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THE HEADLESS COACH

A Warning Phantom That Roams the County Cork.

QUEER IRISH SUPERSTITIONS.

One Dreaded Apparition is the Fairy Horse, whose mission is one of Malice—the Lure of the Poukeen and the Song of the Fir-Darrig.

No wonder strange superstitions linger in the scattered hamlets by the sea or in the lonely cabins on the rocky islands round the Iron coast.

Women and children, crouching over the fire of driftwood, peat or furze branches flaming fitfully on the open hearth, cross themselves as a londer wall rings through the darkness.

This phantom is said to "follow" many old Munster families, the vehicle lumbering heavily up the avenue and stopping at the front door whenever a death is about to occur in the house.

Another much dreaded apparition is the phooka, or fairy horse, a very malicious spirit that is said to appear in the shape of a beautiful coal black steed with fire darting from his eyes and nostrils.

Occasionally he adopts the form of a black bull or goat, and sometimes he appears as an awful compound of several black animals—horse, bull, goat and ram.

The instant the rider is on his back the elfin steed dashes off madly through stream, lake and bog hole, thicket and copse, hedge and ditch, marsh and ravine, till the terrified mortal, drenched, torn and bruised, shrieks for mercy or perhaps remembers to gasp out a prayer, when with a furious bound the phooka flings him off, preferably into a muddy pool or a furze brake, and darts away, leaving the unhappy rider to pick himself up, invariably finding that he is miles out of his way.

Sudden falls are attributed to this malignant sprite, and many a man who has lost his way or met with an accident coming home from fair or funeral on a dark night is convinced for the rest of his days that he has been led astray by the phooka, although his troubles were possibly due to a yet more potent spirit.

The "poukeen," as he is sometimes called, is also said to adopt the form of a great black bird or a bat. The latter is greatly feared by the country folks. In the bat form he is supposed to lure people into climbing ivied walls and towers, from which he throws them, an idea which seems to bear some relation to the vampire stories of eastern Europe.

"Puck, the household fairy," of English legend finds his Irish counterpart in the fir-darrig, or red man, a merry goblin, very similar to the Scotch red cap, or brownie. He is said to be dressed in scarlet. The attire of most of the Irish fairies is supposed to consist of a green suit, red shoes, long white stockings and a red or black cap with an eagle's feather.

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MISCELLANEOUS

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