

King George :

Stab or stabs, the least is my fear ;
Point me the place
And I will meet you there.

Noble Captain :

The place I 'point is on the ground
And there I will lay your body down
Across the water at the hour of five.

King George :

Done, sir, done ! I will meet you there,
If I am alive I will cut you, I will slay you,
All for to let you know that I am King George over Great
Britain O !

[FIGHT : *King George wounds the Noble Captain.*]

Until the close is almost reached the West Wittering Tipteers preserve the illusion of mediæval mummery. But the concluding song transports us to the sentiment of the modern music hall. Its chorus runs, with some callousness :—

“ We never miss a mother till she's gone,
Her portrait's all we have to gaze upon,
We can fancy see her there,
Sitting in an old armchair ;
We never miss a mother till she's gone.”

Mark Antony Lower's *Contributions to Literature*, 1845, contains a pleasant essay on the South Downs which I overlooked when I was writing this book, but from which I now gladly take a few passages. It gives me, for example, a pendent to William Blake's description of a fairy's funeral on page 64, in the shape of a description of a fairy's revenge, from the lips of Master Fowington, a friend of Mr. Lower, who was one that believed in Pharisees (as Sussex calls fairies) as readily and unreservedly as we believe in wireless telegraphy. Mas' Fowington had, indeed, two very good reasons for his credulity. One was that the Pharisees are mentioned in the Bible and therefore must exist ; the other was that his grandmother, “ who was a very truthful woman,” had seen them with her own eyes “ time and often.” “ They was liddle folks

not more than a foot high, and used to be uncommon fond of dancing. They jound¹ hands and formed a circle, and danced upon it till the grass came three times as green there as it was anywhere else. That's how these here rings come upon the hills. Leastways so they say; but I don't know nothing about it, in tye,² for I never seen none an 'em; though to be sure it's very hard to say how them rings do come, if it is'n't the Pharisees that makes 'em. Besides there's our old song that we always sing at harvest supper, where it comes in— 'We'll drink and dance like Pharisees.' Now I should like to know why it's put like that 'ere in the song, if it a'nt true."

Master Fowington's story of the fairy's revenge runs thus:—

"An ol' brother of my wife's gurt gran'mother *see* some Pharisees once, and 'twould a been a power better if so be he hadn't never seen 'em, or leastways never offended 'em. I'll tell ye how it happened. Jeems Meppom—dat was his naüm—Jeems was a liddle farmer, and used to thresh his own corn. His barn stood in a very *elenge* lonesome place, a goodish bit from de house, and de Pharisees used to come dere a nights and thresh out some wheat and wuts for him, so dat de hep o' threshed corn was ginnerly bigger in de morning dan what he left it overnight. Well, ye see, Mas' Meppom thought dis a liddle odd, and didn't know rightly what to make ant. So bein' an out-and-out bold chep, dat didn't fear man nor devil, as de saying is, he made up his mind dat he'd goo over some night to see how 'twas managed. Well accordingly he went out rather airly in de evenin', and laid up behind de mow, for a long while, till he got rather tired and sleepy, and thought 'twaunt no use a watchin' no longer. It was gittin' pretty handy to midnight, and he thought how he'd goo home to bed. But jest as he was upon de move he heerd a odd sort of a soun' comin' tóe-ards the barn, and so he stopped to see what it was. He looked out of de strah, and what should he catch

¹ This is the Sussex preterite of the verb "to join."

² *In tye*—not I.

sight an but a couple of liddle cheps about eighteen inches high or dereaway come into de barn without uppening the doores. Dey pulled off dere jackets and begun to thresh wud two liddle frails as dey had brung wud em at de hem of a rate. Mas' Meppom would a been froughten if dey had been bigger, but as dey was such tedious liddle fellers, he couldn't hardly help bustin right out a laffin'. Howsonever he pushed a hanful of strah into his mouth and so managed to kip quiet a few minutes a lookin' at um—thump, thump; thump, thump, as riglar as a clock.

“At last dey got rather tired and left off to rest derselves, and one an um said in a liddle squeakin' voice, as it might a bin a mouse a talkin':—‘I say Puck, I tweek; do you tweek?’ At dat Jeems couldn't contain hissself no how, but set up a loud haw-haw; and jumpin' up from de strah hollered out, ‘I'll tweek ye, ye liddle rascals; what bisness a you got in my barn?’ Well upon dis, de Pharisees picked up der frails and cut away right by him, and as dey passed by him he felt sich a queer pain in de head as if somebody had gi'en him a lamentable hard thump wud a hammer, dat knocked him down as flat as a flounder. How long he laid dere he never rightly knowed, but it must a bin a goodish bit, for when he come to 'twas gittin' dee-light. He could'nt hardly contrive to doddle home, and when he did he looked so tedious bad dat his wife sent for de doctor dirackly. But bless ye, *dat* waunt no use; and old Jeems Meppom knowed it well enough. De doctor told him to kip up his sperits, becin' 'twas onny a fit he had had from bein' a most smothered wud de handful of strah and kippin his laugh down. But Jeems knowed better. ‘Tā-ünt no use, sir,’ he says, says he, to de doctor; ‘de cuss of de Pharisees is uppán me, and all de stuff in your shop can't do *me* no good.’ And Mas' Meppom waş right, for about a year ahtawuds he died, poor man! sorry enough dat he'd ever intafèred wud things dat didn't consarn him. Poor ol' feller, he lays buried in de church-aird over yender—leastways so I've heerd my

wife's mother say, under de bank jest where de bed of snow-draps grows."

All who know the Downs must know the fairies' or Pharisees' rings, into which one so often steps. Science gives them a fungoid origin, but Shakespeare, as well as Master Fowington's grandmother, knew that Oberon and Titania's little people alone had the secret. Further proof is to be found in the testimony of John Aubrey, the Wiltshire antiquary, who records that Mr. Hart, curate at Yatton Keynel in 1633-4, coming home over the Downs one night witnessed with his own eyes an "innumerable quantitie of pigmies" dancing round and round and singing, "making all manner of small, odd noises."

A word ought to have been said of the quiet and unexpected dew-ponds of the Downs, upon which one comes so often and always with a little surprise. Perfect rounds they are, reflecting the sky they are so near like circular mirrors set in a white frame. Gilbert White, who was interested in all interesting things, mentions the unfailing character of a little pond near Selborne, which "though never above three feet deep in the middle, and not more than thirty feet in diameter, . . . yet affords drink for three hundred or four hundred sheep, and for at least twenty head of cattle beside." He then asks, having noticed that in May, 1775, when the ponds of the valley were dry, the ponds of the hills were still "little affected," "have not these elevated pools some unnoticed recruits, which in the night-time counterbalance the waste of the day?" The answer, which White supplies, is that the hill pools are recruited by dew. "Persons," he writes, "that are much abroad, and travel early and late, such as shepherds, fishermen, &c., can tell what prodigious fogs prevail in the night on elevated downs, even in the hottest part of summer; and how much the surfaces of things are drenched by those swimming vapours, though, to the senses, all the while, little moisture seems to fall."

Kingsley has a passage on the same subject in his essay,

"The Air-Mothers"—"For on the high chalk downs, you know, where farmers make a sheep pond, they never, if they are wise, make it in the valley or on a hillside, but on the bleakest top of the very highest down ; and there, if they can once get it filled with snow and rain in winter, the blessed dews of night will keep some water in it all the summer thro', while ponds below are utterly dried up." There is, however, another reason why the highest points are chosen, and that is that the chalk here often has a capping of red clay which holds the water.

To the smuggling chapter might have been added, again with Mr. Lower's assistance, a few words on the difficulties that confronted the London revenue officers in the Sussex humour. To be confounded by too swift a horse or too agile a "runner" was all in the night's work ; but to be hoodwinked and bamboozled by the deliberate stealthy southern fun must have been eternally galling. The Sussex joker grinds slowly and exceeding small ; but the flour is his. "There was Nick Cossum the blacksmith [the words are a shepherd's, talking to Mr. Lower] ; he was a sad plague to them. Once he made an exciseman run several miles after him, to take away a keg of *yeast* he was a-carrying to Ditchling ! Another time as he was a-going up New Bostall, an exciseman, who knew him of old, saw him a-carrying a tub of hollands. So he says, says he, 'Master Cossum, I must have that tub of yours, I reckon !' 'Worse luck, I suppose you must,' says Nick in a civil way, 'though it's rather again' the grain to be robbed like this ; but, however, I am a-going your road, and we can walk together—there's no law again' that I expect.' 'Oh, certainly not,' says the other, taking of the tub upon his shoulders. So they chatted along quite friendly and *chucker*¹ like till they came to a cross road, and Nick wished the exciseman good bye. After Nick had got a little way, he turned round all of a sudden and called out : 'Oh, there's one thing I forgot ; here's a little bit o' paper that belongs to the keg.'

¹ *Chucker* ; in a cheerful, cordial manner.