

Seanchas Ìle

MACLAGAN MANUSCRIPTS

SUPERNATURAL: Fairies

From Mrs Morrison, Portcharlotte, Islay (Anonymous) V20/3470

S----- was a lad who was at one time in Islay whose growth and life were so unnatural that nobody who ever saw him believed him to be an ordinary human being. Generally he was believed to have been a changeling whom fairies had left in exchange for the real infant. An Uncle, who it seems shared in this belief resolved to test the matter by the force of fire. Having got a big fire prepared, he got S---- and was about to throw him on it, believing that if he was really a fairy, he would escape into the chimney and they would be rid of it, but the Cailleach - the Child's grandmother - would not allow this, declaring that whatever it was it had been lucky to them, for since the day it came in to the house they had felt neither need nor want.

From Miss Macintyre, Port Ellen, Islay (Anonymous) V20/3470/1

There is a hill on the farm of Baile-Bhichdair near Port Ellen which used to be said to be a fairy dwelling, and some believe they are still there. A man has lately declared that one time when he was passing it he heard music which he is quite convinced issued from the hill, and he confesses that since that night he would not pass that place after nightfall should he get a fortune for it.

The reciter has heard her mother tell that it used to be a common thing among women in Islay, if they had occasion to go out to do any outdoor work, to put differently coloured threads of woolen about their infants in the cradle, or bed. This was supposed to be a protection against interference by fairies.

From Miss McAffer, Port Charlotte, Islay (Anonymous) V20 3471

Fairies are supposed to have a strong aversion to Urine, and it seems to have been frequently used in various ways with the view of protecting such as were supposed to be liable to be interfered with. The reciter says she has known of cases where the chamber with its contents was placed outside the door for the purpose of keeping fairies from entering a house in which there was a newly born infant.

From Mrs McConnell, Grulinn, Islay 6194
(translated from Gaelic)

After that the MacNeills had purchased the island of Colonsay, their family were dying as they were coming forward. There was no knowledge what the cause of it was, but they were laying blame on the nursing and nurse after nurse was put away. But the matter was as bad with every one that came, as it had been with the one that went.

At last they got a smart woman to the nurse, and on a day that was there, when she went out with the child, she saw the appearance of a woman, but what it was, was a fairy; and when they met, the fairy said to the nurse: "It's a heavy child that you have there."

"It is heavy; and pregnancy is heavy" said the nurse.

"Isn't it green the face of the child is?"

"It is green; but the grass is green and is continues to grow."

The fairy said something else about the child, and the nurse answered her after the same manner as she had done before. When the fairy saw that she could make nothing of the other one, she said to her, "you are wise and it is time for you." That child thrived, and from that forward, they had no more trouble with their children.

From Mrs McConnell, Grulinn, Islay

6196/7

(translation from Gaelic)

Black Macphee of Colonsay had a fairy sweetheart and she had a family to him. Each time when she was to be on child bed, she went back to the hill; but one time, when it came upon her to go away, as was her custom, black Macphee would not let her go, and she said to him, if he would not let her go to the hill this time, as usual, the time would not be long until there would not be a man of the race of black Macphee in Colonsay: but if he would let her go, that this surname would be in the island as long as the world would last. But in spite of what she would say, he would not let her go, and did not let (her). Well, the time was not long after that until he died, and se was the last Macphee that was ever on Colonsay.

From Mr McLachlan, Gruinart, Islay (anonymous)

6230

Lights used to be seen at the old school house at Ceanndrochaid, in Islay, and the general belief among the people was that fairies were putting up there, and that the lights were theirs.

From Gilbert MacAulay, Portnahaven, Islay

6230

Mullach mòr is a peak on the hill on the farm of Lossit, in Islay. It was believed to be a fairy den, and it was said that fairies used to be seen often sporting in a glare of light that came out of the hill when it was open.

From Mrs MacTaggart, Gruinart, Islay (anonymous)

6230/1

Talking of fairies, the reciter referred to a strange character that was at one time in Islay who was know by the name of Flora na tuinne. This Flora was, it is said, very little, and unearthly looking, and the reciter says that many were under the impression that she was a fairy, or something of that kind. She was often seen during the day, but seldom at night. But one night a man was riding past Gleann MacAoidh - in those days there was no bridge on the glen - and when the horse was in the middle of the ford, it began to snort, kick and rear. The man saw nothing at first, and wondered what the horse was about, but at last, when he bent forward, and looked through between the horses two ears, he saw a little creature washing clothes.

"An tusa tha ann, a Fhloraigh?" ars esan

"S mi." Fhreagair ise.

"De tha thu deanamh an sin?"

"Tha mi glanadh eudaich. Tha mi dol gu torrath Sheumais Ic Eachern Ic Raonull."

(Is it you that is in it Flora? Said he.

It is me, she answered.

What are you doing there?

I am washing clothes. I am going to the burial of James MacEachern, Ronald's son).

From John Livingstone, Coul, Islay (anonymous)

6231/2

An Islay lad says he has often heard his grandfather, who was brought up about Portnahaven, saying that the hill down there used to be open at certain times, and fairies would be seen dancing about it. And when he left there, and came to live at Kilchomain the fairies were so numerous around there Kilchomain and Coul, that they would come into the houses, no matter how many bars would be on the doors: and at last people gave up barring their doors altogether, for it was of no use, since they would come in at any rate, and for a long time the doors all round about Kilchomain were never barred at night.

The reciter says that he believes, and many others whom he knows believe, that fairies are still in it as much as ever, but that now they cannot get above ground, and for that reason, are not now seen.

From Donald McDonald, Kilnave, Islay (anonymous)

6232

A doubt having been lastly expressed in the hearing of an old Islayman as to whether there are any fairies in existence now, he said:

"Oh yes, there are fairies still in it, but although people should see them now, they do not like to speak of them in case of being laughed at. But you know that the fairies are the evil spirits that were cast out of heaven, and they are going through the world yet."

From Mrs McConnel, Grulinn, Islay (anonymous)

6232/3

Protesting her belief in respect of the existence of fairies, an Islay woman said:

(Translated from Gaelic)

There are little people. Isn't the Bible itself telling us that when the evil spirits were cast out, some of them went into the sea, and some into the rocks, and some under the hills.

From Donald McEachern, Kildalton, Islay (anonymous)

6233/4

(Translated from Gaelic)

There were ever so many fairies about that Coul of old. There was not another place in the island where they were so plentiful. The people that were there could not put a bar on a door a night in the year, from the way they would be coming into the houses during the night. I heard about a woman that came the way one time. She was going to pass the night there. When the time came, she went to bed, she and two other women in the one bed - she in the middle, between the other two. But she got no rest the whole night with the way she was thrown from side to side of the bed: and with what she got she took her feet as soon as the day came, and she never came to the way of Coul after that.

From Crawford, Carnàn, Islay (anonymous)

6234-6

An old Islayman declared that he saw a fairy himself, and described the circumstances as follows. The description is given as nearly as possible in his own words.

(Translated from Gaelic)

When I was a fairly sized boy, I was herding in Ardnave. It was a late and dry spring, and one evening the master was in the garden, watering it, and he sent me to draw water to him, up from the little river that was under the houses. When I was down at the river, I got a stick, and I put a napkin to it for a sail, and I began to sail it on the river. The evening was calm, but a gust of wind came, pretty strong, and it capsized my boat, and when I looked up, I saw a little man standing in the passage, and him dressed with a cocked hat. He was no higher than about eight inches, and his feet were as slender as my walking stick.

The gust ceased, and the little man went out of my sight in a minute. I made up in my mind that I would not tell any person what I had seen.