

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

A MAGAZINE of the



BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XIV

NUMBER 5

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$2.50 a year in the United States, \$3.00 a year in Canada. English office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeant's Inn, Fleet Street, E. C. 4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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The Tailed Man of CORNWALL by David H. Keller



"When I separated from him I had his tail in my hand."

FOR several days I was more than busy receiving the great men of Cornwall who thronged to my castle, driven by some mysterious urge, which no one fully comprehended but myself, to acknowledge me as their Overlord. The statements that they

made to me concerning my fitness for this position were most flattering, and, at the same time, as I heard their petitions to have this and that giant killed and one enemy or another of the land driven out or destroyed, I felt that there was certainly a great

deal of work connected with the responsibility. Still, I told them, one and all, that, just as soon as I could, I would attend to all these minor adventures, because if I was going to be Overlord of a country, I wanted that land to be peaceful, quiet and safe. They were delighted with my promises, and departed, thoroughly convinced of my power to do all that would be asked of me. Of course, there was not much doubt in my mind as to my ability to perform any great act of chivalry that fell to my lot. I am sure that I was clever enough to conquer anything, even without help, but, of course, it was far more pleasant to know that I had the assistance of the Demon whom I had rescued from the glass bottle on the occasion of the Battle of the Toads.

Finally, but one of the great lords remained. He was a rather pleasing personality but of a dour humor, for during all the days that he had eaten my meat he had never smiled. He remained behind, and I suspected rightly that the reason for his doing so was a desire to talk over some matters with me which could not be discussed in the presence of the other knights. I heard, indirectly, that he had some ambitions to become Overlord of Cornwall himself; naturally, those ambitions were blighted by my very astonishing assumption of authority. I thought for a while that he might have a desire to slip a dagger into me, but found, in a short time, that I was completely misjudging the poor fellow. He was not worrying about his loss of power, but of something far more precious to him, the loss of his fair lady love.

The unhappy young man told me the sad tale the first evening we were alone. I had purposely taken him into my new library, as I found that he was fond of the finer things in life, and it was my belief that in the quiet peace of that room, in front of the fire, he would feel more confidential and less embarrassed in the telling of

his story than he would otherwise. This was a correct supposition. In no time at all he unburdened himself and told me of his great sorrow.

"I am a man of Cornwall," he said. "My family have always lived in Cornwall. Perhaps I would have been wiser had I always remained here, but, like many young knights, I had to go adventuring. Fate took me to Ireland, and Boy Cupid introduced me to Queen Broda. When we met, doves flew over us and a sparrow lighted on her golden chariot. It was love at first sight, but the sad hap was that she did not know I was from Cornwall. She ruled mightily over a large part of the island, and there her word was law. She loved me, and the fact that I was poor made mighty little difference in the sweetness of her kisses. We were ready to marry, but when she found out that I was from Cornwall, she simply told me that she could never marry me. Then I came home and since then it has made little difference to me whether I was ever Overlord or whether I was even dead or alive. For, to live happy, I must have Broda for wife, and for her to be happy she must have me for her lover, and, yet, she says that it can never be, simply because I am a Cornishman."

"'Tis a sad tale," I agreed, "and I suppose you want my help?"

"That is why I lingered."

"Did she give any reason for her cruel refusal of your love?"

"That in very truth she did. She says that I am from Cornwall and that all Cornishmen have tales of braggadocio and other tails, the very mention of which fills her with fear."

"You mean that she believed you to be a tailed man?"

"Yes. That is her belief."

"Of course, she must have had some reason for such an idea."

"Certainly."

"Naturally, we can not blame her for not marrying you, thinking as she did. It seems to me that under the

circumstances the lady showed rare judgment and a very fine discrimination. But why did you not show her that she was wrong?"

"I tried to in every way I could. I told her that I was as tailless as the Irish, but she simply cried and said that she could not trust me, and how would she feel after she was married to me and could not undo it, to find out that I had lied to her? I told her that I was a true man and spoke the truth, but she retorted that thus had all men spoken to women since the days of Knight Æneas and Lady Dido, and that none of them were to be trusted, especially one with a tail."

I sadly shook my head as I remarked, "Oh! These women! These women!"

"Have you ever been in love?" he asked dolefully.

"Not yet."

"Then you don't know half about them. But will you help me?"

"I certainly will do all I can. In fact, I think I will be sending for this mighty Queen and will be after explaining a few things to her. I can tell her positively that you have no tail?"

"That is something that you will have to decide for yourself," was all the satisfaction that Lord Fitz-Hugh would give me.

I shrugged my shoulders, as I cautioned him.

"I think you ought to be candid with me. I am Overlord now of what I hope will some day be a great realm. One of the foundations of that country will be honesty and fair dealings with our neighbors. Thus we may hope to escape devastating wars. Suppose, on my word of honor as a true King, I tell this lady that you have no tail, and on the strength of my say-so she marries you, and then suppose that she finds that I told her wrong. Think how she would feel! How would I feel if she cut off your head and tail and came to Cornwall to revenge herself on me? I have to know

certainly about this. It is really very important."

"You will simply have to make up your mind—form your own opinion."

He was so stubborn that I saw there was nothing to be done about it; so I bade him go back to his castle, and said that when the time came I would send for him. In fact, I did more. Finding that he lived but a day's journey from my castle, I adventured thither with him the next day and spent a very pleasant time with him. He was living in the castle where he was born and where his family had lived for many generations. I met his mother, a very pleasant lady, who was quite witty, yet, at the same time, remarkably learned and greatly distressed over the unhappiness of her son. Then I left them, promising them that I would do what I could, as soon as I could, and then I was sure everything would turn out in a most happy manner to the great satisfaction of Lord Fitz-Hugh.

IT WAS a fortunate happening that I returned when I did. While the Lords and Knights of Cornwall were perfectly willing for me to be their Overlord, the men of Wales had some different ideas. In fact, they had a candidate of their own. They told me, through their ambassadors, that unless I left the country at once, they would secure the help of the Irish, especially of Queen Broda, who hated Cornwall more than she hated Hell, and they would come over my land and replace all the dead Cornwall men with first-class Welshmen.

I consulted with several of the gray-haired nobles in the vicinity. It seemed that if the Welshmen came by themselves, it would be an even fight, but if the Irish merged forces with either side, it would be hard to overcome them. They said that they would stand by me to the end, but that there was no doubt but that they were afraid of this Irish Queen. I remembered that the Demon had promised

that I was to be Overlord of Cornwall, but there was nothing said in our agreement as to how long I was to hold that position and retain the honor. I had a hard time enjoying the library that evening. Even the manuscript of *Elephantis* failed to thrill me, and I told myself that this matter of politics was a most unsatisfactory one and that just as soon as I could I was going to retire to a nice quiet place, like Avalon-by-the-sea.

The next day was stormy. So was the next day. And on the third day came frightened runners, who told that the Irish were marching through the land, and before I could decide how to act, a great army encamped around my castle, and there I was, with Queen Broda on one side of the castle wall and me on the other side, a most peculiar position for a real Overlord to be placed in.

There was nothing to do except to see what she wanted, so I readily gave willing assent to her request for an interview. She told me, over the drawbridge, through the mouth of a most interesting old herald, that if I doubted her word, I could be accompanied by several hundred of my men-at-arms, but that she preferred privacy and therefore asked that I meet her at sundown that night on the grassy green in front of the castle. I told the herald that I would be there, and that I would come alone, as the Queen requested.

I spent the afternoon in moody silence in the library, trying to decide what the lady wanted and what would satisfy her, but I finally gave it up as something that was hopeless, as there seemed to be no telling what she wanted, and, as far as I knew, no man had ever yet satisfied a woman; at least, he had never lived to boast of it. So I spent the rest of the time reading of the temptations of Saint Anthony, and a most weary time he had of it, what with the desert dust and the lovely women he did not yield to—at least, he boasted that he

did not yield. Later in the afternoon I dressed in my best and at the appointed going-downward of the sun, I walked slowly out through the gate to the grassy place in front of the castle.

QUEEN BRODA sat silent in her golden chariot. She was rather easy to look at. I certainly could not blame young Fitz-Hugh for his infatuation. In fact, I even considered the possibility of explaining to her that I was from France and that things might come to a worse pass than uniting our forces and giving the Welsh a sound thrashing, followed at an appropriate moment by a marriage that would unite the two kingdoms of Ireland and Cornwall. But there was a determined glint in her eye and a pert way of holding her head that made me feel that it would be best for me if I could induce her to take Fitz-Hugh on faith—perhaps I could do more with some other woman than I could with her—maybe Fitz-Hugh could handle her better and easier.

She did not wait for me to even introduce myself, but began, "Are you going to give me what I want?"

"Well, that depends. So far, I have not the least idea of what you are after. Now, if you want me to help you fight the Welsh, I think that we can come to an understanding—"

"Don't be silly! I just want one thing and that is the head of your Lord Fitz-Hugh."

I raised my eyebrows slightly.

"Why, Queen Broda! I am astonished. I thought that you and the young man were friendly. It would be too bad to deprive him of his head, and he young and wonderfully debonair. What can the poor fellow have done to have you treat him thus?"

"He courted me and then when I promised to marry him told me that he was of Cornwall."

"Well, what of it? He had to be from somewhere, did he not?"

"Now, listen to me, Cecil, son of James, son of John, you who hold your place as Overlord by some chicanery that has caused endless talk in this part of the world. In my country we have elephants, cametennus, metacollinarum, white and red lions, men with eyes before and behind. We have satyrs and pigmies and forty-ell giants, but we have no tailed men, and we are certainly not going to have any, certainly not as the husband of Queen Broda; so I came over for the head of this man who insulted me."

"Ireland," I replied, "must be a most interesting country. Have you ever heard of what we have here in Cornwall? Have travelers told you of our Cyclopes, fauns and centaurs, of our wild oxen, hyenas, and lamias; of our white merles, crickets, and men with eyes before and behind? Just as soon as I can I intend to destroy all these evil monsters, and I am really surprized, Queen Broda; in fact, I can not understand at all, at all, why it is that you have allowed your fair land to be overrun by such trash as you tell me of. Allow me to offer my services after I have cleaned Cornwall of its monstrosities. Did you know that I had magical powers? How surprized were Gog and Magog when I conquered them, and Agit and Agimandi were absolutely dumfounded when I bound them in chains and cast them into the Mare Nostrum. I have eaten of the plant Assidos, which protects the eater from evil spirits, and I wear on my body the stone Nudiosi, which prevents the sight from growing feeble and makes it possible for the wearer to see a great distance. For example, at this very moment I can see how this matter is all going to end."

I could see that she was impressed, for she replied, "Just from looking at you, Sir Cecil, one would not believe you had all these powers, and yet there must be something about you, because in no time at all you have established yourself here."

"Well, it is hard to tell about a

man, just by looking at him. But tell me one thing: what put this idea into your head about Lord Fitz-Hugh's having a tail?"

"He is a man of Cornwall, and all of that land are thus tailed."

"Are you sure?"

"Certainly. You are not going to doubt my word, are you? The next thing you will be calling me a liar. It happened this way. A very learned man, Polydore Vergil, hath written the whole tale in his book. He tells how Saint Thomas à Becket came to Strood, one of your villages, which is situated on the Medway, the river that washes Rochester. The men of Cornwall living in that place, wishing to put a mark of contumely on the good Saint, did not scruple to cut the tail off the horse he was riding on, and, for this profane and inhospitable act, they covered themselves with eternal reproach, and since then all the men of Cornwall have been born with tails on them, and no man like that shall ever sit by my side and rule Ireland, and the only way I can ease my pride is to take his head back with me"—here the poor lady began to cry—"and he should have thought of that and how it would make me feel, before he made me love him so. And how would it be for me to be the mother of a poor little Princess with a tail on her like an ape or a monkey?"

"That would not do at all," I replied in my most soothing way, and when I try to soothe the ladies, I usually succeed. I remember very well how I completely changed the desire of a lady in Araby once, for she was first minded to kill me, but, by my power and a certain talisman that I carried, I compelled her to other ideas. So, I soothingly said:

"That would not do at all. But how would it be, if by my power I removed this tail? Suppose I made Lord Fitz-Hugh like other men? How then? Would you still demand his head?"

"Don't be silly," she replied archly. "Of course, I would rather marry him than kill him, but I never thought that anything like that could be done—you mean without a scar? And if there was a little baby, she would be all right? Just like any other little baby?"

"If I promise you that everything will be all right, everything will be all right. All you have to do is to trust me. Of course, it would take some powerful magic. I will at once begin my sorcery by the use of raddomancy; later on I may have to use the blood of a newborn child, but I should rather not do that unless it is necessary. Suppose we have Lord Fitz-Hugh come over here? You will promise him safe conduct, I know. Then the three of us could go down into my special cavern, far in the bowels of the earth, under my castle, and there I could do what is necessary to this man of Cornwall and make him closer to your heart's desire."

"You promise me that it won't hurt him much?"

"Not as much as cutting off his head. Of course, he may moan a little, but he is quite a brave man, and I am sure that he can stand it. Suppose you send most of your army back and come into the castle as my guest. I can take care of about fifty of your men. Then we will send at once for this tailed man and start to work. I suppose you are anxious to go back to Ireland? But I want you to promise me one thing: If I do this feat of magic for you and restore your lover to you, built as all other men, no fear of hereditary taint, you will tell those men of Wales to leave Cornwall alone or settle with me. Will you promise?"

She promised; so I left her with the understanding that she and fifty of her men would become my guests on the morrow and the rest of the wild Irish were to go back to their island. And I walked back to the castle.

Queen Broda sat silent in her golden chariot, but there was a look of

happiness and hope on her lovely face.

THE next day Lord Fitz-Hugh came. He was just as dismal as ever.

"I have to remove either your head or your tail," I told him, "or this wild Irish lassie of yours is going to let the Welshmen cut our throats and wash Cornwall in blood. So, off comes your tail."

"No one can take my tail off," he answered, surly and sad.

"And why not?"

"You know why," was all he could say.

Certainly in that mood he was no fit playmate for a girl like Queen Broda. I saw that I would have to be rather clever or they never would marry, tail or no tail, and there they were, madly in love and grieving themselves sick over the matter.

That night the three of us met in a cell, far down under the castle. It was a very unpleasant place, but it was the best I could do in a hurry. I had sent down some rattling chains and a brazier of charcoal and some incense, which made a terrible smell, and I had a hound dog tied in one corner and seven rats in a wire cage hanging from the wall; so it all looked horrible enough, and even my blood chilled when the hound howled, which he did every time that he looked up at the rats. I had a stool for the lady to sit on, but Fitz-Hugh and I stood up. I began with the Lord's Prayer in Latin said backward, a trick I had learned in my boyhood. And then I threw a dead mouse on the burning charcoal and closed my eyes and just muttered, and then with a howl that startled them all, even the dog, I jumped on poor Fitz-Hugh and wrestled with him, and when I separated from him, I had his tail in my hand, and, after showing it to the Queen, I shakingly put it on the charcoal and it gave off a mighty offensive smell as it burned.

There was no doubt left in the mind of Queen Broda. The man of Cornwall had had a tail; by my magic I had taken the tail from him; and now he had the tail no more and she could marry him. She did not waste any time, but took the poor lad in her arms and kissed him till I tired of the counting, and he kissed her and I saw that I was not wanted; so I suggested that we return to the library and I would leave them there to talk matters over and arrange for their future.

In the library they were most grateful. The Queen told me that I need never worry about those men of Wales, for she was going to attend to them personally, just as soon as the honeymoon was over. Gladly Fitz-Hugh told me he was going to send me a gold chain and some books he had that I wanted. So everything was lovely, and that very night they were married by my priest.

The next morning they left me. I went down the road a piece with them. Of course, Lord Fitz-Hugh was riding with Queen Broda in her golden chariot, and she was silent, but her eyes and dimpled cheeks did a lot of talking. He stepped out of the chariot and came over to my horse when he said good-bye to me. He looked at me earnestly.

“Cecil, son of James, son of John, son of even Saint Christopher,” he said, “how did you know I did not have a tail?”

I laughed. “That was not hard to find out, Fitz-Hugh. When I had the opportunity, I asked your mother.”

We looked over at the young bride.

Queen Broda sat silently in her golden chariot. She was smiling.

A further adventure of the Overlord of Cornwall will appear in WEIRD TALES next month.