

The Occult Basis of Folk Stories

Including the Fairy Story

WHAT GROWN-UP cannot look back to the keen enjoyment of folk stories and fairy stories in the days of childhood? And many are glad even in mature years of the excuse of a juvenile audience to once again live through the thrills of climbing with the hero up the glass mountain, finding the hidden jewels at the bottom of the lake, or awakening the sleeping princess. Why have these tales persisted through the centuries, becoming classics that appear in every country, clothed often in differing verbiage and with trimmings according to the customs of the country in which they are told, but always having at the heart the same idea?

To the student of occult truths the answer is evident. To him these truths project themselves out of many of the classics of all the arts: the Wagner operas; some of the Shakespeare plays; the Bible; the Hindu Puranas; the Vedas; the Greek myths; the poems of Milton, Dante, Goethe, and others; statuary, paintings, architecture, carvings; ancient hieroglyphs of Egypt; the round towers of Ireland; Druid ruins and mounds. All these are as an open book in simple language to the earnest student of the teachings as given by the Elder Brothers of the race.

Of them all the fairy story, perhaps, demands first attention, because it reaches the mind in its formative years. The fairy story, as we have it today in America, is based on remnants of folklore that can be found in every nation, civilized or barbaric.



Detail. Courtesy of the artist, Annie Lauro

Radiance

While animals in folk tales and fables frequently personify specific human qualities, the horse is often representative of intelligence due to the extension of its vital body well beyond the dense physical in the head region. The unicorn is emblematic of both sublimity and the marvelous and extraordinary in nature by virtue of its horn or clairvoyant "third eye."

The brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Anderson, and Andrew Lang have handed down to us precious truths hidden in glittering spangles that ever attract and fascinate. These writers should early have a place in the growing library of every child, and at a suitable age it should be pointed out to the child what such stories really are: not mere figments of the imagination designed solely to entertain, but caches for vital truths. This will make it easier for the child to be attracted later to the deeper philosophical teachings of mystic wisdom. It will

help safeguard it against any wave of materialism or skepticism that may come later.

Folk and fairy stories were not concocted for physical children but for mental children: children of the race; humanity when it was young. They were originally given by great spiritual leaders, who stayed close to humanity at the daybreak of mental life so that when humanity returned at sunset to its Father's house after journeying afar, it would not have found the way too hard. As these spiritual leaders retired more and more from active involvement in human affairs, the esoteric basis for folk stories was forgotten and humanity retained some fetching remnants of fantasy, for "fairy tale"

is now synonymous with what is fanciful and "make believe." Yet the sweet kernels of nourishing truth remain in the folk narrative awaiting discovery, for there are still child minds in adult bodies all over the globe, and there are adult minds in child bodies which these stories can greatly benefit by awakening and nurturing the imaginative faculty and by painting word pictures of the forgotten whole man.

"It is perpetually a truth," says Herbert Spencer, "that accumulated facts lying in disorder begin to assume some order if an hypothesis be thrown among them." This principle is followed by scientists when they have no antecedents from which to work and they wish to find a base or an underlying law. Therefore we shall be strictly scientific in applying an hypothesis to the seemingly disordered facts of folk and fairy stories to see if we can make some order out of them. In fact, we shall "throw among them" two hypotheses. Note then that they immediately begin to assume definite forms, much as do pieces of colored glass when turned in a kaleidoscope. When we have finished, we shall have a beautiful pattern, and it will order and find common terms for all these tales.

The first hypothesis is that there is a path of initiation into the spiritual mysteries of life which every human may tread, nay, must sooner or later



Illustration for *Little Red Riding Hood* in *Perrault's Fairy Realm*, Gustave Doré (1833-1883)

A muted version of the demonic or evil is embodied in the wolf whose wiles (posing as grandmother or sheep or even guardian angel) may deceive the ignorant.

seek, or be left behind; that the treading of this path from the very entrance is fraught with tests and disciplines and overcomings and glorious renunciations and sacrifices—with growth as reward at every successful step of the way. It is the Father's way of bringing His children home to Him, rich in understanding of others because of their own experiences, so that they may help the backward ones.

This hypothesis of initiation runs through all folk stories, no matter in what country or language they appear, regardless of minor interpolations and additions. In the tales we clearly see an outline of a traveler on this path of initiation and the vicissitudes that beset him on that path; the temptations; the struggles in darkness with the goal at times indiscernible or seemingly forgotten; the illusions of the lower mind and the senses, which beckon as traitorous wills-o'-the-wisp to deflect the traveler from the narrow and rugged path of his choice.

The soul itself is this traveler. True, all will in time reach the Father's house and journey on with Him to other lands, but it ordinarily takes aeons of time. Those who elect to complete the journey in a very much shorter time are said to be traveling the path of initiation. They are able to reach out a hand and help those who may be lost on the longer,

darker journey. Some who start on this “straight and narrow path,” as Jesus called it, grow weak and fall back; but those who persist past a certain point begin to see afar off a dim, shadowy radiance that presages a brilliance, an effulgence, that they must at all hazards reach. Many of us have taken some of the minor initiations, returning again and again to continue the journey after the rest between efforts when we paused to assimilate our successes and make provisions for overcoming the failures.

Symbols, the visible figures for invisible facts, occur again and again in folk and fairy stories, just as they do in the Bible and the Scriptures of all other root religions. They constitute a regular code, so that the reader with the key may open the inner, secret meaning. Material objects frequently used in a symbolic sense include water, symbolical of the desire nature; material riches, denoting the physical nature; the stepmother and sometimes the witch (the latter even occurring in the Bible), who hamper and restrict the neophyte until he overcomes them. They designate the restrictions of destiny, the debt under natural law, the debit account which must be balanced, whether the account was opened in this incarnation or a past one.

The good fairy is benefic destiny, although we know that even our so-called malefic destiny is, after all, merely a prod to push us on to the right way and so is really benefic. But the good fairy is our credit side of the account, and appears often to get us out of a tight place, just as she does in the fairy stories. Then there are the three and sometimes seven brothers (or sisters). These symbolize the (three) physical, desire, and mental natures or bodies, and the seven sheaths of the ego or the seven planes which it must master. The marriage with the prince or princess describes the union of the lower with the higher self.

Recall in Christian scriptures the account of the marriage of Cana and the turning of water into wine. Recall also Aladdin’s lamp and the statement of the Christ that if the eye be single, the whole body will be full of light. Truly, when the single eye in the center of the head is lighted with the oil of transmuted sex force, one can be transported where he will, and great riches are his—soul riches.

Many tales recount the three or seven difficult



Illustration for *The Sleeping Beauty* in Perrault's *Fairy Realm*, Gustave Doré (1833-1883)

The old woman (witch), the folk form of a recording angel, weaves a record of our acts which bind us to a self-created destiny (karma) from which we awake through self-overcoming.

tasks to be performed before the candidate can receive the reward. These appear to symbolize certain stages on the path of initiation. There is also frequent mention of shoes and boots and feet and footsteps, as Hop O’ My Thumb’s seven league boots and Cinderella’s slipper. In the Bible we find Jesus washing the feet of the disciples, an act of lowly service, also the caution to remove the sandals when on holy ground. The astrological student and the Mason should both readily recognize this symbol but, alas, they seldom do. This foot and shoe symbol is an intensely interesting and important one. In one sense it may be taken as the symbol of service; lowly offerings to humankind without material return. Service is the first step on the path; it opens the door to it.

In this brief catalogue of symbols let us not forget the tree which appears in so many wonder tales, also in the Bible. There is the tree from which Cinderella asked her father to bring her a sprig, to which she prayed in secret three times a

day. Other tree symbols are the great forest which swallowed up Hansel and Gretel, the Babes in the Wood; the marvelous bean stalk up which Jack climbed to slay the giant (his lower nature); the single tree that sang to the orphaned girl; the vineyard mentioned by the Christ; the tree in the garden of Eden; the tree of life; the tree of wisdom—wisdom culled from the experiences of many lives stored in the tree of the physical body, whose trunk is the spine and whose branches are the brain and nervous system.

Consider the fish, birds, and serpents that appear again and again in both the religious and secular allusions to the human body. We find the bird sym-

When we experience difficulties, seemingly through the acts of another, it is because we have earned it, and that other is simply the means by which we receive our due.

bol in the cultural imaginations of all peoples, from the Aztec and Toltec ruins of South and Central America, among native North Americans as far as Alaska, as well as in Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia. The form varies from the crudest rock carving to the skilled artistry on the effigy of the Egyptian initiate, which bears the serpent, symbol of the creative or sex force, and the falcon, whose soaring flight indicates that the wearer had soared above the limitations of the serpent; in other words, he had raised the creative force up and used its oil to light the lamp in the upper chamber, thus producing true or positive clairvoyance.

The story of Cinderella and the Glass Slipper clearly presents the initiation story and will serve to illustrate our first hypothesis. Cinderella, the soul on the path, is relegated to a lowly position of servitude and abuse by the stepmother, necessity, while the two sisters, the physical and desire natures, torment her. Her father, the source of the soul, promises her a gift as he leaves for a journey. While the two sisters crave material riches, Cinderella asks that her father bring her a sprig

from the first tree that brushes his head. Thus she prays for wisdom to guide her rather than for material riches for the lower nature. She chooses the more permanent riches of the higher life, enduring the taunts and derision of her sisters for so doing. On receiving the bough she visits it in secret three times a day and asks it to rain down on her the necessary patience and wisdom; the latter being the wisdom from many past lives stored-up in the treasure house of the soul.

Here are shown the three stages on the path, and note that they are secret, as are ever the journeying and promotions of a candidate. He does not proclaim his mission to the world except in very rare instances when he has been chosen to carry to the world a light from the Elder Brothers, but he stands out in an unmistakable way and bears every evidence of having support back of him. He seeks no glory or power. He is in the world, patient and tolerant and understanding of it, but not of it. He has a goal and he knows it, while others do not. This would be symbolized by Cinderella's secret comings and goings to the ball, made possible by her fairy godmother, her benefic destiny.

Then we see the setback. On the third night she disobeys and overstays her time (many a candidate on the path has stumbled at the third initiation, through disobedience to his own higher self). But it was the slipper, the symbol of service, that eventually united her to the prince, the higher self. Service heaped high balanced the mistake of a later time. The slipper would fit none other than its owner, because one cannot possibly reap the reward of another, be that reward painful or pleasant. When we experience difficulties, seemingly through the acts of another, it is because we have earned it, and that other is simply the means by which we receive our due.

Over the centuries of telling this tale, like many others, has been embellished by accounts of the activities of nature spirits or elementals. Their antics add zest and virility to the tale, insuring its longevity. This brings us to our second hypothesis, namely, that the invisible world around us is peopled with invisible creatures, most commonly called fairies. Accounts of the pranks and aid rendered by these invisible creatures appear in the

myths, tales, and fables of all nations. We know them by many names, the most familiar being elves, trolls, fays, goblins, nixies, banshees, moss people, and little people. They have even crept into American literature in the very popular form of Palmer Cox's *brownies* and Rose O'Neill's *kewpies*. In the Jewish Kabala nature spirits were known under the general name of *shedim* and *klippoth*, and were divided into four classes. The Persians called them *devs*, the Greeks *demons*, and the Egyptians *afrites*.

Iamblichus, the great theurgist of the Neoplatonic school, taught that nature spirits appear to us in reality. Many poets mention them, including: Longfellow, the initiate who wrote the Shakespeare plays, and William Bulter Yeats. Yeats divides them into three classes: the evil forces or dark folk; the elementals, who have no sense of right or wrong—no moral nature as we would say; and the angels or devas. Many of the Irish see them quite commonly; the man in the throes of delirium tremens sees the most terrible of them as his alcohol exhalations attract the lowest; and many children see them, but are soon ridiculed into dismissing and forgetting them.

Many are quick to deny what they do not understand and maintain there can be no such thing, while with the next breath they speak of the handiwork or grandeur of nature. But what do we mean when we say nature? We mean the myriad manifestations of God working in His universe. And how is that work accomplished? The God of all has below Him a vast graded hierarchy to execute His law: cherubim and seraphim, elohim, archangels, and angels; hosts of shining ones, grade upon grade of messengers, from lofty and inconceivably glorious Beings down to tiny nature spirits that organize the elements around us. All live and advance their evolution through taking part in the execution of cosmic tasks and the administration of divine justice. They obey our thoughts, whether constructive or destructive, for it is a law that man is the ruler of his own destiny. Thus when he thinks destructively, he summons these elemental forces of destruction and they obligingly destroy his health, success, happiness, and hope, until the very agony of their summoned torments goads him to change his men-



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From Manly Hall's *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*.

Magician Invoking Elementals

Standing in his four-tiered magic circle, the magician summons the fashioners of nature's forms from their respective four elemental habitats: gnomes from the earth, undines from water, salamanders from fire, and sylphs from the air.

tal patterns and call by thoughts of kindness, amity, patience and forgiveness the agents of constructive forces. Thus does even destruction clear the way for mighty building, and all is good after all.

These elemental forces gather up our unuttered prayers, which all acts of service are, and carry them to the Throne of Grace, whence they return to us as showers of blessings. Or, as the result of thoughts of anger, unkind criticism, or injurious actions, these beings return our expressions in kind and we are plunged into the depths of sorrow. They are the keepers of life's records; it is they who write our names in the *Great Book*; they guide us

to the nation, race, and family of our earning; they stir up cyclones and floods, build mighty oaks and design velvety pansies. They translate our negativity into pests and vermin which prey upon us—all strictly upon our own orders.

The fairies in the Cinderella tale are of a lesser order, evolving creatures with a definite place in the economy of the universe with a definite goal ahead of them. They never become human, although in the exquisitely beautiful story called “Undine” that does happen. This classic from the German was filmed some years ago, and the wonder is that more of the fairy stories of this sort are not shown instead of repugnant sex dramas. But people get what they ask for.

Nature spirits may be divided into four classes, one assigned to each of the four *elements*. Gnomes work in the earth or soil, forming rocks, alloying metals, and crafting precious stones. They shape mountains and plains, shore lines and deserts. Undines live in every drop of water and account for all watery phenomena, be it a tidal

wave, rain, or dew. Sylphs, said to be the most powerful nature spirits, disport themselves in a gentle, cooling zephyr or a sudden devastating tornado. They are sculptors of air, be it jet stream or ephemeral puff. Salamanders are custodians and builders of flame and fire, be it lightning or Vulcan’s furnace. Each of these classes is presided over by devas or angels. It is to these beings that one addresses requests for rain or an abatement of the wind.

Materialism and skepticism have blunted modern sensibilities to the finer vibrations of the etheric dimension and its denizens. It is impossible to satisfy the demand of the “prove-it-to-me” mentality, since it lacks and scorns the existence of the perceptual refinement that makes the elemental world and the higher worlds evident. Patience, poise, and a turning of the consciousness inward will prove these things to each in their time, as they elect. On the occult path all proof is personal only. □

—Amelia Brooks Chase

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