

Immediately the little people began to "squittle" off, just like minnows when you throw a stone in among them. They went tumbling and scrambling, head over heels and heels over head; indeed their limbs seemed made of india-rubber, and they bounded over the eight-foot wall like so many india-rubber balls; not in silence, however, but with such a great buzzing and humming, like a swarm of gigantic bluebottle flies, that they quite confused Butterfield's faculties. He stood gaping at them, he declared, "like a big fool," making no attempt to catch them, until they had all disappeared, one after the other, over the high wall, leaving the water empty.

Then he came to his sober senses, and rushed out to the door, and looked in every direction up and down the hill-side. But there was nothing to be seen, except a great stirring among the bracken—which was growing tall and green—as if a troop of hares or rabbits, or some such small animals, were scampering through it. And while he stood watching, and thinking what a stupid ass he had been, the big, round, red sun popped up his head from the horizon, and shot his first arrow of light from east to west along the dale.

Butterfield ran back inside the wall, and searched all about the bath, but it was quiet and silent, and the surface of the water perfectly motionless, looking exactly as it had looked for so many years, and as it did continue to look for many years after, for he never saw the fairies again. The whole thing had passed so like a dream, that he rubbed his eyes and pinched himself to see if he were quite awake yet; but whether he was dreaming or not, no one but himself could ever know.

The story seemed so strange, and even ridiculous, that he was a good while before he told it to anybody; besides, he had an idea that if they were fairies, his seeing them might be unlucky, and might bring some harm to his wife and child. But as no harm ever came—indeed, being an uncommonly steady and industrious young man, he rather prospered in the world than otherwise—Butterfield took courage and told his wife, and of course she told everybody; and by the time he grew to be an old man, and people had gradually ceased to believe that there were such things as fairies, he used to tell the story very often indeed to all sorts of persons; some believed it and some didn't, but nobody ever doubted that William Butterfield believed it, and he being a man of such undoubted truthfulness, it was a very great puzzle to a good many. But one thing was certain, he never saw the fairies again.

"And did anybody else in the Dale ever see them, John?" asked I, when we came to a pause in the story.

John looked at me, as if to make sure that I was not quizzing him, and answered cautiously, "Yes, there were several stories abroad of folk who said they had seen them, but they were generally stupid folk, or drunken folk, quite different from William Butterfield. The most reliable of them was a man named Henry Roundell, who declared he had seen them once in the early morning, at his sister's farm, ten miles off."

"Did you hear the story from himself, then?"

"No," said John, honestly, "I can't say I did. I never knew the man myself, but he was well known in these parts, and bore a very good character too. A shrewd fellow he was, who knew quite well the difference between a pound and a shilling; and a steady church-goer, which often stood in his way, because the most of the rich folk here were then Independents, and disliked having to do with Church people. So he must have had a conscience, you see, ma'am."

I agreed, and begged John to tell me, even if it were only by hearsay, the story.

Henry Roundell, it seemed, was never anything beyond a labouring man himself, but a sister of his was married to a prosperous farmer, and lived at a place called Washburn Dell. There he often hired himself, doing any work that came to hand. It was a large farm, and parts of it were exceedingly lonely, and far away from any cottage or human habitation. To one of these distant fields he was once sent to hoe turnips. He used to start off long before dawn, taking his food with him, and often not seeing a creature till he returned to the farm at the close of day.

One morning he rose, so early that it was almost in the middle of the night, and started off for the field, which he reached long before sunrise. He thought somehow it looked queer-like, in the misty dawn, that the turnips had grown ever so much greener and higher since he left them overnight, and that their leaves were stirring strangely. When he looked again, he saw that what was moving about was not the turnip-leaves at all. Between every row of them was a row of little men, all dressed in green, and all with tiny hoes in their hands. They were hoeing away with might and main; and chattering and singing to themselves meanwhile, but in an odd, shrill, cracked voice, like a lot of field-crickets. They had hats on their heads, something in the shape of fox-glove bells, Roundell thought, but he was not near enough to distinguish