

William Allingham (1824-89)

3 *The Maids of Elfin-Mere*

'Twas when the spinning-room was here.
Came Three Damsels clothed in white,
With their spindles every night;
Two and one, and Three fair Maidens,
Spinning to a pulsing cadence, 5
Singing songs of Elfin-Mere;
Till the eleventh hour was toll'd,
Then departed through the wold.
Years ago, and years ago;
And the tall reeds sigh as the wind doth blow. 10

Three white Lilies, calm and clear,
And they were loved by every one;
Most of all, the Pastor's Son,
Listening to their gentle singing,
Felt his heart go from him, clinging 15
Round these Maids of Elfin-Mere;
Sued each night to make them stay,
Sadden'd when they went away.
Years ago, and years ago;
And the tall reeds sigh as the wind doth blow. 20

Hands that shook with love and fear
Dared put back the village clock, —
Flew the spindle, turn'd the rock,
Flow'd the song with subtle rounding,
Till the false "eleven" was sounding; 25
Then these Maids of Elfin-Mere
Swiftly, softly, left the room,
Like three doves on snowy plume.
Years ago, and years ago;
And the tall reeds sigh as the wind doth blow. 30

One that night who wander'd near
Heard lamentings by the shore,

Saw at dawn three stains of gore
In the waters fade and dwindle.
Nevermore with song and spindle 35
Saw we Maids of Elfin-Mere.
The Pastor's Son did pine and die;
Because true love should never lie.
Years ago, and years ago;
And the tall reeds sigh as the wind doth blow. 40

1877

(From *Songs, Ballads, and Stories*. London: George Bell and Sons, 1877)