

Tonkin (*Natural History MS.*, pp. 10—11) writes as follows:—

“Many strange stories we have, more especially among the miners, of Fairies, or, as they call them, Piskys, Small People, &c.; of their discovering Mines to them, playing on Musick very sweetly in them, &c., Dancing in Rings and Circles, from whence come the many bare rings and circles which we see in many places, particularly one in a field of my own on Trevaunance, called The Rose Field, where I have been told of above 20 several appearances of them even in the day time. But as I look upon them all as perfect whimsies and dreams, I shall say no more of them.” [Here he refers to botanical works proving the fungous origin of such rings].

“I remember that about 40 years since, *viz.*, about 1687, one Agnes Martin, of St. Agnes, pretended that she had been carried away by these Small People, and gave a long account of her living among them, &c., and that her employment was to look after the children. I have often discours'd her about it since that time, she being now dead, and by the best conjectures that I could make she was carried away by a gang of Gipsies (for she was certainly wanting several years, and no one could tell what was become of her, till she was accidentally met with in a Fair and brought home), and being very young, not above 7 or 8 years of age, carried

about from place to place generally by night, &c.; she verily believed the tale she told, and that she lived with them underground, was very well treated by them, and (no doubt) had this story put into her head by them. I mention this little story as being within my own knowledge, and not unknown, neither, to many people still living, who have had it from her own mouth: and also for that I verily believe most of these tales so rife among us have as little foundation, if as much as this.”

Tonkin's explanation, that all Agnes Martin's tale was put into her head by gipsies, seems quite unnecessary when one knows that it was generally believed at the time that young girls might be taken away by the Small People to look after their children. In Bottrell's stories, “Cherry of Zennor” in Hunt, and “The Fairy Master” in his own book, we have semi-rationalised versions of the same tale as lived in imagination by a girl who, going down for the first time from a wild moorland parish into the richer “Low Countries” about Penzance, fancies herself walking into a Fairyland, while her new master's house, with its waxed floors, marble busts and harpsichord, takes on the likeness of a fairy palace filled with marvels. No girl would be likely to imagine herself the heroine of such a fairy-tale, however, unless the tale itself had often been told to her before; the intercourse of Anne Jefferies with the fairies was apparently well known throughout 17th-century Cornwall, people coming to her to be healed from as far off as the Land's End, and Agnes Martin, whether we believe that she really lived with the Small People or not, would probably have taken the possibility of such things happening as beyond doubt. Had Tonkin given us more of her “long account of her living among them, &c.,” we might have been able to judge how much the seeing of fact through the glamour of an old tale had to do with them.

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