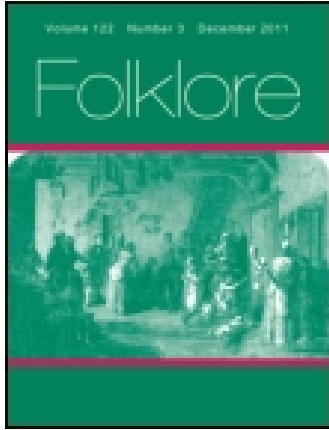


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A Cambridgeshire Witch

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A CAMBRIDGESHIRE WITCH.

(Communicated through Miss Beatrix Wherry.)

MRS. SMITH was born about 1810 and died about 1880. My father was then clergyman of the parish (in Cambridgeshire), and I have heard him say there were such crowds of people at her funeral that they pushed each other right into the grave, all expecting that she would burst her coffin. He was obliged to stop and speak to them, "and a fine lecture he gave them," a woman told me when lately I revisited my old home, "and serve 'em right too, for their wonderful ignorance, believing in such things."

On the occasion of the same visit I asked another old acquaintance, Mrs D——, if she could tell me anything about Mrs. Smith. "Oh yes," she said, "she used to live near us and would often come to see mother. Sometimes we would lay a knife or a pair of scissors just inside the door, and then she would say, 'I can't come in, my sole is coming off my shoe,' and she couldn't come in until we had taken the knife away, because a witch can't pass over steel. Other times we would hide a knife under the cushion on the arm-chair and ask her to sit down, but she would pick up the cushion and say, 'Why, you have got a knife hidden there!'"

I then asked if it was true that she had power over animals. "Oh yes!" was the reply, "my mother saw a waggon opposite the public-house down the road there, and the horses couldn't move it. The man was cursing, and thrashing 'em something cruel, and the horses was pulling, but they couldn't move the cart nohow. At last he got so wild, he caught hold of a pitchfork and drove it into the horse's knee, but even then [!] it couldn't go on. Well, Mrs. Smith she came down the road. 'Don't treat the poor horses like that,' she says, and directly she spoke off went the horses as if nothing was the matter. Then there was a woman here as had a pig as was taken wonderful bad, a-whirling round in the field and frothing at the mouth. Well, the woman she sent for a man to kill it, and he came a-sharpening his knife, when all of a sudden the pig

it stopped rushing round, and just ran after the man as was going to kill it—and Mrs. Smith she come by just at the minute.” “And did they kill the pig?” I asked. “No, in course,” she said, “it was quite well after that.”

“Mrs. Smith seems to have been very kind to animals,” I remarked. “Well you see, Miss,” she said, “if a pig was hurt, it hurt her too: if they cut a pig on the nose, the mark came on her face. There was another woman as wanted to kill a pig as was took bad, so Mrs. Smith she took some meal and she says to the woman, ‘I owe you this,’ she says; and if the woman had answered she would not have been able to kill that pig. The children they used to have all sorts of jokes with her; sometimes they would stick pins into her footmark and she would turn round and ask them what they were a-doing of.”

“I have been told she had imps,” I said, “did you ever see any?” “No,” said Mrs. D——, “I didn’t, but other people have.” I asked her to tell me something about them. “After Mrs. Smith died mother laid her out. There was a chest of drawers in the room and such a squeaking and a hollering going on inside it like a lot of rats, but when mother looked in there was nothing inside it. Before she died she said to mother, ‘When I am dead don’t you make a peep-show of me, Sarah,’ but mother she did, and I went and so did lots of others. My sister Mary she saw an imp once; she was on her way to the mill and something jumped out on her, a black thing; it wasn’t exactly a dog nor a rat, it looked more like a frog; the thing jumped on her and Mary she screeched something awful and ran for dear life. Mother heard she had been bitten by a mad dog, so she sent a message down she had better go to the doctor. But Mary said, no, it wasn’t a dog as had jumped on her, it had the look of a frog. Mrs. Smith came to see mother. ‘Is it true,’ she says, ‘as your darter’s been bitten by a dog?’ ‘No,’ says mother, ‘it was a frog that jumped on her.’ ‘Ah,’ says Mrs. Smith, ‘it would have been a pity if she had killed it.’ You see, Miss, if she had killed it, that would have hurt *her*.”

“Did anybody else see the imps?” I asked.

"Yes, there was a man saw Mrs. and Mr. Smith, a-feeding the imps out of a box; that was when her husband was alive. There was my cousin, Jim D——; everybody knows he drank, but not so bad as some, not by a long way. He was coming home one night, and do what he would he could not reach home. He could walk straight in any other direction, but directly he tried to walk home something seemed to stop him, a-pulling of him back. He climbed hedges, he tried every way, and a fine state of mind he was in lest the police should catch him roaming about, and think he was up to mischief. All at once he thought he saw a woman on a horse, and when he come close, he saw it was the old girl on a hurdle! That's how she used to go about at night. Another man he saw her a-flying over hedges and ditches on her hurdle."

"There was my brother's little girl Florry as was very ill. They lived over at T——. There was a witch there, Miss. Well, they put the child's illness down to her. So my brother he got a bottle and filled it with water and put in some of the child's hair and a lot of other things as I can't remember, then they corked it up and put it on the fire to boil. Then when the bottle burst that would hurt the witch—that is, if you did not speak to her; and she came and she did her best to make them speak. There was a woman here as Mrs. Smith had a spite against. She did not leave her house for years and years, but directly Mrs. Smith died she was all right again, and so we always says as she was bewitched. Then there was a little niece of mine staying here with her mother. She was on her mother's lap sitting near the fire, and she looks up the chimney and starts screaming awful, and nothing would pacify her. They took her out of the house cause they couldn't bear the noise, but directly she was brought back she would look up the chimney and start screaming again, so we thinks she must have seen something up the chimney, and it was Mrs. Smith's doing."

"What was she like to talk to?" I asked.

"Oh, she was always very nice to us. My mother, she told her plain, that if she tried any of her tricks on our animals, she would just mark them so that it would come out on her,

so that everyone should see. If you gave her anything or lent her anything, then she had got a hold over you."

Mrs. D—— had many more anecdotes about pigs which Mrs. Smith had made ill. The complaint always took the form of whirling round and round. Many people had seen them in that state, and as soon as Mrs. Smith spoke to them they recovered immediately. But in subsequent visits Mrs. D—— refused to return to the subject, as she said it made her feel nervous at night. Another woman in the village afterwards told me nearly the same stories, and with reference to the marks coming out on the witch's hands, she declared she had seen them covered with cuts. She had herself, so she said, been an eye-witness of the scene, when a man she knew put a bottle on the fire and "said some words" over it, and directly the water began to simmer, old Mrs. Smith rushed to the door and made such a noise that they were obliged to speak to her.

HERMIONE L. F. JENNINGS.

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CUTTING A WATERSPOUT.

(Communicated through Mr. J. G. Fraser.)

THE story which I give below was told me by a young Greek friend of mine, André Vagliano, a son of the Paris Vagliano. He was quite unaware of its real interest and merely regarded the whole thing as a "funny" incident. There is at least this advantage in his unsophisticated attitude that he cannot have read into the ceremony details which were not there; though, of course, he may have failed to observe points which were. This is what he told me:—

"I was travelling to Cephalonia on board the Greek S.S.