

Alison Pearson and the Fairy Folk

By E. Lynn Linton

On the 28th of May, 1588, Alesoun Peirsoun, in Byrehihl, was haled before a just judge and sapient jury on the charge of witchcraft, and seven years' consorting with the fairy folk. This Alesoun Peirsoun, or, as we should now write it, Alison Pearson, had a certain cousin, one William Simpson, a clever doctor, who had been educated in Egypt; taken there by a man of Egypt, "ane gyant," who, it is to be supposed, taught him many of the secrets of nature then hidden from the vulgar world. During his absence, his father, who was smith to king's majesty, died for opening of "ane preist-buik and inking vpoune it:" which showed the tendency of the family. When Mr. William came back he found Alison afflicted with many diseases, powerless in hand and foot, and otherwise evilly holden; and he cured her, being a skilful man and a kindly, and ever after obtained unlimited influence over the brain and imagination of his crazed cousin. He abused this influence by taking her with him to fairy land, and introducing her to the "gude wychtis," whose company he had affected for many years. In especial was she much linked with the Queen of Elfame, who might have helped her, had she been so minded. One day being sick in Grange Muir, she lay down there alone, when a man in green suddenly appeared to her and said that if she would be faithful lie would do her good. She cried for help, and then charged him in God's name, and by the law he lived on, that if he came in God's name and for the welfare of her soul, he would tell her. He passed away on this, and soon after a lusty man, and many other men and women came to her, and she passed away with them further than she could tell; but not before she had "sanit," or blessed herself and prayed. And then she saw piping, and merriness, and good cheer, and puncheons of wine with "tassis," or cups to them. But the fairy folk were not kind to Alison. They tormented her sorely, and treated her with great harshness, knocking her about and beating her so that they took all the "poustie," or power out of her side with one of their heavy "straiks," and left her covered with bruises, blue and evil-favoured. She was never free from her questionable associates, who used to come upon her at all times and initiate her into their secrets, whether she liked it or no. They showed her how they gathered their herbs before sunrise, and she would watch them with their pans and fires making the "saws" or salves that could kill or cure all who used them, according to the witches' will; and they used to come and sit by her, and once took all the "poustie" from her for twenty weeks. Mr. William was then with them. He was a young man, not six years older than herself, and she would "feir" (be afraid) when she saw him. What with fairy teaching, and Mr. William's clinical lectures, half-crazed Alison soon got a reputation for healing powers; so great, indeed, that the Bishop of St. Andrews, a wretched hypochondriac, with as many diseases as would fill half the wards of an hospital, applied to her for some of her charms and remedies, which she had sense enough to make palatable, and such as should suit episcopal tastes: namely, spiced claret (a quart to be drunk at two draughts), and boiled capon as the internal remedies, with some fairy salve for outward application. It scarcely needed a long apprenticeship in witchcraft to prescribe claret and capon for a luxurious prelate who had brought himself into a state of chronic dyspepsia by laziness

and high living; yet the jury thought the recipe of such profound wisdom that Alison got badly off on its account.

Mr. William was very careful of Alison. He used to go before the fairy folk when they set out on the whirlwinds to plague her—"for they are ever in the blowing sea-wind," said Allie—and tell her of their coming; and he was very urgent that she should not go away with them altogether, since a tithe of them was yearly taken down to hell, and converts had always first chance. But many people known to her on earth were at Elfame. She said that she recognized Mr. Secretary Lethington, and the old Knight of Buccleugh, as of the party; which was equivalent to putting them out of heaven, and was a grievous libel, as the times went. Neither Mr. William's care nor fairy power could save poor Alison. After being "wirreit (strangled) at ane staik," she was "conuicta et combusta," never more to be troubled by epilepsy or the feverish dreams of madness.