

CHAPTER IV.

HATTON AND THE FAIRIES.

“Oh, where do fairies hide their heads
When snow lies on the hills,
When frost has spoiled their mossy beds
And crystallized their rills?”

ON a winter's night, when the wind swept down the burn and howled around the chimney-head like the wailing of a lost spirit, the miller was at his best. Seated beside the great open hearth, whereon lay a pile of the husks winnowed from newly-dried corn, which burned like tinder, the old man with a slender iron rod kept constantly stirring them into flame, which threw his shadow into grotesque forms upon the wall behind. He would then hand the rod to me while he related his stories and told his family history, and how his grandfather fought and fled from the fatal field of Culloden, and lay hiding for many a day in what was called “The Brockhole,” a cave in the brae above the mill. He seemed to have held his own father in little esteem. He had four wives, and the son set forth their merits and demerits in the following couplet :—

“First he got a wife, an' syne he got anither,
Then he got the deevil, an' then he got my mither.”

The evening's entertainment finished generally with a story of a supernatural kind. The story of Hatton being trepanned by the fairies on his way home from the mill was often rehearsed. At that time it was the custom amongst farmers to bring their grain to the mill, and stay there until the grinding was finished. The servant girls were taken to sift the meal. When the melder was large and the water scant, it was often late before they finished and left with the newly-made meal for home, with the girls seated on the carts. While the grinding went on, the miller and the farmer washed the dust out of their throats with something stronger than meal and water. It must have been upon an

occasion of this kind that Hatton, as related by the miller, "fell in wi' the fairies." The miller was no stranger to the pranks of the green-coated gentry, for, said he, "I often wauken up in the night an' hear the wheel gaun roon'. I ken brawly fa's turned on the water, but they never brack onything, an' I never heed their frolicks; they never fash mysel'. Ay, but Hatton couldna tell the same tale. It was verra late, I've heard them say, afore his melder was finished—weel on tae twal' o'clock when the lasses took aff their dusty duds an' mountit the cairts at the mill door. Hatton says tae them, 'Gang yer wa's; I'll tak' the near cut by Stripeside an' Hillockhead, an' be hame afore ye.' But fan the cairts got hame there was nae Hatton tae be seen. The guidwife had been confined the day afore, an' the howdie said, 'Ye mauna tell the guidwife. Ane o' ye gang doon the gait an' try an' fin' him.' Hatton's man gaed doon the fitpath till he cam' tae 'The Shean.' He thocht he saw a licht shinin' oot o' a hole in the side o't. Fan he cam' nearer he saw it was a door, an' there, sure eneuch, stood Hatton, crackin' his thooms abeen his head an' jumpin' like an antick. The man gaed up tae him an' laid his han' on his shouther, an' said, 'Come awa' hame, Hatton; the guidwife is wearyin' for ye.' 'Bide a wee, man,' said Hatton; 'fat the deil's a' the hurry? Wait till the spring's finished.' The man waited, but the music never stoppit. While the 'dancers quick an' quicker flew,' Hatton clappit his han's an' roared oot, 'Weel dune, little mannie; gang at it wi' the little woman.' This was said in praise o' a little mannie dressed in a green coat wi' yallow kneebreeks, blue stockin's, an' siller buckles on his sheen. The man saw that Hatton was creepin' farer ben, so he made a last effort tae pull him oot, but a' in vain. 'Deil ae fit will I gang oot o' this till the spring's finished an' the dancin's deen,' said Hatton. Fan the man gaed hame an' telt his tale, the howdy said truly that 'they wud see nae mair o' Hatton for a twalmonth an' a' day.' At the en' o' that time the man gaed back, an' there, sure eneuch, he saw Hatton still stan'in' inside the door. The man pulled him oot by main force, an' as seen as he was outside the door the spell was broken. On his wy hame Hatton remarkit that he was 'gettin' gey hungry.' 'Nae wonner,' said the man; 'ye've stood there for a hale year.' 'Dae ye think,' said Hatton, 'that I'm a feel a'thegither? They hadna finished the

spring, man.' When he got hame an' saw the bairn that was born the day afore he gaed tae the mill, he was convinced that he had been trepanned by the fairies."

Whether the round, conical mound called "The Shean," that stands a little distance below the farm of the Hatton, is natural or artificial has not been satisfactorily decided, but it is a conspicuous object in the parish. There is no doubt that round about on the farm of Hatton there is clear evidence of Druidical remains and burial mounds and cairns. Where now stands the farm house a "ha'" had stood, hence the name of Ha-ton.