

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen  
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo  
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm  
Garnett Engels Schiller Byron Maupassant Schiller  
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka  
Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall Willis  
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle  
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche  
Stockton Turgenev Balzac  
Burroughs Vatsyayana Crane  
Curtis Tocqueville Verne  
Homer Tolstoy Gogol Busch  
Darwin Thoreau Twain  
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott  
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Burton Harte  
Andersen London Descartes Cervantes Voltaire Hesse  
Poe Aristotle Wells Bunner Shakespeare Cooke  
Richter Chekhov Chambers Irving  
Doré Dante Shaw Wodehouse  
Swift Pushkin Alcott  
Newton



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# **Fians, Fairies and Picts**

David MacRitchie

# Imprint

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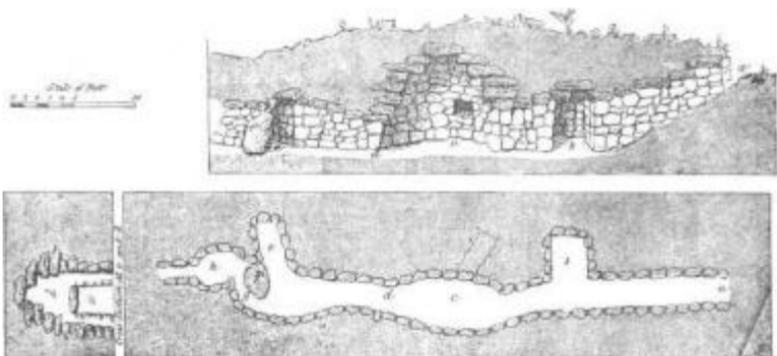


PLATE I.

SELECTIONAL VIEW AND GROUND PLAN OF UNDER-  
GROUND GALLERY, CALLED *UAMH SGALABHAD*, NEAR MOL  
A DEAS, HUISHNISH, ISLAND OF SOUTH UIST.

*Frontispiece.*



**FIANS, FAIRIES  
AND  
PICTS**

**BY**

**DAVID MacRITCHIE**

"Sometimes ... it seems that the stones are really speaking—speaking of the old things, of the time when the strange fishes and animals lived that are turned into stone now, and the lakes were here; and then of the time when the little Bushmen lived here, so small and so ugly, and used to sleep in the wild dog holes, and in the 'sloots,' and eat snakes, and shoot the bucks with their poisoned arrows ... Now the Boers have shot them all, so that we never see a little yellow face peeping out among the stones ... And the wild bucks have gone, and those days, and we are here."—Waldo, in *The Story of an African Farm*.

**WITH ILLUSTRATIONS**



## INTRODUCTION.

The following treatise is to some extent a re-statement and partly an amplification of a theory I have elsewhere advanced. [1] But as that theory, although it has been advocated by several writers, especially during the past half-century, is not familiar to everybody, some remarks of an explanatory nature are necessary. And if this explanation assumes a narrative form, not without a tinge of autobiography, it is because this seems the most convenient way of stating the case.

It is now a dozen years or thereabouts since I first read the "Popular Tales of the West Highlands," by Mr. J.F. Campbell, otherwise known by his courtesy-title of "Campbell of Islay." Mr. Campbell was, as many people know, a Highland gentleman of good family, who devoted much of his time to collecting and studying the oral traditions of his own district and of many lands. His equipment as a student of West Highland folklore was unique. He had the necessary [Pg vi] knowledge of Gaelic, the hereditary connection with the district which made him at home with the poorest peasant, and the sympathetic nature which proved a master-key in opening the storehouse of inherited belief. It is not likely that another Campbell of Islay will arise, and, indeed, in these days of decaying tradition, he would be born too late.

In reading his book, then, for the first time, what impressed me more than anything else in his pages were statements such as the following:—

"The ancient Gauls wore helmets which represented beasts. The enchanted king's sons, when they come home to their dwellings, put off *cochal* [a Gaelic word signifying], the husk, and become men; and when they go out they resume the *cochal*, and become animals of various kinds. May this not mean that they put on their armour? They marry a plurality of wives in many stories. In short, the enchanted warriors are, as I verily believe, nothing but real men, and their manners real manners, seen through a haze of centuries.... I do not mean that the tales date from any particular period, but that traces of all periods may be found in them— that various actors have played the same parts time out of mind, and that their manners and

customs are all mixed together, and truly, though confusedly, represented—that giants and fairies and enchanted princes were men ... that tales are but garbled popular history, of a long journey through forests and wilds, inhabited by savages and wild beasts; of events that occurred on the way from east to west, in the year of grace, once upon a time" (I. cxv.-cxvi.). "The [Pg vii] Highland giants were not so big but that their conquerors wore their clothes; they were not so strong that men could not beat them, even by wrestling. They were not quite savages; for though some lived in caves, others had houses and cattle and hoards of spoil" (I. xcix.). "And though I do not myself believe that fairies *are* ... I believe there once was a small race of people in these islands, who are remembered as fairies, for the fairy belief is not confined to the Highlanders of Scotland" (I. c.) "This class of stories is so widely spread, so matter-of-fact, hangs so well together, and is so implicitly believed all over the United Kingdom, that I am persuaded of the former existence of a race of men in these islands who were smaller in stature than the Celts; who used stone arrows, lived in conical mounds like the Lapps, knew some mechanical arts, pilfered goods and stole children; and were perhaps contemporary with some species of wild cattle and horses and great auks, which frequented marshy ground, and are now remembered as water-bulls and water-horses, and boobries, and such like impossible creatures" (IV. 344).

And much more to the same effect, [2] with which it is unnecessary to trouble the reader. Now, all this was quite new to me. If I had ever given a second thought to the so-called "supernatural" beings of tradition, it was only to dismiss them, in the conventional manner as creatures of the imagination. But these ideas of Mr. Campbell's were decidedly interesting, and deserving of consideration. It was obvious that tradition, especially where there had been an intermixture of races, could not preserve one clear, unblemished record of the past; and this he fully recognised. But it seemed equally obvious that the "matter-of-fact" element to which he refers could not have owed its origin to myth or fancy. The question being fascinating, there was therefore no alternative but to make further inquiry. And the more it was considered, the more did his theory proclaim its reasonableness. He suggests, for example, that certain "fairy herds" in Sutherlandshire were probably reindeer,

that the "fairies" who milked those reindeer were probably of the same race as Lapps, and that not unlikely they were the people historically known as Picts. The fact that Picts once occupied northern Scotland formed no obstacle to his theory. And when I learned that the reindeer was hunted in that part of Scotland as recently as the twelfth century, that remains of reindeer horns are still to be found in the counties of Sutherland, Ross, and Caithness, sometimes in the very structures ascribed to the Picts, then I perceived this to be a theory which, to quote his words, "hung well together." Further, the actual Lapps are a small-statured race, the fairies also were so described, and this, too, I found to be the traditional idea regarding the Picts. Here the identification was closer still. [Pg ix] Then came the consideration: The fairies lived in hollow hillocks and under the ground: what kind of dwellings are the Picts supposed to have occupied? The answer to this question still further strengthened Mr. Campbell's conjecture. There yet exist numerous underground structures and artificial mounds whose interior shows them to have been dwelling-places; and these are in some places known as "fairy halls" and in others as "Picts' houses." (Illustrations of these are shown in the present volume, and are specially referred to in the annexed paper.)

The examination, therefore, of this interesting theory not only helped greatly to bear out its probable correctness, but it further began to appear that by following this method of inquiry new lights might be thrown upon history — perhaps upon very remote history. It was clear that the question was not a simple one. All tradition is obscured by the darkness of time, and genuine fact is mixed up with ideas which belong to the world of religion and of myth. Even in Mr. Campbell's own statements there were seeming contradictions. These, however, it is not my present purpose to discuss; since they do not vitally affect his main contention.

The Lapp-Dwarf parallel was gone into very fully by Professor Nilsson in his *Primitive Inhabitants of Scandinavia*, written twenty years before the "West [Pg x] Highland Tales." Not that he, either, was the originator of that theory, for it is frequently referred to by Sir Walter Scott, who accepted it himself. [3] "In fact," he says, "there seems reason to conclude that these *duergar* [in English, *dwarfs*] were originally nothing else than the diminutive natives of the Lappish,

Lettish and Finnish nations, who, flying before the conquering weapons of the Asae, sought the most retired regions of the north, and there endeavoured to hide themselves from their eastern invaders." Scott, again, refers us back to Einar Gudmund, an Icelandic writer of the second half of the sixteenth century, whom I would cite as the earliest "Euhemerus" of northern lands, were it not for the fact that he is obviously much more than a theorist, and is beyond all doubt speaking of an actual race, as may be seen from an incident which he relates.

But, although the popular memory may retain for many centuries the impress of historical facts, these become inevitably blurred and modified by the lapse of time and the ignorance of the very people who preserve the tradition. As an illustration of this, I may cite the instance of the dwarfs of Yesso, referred to in the following pages. These people still survived [Pg xi] as a separate community until the first half of the seventeenth century, if not later. They occupied semi-subterranean or "pit" dwellings, and are said to have been under four feet in height. But, although the modern inhabitants of that island still describe them, on the whole, in these terms, a new belief regarding them has recently sprouted up in one corner. The Aïno word signifying "pit-dweller" is also not unlike the word for a burdock leaf. It was known that those dwarfs were little people. Obviously, then, their name must have meant "people living under burdock leaves" (instead of "in pits"). And so, to some of the modern natives of Yesso, those historical dwarfs of the seventeenth century "were so small that if caught in a shower of rain or attacked by an enemy, they would stand beneath a burdock leaf for shelter, or flee thither to hide." [4]

In that instance, we see before our eyes the whole process by which a real race has been transformed into an unreal impossibility, within a period of two centuries or so. Had the extinction (or modification by inter-marriage or by the processes of evolution) of those [Pg xii] Yesso dwarfs taken place a thousand years earlier, the difficulty of identifying them would have been greatly increased. After a race has once disappeared from sight, the popular terms describing it must become more vague and confused with every century. Thus, in a certain traditional Scotch story there is mention of a number of "little black creatures with spades." The description is delightfully

comprehensive. It would be quite applicable to a gang of Andaman coolies. On the other hand, if we exclude the "spades," it might be applied to any "little black creatures"—say a colony of tadpoles or of black-beetles. So that, when a poet or an artist gets hold of a tradition which has reached this stage of uncertainty, he may give the reins to his fancy, so long as he portrays some kind—any kind—of "little black creatures." [5]

Before parting altogether from the Yesso dwarfs, notice may be taken of a folk-tale containing an [Pg xiii] incident which obviously derives its existence from them, or from a branch of their race. In Mr. Andrew Lang's "Green Fairy Book" there is introduced a certain Chinese "Story of Hok Lee and the Dwarfs." It appears to be also current in Japan, to judge from a reviewer's remark, that "the clever artist who has illustrated the book must have known the Japanese story, for he gets some of his ideas from the Japanese picture-maker." In the story of Hok Lee the dwarfs are represented as living in subterranean dwellings, and in the picture they are portrayed as half-naked, with (for the most part) shaggy beards and eyebrows, and bald heads. It is wonderfully near the truth. The baldness is one of the most striking characteristics of those actual dwarfs, and is caused by a certain skin-disease, induced by their dirty habits, from which a great number of them suffer, or did suffer. The shaggy beards and eyebrows are equally characteristic of the race; and their custom of occupying half-underground dwellings has given them the name by which they are remembered in Japan at the present day. The exact scene of the story is a matter of minor importance. Those people appear to have been known to the Chinese for at least twelve centuries, and to the Japanese for a much longer period. Thus, it was quite unnecessary for any novelist in China or Japan to *invent* such people, since they already existed. As for [Pg xiv] the details of that particular story, or of any other of the kind, it is not to be supposed that a belief in its historical basis necessarily implies an acceptance of every statement contained in it. On this principle, one would be bound to accept the truth of every "snake-story," for the simple reason that one believed in the existence of snakes. Still, it is possible, and perhaps not improbable, that tales which preserve the memory of those people, may also be fairly accurate in many of the statements made regarding them. The reason, however, of introduc-

ing this particular story is to show that the Chinese or Japanese romancer did not require to *create* a race of bald-headed, shaggy, half-wild dwarfs, seeing that that had already been done for him by the Creator.

Those to whom this question is a new one will now see what is the point of view of the realist or euhemerist with regard to such traditions. He sees here and there in the past, through much intervening mist, something that looks like a real object, and he tries to define its outlines. He has no intention of denying, as some have vainly imagined, that there *is* an intervening mist. Nor, it seems necessary to explain, does he assume that wherever there is a mist there must be some tangible object behind it. For example, he does not believe that Boreas, or Zephyrus, or Jack Frost were ever anything but personifications of certain natural forces. [Pg xv]

Various other considerations have also to be borne in mind; not the least important of which is the fact that the very people who have preserved these traditional beliefs have done much to obscure them, owing to their want of education. Scott tells a story of a Scotch peasant who, discovering a company of gaily-dressed puppets standing in a thicket, where they had been concealed by a travelling showman, at once concluded that they were "fairies." He had inherited the belief that fairies were "little people" who frequented just such places as this; consequently, he decided these were fairies. This fact was elicited in court, where the countryman had to appear as a witness. From that time onward his mind ought to have been disabused of his hasty belief. But a man so stupid as to assume that a showman's marionettes were anything else than lifeless dolls, might continue for the rest of his life to recount his marvellous meeting with "the fairies." Similarly, to a tipsy man returning homeward from market, many common and every-day objects take on a weird and superhuman aspect, due to no other spirits than those he has consumed. From this cause, a large number of odd stories (such as one told by Mr. William Black of a tipsy Hebridean) has doubtless arisen. Further, the belief in the existence of "supernatural" beings has been much utilised by rustic humourists, and no doubt also by smugglers and [Pg xvi] other night-birds, in comparatively recent times. The prolonged absence of a husband, or it may be of a wife, could be explained by some wild legend of having been

"stolen by the fairies," when a more frank avowal dared not be offered. And although "strange tales were told" regarding the paternity of "Brian," in *The Lady of the Lake*, and although Scott adheres to those legends in his poem, he does not fail to point out in his appended *Note* that the story could be explained in a much more rational manner. There have been many "Brians."

To give this subject the special attention which it deserves would, however, swell these introductory notes to an intolerable size; and, indeed, their purpose is rather to show what the euhemeristic theory is than what it is not; that is to say, the euhemeristic theory as applied to the traditions relating to dwarf races.

In the work to which I have referred, the opinions enunciated by Professor Nilsson and Mr. J.F. Campbell, together with other developments which suggested themselves to me, were duly set forth, and were received, as was to be expected, with every form of comment, from complete approval to entire dissent. Among the adverse criticisms, some arose from a misapprehension of the case, while others were due to the critic's imperfect acquaintance with the subject he professed to discuss. But besides these, there were of [Pg xvii] course the legitimate objections which can always be urged in matters of a debateable character, where there is no positive evidence on either side. With regard to such I can at least echo the words of one of the most eminent and most courteous of my opponents, M. Charles Ploix, and say for euhemerism what he says for naturalism:—"Tant que la théorie sur laquelle il s'appuie n'aura pas été démontrée fautive par des arguments décisifs, et surtout tant qu'elle n'aura pas été remplacée par une hypothèse plus certaine, il pourra continuer à s'affirmer." [6]

It ought to be mentioned that the following paper was written for the Folk-Lore Society, at one of whose meetings (in February 1892) it was subsequently read. As, however, the Council of that Society ultimately decided that the paper was unsuited for publication in a journal devoted to the study of folk-lore, it now appears in a separate form. One advantage to be derived from this is that the illustrations which accompanied the lecture, and which are of much importance in enabling one to understand the argument, can also be reproduced at the same time. It may be added that, while the theme

is capable of much amplification, [7] have preferred to print the paper [Pg xviii] as it was written for the occasion referred to. It states, concisely enough, the leading points of the argument.

To those who are interested in the "realistic" interpretation of such traditions, I beg to recommend for reference the following works:—First and foremost, there is "The Anatomy of a Pygmie," by Dr. Edward Tyson (London, 1699), a book full of suggestive notices. This author has undoubtedly reached the "bed-rock" of the question; but, owing to his era and mental environment, he has not realised that his argument is useless without a consideration of the various stratifications above the "bed-rock." Belonging to the same century is the chapter "Of Pigmies" in Sir Thomas Browne's "Vulgar Errors," wherein he makes several very interesting statements, although he argues from the opposite side. Scattered throughout the writings of Sir Walter Scott, both poetry and prose, there are also many references bearing upon this question, from the realistic point of view. In addition to these, there is his well-known treatise "On the Fairies of Popular Superstition," prefaced to "The Tale of Tam-lane," wherein he states that "the most distinct account of the duergar [*i.e.* dwergs, or dwarfs], or elves, and their attributes, is to be found in a preface of [Pg xix] Torfæus to the history of Hrolf Kraka [Copenhagen, 1715], who cites a dissertation by Einar Gudmund, a learned native of Iceland. 'I am firmly of opinion,' says the Iceland, 'that these beings are creatures of God, consisting, like human beings, of a body and rational soul; that they are of different sexes, and capable of producing children, and subject to all human affections, as sleeping and waking, laughing and crying, poverty and wealth; and that they possess cattle and other effects, and are obnoxious to death, like other mortals.' He proceeds to state that the females of this race are capable of procreating with mankind; [8] and gives an account of one who bore a child to an inhabitant of Iceland, for whom she claimed the privilege of baptism; depositing the infant for that purpose at the gate of the churchyard, together with a goblet of gold as an offering." [9] Scott further cites from Jessen's *De Lapponibus* similar matter-of-fact details obtained on this subject from the Lapps; who, on their own showing, are inferentially the half-bred descendants of dwarfs. [Pg xx]

"That some of the myths of giants and dwarfs are connected with traditions of real indigenous or hostile tribes is settled beyond question by the evidence brought forward by Grimm, Nilsson, and Hanusch," observes Dr. E.B. Tylor. [10] And although that eminent anthropologist sees a different meaning in many kindred traditions, yet his observations, and the great mass of references which he gives in connection with this single detail, are of much interest to euhemerists pure and simple. The late Sir Daniel Wilson's "Caliban" [11] teems with the realistic doctrine, and so also does a work of (in my opinion) less equal merit, "The Pedigree of the Devil," [12] by Mr. Frederic T. Hall. In Mr. R.G. Haliburton's "Dwarfs of Mount Atlas: with notes as to Dwarfs and Dwarf Worship," [13] and also in his "Further Notes" [14] on that subject, the same idea is prominent. All of these writers, with the exception of Sir Thomas Browne (and excluding Dr. Tylor in so far as regards some of his deductions), refer practically, though in varying degrees, to the question discussed by Tyson; and in this respect I must also cite my recent work on "The [Pg xxi] Ainos" (pp. 51-66). Of other writers who have not probed quite so deeply, and who possibly may not recognise the necessity for so doing, but who are realists nevertheless, the following may be mentioned: M. Paul Monceaux, who, in the *Revue Historique* of October 1891, deals with the African dwarfs of ancient and modern writers; [15] Professor Henri van Elven, the main theme of whose forthcoming work, *Les Nains préhistoriques de l'Europe Occidentale*, formed the subject of a paper recently read by him before the *Société d'Archéologie de Bruxelles*; and MM. Grandgagnage and De Reul, cited by Mr. C. Carter Blake, F.G.S., in connection with the *Nutons* of the Belgian bone-caves; [16] as also another writer of the Low Countries, Van den Bergh ("xxx. and 313"), whom Mr. J. Dirks quotes at p. 15 of his *Heidens of Egyptiërs*, Utrecht, 1850. In Mr. W.G. Black's charming book on Heligoland, [17] one passage (p. 72) recognises that a certain Sylt tradition "is evidently one of those valuable legends which illuminate dark pages of history. It clearly bears [Pg xxii] testimony to the same small race having inhabited Friesland in times which we trace in the caves of the Neolithic age, and of which the Esquimaux are the only survivors." For many of the kindred traditions in that locality, one cannot do better than refer to Mr. Christian Jensen's *Zwergsagen aus Nordfriesland*, contributed to the *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde* (Berlin, Heft 4, 1892).

[The foregoing pages were all in type before the appearance of Vol. VIII. of the *Bibliothèque de Carabas*, which contains several criticisms by Mr. Andrew Lang on my "Testimony of Tradition" and "Underground Life." The already excessive length of this Introduction prevents me from now referring more particularly to these observations, as I should otherwise have done. In the meantime, however, I beg to refer Mr. Lang to the present work, and to ask him whether he thinks the statements there quoted substantiate his conception of the *Fir Sidhe* as a deathless people, occupying some region "unknown of earth."

An addition to the Bibliography of this subject is made in the above-named volume (p. 88). "In his *Scottish Scenery* (1803), Dr. Cririe suggests that the germ of the Fairy myth is the existence of dispossessed aboriginals dwelling in subterranean houses, in some places called Picts' houses, covered with artificial mounds. The lights seen near the mounds are lights actually carried by the mound-dwellers." Mr. Lang adds: "Dr. Cririe works out in some detail 'this marvellously absurd supposition,' as the *Quarterly Review* calls it (vol. lix. p. 280)."]

[1] *The Testimony of Tradition*. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., London, 1890.

[2] Such as at pp. ci.-cix. of Vol. I., and pp. 46, 101, and 275 of Vol. II.

[3] Scott, however, had only imperfectly grasped this idea. In numerous passages he inconsistently refers to "the little people" as purely the creatures of imagination.

[4] A description of those dwarfs, obtained from Japanese records and pictures, may be seen in my monograph on "The Aïnos" (Supplement to Vol. IV. of the *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie*, Leiden, 1892). Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., London.

[5] Similarly, the "little Bushmen" referred to by Miss Olive Schreiner's *Waldo* (as quoted by me on the title-page) would be remembered with as much uncertainty a century hence if the modern population of South Africa had nothing but tradition to depend upon. (It may be explained, in case of misapprehension on the part of any too-literal reader, that that quotation is not supposed to

prove that the earth-dwellers of the Hebrides were small and ugly, with "little yellow faces," any more than it proves the reindeer of Scotland to have been identical with the wild buck of South Africa. But the cases are analogous, and the quotation seems à propos.)

[6] *Le Surnaturel dans les Contes Populaires*, Paris, 1891, p. iv.

[7] Some portions of it I have already amplified: in a pamphlet entitled "The Underground Life," Edinburgh, 1892 (privately printed); in a paper on "Subterranean Dwellings," contributed to *The Antiquary* (London: Elliot Stock) of August 1892; and at pp. 52-58 of "The Ainos," previously quoted.

[8] By "mankind" need only be understood the race to which Einar Gudmund belonged. It is well known that many races apply the term "men" to themselves alone. At the same time, Gudmund's words may denote a very marked difference in the two types.

[9] Scott again quotes this story, in fuller detail, in the Appendix to *The Lady of the Lake*, Note 3 C.

[10] "Primitive Culture," vol. i. p. 385 (3rd edition).

[11] London, Macmillan and Co., 1873.

[12] London, Trübner and Co., 1883.

[13] London, David Nutt, 1891.

[14] *Asiatic Quarterly Review*, July 1892.

[15] For an exhaustive account of "The Pygmy Tribes of Africa," treated from the purely scientific and ethnological point of view see Dr. Henry Schlichter's articles in *The Scottish Geographical Magazine* of June and July 1892.

[16] *Memoirs of the Anthropological Society of London*, vol. iii. 1870, pp. 320, 321.

[17] Blackwood and Sons, 1888.

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