

Mary Howitt (1799-1888)

2 *The Fairies of the Caldon Low*

A Midsummer Legend.

“And where have you been, my Mary,
And where have you been from me?”
“I’ve been to the top of the Caldon Low,
The midsummer-night to see!”

“And what did you see, my Mary, 5
All up on the Caldon Low?”
“I saw the glad sunshine come down,
And I saw the merry winds blow.”

“And what did you hear, my Mary, 10
All up on the Caldon Hill?”
“I heard the drops of the water made,
And the ears of the green corn fill.”

“Oh! tell me all, my Mary, 15
All, all that ever you know;
For you must have seen the fairies,
Last night, on the Caldon Low.”

“Then take me on your knee, mother;
And listen, mother of mine.
A hundred fairies danced last night,
And the harpers they were nine. 20

“And their harp-strings rung so merrily
To their dancing feet so small;
But oh! the words of their talking
Were merrier far than all.”

“And what were the words, my Mary, 25
That then you heard them say?”
“I’ll tell you all, my mother;
But let me have my way.

“Some of them played with the water,
And rolled it down the hill; 30
‘And this,’ they said, ‘shall speedily turn
The poor old miller’s mill:

“For there has been no water
Ever since the first of May;
And a busy man will the miller be 35
At dawning of the day.

“Oh! the miller, how he will laugh
When he sees the mill-dam rise!
The jolly old miller, how he will laugh
Till the tears fill both his eyes!’ 40

“And some they seized the little winds
That sounded over the hill;
And each put a horn unto his mouth,
And blew both loud and shrill:

“And there,’ they said, ‘the merry winds go 45
Away from every horn;
And they shall clear the mildew dank
From the blind, old widow’s corn.

“Oh! the poor, blind widow,
Though she has been blind so long, 50
She’ll be blithe enough when the mildew’s gone,
And the corn stands tall and strong.’

“And some they brought the brown lint-seed,
And flung it down from the Low;
‘And this,’ they said, ‘by the sunrise, 55
In the weaver’s croft shall grow.

“Oh! the poor, lame weaver,
How will he laugh outright,
When he sees his dwindling flax-field
All full of flowers by night!’ 60

“And then outspoke a brownie,

With a long beard on his chin;
'I have spun up all the tow,' said he,
'And I want some more to spin.

"I've spun a piece of hempen cloth, 65
And I want to spin another;
A little sheet for Mary's bed,
And an apron for her mother.'

"With that I could not help but laugh,
And I laughed out loud and free; 70
And then on the top of the Caldun Low
There was no one left but me.

"And all on the top of the Caldun Low
The mists were cold and grey,
And nothing I saw but the mossy stones 75
That round about me lay.

"But, coming down from the hill-top,
I heard afar below,
How busy the jolly miller was,
And how the wheel did go. 80

"And I peeped into the widow's field,
And, sure enough, were seen
The yellow ears of the mildewed corn,
All standing stout and green.

"And down by the weaver's croft I stole, 85
To see if the flax were sprung;
But I met the weaver at his gate,
With the good news on his tongue.

"Now this is all I heard, mother,
And all that I did see; 90
So, pr'ythee, make my bed, mother,
For I'm tired as I can be."

1847

(From *Ballads and Other Poems*. London, 1847)