

**FAIRY TALES, NOW FIRST  
COLLECTED: TO WHICH ARE  
PREFIXED TWO DISSERTATIONS:  
1. ON PYGMIES. 2. ON FAIRIES**

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Fairy tales, now first collected: to which are prefixed two dissertations: 1. On pygmies. 2. On fairies by Joseph Ritson

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**JOSEPH RITSON**

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# Fairy Tales,

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TWO DISSERTATIONS:

1. ON PYGMIES.

2. ON FAIRIES.

BY

JOSEPH RITSON, ESQ.

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— Fairy Elves ✓

Whose midnight revel, by a forest side,  
Or fountain, some belated peasant sees,  
Or dreams he sees; while over-head the moon  
Sits arbitress, and nearer to the earth  
Wheels her pale course; they, on their mirth and dance  
Intent, with jocund music charm his ear:  
At once with joy and fear his heart rebounds.

MILTON.

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## DISSERTATION I.

ON PYGMIES.

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THE existence of a little nation of diminutive people engaged in, almost, continual wars with the cranes, is an opinion of such high antiquity as to be coeval with the rudiments of the heathen mythology. Homer, who flourished 907 years before the vulgar æra, is, universally, admitted to be the earliest poet whose works remain, and, though totally blind and unable either to read or write (no written characters being known to the Greeks till many centuries after his time), he had recourse to his invention and, with a harp in his hand, went about various countries, singing and playing, as a bard or rhapsodist, and was well rewarded for his poetical effusions, which being fabulous stories, of his own composition, of gods, heroes, wars, battles, sieges, voyages, adventures and miracles, altogether incredible and impossible, and of persons, things, cities and countries, which never existed,



but in his fertile invention and ingenious fabrication, [and with] which every one who heard him was delighted; and, in process of time, four or five centuries after his death, when his countrymen, the learned Greeks, possessing admirable memories and 'having,' some how or other, got an alphabet and being made capable to read and write, these delightful and ingenious compositions of our blind bard have, fortunately, come down to the present times, in the course of 2000 years or upward. When, therefore, translations have become common in, almost, every learned language, particularly, in our own, of which we are possessed of one so excellent that it has been, happily, said :

So much, dear POPE, thy ENGLISH Iliad charms,  
 When pity melts us or when passion warms,  
 That after-ages shall, with wonder, seek  
 Who 'twas translated HOMER into GREEK :

we are at liberty to conceive that the account of the Pygmies, as found in the Iliad, is there given and preserved, from ancient and established tradition and, possibly, recorded in history or celebrated in epic poetry, long before the time of Homer :

So, when inclement winters vex the plain  
 With piercing frosts or thick-descending rain,

To warmer seas the cranes embody'd fly,  
 With noise and order, through the mid-way sky,  
 To Pygmy nations wounds and death they bring  
 And all the war descends upon the wing\*.

Hesiod, likewise, had mentioned the Pygmies, in some work now lost, as we learn from Strabo †.

[Birds] in the spring-time, says Aristotle, betake themselves from a warm country to a cold one, out of fear of heat to come, as the cranes do, which come from the Scythian fields to the higher marshes, whence the Nile flows, in which place they are said to fight with the Pygmies. For that is not a fable, but, certainly, the genus as well of the men, as, also, of the horses is little (as it is said) and dwell in caves, whence they have received the name Troglodytes, from those coming near them ‡.

Herodotus, indeed, speaks "of a little people,

\* Homers *Iliad*, B. 3, v. 3, in the lines of Pope.

† B. 1. p. 43; B. 7, p. 299. "But, for, to Hesiod no one would object ignorance, naming Half-dogs, *Longicipites*, and Pygmies. Neither, truly, that, concerning Homer, to be wonderful, when, also, by much, of those who come after, many things both have been ignorant of and, monstrously, feigned: as Hesiod, Half-dogs, Jothheads, Pygmies."

‡ *Of the history of animals*, B. 8, c. 12. "Of the Pygmies, that is, of dwarfs, dandiprats and little men and women, the generation is alike: for, of those, also, whose members and sizes are spoiled in the womb and are, even as, pigs and mules." (*Aristotle, of the generation of animals*, B. 2, c. 8.)

under the middle stature of men 'coming' up to certain Nasamonians who were wandering in Africa and knew not the language of each other\*: but does not call them Pygmies or give them any other name. Cambyses, however, as he, elsewhere, says, went into the temple of Vulcan [in Egypt] and, with much derision, ridiculed his image, forasmuch as the statue of Vulcan was very like to the Phœnician Pataicks, which they carried about in the prows of their galleys: which those who saw not, it was indicated to him to be those in the image of a Pygmean-man †.

“ Middle India has black men, who are called Pygmies, using the same language as the other Indians: they are, however, very little: that the greatest do not exceed the height of two cubits and, the most part, only, of one cubit and a half. But they nourish the longest hair, hanging down unto the knees and even below: moreover, they carry a beard more at length than any other men: but, what is more, . . . after this promised beard is risen to them, they never after use any clothing, but send down, truly, the hairs from the back much below the knees, but draw the beard before down to the feet: afterward, when they have

\* *Enterpe*, II, p. 32.

† *Thalia*, III, p. 37.