

Weird Tales

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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Contents for March, 1929

- Cover Design**..... **C. C. Senf**
Illustrating a scene in "The People of Pan"
- The People of Pan**..... **Henry S. Whitehead** 292
Under the surface of a West Indian island Canevin found a strange people who worshiped Pan—then the catastrophe
- The City of Iron Cubes (Part 1)**..... **H. F. Arnold** 306
A two-part weird-scientific serial story by the author of "The Night Wire"—strange invaders from space land in Peru
- The Immortal Hand**..... **Arlton Eadie** 325
A ghost-story of Shakespeare and Stratford-on-Avon—three tourists make a startling discovery
- Visions in Smoke**..... **Rufus W. Landon** 332
Verse
- The Deserted Garden**..... **August W. Derleth** 333
He investigated the mysterious death of his predecessor—and himself fell a victim to an elemental spirit

[CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE]

[CONTINUED FROM PRECEDING PAGE]

- The Rat**.....**S. Fowler Wright** 337
The surgeon experimented on a blind rat, then committed a strange murder—a story by the author of "The Deluge"
- The Sea Horror**.....**Edmond Hamilton** 351
In their cities in the ocean depths the slug-people launched their war against the civilization of man
- The Hounds of Tindalos**.....**Frank Belknap Long, Jr.** 373
A tale of unutterable horror—of a pursuit by loathsome entities through the ages and through the dimensions
- Ballade of Wandering Ghosts**.....**Hanna Baird Campbell** 382
Verse
- The Vengeance of the Dead (Conclusion)**.....**Eli Colter** 383
A two-part serial story of a strange monstrosity whose ghastly depredations terrified the guests at Waggener Wilds
- The Celadon Vase**.....**John Murray Reynolds** 397
The alchemist devised an ingenious trap in which to catch his lady and test her faithfulness
- Folks Used to Believe:**
- May Dew**.....**Alvin F. Harlow** 403
 One of the strange superstitions of our ancestors
- Left by the Tide**.....**Edward E. Schiff** 404
 A bizarre tale of the sea—the story of a gruesome struggle with a monstrosity out of the deeps
- Weird Story Reprint:**
- The Phantom Farmhouse**.....**Seabury Quinn** 406
 A reprint from Weird Tales of six years ago—a werewolf story of unusual pathos and beauty
- Sonnets of the Midnight Hours:**
- 12. A Vision of the Future**.....**Donald Wandrei** 420
 Verse; decoration by Hugh Rankin
- The Eyrie**..... 421
 A chat with the readers

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Folks Used to Believe

by ALVIN F.
HARLOW

MAY DEW

THE joyous celebration of May Day can be traced back to the Roman Floralia, a spring festival of flowers. Then the Goths and other northern barbaric races had a similar festival of rejoicing over the departure of winter. The Queen of the May was simply a modern prototype of the Roman goddess Flora, and the maypole dance and other festivities of the day were reminders of early pagan rites which were far less decorous than they became later.

In England even as late as the Sixteenth Century, people often spent the whole night previous to May Day frolicking in the woods (perhaps in more or less conscious imitation of the witches who were holding their "sabbath" at the same time) and bringing home flowers and boughs.

Along some of the estuaries in Scotland where salmon fishing is carried on, a man goes across the river before daybreak on May Day, for if a female crossed first, the salmon would not come up into the river that season, and the fishing would be ruined.

Throughout Europe it was believed

that if a maiden washed herself with dew gathered from the hawthorn at daybreak on every May Day, her beauty would never fade. We read in 1515 of Catherine of Aragon, first wife of Henry VIII, going out with twenty-five of her ladies after May dew. In 1623 there is a record of the Spanish Infanta Maria doing the same thing while Prince Charles of England, afterward Charles I, was paying his addresses to her.

In the *London Morning Post* for May 2, 1791, we read, "Yesterday being the first of May, according to annual and superstitious custom, a number of persons went into the fields and bathed their faces with the dew, under the idea that it would make them beautiful."

In Pepy's *Diary* in May, 1667, we find, "My wife away down with Jane and W. Hewer to Woolwich, in order to a little ayre and to lie there tomorrow, and so to gather May dew tomorrow morning, which Mrs. Turner hath taught her is the only thing in the world to wash her face with; and I am contented with it."