

fellow was William Butterfield. Besides, often and often as he told the story, he never altered it one bit."

"And he told it to you yourself?"

"Ay; I remember the day quite well. We were sitting on the bench outside the public-house door—he never went inside; he said all the beer in the world was not worth a glass of the Wells waters. I was a boy, but a big-gish boy—old enough to like the company of my elders and betters, and I used to go about a good deal with this William Butterfield, who had such a lot of queer stories to tell, especially about his Wells, of which he was very proud."

(Here I ought to explain that "the Wells" are the principal feature of the village where John lives, which they are fast changing from a village into a flourishing town.)

"And it was at the Wells," John continued, "that he saw, or fancied he saw, the fairies."

"Do tell me all about it," I asked eagerly; and John told me. I wish I could give anything like the graphic words in which he did so; but as I cannot, I had better give it in my own.

The Wells were originally a moorland spring on the hill-side, supposed to have some medicinal properties, but at any rate producing an unlimited supply of very pure and delicious water. Over them is now erected a handsome building, and outside there are benches where people may sit about and admire the view up and down the dale, one of the finest in Yorkshire. But in John's boyhood the Wells were left open to the sky—the spring being merely led into a reservoir, which was enclosed by a circular wall, eight feet high, and used as a sort of bath.

This bath was entered by a small door, of which William Butterfield kept the key. It was his business to lock it up the last thing at night, and go back to open it the first thing in the morning. He did this day after day, and year after year, without seeing anything until one midsummer morning.

I inquired particularly, and found out from John without telling him the reason why—the fact that it *was* upon midsummer morning, and just before dawn. Which was a curious coincidence, as I am certain neither my friend John nor William Butterfield had the slightest idea that St. John's Eve—or the night before Midsummer-day—and the magic hour "between the night and the day," is, according to all popular superstition, the favourite time when the fairies are abroad, and disposed to make themselves visible.

William Butterfield got up that morning, he declared, no more expecting to see anything "queer" than on any other morning.

He had gone to bed at his usual hour, and rose as usual, perfectly sober and cool-headed; climbing the steep ascent of the moor with active feet, and noticing nothing in particular, except that it was a very fine midsummer morning, cool, grey, and still, for the sun was not up, and the only sound along the hill-side was the cry of one solitary cuckoo in the distance; it being so early that no other birds were awake.

Butterfield thought he had made some mistake as to the hour; however, it mattered little, so he went cheerfully on his way, and coming to the circular wall, drew his big key out of his pocket, trying to open the door. But there was something "uncanny" about it; it refused to be unlocked—or rather the key turned round and round in the key-hole quite easily, but the door stuck fast. As often as he tried to push it open, it was pushed back again from inside; and he fancied he heard within the enclosure a rushing and a scrambling, as if of a troop of rabbits or rats, accompanied by a noise not unlike children's laughter, only it was such very shrill thin laughter, as if the children had been tiny babies, except that new-born babies never laughed; which William Butterfield, who had one of his own at home, was well aware of.

At last, with one steady push, he forced the door open, and then—what do you think he saw?

I repeat I do not expect *you* to believe the story, but he believed it, and kept firm in his belief as long as he lived.

All over the well, skimming on its surface like water-spiders, or dipping into it as if they were taking a bath, was a swarm of little people, the biggest of them not above eighteen inches high; yet they seemed perfect human beings. They bathed with all their clothes on; and Butterfield noticed that they were dressed from head to foot in green—as green as the colour of grasshoppers. There was such a quantity of them, and they were so agile, and lively, and frolicsome, that he felt he might as soon have tried to catch them as if they had been a swarm of may-flies or a shoal of minnows. He only stood and stared in mute amazement, though not exactly afraid; indeed he was not the sort of young man to be afraid. Only bad men are cowards, and Butterfield was a very good fellow in his way.

So he stood and stared, he could hardly tell how long, for his tongue seemed frozen to the roof of his mouth. At last, with a very great effort, he called out, "Hallo there!" in his blunt Yorkshire way, it being the only thing he could find to say.