

faith; and are mostly commemorated still by an unpremeditated yet universal consent, according to the Old Style. Such a faithful popular tradition thus running counter alike to modern almanacs and creeds, has not unreasonably been advanced as confirmation of the authenticity of the ballad-poems in which the same ideas have been transmitted, mainly by oral tradition. But there also the supernatural beliefs of earlier generations have proved no less tenacious than such ecclesiastical traditions. In "Tamlane" and "True Thomas" the apparition of the Queen of Elfland gives the special character to these old ballads. But the Scottish elves peopled the scaurs and dens of a wild country which for centuries had been the scene of bloody feud and violence, and reflect in their sombre hue the characteristics of their source. They were esteemed a capricious, irritable, and vindictive race very different from the airy haunters of England's moonlit glades. The Scottish Elfin Queen is in part the embodiment of the same gloomy superstitions which begot the witch-hags and other coarse imaginings of the national demonology. Nevertheless the Queen of Elfland and her mischievous elves are generally designated the Good People: the canny prudence of the Scot leading him to apply fair words in the very naming of such testy and capricious sprites. Even in the indictments of ecclesiastical courts this is adhered to, as in that of Alison Pearson, convicted at St. Andrews, in 1586, of witchcraft, and consulting with evil spirits. She is charged with "haunting and repairing with the gude neighbors and Queene of Elfland, thir divers years by-past, as she had confest;" and, among other things, she had been warned by one she met in Fairyland to "sign herself that she be not tane away, for the teind of them are tane to hell everie year."

The Scottish Elfin Queen is, accordingly, a very different character from the sportive Mab of Shakespeare's *Mercutio*, who gallops night by night over lawyers' fingers, courtiers' knees, and through lovers' brains; and only becomes "the angry Mab" when, as she drives o'er slumbering ladies' lips, she finds "their breaths with sweetmeats tainted are." Still less does she resemble the ethereal Queen of Shadows, Titania, in the "Midsummer Night's Dream." Her elfin court has indeed its deceptive pleasures, its glamor, and its green-wood revels; but she and her elves are the vassals of hell; and in the fanciful ballad, as in the prosaic indictment for witchcraft, are described as paying their tithe, not annually indeed, but every seven years to the devil. Tamlane, for example, tells the Earl's daughter, who meets this wanderer from Fairyland "among the leaves sae green"—

"And never would I tire, Janet,
In Fairyland to dwell;
But aye, at every seven years,
They pay the teind to hell;
And I'm sae fat and fair o' flesh,
I fear 'twill be mysel."

The ballad of "Tamlane" is mentioned in the "Complaynt of Scotland," printed at St. Andrews in 1549, and undoubtedly embodies the superstitions of a much earlier date.

But it is more significant for our present purpose to see reflected in the early Scottish ballads the popular ideas of spirits, ghosts, and apparitions of the dead haunting the scenes of their unexpiated crimes, or the grave where the murdered body had been laid. The resemblance between these ill-defined, incongruous ideas and some of those already referred to as characteristic of the savage conception of death and the departed spirit, is unmistakable. But besides the apparitions of the dead who can find no repose in the grave till expiation has been made for some deadly sin, or of the victim of crime whose unresting spirit wanders abroad, like that of the murdered Dane, demanding vengeance, there are characteristic types of national superstition: as where the dead are disquieted by the mourning of loving ones refusing to be comforted because they are not; or again where rest is denied them till they recover their plighted troth. In "The Wife of Usher's Well," her three stout and stalwart sons, sent by her over the sea, are scarcely a week gone from her when she learns that they are drowned. In her agony at their loss, she prays that the winds may never again be still, nor the floods be calmed, till her sons return to her "in earthy flesh and blood." The dread prayer disturbs the rest of her sons, and the result is thus set forth in homely simplicity:—

"It fell about the Martinmas,
When nights are lang and mirk,
The carline wife's three sons cam hame,
And their hats were o' the birk."

It neither grew in syke nor ditch,
Nor yet in ony sheugh;
But at the gates o' Paradise,
That birk grew fair enough."

And so the three drowned men remain, till the dawn approaches, with their mother tending on them in her short-lived joy, as seemingly her living sons restored to her. She lays them to rest with all a mother's tender care, wraps her mantle about them, and sitting down by their bedside, at length yields to sleep, ere the red cock's crow warns them to begone. They cannot tarry longer from Paradise; but their consideration for her is indicated with touching simplicity by their urging one another to linger to the latest moment on her account:—