

Bartholomew Tide.

I do not know that I can better show my gratitude for the insertion in last Saturday's *Athenæum* of my letter inviting you to receive, and your country readers to furnish, communications on the subject of our 'Folk-Lore,' than by indicating to "intending" correspondents some points connected with our Popular Mythology and Observances, respecting which new facts and existing traditions might prove of considerable value.

I would observe, in the first place, that, as the Fairy Mythology of England, as preserved to us in the writings of Shakspeare (its best and most beautiful expositor), exhibits a striking intermixture of Celtic and Teutonic elements, all local traditions respecting that mystic race,—whether

Of elves, of hills, brooks, standing lakes, or groves,— will be useful in developing the influence which such elements respectively exercised upon this poetical branch of our Popular Mythology. And as I agree with Mr. Keightley—no mean authority on such a subject—in opinion "that the belief in Fairies is by no means extinct in England,—and that in districts, if there be any such, where steam-engines, cotton mills, mail coaches,* and similar exorcists have not yet penetrated, numerous legends might be collected,"—I am not without hope of seeing many "a roundel and a fairy song" rescued from destruction through the agency of the *Athenæum*.

Can no Devonshire correspondent furnish new and untold stories of his native Pixies? Are there no records of a fairy pipe-manufactory to be gathered at Swinborne, in Worcestershire?—In the mining and mountainous districts of Derbyshire are all "such antique fables and such fairy toys" entirely extinct?—If so, is not the neighbourhood of Haddon, or of Hardwicke, or of both, still visited by the coach drawn by headless steeds, driven by a coachman as headless as themselves?—Does not such an equipage still haunt the mansion of Parsloes, in Essex?—and could not some correspondent from that county furnish you with stories of the inhabitants of Coggeshall, to prove them very rivals of the Wise Men of Gotham?—Is the Barguest no longer seen in Yorkshire?—Is "howdening" altogether obsolete in Kent—and, if so, when was this last trace of a heathen rite performed?—Are the legends of Tregagle no longer current in Cornwall?—These are all subjects not undeserving attention: and it should be remembered that legends and traditions which are considered trifling, in the localities to which they more immediately relate, assume an interest in the eyes of strangers to whom they are not familiar—and an importance when placed in apposition with cognate materials, by the light which they both receive and furnish from such juxtaposition.

There is another matter, too, on which local information is much to be desired while it is still attainable. I mean the "Feasts" which are still annually celebrated in the more remote parts of the country; many of which are, doubtless, of very considerable antiquity—even as old as the days of Heathenism. This is a branch of our Popular Antiquities which—to use a happy phrase of Horace Walpole's—has not yet been "tapped" in England; one which can now be thoroughly and properly investigated only by ascertaining, in each case, the following particulars, among others:—the day on which

* This was written, by Mr. Keightley, in 1828; but now, what Chaucer said of the "elves" may almost be applied to the mails—"But now can no man see non *mails* mo."

the Feast is held; the peculiar observances by which it is accompanied, and—which will serve, in some measure, to illustrate the history of the climate in this country, and (strange combination!) the progress of social improvement—the peculiar dishes which are usually introduced on such festivals.

I ought to apologize for thus occupying so much of your space: but, as you have kindly consented, at my request, to open your pages to contributions on the subject of our 'Folk-Lore,' I thought it might be of advantage to point out to correspondents some matters respecting which communications would be both valuable and acceptable.

AMBROSE MERTON.

The Epithet 'Old Scratch.'

OF that huge mass of imperfectly digested materials which may be said to constitute the text book of the students of our English 'Folk-Lore,' Brand's 'Popular Antiquities,' there is no chapter more imperfect, and consequently more unsatisfactory, than that entitled 'Popular Notions concerning the Apparition of the Devil.'

In this chapter,—after some allusion to the names "Old Nick," "Old Harry," "Old Scratch," and "The Old One,"—Brand observes:—"The epithet 'old' to so many of his titles seems to favour the common opinion, that the Devil can only appear in the shape of an old man."—It may, however, be doubted whether the epithet "old" has not, in this case, been derived from the Early Latin Fathers; who frequently use the expression, "Antiquus hostis," when speaking of the Enemy of mankind. In this way, the Anglo-Saxon, Cædmon, speaks of "*se ealda deofol*,"—"se ealda," "the Old Devil," "the Old One;" and in North Friesland, the same epithet, "*de ual duivel*," still obtains. *Gammel Erik* (Old Erik) is a title bestowed upon the Devil by the Danes; and in this *Old Erik* we have, probably, the origin of our "Old Harry." In the old Norse, "Kölski"—which signifies both "senex" and "diabolus"—is the epithet by which the "foul fiend" is usually designated.

Again,—though the epithet "Scratch" is, by modern usage, exclusively applied to his Satanic Majesty, such was not its original application. In the old High German monuments, mention is made of a small elfish sprite, *Scrat*, or *Scrato*,—by Latin writers translated *Pilosus*; as *Waltschrato*, or *Wood Scrat*, is *Satyrus*. In the 'Vocabularius' of 1482 we find *Schretlin* (penates), *Nacht-schrettele* (Ephialtes). The Anglo-Saxon *Schritta* (Hermaphroditus), and the Old Norse *Skratti* (malus genius, *gigas*), are also clearly allied to this elfish Being.

Grimm describes the *Schrat* as resembling in its nature the Latin Faun, and the Greek Satyr,—the 'Sylvanus' of Livy; and the *Schratlein* as being a domestic spirit more resembling the German *Wichtel* and *Alp*. The *Schrat* is never represented as a female; and differs from the *Elf* as appearing only singly—not in hosts.

The reader of the third volume of the 'Fairy Legends of the South of Ireland'—which contains a translation of the Brothers Grimm's 'Essay on the Irish Legends'—will, doubtless, remember the very curious old German poem there translated, in which the nature of the *Schretel* or *Schrat* is fully described. The manner in which the sprite encounters a huge white bear, by whom it is worsted in the contest,—in consequence of which the house is freed from its intrusion,—is told with considerable humour; and will give the reader a satisfactory notion of the malicious spirit who has been despoiled of his name, for the purpose of enriching the abundant nomenclature in which Old Scratch—as the Devil is now improperly designated—already rejoices.