

The Coming of the Fairies

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by

Arthur Conan Doyle

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The Coming of the Fairies, by Arthur Conan Doyle

This book in its current typographical format first published 2009 by

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-0612-9, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-0612-1

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PREFACE

This book contains reproductions of the famous Cottingley photographs, and gives the whole of the evidence in connection with them. The diligent reader is in almost as good a position as I am to form a judgment upon the authenticity of the pictures. This narrative is not a special plea for that authenticity, but is simply a collection of facts the inferences from which may be accepted or rejected as the reader may think fit.

I would warn the critic, however, not to be led away by the sophistry that because some professional trickster, apt at the game of deception, can produce a somewhat similar effect, therefore the originals were produced in the same way. There are few realities which cannot be imitated, and the ancient argument that because conjurers on their own prepared plates or stages can produce certain results, therefore similar results obtained by untrained people under natural conditions are also false, is surely discounted by the intelligent public. I would add that this whole subject of the objective existence of a subhuman form of life has nothing to do with the larger and far more vital question of spiritualism. I should be sorry if my arguments in favour of the latter should be in any way weakened by my exposition of this very strange episode, which has really no bearing upon the continued existence of the individual.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

Crowborough,
March 1922.

CHAPTER I. HOW THE MATTER AROSE

The series of incidents set forth in this little volume represent either the most elaborate and ingenious hoax every played upon the public, or else they constitute an event in human history which may in the future appear to have been epoch-making in its character. It is hard for the mind to grasp what the ultimate results may be if we have actually proved the existence upon the surface of this planet of a population which may be as numerous as the human race, which pursues its own strange life in its own strange way, and which is only separated from ourselves by some difference of vibrations. We see objects within the limits which make up our colour spectrum, with infinite vibrations, unused by us, on either side of them. If we could conceive a race of beings which were constructed in material which threw out shorter or longer vibrations, they would be invisible unless we could tune ourselves up or tone them down. It is exactly that power of tuning up and adapting itself to other vibrations which constitutes a clairvoyant, and there is nothing scientifically impossible, so far as I can see, in some people seeing that which is invisible to others. If the objects are indeed there, and if the inventive power of the human brain is turned upon the problem, it is likely that some sort of psychic spectacles, inconceivable to us at the moment, will be invented, and that we shall all be able to adapt ourselves to the new conditions. If high-tension electricity can be converted by a mechanical contrivance into a lower tension, keyed to other uses, then it is hard to see why something analogous might not occur with the vibrations of ether and the waves of light.

This, however, is mere speculation and leads me to the fact that early in May 1920 I heard, in conversation with my friend Mr. Gow, the Editor of *Light*, that alleged photographs of fairies had been taken. He had not actually seen them, but he referred me to Miss Scatcherd, a lady for whose knowledge and judgment I had considerable respect. I got into touch with her and found that she also had not seen the photographs, but she had a friend, Miss Gardner, who had actually done so. On May 13 Miss Scatcherd wrote to me saying that she was getting on the trail, and including an extract from a letter of Miss Gardner, which ran as follows. I am quoting actual documents at this early stage, for I think there are many who would like a complete inside view of all that led up to so remarkable an episode. Alluding to her brother Mr. Gardiner, she says:

"You know that Edward is a Theosophist, has been for years, and now he is mostly engaged with lecturing and other work for the Society—and although for years I have regarded him as bathed in error and almost past praying for, I now find a talk with him an inspiring privilege. I am so very thankful that I happened to be in

Willesden when his bereavement took place, for it was so wonderful to watch him, and to see how marvellously his faith and beliefs upheld and comforted him. He will probably devote more and more of his time and strength to going about the country lecturing, etc.

"I wish you could see a photo he has. He believes in fairies, pixies, goblins, etc.—children, in many cases, really see them and play with them. He has got into touch with a family in Bradford where the little girl, Elsie, and her cousin, Frances, constantly go into woods and play with the fairies. The father and mother are sceptical and have no sympathy with their nonsense, as they call it, but an aunt, whom Edward has interviewed, is quite sympathetic with the girls. Some little time ago, Elsie said she wanted to photograph them, and begged her father to lend his camera. For long he refused, but at last she managed to get the loan of it and one plate. Off she and Frances went into the woods near a water-fall. Frances "ticed" them, as they call it, and Elsie stood ready with the camera. Soon the three fairies appeared, and one pixie dancing in Frances' aura. Elsie snapped and hoped for the best. It was a long time before the father would develop the photo, but at last he did, and to his utter amazement the four sweet little figures came out beautifully!

"Edward got the negative and took it to a specialist in photography who would know a fake at once. Sceptical as he was before he tested it, afterwards he offered £100 down for it. He pronounced it absolutely genuine and a perfectly remarkable photograph. Edward has it enlarged and hanging in his hall. He is very interested in it and as soon as possible he is going to Bradford to see the children. What do you think of this? Edward says the fairies are on the same line of evolution as the *winged* insects, etc., etc. I fear I cannot follow all his reasonings, but I knew you would be keenly interested. I wish you could see that photo and another one of the girls playing with the quaintest goblin imaginable!"

This letter filled me with hopes, and I renewed my pursuit of the photographs. I learned that they were two in number and that they had been sent for inspection to Miss Blomfield, a friend of the family. My chase turned, therefore, in that direction, and in reply to a letter of inquiry I received the following answer:

The Myrtles,
Beckenham,
June 21, 1920.

DEAR SIR,

I am sending the two fairy pictures; they *are* interesting, are they not?

I am sure my cousin would be pleased for you to see them. But he said (and wrote it to me afterwards) that he did not want them to be used in any way at present. I believe he has plans in regard to them, and the pictures are being copyrighted. I don't think the copyright will be his. He has not yet finished his investigations. I

asked him if I might photograph them myself so as to have a few prints to give to friends interested, but he wrote that he would rather nothing was done at present.

I think my cousin is away from home just now. But his name is Edward L. Gardner, and he is President of one of the branches of the Theosophical Society (Blavatsky Lodge), and he lectures fairly often at their Hall (Mortimer Hall, Mortimer Square, W.). He lectured there a few weeks ago, and showed the fairies on the screen and told what he knew about them.

Yours sincerely,

E. BLOMFIELD.

This letter enclosed the two very remarkable photographs which are reproduced in this volume, that which depicted the dancing goblin, and the other of wood elves in a ring. An explanatory note setting forth the main points of each is appended to the reproductions. I was naturally delighted at the wonderful pictures, and wrote back thanking Miss Blomfield for her courtesy, and suggesting that an inquiry should be set on foot which would satisfy me as to the genuine nature of the photographs. If this were dearly established I hoped that I might be privileged to help Mr. Gardner in giving publicity to the discovery. In reply I had the following letter:

The Myrtles,
Beckenham,
June 23, 1920.

DEAR SIR ARTHUR,

I am so glad you like the fairies! I should be only too glad to help in any way if I could, but there is so little I can do. Had the photographs been mine (I mean the negatives) , I should have been most pleased that anything so lovely in the way of information should have been introduced to the public under such auspices. But it would, as things are, be necessary to ask my cousin. I believe he *wants* people to know, but, as I wrote before, I do not know his plans, and I'm not sure if he is ready.

It has occurred to me since writing to you that it would have been better had I given you his sister's address. She is a most sensible and practical person, much engaged in social work, with which her sympathetic nature and general efficiency make her very successful.

She believes the fairy photographs to be quite genuine. Edward is a clever man—and a good one. His evidence on any of the affairs of life would, I am sure, be considered most reliable by all who knew him, both for veracity and sound judgment. I hope these details will not bore you, but I thought perhaps some knowledge of the people who, so to say, "discovered" the photographs would help in taking you *one* step nearer the source. I do not see any opening for fraud or hoax, though at first when I saw the prints I thought there must be some other explanation than the simple one that they were what they seemed. They appeared too good to be true! But every little detail I have since heard has added to my

conviction that they are genuine; though I have only what Edward tells me to go upon. He is hoping to obtain more from the same girls.

Yours sincerely,

E. BLOMFIELD.

At about the same time I received a letter from another lady who had some knowledge of the matter. It ran thus:

29 Croftdown Road,
Highgate Road,
N.W.,
June 24, 1920

DEAR SIR ARTHUR,

I am glad to hear that you are interested in the fairies. If they were really taken, as there seems good reason to believe, the event is no less than the discovery of a new world. It may not be out of place to mention that when I examined them with a magnifying glass I noticed, as an artist, that the hands do not appear to be quite the same as ours. Though the little figures look otherwise so human, the hands seemed to me something like this. (There followed a sketch of a sort of fin.) The beard in the little gnome seems to me to be some sort of insect-like appendage, though it would, no doubt, be called a beard by a clairvoyant seeing him. Also it occurs to me that the whiteness of the fairies may be due to their lack of shadow, which may also explain their somewhat artificial-looking flatness.

Yours sincerely,

MAY BOWLEY.

I was now in a stronger position, since I had actually seen the photographs and learned that Mr. Gardner was a solid person with a reputation for sanity and character. I therefore wrote to him stating the links by which I had reached him, and saying how interested I was in the whole matter, and how essential it seemed that the facts should be given to the public, so that free investigation might be possible before it was too late. To this letter I had the following reply:

5 Craven Road,
Harlesden,
N.W.10.
June 25, 1920

DEAR SIR,

Your interesting letter of the 22nd has just reached me, and very willingly I will assist you in any way that may be possible.

With regard to the photographs, the story is rather a long one and I have only gathered it by going very carefully. The children who were concerned are very shy and reserved indeed....They are of a mechanic's family of Yorkshire, and the children are said to have played with fairies and elves in the woods near their

village since babyhood. I will not attempt to narrate the story here, however—perhaps we may meet for that—but when I at length obtained a view of the rather poor prints it so impressed me I begged for the actual negatives. These I submitted to two first-class photographic experts, one in London and one in Leeds. The first, who was unfamiliar with such matters, declared the plates to be perfectly genuine and unfaked, but inexplicable! The second, who did know something of the subject and had been instrumental in exposing several "psychic" fakes, was also entirely satisfied. Hence I proceeded.

I am hopeful of getting more photographs, but the immediate difficulty is to arrange for the two girls to be together. They are 16 or 17 years old and beginning to work and are separated by a few miles. It may be we can manage it and thus secure photographs of the other varieties besides those obtained. These nature spirits are of the non-individualized order and I should greatly like to secure some of the higher. But two children such as these are, are rare, and I fear now that we are late because almost certainly the inevitable will shortly happen, one of them will "fall in love" and then—hey presto!!

By the way, I am anxious to avoid the money consideration. I may not succeed, but would far rather not introduce it. We are out for Truth, and nothing soils the way so quickly. So far as I am concerned you shall have everything I can properly give you.

Sincerely yours,

(Sgd.) EDW. L. GARDNER.

This letter led to my going to London and seeing Mr. Gardner, whom I found to be quiet, well-balanced, and reserved—not in the least of a wild or visionary type. He showed me beautiful enlargements of these two wonderful pictures, and he gave me much information which is embodied in my subsequent account. Neither he nor I had actually seen the girls, and it was arranged that he should handle the personal side of the matter, while I should examine the results and throw them into literary shape. It was arranged between us that he should visit the village as soon as convenient, and make the acquaintance of everyone concerned. In the meantime, I showed the positives, and sometimes the negatives, to several friends whose opinion upon psychic matters I respected.

Of these Sir Oliver Lodge holds a premier place. I can still see his astonished and interested face as he gazed at the pictures, which I placed before him in the hall of the Athenæum Club. With his usual caution he refused to accept them at their face value, and suggested the theory that the Californian Classical dancers had been taken and their picture superimposed upon a rural British background. I argued that we had certainly traced the pictures to two children of the artisan class, and that such photographic tricks would be entirely beyond them, but I failed to convince him, nor am I sure that even now he is whole-hearted in the matter.

My most earnest critics came from among the spiritualists, to whom a new order of being as remote from spirits as they are from human beings was an unfamiliar idea,

and who feared, not unnaturally, that their intrusion would complicate that spiritual controversy which is vital to so many of us. One of these was a gentleman whom I will call Mr. Lancaster, who, by a not unusual paradox, combined considerable psychic powers, including both clairvoyance and clairaudience, with great proficiency in the practice of his very prosaic profession. He had claimed that he had frequently seen these little people with his own eyes, and I, therefore, attached importance to his opinion. This gentleman had a spirit guide (I have no objection to the smile of the sceptic), and to him he referred the question. The answer showed both the strength and the weakness of such psychic inquiries. Writing to me in July 1920, he said:

"Re Photographs: The more I think of it the less I like it (I mean the one with the Parisian-coiffed fairies). My own guide says it was taken by a fair man, short, with his hair brushed back; he has a studio with a lot of cameras, some of which are 'turned by a handle.' He did not make it to sell Spiritualists a 'pup,' but did it to please the little girl in the picture who wrote fairy stories which he illustrated in this fashion. He is not a Spiritualist, but would laugh very much if anyone was taken in by it. He does not live near where we were, and the place is all different, i.e. the houses, instead of being in straight lines, are dropped about all over the place. Apparently he was not English. I should think it was either Denmark or Los Angeles by the description, which I give you for what it is worth.

"I should very much like the lens which would take persons in rapid motion with the clarity of the photo in question, it must work at F 4.5 and cost fifty guineas if a penny, and not the sort of lens one would imagine the children in an artisan's household would possess in a hand camera. And yet with the speed with which it was taken the waterfall in the background is blurred sufficiently to justify a one second's exposure at least. What a doubting Thomas! I was told the other day that, in the unlikely event of my ever reaching heaven, I should (a) Insist on starting a card file index of the angels, and (b) Starting a rifle range to guard against the possibility of invasion from Hell. This being my unfortunate reputation at the hands of the people who claim to know me must discount my criticisms as carping—to a certain extent, at all events."

These psychic impressions and messages are often as from one who sees in a glass darkly and contain a curious mixture of truth and error. Upon my submitting this message to Mr. Gardner he was able to assure me that the description was, on the whole, a very accurate one of Mr. Snelling and his surroundings, the gentleman who had actually handled the negatives, subjected them to various tests and made enlarged positives. It was, therefore, this intermediate incident, and not the original inception of the affair, which had impressed itself upon Mr. Lancaster's guide. All this is, of course, quite non-evidential to the ordinary reader, but I am laying all the documents upon the table.

Mr. Lancaster's opinion had so much weight with us, and we were so impressed by the necessity of sparing no possible pains to get at truth, that we submitted the plates to fresh examination, as detailed in the following letter:

5 Craven Road,
Harlesden,
N.W.10,
July 12, 1920.

DEAR SIR ARTHUR,

Just a line to report progress and acknowledge your kind letters and enclosure from Kodak's.

A week back, after your reference to Mr. Lancaster's opinion, I thought I would get a more careful examination of the negatives made than before, though that was searching enough. So I went over to Mr. Snelling's at Harrow and had a long interview with him, again impressing him with the importance of being utterly certain. I told you, I think, that this Mr. Snelling has had a varied and expert connection of over thirty years with the Autotype Company and Illingworth's large photographic factory and has himself turned out some beautiful work in natural and artificial studio studies. He recently started for himself at Wealdstone (Harrow) and is doing well.

Mr. Snelling's report on the two negatives is positive and most decisive. He says he is perfectly certain of two things connected with these photos, namely:

1. One exposure only;
2. All the figures of the fairies moved during exposure, which was "instantaneous."

As I put all sorts of pressing questions to him, relating to paper or cardboard figures, and backgrounds and paintings, and all the artifices of the modern studio, he proceeded to demonstrate by showing me other negatives and prints that certainly supported his view. He added that anyone of considerable experience could detect the dark background and double exposure in the negative at once. Movement was as easy, as he pointed out in a crowd of aeroplane photos he had by him. I do not pretend to follow all his points, but I am bound to say he thoroughly convinced me of the above two, which seem to me to dispose of all the objections hitherto advanced when they are taken together! Mr. S. is willing to make any declaration embodying the above and stakes his reputation unhesitatingly on their truth.

I am away from London from Wednesday next till the 28th when I go on to Bingley for one or two days' investigation on the spot. I propose that you have the two negatives, which are carefully packed and can be posted safely, for this fortnight or so. If you would rather not handle them I will send them to Mr. West

of Kodak's, or have them taken to him for his opinion, for I think as you say, it would be worth having, if he has had direct and extensive practical experience.

I am very anxious now to see this right through, as, though I felt pretty sure before, I am more than ever satisfied now after that interview the other day.

Yours sincerely,

EDW. L. GARDNER.



B. ELSIE AND THE GNOME

Photograph taken by Frances. Fairly bright day in September, 1917. The "Midg" camera. Distance, 8 ft. Time, 1/50th sec. The original negative has been tested, enlarged, and analysed in the same exhaustive manner as A. This plate was badly under-exposed. Elsie was playing with the gnome and beckoning it to come on to her knee.

After receiving this message and getting possession of the negatives I took them myself to the Kodak Company's Offices in Kingsway, where I saw Mr. West and another expert of the Company. They examined the plates carefully, and neither of them could find any evidence of superposition, or other trick. On the other hand, they were of opinion that if they set to work with all their knowledge and resources they could produce such pictures by natural means, and therefore they would not undertake to say that these were preternatural. This, of course, was quite reasonable if the pictures are judged only as technical productions, but it rather savours of the old discredited anti-spiritualistic argument that because a trained conjurer can produce certain effects under his own conditions, therefore some woman or child who gets similar effects must get them by conjuring. It was clear that at the last it was the character and surroundings of the children upon which the inquiry must turn, rather than upon the photos themselves, I had already endeavoured to open up human relations with the elder girl by sending her a book, and I had received the following little note in reply from her father:



ELSIE AND FRANCES

A snapshot taken by Mr. Wright in June, 1917, with the "Midg" camera—his first and only camera.

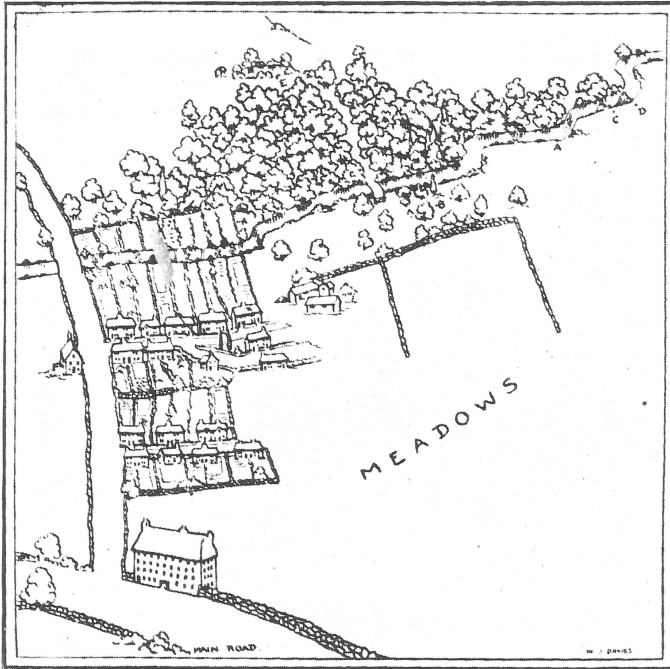
31 Main Street,
Cottingley,
Bingley,
July 12, 1920.

DEAR SIR,

I hope you will forgive us for not answering your letter sooner and thanking you for the beautiful book you so kindly sent to Elsie. She is delighted with it. I can assure you we do appreciate the honour you have done her. The book came last Saturday morning an hour after we had left for the seaside for our holidays, so we did not receive it until last night. We received a letter from Mr. Gardner at the same time, and he proposes coming to see us at the end of July. Would it be too long to wait until then, when we could explain what we know about it?

Yours very gratefully,

ARTHUR WRIGHT.



COTTINGLE BECK AND GLEN

Sites of photographs are marked A, B, C, D, E, and the cottage with an X.

It was evident, however, that we must get into more personal touch, and with this object Mr. Gardner went North and interviewed the whole family, making a thorough investigation of the circumstances at the spot. The result of his journey is given in the article which I published in the *Strand Magazine*, which covers all the ground. I will only add the letter he wrote to me after his return from Yorkshire.

5 Craven Road,
Harlesden,
N.W.10,
July 31, 1920.

MY DEAR CONAN DOYLE,

Yours just to hand, and as I have now had an hour to sort things out I write at once so that you have the enclosed before you at the earliest moment. You must be very pressed, so I put the statement as simply as possible, leaving you to use just what you think fit. Prepared negatives, prints of quarter, half-plate, and enlarged sizes, and lantern slides, I have all here.

Also on Tuesday I shall have my own photographs of the valley scenery including the two spots shown in the fairy prints, and also prints of the two children taken in 1917 with their shoes and stockings off, just as they played in the beck at the rear of their house. I also have a print of Elsie showing her hand.

With regard to the points you raise:

1. I have definite leave and permission to act as regards the use made of these photographs in any way I think best. Publication may be made of them, the only reserve being that full names and addresses shall be withheld.

2. Copies are ready here for England and U. S. A.

3....The Kodak people and also the Illingworth Co. are unwilling to testify. The former, of course, you know of. Illingworths claim that they could produce, by means of clever studio painting and modelling, a similar negative. Another Company's expert made assertions concerning the construction of the "model" that I found were entirely erroneous directly I saw the real ground! They, however, barred any publication. The net result, besides Snelling's views, is that the photograph *could* be produced by studio work, but there is no evidence *positively* of such work in the negatives. (I might add that Snelling, whom I saw again yesterday evening, scouts the claim that such negatives could be produced. He states that he would pick such a one out without hesitation!)

4. My report is enclosed and you are at perfect liberty to use this just as you please.

The father, Mr. Arthur Wright, impressed me favourably. He was perfectly open and free about the whole matter. He explained his position—he simply did not understand the business, but is quite clear and positive that the plate he took out of the Midg camera was the one he put in the same day. His work is that of electrician to an estate in the neighbourhood near. He is clear-headed and very intelligent, and gives one the impression of being open and honest. I learnt the reason of the family's cordial treatment of myself. Mrs. Wright, a few years back, came into touch with theosophical teachings and speaks of these as having done her good. My own connection with the Theosophical Society she knew of and this gave them confidence. Hence the very cordial reception I have met with, which somewhat had puzzled me.

By the way, I think "L.'s" guide ran up against innocent little Snelling! He matches the description quite well, as I realized last night. And he did prepare the new

negatives from which the prints you have were made, and he has a room full up with weird machines with handles and devices used in photography....

Sincerely yours,

EDW. L. GARDNER.

I trust that the reader will agree that up to this point we had not proceeded with any undue rashness or credulity, and that we had taken all common-sense steps to test the case, and had no alternative, if we were unprejudiced seekers for truth, but to go ahead with it, and place our results before the public, so that others might discover the fallacy which we had failed to find. I must apologize if some of the ground in the *Strand* article which follows has already been covered in this introductory chapter.

CHAPTER II. THE FIRST PUBLISHED ACCOUNT —"STRAND" CHRISTMAS NUMBER, 1920

Should the incidents here narrated, and the photographs attached, hold their own against the criticism which they will excite, it is no exaggeration to say that they will mark an epoch in human thought. I put them and all the evidence before the public for examination and judgment. If I am myself asked whether I consider the case to be absolutely and finally proved, I should answer that in order to remove the last faint shadow of doubt I should wish to see the result repeated before a disinterested witness. At the same time, I recognize the difficulty of such a request, since rare results must be obtained when and how they can. But short of final and absolute proof, I consider, after carefully going into every possible source of error, that a strong *prima-facie* case has been built up. The cry of "fake" is sure to be raised, and will make some impression upon those who have not had the opportunity of knowing the people concerned, or the place. On the photographic side every objection has been considered and adequately met. The pictures stand or fall together. Both are false, or both are true. All the circumstances point to the latter alternative, and yet in a matter involving so tremendous a new departure one needs overpowering evidence before one can say that there is no conceivable loophole for error.

It was about the month of May in this year that I received the information from Miss Felicia Scatcherd, so well known in several departments of human thought, to the effect that two photographs of fairies had been taken in the North of England under circumstances which seemed to put fraud out of the question. The statement would have appealed to me at any time, but I happened at the moment to be collecting material for an article on fairies, now completed, and I had accumulated a surprising number of cases of people who claimed to be able to see these little creatures. The evidence was so complete and detailed, with such good names attached to it, that it was difficult to believe that it was false; but, being by nature of a somewhat sceptical turn, I felt that something closer was needed before I could feel personal conviction and assure myself that these were not thought-forms conjured up by the imagination or expectation of the seers. The rumour of the photographs interested me deeply, therefore, and following the matter up from one lady informant to another, I came at last upon Mr. Edward L. Gardner, who has been ever since my most efficient collaborator, to whom all credit is due. Mr. Gardner, it may be remarked, is a member of the Executive Committee of the Theosophical Society, and a well-known lecturer upon occult subjects.

He had not himself at that time mastered the whole case, but all he had he placed freely at my disposal. I had already seen prints of the photographs, but I was relieved to find that he had the actual negatives, and that it was from them, and not from the prints, that two expert photographers, especially Mr. Snelling of 26 The Bridge, Wealdstone, Harrow, had already formed their conclusions in favour of the genuineness of the pictures. Mr. Gardner tells his own story presently, so I will simply say that at that period he had got into direct and friendly touch with the Carpenter family. We are compelled to use a pseudonym and to withhold the exact address, for it is clear that their lives would be much interrupted by correspondence and callers if their identity were too clearly indicated. At the same time there would be, no doubt, no objection to any small committee of inquiry verifying the facts for themselves if this anonymity were respected. For the present, however, we shall simply call them the Carpenter family in the village of Dalesby, West Riding.

Some three years before, according to our information, the daughter and the niece of Mr. Carpenter, the former being sixteen and the other ten years of age, had taken the two photographs—the one in summer, the other in early autumn. The father was quite agnostic in the matter, but as his daughter claimed that she and her cousin when they were together continually saw fairies in the wood and had come to be on familiar and friendly terms with them, he entrusted her with one plate in his camera. The result was the picture of the dancing elves, which considerably amazed the father when he developed the film that evening. The little girl looking across at her playmate, to intimate that the time had come to press the button, is Alice, the niece, while the older girl, who was taken some months later with the quaint gnome, is Iris, the daughter. The story ran that the girls were so excited in the evening that one pressed her way into the small dark-room in which the father was about to develop, and that as she saw the forms of the fairies showing through the solution she cried out to the other girl, who was palpitating outside the door: "Oh, Alice, Alice, the fairies are on the plate—they are on the plate!" It was indeed a triumph for the children, who had been smiled at, as so many children are smiled at by an incredulous world for stating what their own senses have actually recorded.

The father holds a position of trust in connection with some local factory, and the family are well known and respected. That they are cultivated is shown by the fact that Mr. Gardner's advances towards them were made more easy because Mrs. Carpenter was a reader of theosophical teachings and had gained spiritual good from them. A correspondence had arisen and all their letters were frank and honest, professing some amazement at the stir which the affair seemed likely to produce.

Thus the matter stood after my meeting with Mr. Gardner, but it was clear that this was not enough. We must get closer to the facts. The negatives were taken round to Kodak, Ltd., where two experts were unable to find any flaw, but refused to testify to the genuineness of them, in view of some possible trap. An amateur photographer of experience refused to accept them on the ground of the elaborate

and Parisian coiffure of the little ladies. Another photographic company, which it would be cruel to name, declared that the background consisted of theatrical properties, and that therefore the picture was a worthless fake. I leaned heavily upon Mr. Snelling's wholehearted endorsement, quoted later in this article, and also consoled myself by the broad view that if the local conditions were as reported, which we proposed to test, then it was surely impossible that a little village with an amateur photographer could have the plant and the skill to turn out a fake which could not be detected by the best experts in London.

The matter being in this state, Mr. Gardner volunteered to go up at once and report—an expedition which I should have wished to share had it not been for the pressure of work before my approaching departure for Australia. Mr. Gardner's report is here appended:

5 Craven Road,
Harlesden,
N.W.10,
July 29, 1920.

It was early in this year, 1920, that I heard from a friend of photographs of fairies having been successfully taken in the North of England. I made some inquiries, and these led to prints being sent to me with the names and address of the children who were said to have taken them. The correspondence that followed seemed so innocent and promising that I begged the loan of the actual negatives—and two quarter-plates came by post a few days after. One was a fairly clear one, the other much underexposed.

The negatives proved to be truly astonishing photographs indeed, for there was no sign of double exposure nor anything other than ordinary straightforward work. I cycled over to Harrow to consult an expert photographer of thirty years' practical experience whom I knew I could trust for a sound opinion. Without any explanation I passed the plates over and asked what he thought of them. After examining the "fairies" negative carefully, exclamations began: "This is the most extraordinary thing I've ever seen!" "Single exposure!" "Figures have moved!" "Why, it's a genuine photograph! Wherever did it come from?"

I need hardly add that enlargements were made and subjected to searching examination—without any modification of opinion. The immediate upshot was that a "positive" was taken from each negative, that the originals might be preserved carefully untouched, and then new negatives were prepared and intensified to serve as better printing mediums. The originals are just as received and in my keeping now. Some good prints and lantern slides were soon prepared.

In May I used the slides, with others, to illustrate a lecture given in the Mortimer Hall, London, and this aroused considerable interest, largely because of these pictures and their story. A week or so later I received a letter from Sir A. Conan Doyle asking for information concerning them, some report, I understood, having

reached him from a mutual friend. A meeting with Sir Arthur followed, and the outcome was that I agreed to hasten my proposed personal investigation into the origin of the photographs, and carry this through at once instead of waiting till September, when I should be in the North on other matters.



ELSIE IN 1920, STANDING NEAR
WHERE THE GNOME WAS TAKEN IN
1917

In consequence, to-day, July 29, I am just back in London from one of the most interesting and surprising excursions that it has ever been my fortune to make!

We had time, before I went, to obtain opinions on the original negatives from other expert photographers, and one or two of these were adverse rather than favourable. Not that any would say positively that the photographs were faked, but two did claim that they *could* produce the same class of negative by studio work involving painted models, etc., and it was suggested further that the little girl in the first picture was standing behind a table heaped up with fern and moss, that the toadstool was unnatural, that in the gnome photo the girl's hand was not her own, that uniform shading was questionable, and so on. All of this had its weighty and though I went North with as little bias one way or the other as possible, I felt quite prepared to find that a personal investigation would disclose some evidence of falsity.

The lengthy journey completed, I reached a quaint, old-world village in Yorkshire, found the house, and was cordially received. Mrs. C. and her daughter I. (the girl as

shown playing with the gnome) were both at home to meet me, and Mr. C, the father, came in shortly afterwards.



FRANCES IN 1920

Several of the objections raised by the professionals were disposed of almost at once, as, a half-hour after reaching the house, I was exploring a charming little valley, directly at the rear, with a stream of water running through, where the children had been accustomed to see and play with the fairies. I found the bank behind which the child, with her shoes and stockings off, is shown as standing; toad-stools exactly as in the photograph were about in plenty, quite as big and hearty-looking. And the girl's hand! Well, she laughingly made me promise not to say much about it, it is so very long! I stood on the spots shown and easily identified every feature. Then, in course of eliciting all that one could learn about the affair, I gathered the following, which, for the sake of conciseness^ I set out below:

Camera used: "The Midg" quarter-plate. Plates: Imperial Rapid.

Fairies photo: July 1917. Day brilliantly hot and sunny. About 3 p.m. Distance: 4 feet. Time: 1-50th second.

Gnome photo: September 1917. Day bright, but not as above. About 4 o'clock. Distance: 8 feet. Time: 1-50th second.



A. FRANCES AND THE FAIRIES

Photograph taken by Elsie. Bright sunny day in July, 1917. The "Midg" camera. Distance, 4 ft. Time, 1/50th sec. The original negative is asserted by expert photographers to bear not the slightest trace of combination work, retouching, or anything whatever to mark it as other than a perfectly straight single-exposure photograph, taken in the open air under natural conditions. The negative is sufficiently, indeed somewhat over-exposed. The waterfall and rocks are about 20 ft. behind Frances, who is standing against the bank of the beck. A fifth fairy may be seen between and behind the two on the right. The colouring of the fairies is described by the girls as being of very pale pink, green, lavender, and mauve, most marked in the wings and fading to almost pure white in the limbs and drapery. Each fairy has its own special colour.

I. was sixteen years old; her cousin A. was ten years. Other photographs were attempted but proved partial failures, and plates were not kept.

Colouring: The palest of green, pink, mauve. Much more in the wings than in the bodies, which are very pale to white. The gnome is described as seeming to be in black tights, reddish-brown jersey, and red pointed cap. He was swinging his pipes, holding them in his left hand and was just stepping up on to I.'s knee when A. snapped him.

A., the visiting cousin, went away soon after, and I. says they must be together to "take photographs." Fortunately they will meet in a few weeks' time, and they

promise me to try to get some more. I. added she would very much like to send me one of a fairy flying.

Mr. C.'s testimony was clear and decisive. His daughter had pleaded to be allowed to use the camera. At first he demurred, but ultimately, after dinner one Saturday, he put just one plate in the Midg and gave it to the girls. They returned in less than an hour and begged him to develop the plate as I. had "taken a photograph." He did so, with, to him, the bewildering result shown in the print of the fairies!

Mrs. C. says she remembers quite well that the girls were only away from the house a short time before they brought the camera back.

Extraordinary and amazing as these photographs may appear, I am now quite convinced of their entire genuineness, as indeed would everyone else be who had the same evidence of transparent honesty and simplicity that I had. I am adding nothing by way of explanations or theories of my own, though the need for two people, preferably children, is fairly obvious for photography, in order to assist in the strengthening of the etheric bodies. Beyond this I prefer to leave the above statement as a plain, unvarnished narrative of my connection with the incidents.

I need only add that no attempt appears ever to have been made by the family to make these photographs public, and whatever has been done in that direction locally has not been pressed by any of them, nor has there been any money payment in connection with them.

EDWARD L. GARDNER.

I may add as a footnote to Mr. Gardner's report that the girl informed him in conversation that she had no power of any sort over the actions of the fairies, and that the way to "tice them," as she called it, was to sit passively with her mind quietly turned in that direction; then, when faint stirrings or movements in the distance heralded their presence, to beckon towards them and show that they were welcome. It was Iris who pointed out the pipes of the gnome, which we had both taken as being the markings of the moth-like under-wing. She added that if there was not too much rustling in the wood it was possible to hear the very faint and high sound of the pipes. To the objections of photographers that the fairy figures show quite different shadows to those of the human our answer is that ectoplasm, as the etheric protoplasm has been named, has a faint luminosity of its own, which would largely modify shadows.

To the very clear and, as I think, entirely convincing report of Mr. Gardner's, let me add the exact words which Mr. Snelling, the expert photographer, allows us to use. Mr. Snelling has shown great strength of mind, and rendered signal service to psychic study, by taking a strong line, and putting his professional reputation as an expert upon the scales. He has had a varied connection of over thirty years with the Autotype Company and Illingworth's large photographic factory, and has himself turned out some beautiful work of every kind of natural and artificial studio studies. He laughs at the idea that any expert in England could deceive him with a faked photograph. "These two negatives," he says, "are entirely genuine, unfaked

photographs of single exposure, open-air work, show movement in the fairy figures, and there is no trace whatever of studio work involving card or paper models, dark backgrounds, painted figures, etc. In my opinion, they are both straight untouched pictures."

A second independent opinion is equally clear as to the genuine character of the photographs, founded upon a large experience of practical photography.

There is our case, fortified by pictures of the places which the unhappy critic has declared to be theatrical properties. How well we know that type of critic in all our psychic work, though it is not always possible to at once show his absurdity to other people.

I will now make a few comments upon the two pictures, which I have studied long and earnestly with a high-power lens.

One fact of interest is this presence of a double pipe—the very sort which the ancients associated with fauns and naiads—in each picture. But if pipes, why not everything else? Does it not suggest a complete range of utensils and instruments for their own life? Their clothing is substantial enough. It seems to me that with fuller knowledge and with fresh means of vision these people are destined to become just as solid and real as the Eskimos. There is an ornamental rim to the pipe of the elves which shows that the graces of art are not unknown among them. And what joy is in the complete abandon of their little graceful figures as they let themselves go in the dance! They may have their shadows and trials as we have, but at least there is a great gladness manifest in this demonstration of their life.

A second general observation is that the elves are a compound of the human and the butterfly, while the gnome has more of the moth. This may be merely the result of under-exposure of the negative and dullness of the weather. Perhaps the little gnome is really of the same tribe, but represents an elderly male, while the elves are romping young women. Most observers of fairy life have reported, however, that there are separate species, varying very much in size, appearance, and locality—the wood fairy, the water fairy, the fairy of the plains, etc.

Can these be thought-forms? The fact that they are so like our conventional idea of fairies is in favour of the idea. But if they move rapidly, have musical instruments, and so forth, then it is impossible to talk of "thought-forms," a term which suggests something vague and intangible. In a sense we are all thought-forms, since we can only be perceived through the senses, but these little figures would seem to have an objective reality, as we have ourselves, even if their vibrations should prove to be such that it takes either psychic power or a sensitive plate to record them. If they are conventional it may be that fairies have really been seen in every generation, and so some correct description of them has been retained.

There is one point of Mr. Gardner's investigation which should be mentioned. It had come to our knowledge that Iris could draw, and had actually at one time done

some designs for a jeweller. This naturally demanded caution, though the girl's own frank nature is, I understand, a sufficient guarantee for those who know her. Mr. Gardner, however, tested her powers of drawing, and found that, while she could do landscapes cleverly, the fairy figures which she had attempted in imitation of those she had seen were entirely uninspired, and bore no possible resemblance to those in the photograph. Another point which may be commended to the careful critic with a strong lens is that the apparent pencilled face at the side of the figure on the right is really only the edge of her hair, and not, as might appear, a drawn profile.

I must confess that after months of thought I am unable to get the true bearings of this event. One or two consequences are obvious. The experiences of children will be taken more seriously. Cameras will be forthcoming. Other well-authenticated cases will come along. These little folk who appear to be our neighbours, with only some small difference of vibration to separate us, will become familiar. The thought of them, even when unseen, will add a charm to every brook and valley and give romantic interest to every country walk. The recognition of their existence will jolt the material twentieth-century mind out of its heavy ruts in the mud, and will make it admit that there is a glamour and a mystery to life. Having discovered this, the world will not find it so difficult to accept that spiritual message supported by physical facts which has already been so convincingly put before it. All this I see, but there may be much more. When Columbus knelt in prayer upon the edge of America, what prophetic eye saw all that a new continent might do to affect the destinies of the world? We also seem to be on the edge of a new continent, separated not by oceans but by subtle and surmountable psychic conditions. I look at the prospect with awe. May those little creatures suffer from the contact and some Las Casas bewail their ruin! If so, it would be an evil day when the world defined their existence. But there is a guiding hand in the affairs of man, and we can but trust and follow.

CHAPTER III. RECEPTION OF THE FIRST PHOTOGRAPHS

Though I was out of England at the time, I was able, even in Australia, to realize that the appearance of the first photographs in the *Strand Magazine* had caused very great interest. The press comments were as a rule cautious but not unsympathetic. The old cry of "Fake!" was less conspicuous than I had expected, but for some years the press has been slowly widening its views upon psychic matters, and is not so inclined as of old to attribute every new manifestation to fraud. Some of the Yorkshire papers had made elaborate inquiries, and I am told that photographers for a considerable radius from the house were cross-questioned to find if they were accomplices. *Truth*, which is obsessed by the idea that the whole spiritualistic movement and everything connected with it is one huge, senseless conspiracy to deceive, concocted by knaves and accepted by fools, had the usual contemptuous and contemptible articles, which ended by a prayer to Elsie that she should finish her fun and let the public know how it really was done. The best of the critical attacks was in the *Westminster Gazette*, who sent a special commissioner to unravel the mystery, and published the result on January 12, 1921. By kind permission I reproduce the article:

DO FAIRIES EXIST?

INVESTIGATION IN A YORKSHIRE VALLEY

COTTINGLEY'S MYSTERY

STORY OF THE GIRL WHO TOOK THE SNAPSHOT

The publication of photographs of fairies—or, to be more explicit, one photograph of fairies and another of a gnome—playing round children has aroused considerable interest, not only in Yorkshire, where the beings are said to exist, but throughout the country.

The story, mysterious as it was when first told, became even more enigmatical by reason of the fact that Sir A. Conan Doyle made use of fictitious names in his narrative in the *Strand Magazine* in order, as he says, to prevent the lives of the people concerned being interrupted by callers and correspondence. That he has failed to do. I am afraid Sir Conan does not know Yorkshire people, particularly those of the dales, because any attempt to hide identity immediately arouses their suspicions, if it does not go so far as to condemn the writer for his lack of frankness.

It is not surprising, therefore, that his story is accepted with reserve. Each person to whom I spoke of the subject during my brief sojourn in Yorkshire dismissed the matter curtly as being untrue. It has been the principal topic of conversation for weeks, mainly because identity had been discovered.

My mission to Yorkshire was to secure evidence, if possible, which would prove or disprove the claim that fairies existed. I frankly confess that I failed.

The particular fairyland is a picturesque little spot off the beaten track, two or three miles from Bingley. Here is a small village called Cottingley, almost hidden in a break in the upland, through which tumbles a tiny stream, known as Cottingley Beck, on its way to the Aire, less than a mile away. The "heroine" of Sir Conan Doyle's story is Miss Elsie Wright,ⁱ who resides with her parents at 31 Lynwood Terrace. The little stream runs past the back of the house, and the photographs were taken not more than a hundred yards away. When Miss Wright made the acquaintance of the fairies she was accompanied by her cousin, Frances Griffiths, who resides at Dean Road, Scarborough.

One photograph, taken by Miss Wright in the summer of 1917, when she was sixteen, shows her cousin, then a child of ten, with a group of four fairies dancing in the air before her, and in the other, taken some months afterwards, Elsie, seated on the grass, lies a quaint gnome dancing beside her.

There are certain facts which stand out clearly and which none of the evidence I was able to obtain could shake. No other people have seen the fairies, though everybody in the little village knew of their alleged existence; when Elsie took the photograph she was unacquainted with the use of a camera, and succeeded at the first attempt; the girls did not invite a third person to see the wonderful visitors, and no attempt was made to make the discovery public.

First I interviewed Mrs. Wright, who, without hesitation, narrated the whole of the circumstances without adding any comment. The girls, she said, would spend the whole of the day in the narrow valley, even taking their lunch with them, though they were within a stone's throw of the house. Elsie was not robust, and did not work during the summer months, so that she could derive as much benefit as possible from playing in the open. She had often talked about seeing the fairies, but her parents considered it was nothing more than childish fancy, and let it pass. Mr. Wright came into possession of a small camera in 1917, and one Saturday afternoon yielded to the persistent entreaties of his daughter and allowed her to take it out. He placed one plate in position, and explained to her how to take a "snap." The children went away in high glee and returned in less than an hour, requesting Mr. Wright to develop the plate. While this was being done Elsie noticed that the fairies were beginning to show, and exclaimed in an excited tone to her cousin, "Oh, Frances, the fairies are on the plate!" The second photograph was equally successful, and a few prints from each plate were given to friends as curiosities about a year ago. They evidently attracted little notice until one was