterly denies the existence of any middle state in the world to come--and explained to him that he, as a clergyman of the Church of Scotland, neither could nor dared authorize opening graves or using the intervention of prayer to sanction rites of a suspicious character. The poor man, confounded and perplexed by various feelings, asked his pastor what he should do. "I will give you my best advice," said the clergyman. "Get your new bride's consent to be married to-day, or to-morrow, or to-day, if you can; I will take it on me to dispense with the rest of the banns, or proclaim them three times in one day. You will have a new wife, and, if you think of the former, it will be only as of one from whom death has separated you, and for whom you may have thoughts of affection and sorrow, but as a saint in Heaven, and not as a prisoner in Elfland." The advice was taken, and the perplexed widower had no more visitations from his former spouse.

An instance, perhaps the latest which has been made public, of communication with the Restless People--(a more proper epithet than that of _Daoine Shi_, or Men of Peace, as they are called in Gaelic)--came under Pennant's notice so late as during that observant traveller's tour in 1769. Being perhaps the latest news from the invisible commonwealth, we give the tourist's own words.
"A poor visionary who had been working in his cabbage-garden (in Breadalbane) imagined that he was raised suddenly up into the air, and conveyed over a wall into an adjacent corn-field; that he found himself surrounded by a crowd of men and women, many of whom he knew to have been dead for some years, and who appeared to him skimming over the tops of the unbending corn, and mingling together like bees going to hive; that they spoke an unknown language, and with a hollow sound; that they very roughly pushed him to and fro, but on his uttering the name of God all vanished, but a female sprite, who, seizing him by the shoulder, obliged him to promise an assignation at that very hour that day seven-night; that he then found his hair was all tied in double knots (well known by the name of elf-locks), and that he had almost lost his speech; that he kept his word with the spectre, whom he soon saw floating through the air towards him; that he spoke to her, but she told him she was at that time in too much haste to attend to him, but bid him go away and no harm should befall him, and so the affair rested when I left the country. But it is incredible the mischief these _aegri somnia_ did in the neighbourhood. The friends and neighbours of the deceased, whom the old dreamer had named, were in the utmost anxiety at finding them in such bad company in the other world; the almost extinct belief of the old idle tales began to gain ground, and the good minister will have many a weary discourse and exhortation before he can eradicate the absurd ideas this idle story has revived."(38)

(Footnote 38: Pennant's "Tour in Scotland," vol. i. p. 110.)

It is scarcely necessary to add that this comparatively recent tale is just the counterpart of the story of Bessie Dunlop, Alison Pearson, and of the Irish butler who was so nearly carried off, all of whom found in Elfland some friend, formerly of middle earth, who attached themselves to the child of humanity, and who endeavoured to protect a fellow-mortal against their less philanthropic companions.

These instances may tend to show how the fairy superstition, which, in its general sense of worshipping the _Dii Campestres_, was much the older of the two, came to bear upon and have connexion with that horrid belief in witchcraft which cost so many innocent persons and crazy impostors their lives for the supposed commission of impossible crimes. In the next chapter I propose to trace how the general disbelief in the fairy creed began to take place, and gradually brought into discredit the supposed feats of witchcraft, which afforded pretext for such cruel practical consequences.

**By Sir Walter Scott**