The Red Bandits of Montgomery | Texto Completo

When chimneys were first added to houses in Wales, and the style of house-building changed, from round to square, many old people found fault with the new fashion of letting the smoke out. They declared they caught colds and sneezed more often, than in the times gone by. But the greatest objection that the old folks had to the chimneys was that robbers used them to climb down at night and steal people's money, when they were asleep. In Montgomery, which is one of the Welsh shires, the most famous of the robber gangs were called the Red Bandits. A young widow lived there, whose husband had been killed by road robbers. She was left alone in the world, with a little baby boy in the cradle and only one cow in the shed. She had to work hard to pay her rent, but as there were three or four scythes set in the chimney, and the cow stable had a good lock on it, she thought she was safe from burglars.

But the Reds picked out the most expert chimney-climber in their gang, and he one night slipped down into the widow's cottage, without making any noise or cutting off his nose, toes, or fingers. Then, robbing the widow of her rent money, he picked the lock of the barn and drove off the cow. In the morning, the poor woman found both doors open, but there was no money and no cow. While she was crying over her loss, and wringing her hands, because of her poverty, she heard a knock at the door. "Come in," said the widow. There entered an old lady with a kindly face. She was very tall and well dressed. Her cloak, her gloves, and shoes, and the ruffles under her high peaked Welsh headdress, were all green. The widow thought she looked like a lively leek. In her right hand was a long staff, and in her left, under her cloak, she held a little bag, that was green, also.

"Why do you weep?" asked the visitor. Then the widow told her tale of woe, the story of the loss of her husband, and how a red robber had come down the chimney and taken away both her money and her cow. Now, although she had sold all her butter and cream, she could neither pay her rent, nor have any buttermilk with her rye bread. "Dry your tears and take comfort," said the tall lady in the green peaked hat. "Here is money enough to pay your rent and buy another cow." With that, she sat down at the round table near the peat fire. Opening her bag, the shining gold coins slid out and formed a little heap on the table. "There, you can have all this, if you will give me all I want." At first, the widow's eyes opened wide, and then she glanced at the cradle, where her baby was sleeping.

Then she wondered, though she said nothing. But the next moment, she was laughing at herself, and looking around at her poor cottage. She tried to guess what there was in it, that the old lady could possibly want. "You can have anything I have. Name it," she said cheerfully to her visitor. But only a moment more, and all her fears returned at the thought that the visitor might ask for her baby boy. The old lady spoke again and said: "I want to help you all I can, but what I came here for is to get the little boy in the cradle." The widow now saw that the old woman was a fairy, and that if her visitor got hold of her son, she would never see her child again. So she begged piteously for the old lady to take anything and everything, except for her child. "No, I want that boy, and, if you want the gold, you must let me take him."

"Is there anything else that I can do for you, so that I may get the money?" asked the widow. "Well, I'll make it easier for you. There are two things I must tell you to cheer you." "What are they?" asked the widow, eagerly. "One is, that by our fairy law, I cannot take your boy, until three days have passed. Then, I shall come again, and you shall have the gold; but only on the one condition I have stated." "And the next?" almost gasped the widow. "If you can guess my name, you will doubly win; for then, I shall give you the gold and you can keep your boy." Without waiting for another word, the lady in green scooped up her money, put it back in the bag, and moved off and out the door. The poor woman, who was both a widow and mother, brooded all night over her troubles and never slept a wink.

In the morning, she rose up, left her baby with a neighbor, and went to visit some relatives in the next village, which was several miles away. She told her story, but her kinsfolk were too poor to help her. So, all downcast she turned her face homewards. On her way back she had to pass through the woods, where, on one side, was a clearing. In the middle of this open space, was a ring of grass. In the ring a little fairy lady was tripping around and singing to herself. Creeping up silently, the anxious mother caught the sound of a name, several times repeated. It sounded like "Silly Doot." She hurried home and set about her regular work and daily tasks. In fact, she slept soundly that night. The next day, in came ther lady in green as before, with her bag of money. Taking her seat at the round table, near the fire, she poured out the gold. Then jingling the coins in the pile, she said: "Now give up your boy, or guess my name, if you want me to help you."

The young widow, feeling sure that she had the old fairy in a trap, thought she would have some fun first. "How many guesses am I allowed?" she asked. "All you want, and as many as you please," answered the green lady, smiling.

The widow rattled off a string of names, English, Welsh and Biblical; but every time the fairy shook her head. Her eyes began to gleam, as if she felt certain of getting the boy. She even moved her chair around to the side nearest the cradle. "One more guess," cried the widow. "Can it be Silly Doot?" At this sound, the fairy turned red with rage. At the same moment, the door opened wide and a blast of wind made the hearth fire flare up. Leaving her gold behind her, the old woman flew up the chimney, and disappeared over the housetops. The widow scooped up the gold, bought two cows, furnished her cottage with new chairs and fresh flowers, and put the rest of the coins away under one of the flag stones at the hearth. When her boy grew up, she gave him a good education, and he became one of the fearless judges, who rooted out the Red Bandits that had robbed his mother.