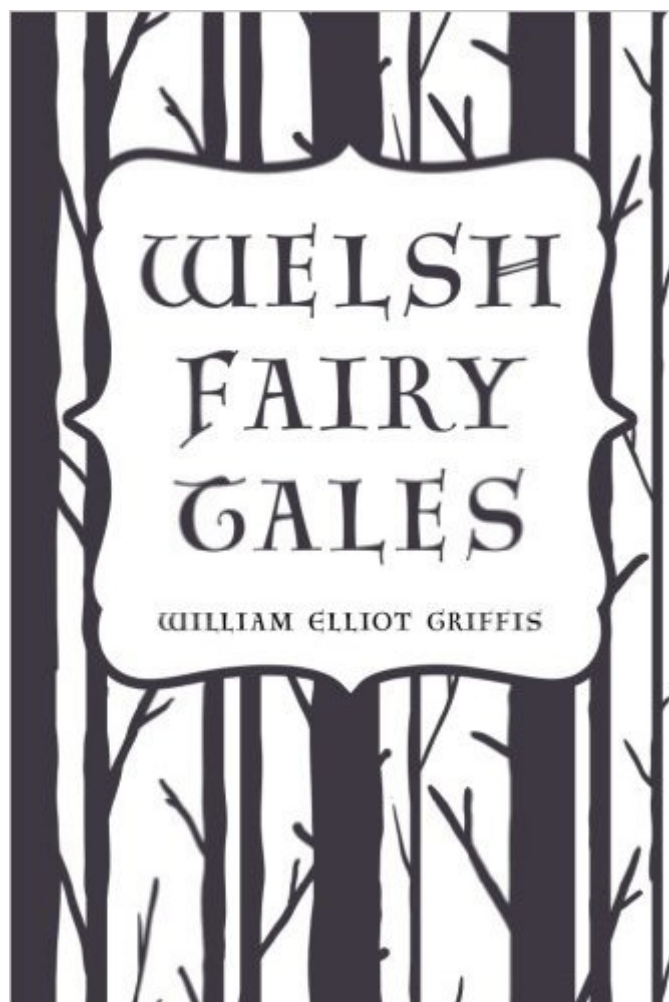


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Welsh Fairy Tales



Synopsis

William Elliot Griffis was an American orientalist, Congregational minister, lecturer, and prolific author. Griffis was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the son of a sea captain and later a coal trader.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

W. E. Griffis, the author of this collection of twenty four short stories, lived between 1843 and 1928. His tales have a distinct Welsh flavor. They speak about the Welsh history, the countryside, and the customs of the people. His first tale, for example, tells that the name Taffy used by the Welsh is a mispronunciation of David, a saint who came to the country and taught the people how to eat a good food without killing an animal. This was to melt a good cheese over bread. The British, who loved to eat rabbits, called this delicacy Welsh Rabbit, and many people today think that a Welsh Rabbit is a food made from animals. The second has an interesting twist on the story of a warrior fighting a monster. In this tale, the hero is a beautiful young girl who perfumes herself and enchants the monster with her beauty and her smells and her lullaby, which causes him to fall asleep. The story is ostensibly about the distant past and the origin of some famous Welsh places. The third tells some adventures of Hugh the conjurer. He was a seventh son, and seventh sons in Wales have magical powers. Once he was told that people who came to a certain Inn were robbed, even though their rooms were locked and there was no sign that any human had entered. Hugh, willing to go anywhere to help people, agreed to solve the crimes. The fourth allegedly relates the history of the country, how the people settled the land, the wars between tribes, how women were treated, and how customs like the "wake" were created (people had to stay awake all night to protect the

dead from wild animals).

I read Dutch Fairy Tales for Young Folks by the same author, and was so terribly unimpressed with them that I only read enough of this one to ascertain that it was similar--except this one involves Welsh children learning the Secret of Cheese on Toast instead of Dutch ones learning the Secret of Flax. If you can handle the perfectly obedient children go ahead and read it, otherwise Welsh Fairy-Tales and Other Stories was much better. Stories included are: Welsh Rabbit and Hunted Hares, The Mighty Monster Afang, The Two Cat Witches, How the Cymry Land Became Inhabited, The Boy that was Named Trouble, The Golden Harp, The Great Red Dragon of Wales, The Touch of Clay, The Touch of Iron, The Maiden of the Green Forest, The Treasure Stone of the Fairies, Giant Tom and Giant Blubb, A Boy that Visited Fairyland, The Welshery and the Normans, The Welsh Fairies Hold a Meeting, King Arthur's Cave, The Lady of the Lake, The King's Foot Holder, Powell, Prince of Dyfed, Powell and his Bride, Why the Back Door was Front, The Red Bandits of Montgomery, The Fairy Congress, The Sword of Avalon.

The author of this volume, William Elliot Griffis, was a proud Pennsylvanian descended from Welsh stock. He was a Congregational minister and a prominent orientalist, but as a Welshman from Pennsylvania, especially in 1921, he was a Welshman through and through. (The dedication of the book to his Welsh born grandfather is both touching and hilarious and a perfect example of how proud the early American Welsh were to wear the leek.) Anyway, this collection is a labor of love, not academic scholarship. No footnotes, no citation of sources, no careful parsing of disputed passages from the Red Book of Hergest, ("Llyfr Coch Hergest"), this is an energetic, muscular all out love letter to Wales, the Welsh, and traditional Welsh stories. It's loaded with questionable history and dubious explanations of the origins of the Cymry, and apparently Saint David was responsible for inventing everything from Welsh rarebit, (rabbit), to the telephone. But I don't care, because Griffis is a tremendous storyteller, with an instinct for the rhythm of a story and the telling, engaging detail. You can read this yourself as a light entertainment, or I guess you could read it critically if you are so inclined, but this strikes me as best as a read aloud for a younger listener. The tales aren't scary, but they are clever, or touching, or full of action, or fantastic, and really beg to be read out loud. Despite the fact that the text is almost a hundred years old it is fresh and clear and direct, which also recommends it for younger, modern readers. This is a well formatted and readable Kindle freebie, (although without an active Table of Contents), and has so much zest and personality, it ended up being a very pleasant freebie find.

While some reviewer's are finding the incidences of domestic violence and subjugation of women to be part of this collection, I view it as yet another example of folklore from an earlier time in history. If we were to hold every example of folklore up to today's societal standards quite a few would fail. The standards and mores of the times that have passed are not the point to me. The stories of the culture and folklore and seeing connections with other cultures and folklore is my primary interest. It would be nice if someone could find out the name of the beautiful maiden who charmed and sang Anfang to sleep but is only remembered by that incident and for later marrying the "hero" of the tale though. I did read many more tales of Welsh folklore than I had ever previously encountered and it was nice to discover so many hidden gems.

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