English fairy poetry from the origins to the seventeenth century

Delattre Floris
A DESCRIPTION
Of the King and Queene of Fayries, their habit, fare, their abode, pompe, and state.

Being very delightfull to the sense, and full of mirth. 

LONDON,
Printed for Richard Harper, and are to be sold at his shop, at the Hospitall gate, 1635.

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ENGLISH FAIRY POETRY
FROM THE ORIGINS TO THE
SEVENTEENTH CENTURY
BY
FLORIS DELATTRE

LONDON, HENRY FROWDE, AMEN CORNER, E.C.
PARIS, HENRI DIDIER, 6, RUE DE LA SORBONNE.
MCMXII.
TO
MY WIFE
AND
MY DAUGHTER
PREFACE

No more has been attempted in the following essay—which may be considered as a by-chapter to the present writer's study on Robert Herrick—than to examine the fairy mythology of the British Isles in its connection with, and influence on, English poetry. It aims at tracing the various phases of its development, from the earliest folk-beliefs, still rough and undefined, to the elaborate productions of the XVIIth century, with which English fairy poetry practically came to an end. The estimate of the aesthetic value of such literature has been purposely left aside to give more room for a critical survey of the progressive formation, the modifications, and the decay of the fairy themes, for an historical account of the successive steps that led up from popular tradition to the poetry of art. The matter may seem, at first sight, somewhat trifling: let it be remembered however that some of the greatest English poets have thought it worth their while to expend no small amount of time and labour on the descrip-

tion of Fairyland, and have even made it the subject of several of their unquestioned masterpieces. Having thus cleared the ground, we may be able to go deeper into our research, and to enquire more closely into the important question of the dependence of poetry, of the individual poetry of art, upon folk-lore, that is upon the original beliefs, superstitions and customs of the whole race.

Separate aspects of the subject have already been treated at length by many others, and I beg to acknowledge my indebtedness to my predecessors, of whose writings, as will be easily detected, I have made free use. At the same time, no attempt has yet been made to establish the existence of a common tendency between the various fairy themes, and to trace the historical evolution which they underwent in English poetry from the origins to the XVIIth century. It is hoped that something may be gained by bringing together the hitherto scattered parts of the question; and that the following essay, strictly limited to the essentials as it is, will throw some new light on a few points which, by themselves, would appear but commonplace topics to the literary student.

It must be added that no statement has been taken at second hand, but has always been scrupulously verified. The quotations have been borrowed, whenever possible, from the earliest editions and I have thought it desirable to adhere faithfully