



The Coming of the Fairies

Arthur Conan Doyle , John M. Lynch (Introduction)

[Download now](#)

[Read Online ➔](#)

The Coming of the Fairies

Arthur Conan Doyle , John M. Lynch (Introduction)

The Coming of the Fairies Arthur Conan Doyle , John M. Lynch (Introduction)

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, best known as the creator of Sherlock Holmes but also a devout spiritualist, was entirely convinced by a set of photographs seemingly showing two young girls playing with a group of tiny, translucent fairies.

To demonstrate his unshakable belief in the spirit world, the celebrated writer published, in 1922, The 'Coming of the Fairies'. It recounts the story of the photos, their supposed provenance, and the startling implications of their existence.

One of the great hoaxes of all time, the Cottingley Fairy photographs are proof of mankind's willingness to believe. Conan Doyle's book, reprinted here with the original photographs, offers a unique insight into the mind of an intelligent, highly respected figure, who just happened to believe in fairies.

The Coming of the Fairies Details

Date : Published October 1st 2006 by Bison Books (first published 1921)

ISBN : 9780803266551

Author : Arthur Conan Doyle , John M. Lynch (Introduction)

Format : Paperback 189 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, History, Classics, Mystery

 [Download The Coming of the Fairies ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Coming of the Fairies ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The Coming of the Fairies Arthur Conan Doyle , John M. Lynch (Introduction)

From Reader Review The Coming of the Fairies for online ebook

C.O. Bonham says

The reason for looking up and reading this obscure piece of history is because the recent rediscovery of a very cute movie titled: *Fairy Tale: a true story*. This short book is the nonfiction account of the events dramatized in the aforementioned movie. The events being the infamous Cottingly Fairy photographs.

The actual photos as reprinted by Doyle do appear rather fake to my modern eye. It is also a problem that Doyle's only argument in favor of the photo's depicting real fairies is that the girls who took them were . . . Well girls, and therefore not crafty and mischievous enough to have faked them. Are only are girls clever enough to have faked them they certainly fooled you Mr. Creator of Sherlock Holmes.

The rest of the book is full of Doyle's spiritualist agenda as well as so many Fairy theories that they all contradict each other. If fairies are psychic phenomena then how can they be photographed? If they are scientific products of evolution then why don't more people see them? Apparently bringing God into it means that the fairies are either Demons or delusions.

Anyway this is a short and entertaining piece of history and can be enjoyed as such without becoming completely disgusted by the obvious agenda behind its publication.

Owlseyes says

Whether you believe in them or not; or, whether you think you don't have the psychic ability to see them...; or, whether you think it's fake,...it just doesn't matter. Doyle's work presents a good discussion of the reactions of the people when the photos showed up. Perhaps, the artistic side of the matter nobody would dare to question.

"September 6, 1920.

MY DEAR DOYLE, Greetings and best wishes

....

I have received from Elsie three more negatives taken a few days back. I need not describe them, for enclosed are the three prints in a separate envelope. The Flying Fairy and the Fairies' Bower are the most amazing that any modern eye has ever seen surely I received these plates on Friday morning last and have since been thinking furiously."

"MELBOURNE, October 21, 1920.

DEAR GARDNER, My heart was gladdened when out here in far Australia I had your note and the three wonderful prints which are con?rmatory of our published results. You and I needed no con?rmation, but the whole line of thought will be so novel to the ordinary busy man who has not followed psychic inquiry, that he will need that it be repeated again and yet again before he realizes that this new order of life is really established and has to be taken into serious account, just as the pygmies of Central Africa.

...

It almost seems to me that those wise entities who are conducting this campaign from the other side, and using some of us as humble instruments have recoiled before that sullen stupidity against which Goethe said the Gods themselves ?ght in vain, and have opened up an entirely new line of advance, which will turn that so -called religious," and essentially irreligious, position, which has helped to bar our way.

...

Yours sincerely, ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE."

"...a gentleman named Matthews, writing on January 3, 1921, from San Antonio, Texas. He declared that his three daughters, now married women, could all see fairies before the age of puberty, but never after it. The fairies said to them We are not of the human evolution".

Right, many years later both sisters acknowledged it had been a trick, for 4 photographs; but the fifth one was a true one.

Yours to decide.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/07/wor...>

Graham says

The story of the Cottingley Fairies is one of the biggest hoaxes of the 20th century, alongside the infamous Piltdown Man case. Essentially, a couple of bored teenage girls decided to cut a load of fairy figures out of magazines and photograph them in the woods, pretending they were the real thing. What's astonishing is that many people believed them, none more prominent than the great Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who wrote this book on the case.

The whole thing seems astonishingly obvious and fake to the modern reader, but if you put yourself into the mindset of the era - a time of war and great death - then the credulity and the willingness to believe in something otherworldly and magical begins to make sense. As for this book, it's as well written and engaging as the rest of the author's canon, and watching him make a case, you're tempted to believe - if the whole thing wasn't so screamingly obvious, except for Doyle and his mates, of course.

Manybooks says

When I was in grade five (in 1977), I checked out Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's The Coming of the Fairies from my elementary school library, not because I knew at that time who the author was and that he was indeed famous and known for his *Sherlock Holmes* mysteries, but simply because I found the cover photo both visually appealing and at the same time somewhat strange, and of course I was therefore also more than a bit curious if The Coming of the Fairies was a collection of folklore tales or perhaps actually a book that strived to prove that fairies in fact did exist (and the latter was indeed the case with The Coming of the Fairies).

Now while I did not at the age of eleven actually manage to either finish reading or fully and lastingly comprehend all or even half of the textual components of The Coming of the Fairies (as my command of the English language was in 1977 not as yet strong enough for that, seeing that my family had but immigrated to Canada from Germany in 1976 and of course, I was still in the process of learning the ins and outs of English grammar, syntax and word usage) I certainly was even with my at that time still somewhat limited English language skills able to not only figure out pretty rapidly that yes and for certain, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle absolutely and totally not only believed that fairies were real, that according to him, they actually did in fact exist in real life, but also that with regard to the presented and included photographs of the now infamous Cottingley Fairies that I personally could not in any way imagine how the author, how Sir Arthur Conan Doyle could have been so ridiculously gullible and so easily mislead by Elsie Wright and her cousin Frances Griffiths that their supposed photographs were real and natural, as yes, every single one of those so-called (and included as proofs and examples in The Coming of the Fairies) fairy photographs (even if I now do realise that photography was still a bit of an enigma and a "miracle" to many in the early part of the 20th century) absolutely and totally looked even to my eleven year old eyes as utterly managed and faked, often beautiful and enchanting, for sure, but really, anyone with reasonable eyesight should have been able to notice and discern that these were not bona fide fairies being photographed but rather pictures of the two cousins posing with staged paper cut-outs.

While the presented and included "fairy" photographs of The Coming of the Fairies I do consider even now as being visually and aesthetically quite interesting (if not even rather pleasing from an artistic point of departure) the entire premise of The Coming of the Fairies (namely that according to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, fairies do truly exist) is actually and in my humble opinion mostly rather massively saddening and even pity-producing. Also and furthermore the narratives, the texts included (which obviously are meant to both justify and prove alongside of the shown photographs the bona fide, the supposed reality of the existence of fairies) upon just having now reread The Coming of the Fairies, I have definitely and personally found Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's written, his printed words (as well as his inclusions from other supposed "fairy" experts) neither all that readable nor in any way of much narrational interest (and truth be told, I now also do tend to believe that my textual problems with The Coming of the Fairies in 1977 were indeed NOT ONLY due to my at that time still prevalent English language learning issues but also simply the fact that the presented and featured narrative of The Coming of the Fairies just is not and cannot be described as being all that engaging and interesting in and of itself).

Rachael says

Oh, the poor delusional man. He really believes it.

The writing is rather dry and repetitive. Unfortunately for Doyle, pounding the same point over and over doesn't actually make it true; if it did, fairies would have taken over Yorkshire by now.

I'm not convinced of his investigative abilities, as he relies entirely on the testimony of others. And while I'm willing to believe the expert photographers who asserted that the plates were taken in a single exposure, and therefore are not faked by a trick of photography, I'm not convinced those fairies aren't made of paper.

The book is amusing in a sad, pitiable sort of way, as it is definitely not meant to be humorous. When I finished, I shook my head, joining the rest of the throngs of Holmesians in wondering, "What on earth was Doyle thinking?"

Lisa Llamrei says

This is the book published by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, of Sherlock Holmes fame, supporting his belief that the Cottingley photographs are genuine.

I'm giving it five stars, not because the reasoning is sound (it isn't), but because of sheer historical interest. This book is evidence that, contrary to what we now believe of the case, the Cottingley Fairies did not fool the entire world. There were plenty who saw through the ruse from the beginning.

Conan Doyle presents his arguments in the form of essays by himself and others. To his credit, he does present the view of sceptics, and rebuts them. Readers, therefore, see a balanced view of both sides of the debate and are left to draw their own conclusions. Specifically what those conclusions are depends largely on what one wants to believe.

Interestingly, although all of the photographic experts consulted at the time agreed that the photographs were not faked, they also said that they could have been achieved using paper cutouts - which, as we now know, was exactly how they were created. Conan Doyle's response to these statements was, essentially, just because they could have been created this way doesn't mean they were. This is completely true. However, the only proof offered that they weren't created by means of paper cutouts was the "fact" that while Elsie (the older of the two girls) could draw beautiful landscapes, she could not draw human figures well, at least not when investigators were watching her.

The book also details the myriad investigations, including the mediums who claimed to communicate with the fairies in the spot where the photographs were taken.

All in all, *The Coming of the Fairies* is a fascinating study in the willingness of people to believe. It's proof positive that the ability of seemingly intelligent people to fall into gullibility we now attribute to the preponderance of social media is nothing new.

Michael Burnam-Fink says

The sad coda to Arthur Conan Doyle's great career was his belief in spiritualism. The man responsible for the famous line "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth," spent his final years clinging to every impossibility that he found. This book is his account of

Cottingley Fairies incident, including his article in *The Strand Magazine*, and the work of Doyle and his partner Edward Gardner in investigating the claims.

As a primary source, it's an interesting look inside the mind of man desperately trying to prove the truth of something ignored by science. It's rather interesting to see the focus on various forms of darkroom trickery, and not the obvious explanation that the fairies are painted cardstock cleverly posed. There are some interesting glimpses of English theosophy, but mostly the impression that they're willing to believe in anything other than mundane reality; etheric matter, phasic vibrations, auras, and of course tiny dancing woodland elves in rich taxonomy. The saddest chapter is one where Doyle sends another friend, a "Sergeant Tank" with the gift of clairvoyance to Cottingley, and he reports tons of fairies in great detail without a single photograph.

This is an important book, for say an academic studying cryptozoology, or cultural research on belief in the supernatural, but there's little pleasure and less information in reading it.

Chris says

Once upon a time, the man who created the world's most famous consulting detective had his leg pulled by two young women. In the days before Photoshop, the young ladies took pictures of fairies. They posed with the fairies. They claimed to see the fairies quite often.

Of course, the fairies were pasted pictures. You look at this photographs today, and part of you wonders how people could be so gullible. Yet, we have famous fake pictures today as well. Do you really think the reporter is always in front of the White House?

Doyle's defense of the photos is a collection of essays, in part by him and in part by others. It can be rather dull reading, but it does include reporters various reactions as well as other accounts from elsewhere. These other accounts show why people were willing to believe, even those who should have known better.

For me, the biggest surprise was the fact that one of the girls was 16, which does present a slightly different take on the story.

Still worth reading for a Doyle fan or fairy tale fan.

Crossposted at Booklikes.

Paul Nash says

It's hard to believe that, what I consider, the most intelligent author of all time, was fooled by a family of girls. Come on Doyle, what about that deductive reasoning you wrote so well with Holmes.

It's like the phrase "Eliminate the impossible..." never even crossed his mind.

But he was a diverse yet conflicted writer who just wanted to believe. Can't fault him for that.

What's that old saying?, "You don't quit playing because you grow old. You grow old because you quit playing".

If you decide to read this...don't go into it looking for something serious and educational.

Just take it for what it is...an old man wanting to believe.

Roser says

The first half was interesting but the second one was like a constant Blah Blah Blah.

Ashley says

Being a fan of Conan Doyle's fiction and having read previous accounts of the Cottingley fairies within various 'mysteries of the world' type books, I was both eager and wary to read 'The Coming of the Fairies'.

Thankfully, I was spared the second-hand embarrassment I thought I was going to endure. This slim volume is delightful despite the more recent revelations that have proven so many of the theories and ideas contained within inaccurate (the original Cottingley photographs were debunked as fakes quite a while ago). Instead, the book is a fascinating account of what Conan Doyle and so many others wanted the Cottingley photographs to be and why they were so convinced as to the authenticity of the photographs in the first place. Oddly enough, the majority of second-hand embarrassment was to be found in Conan Doyle's bias towards Spiritualism, which is about as subtle as it was in his novel 'The Land of Mist'. In a way, the argument Conan Doyle is making on the existence of fairies suffers more from his Spiritualist beliefs than from actual facts.

All in all, a short and entertaining read. Despite knowing the Cottingley photographs were faked, it is still fun to lose yourself in the argument being made and allow yourself to consider that, perhaps, there truly are fairies out there somewhere.

Lucas says

"The series of incidents set forth in this little volume represent either the most elaborate and ingenious hoax ever played upon the public, or else they constitute an event in human history which may in the future appear to have been epoch-making in its character."

If somebody ever asks me what my favorite opening sentence in a book is, I think I will refer them to the above.

When I cracked open this book I expected to have a nice, tongue-in-cheek read of one man's defense of a few fake photographs taken by some little girls. What I got instead was an earnest parade of craziness so large that, if this were fiction, people would say that none of these characters could possibly exist in the real world. The tapestry of delusion that these people weave around themselves in order to believe the photographs are evidence of the existence of fairies grows with every word. Conan Doyle poo-poos the photographic experts (from Kodak, no less) who refuse to declare the photos legitimate, accusing them of falling back on "old discredited anti-spiritualistic" arguments. Another person hypothesizes that fairies don't cast shadows due to their ethereal nature and that is why they look so flat! To top it all off, there is an entire chapter dedicated to the notes of a World War I veteran -- an ex-tank brigade commander and self-described clairvoyant -- who spends several days traipsing about the meadows of Cottingley with the two girls, Elsie and Frances, relating all of the psychic creatures that they see. But the cream of the crop is a medium who, with the help of his spirit guide, describes the circumstances surrounding the taking of the photographs and their development

(all in generalities, of course) before ending the session by saying that, should he (the medium) ever be lucky enough to get into Heaven, he would be well-suited to stocking God's arsenal with rifles to fend off any invasions from Hell. Why that is relevant to photographs of fairies, I have no idea.

The entire situation, at times, seems to be even too much for Conan Doyle to process. He occasionally expresses doubt in the validity of the pictures, though never for long, as he just as quickly shakes it off by extolling the good, middle-class background of the girls and the virtue of the other characters in this "story," commonly introducing each person as "having nothing to gain by lying." That is, in fact, part of the problem. It is my belief that many of the people involved don't think they are lying; or they want so badly to validate their beliefs that overlooking an inconvenient fact or two, or "tweaking" the truth just a little bit, isn't much of a bad thing in their minds. For instance, there is a lot of wonder that the photographs show the fairies "moving" (they're in poses that look like they're dancing, or walking, etc.), yet they conveniently ignore the fact that the apertures in cameras at the time stayed open long enough that if an object is moving it will look blurry in the resulting photograph. Yet these "dancing" fairies come out looking crystal clear.

Conan Doyle is himself part of the problem. Being, of course, the author of Sherlock Holmes, I got the feeling that he believed he had a little bit of Holmes inside of him. After all, the man who created the logical genius who could solve any crime, no matter how perplexing, surely must be a very good sleuth himself, right? Wrong. Consistently he states how very logical and careful he is being in his investigations, but should a critic come along to rain on his parade, he spouts off some quip and immediately dismisses them. Or he'll counteract criticism such as "these look like they could have been done in a studio" by showing a picture of the area where the photographs were taken and claim victory simply because, see, the *area* itself really exists! In the end, Conan Doyle is undone by his prejudices. Not just his deep-seated belief in spiritualism and the validity of these photos, but in his Victorian-era ideas that middle-class children couldn't possibly have the desire to lie, and if they somehow *did* then they'd be so bad at it that the man who created Sherlock Holmes would surely see through such a ruse.

I couldn't help but find myself feeling a little sad for Conan Doyle. When his son was killed in World War 1 he threw himself into the world of seances and ghostly rappings wholeheartedly in an effort to maintain a connection with his son. It's a lesson to all skeptics out there in just how easily the human mind is able to overcome any obstacle, large or small, that stands in the way of whatever it is that the believer wants to believe, with the truth itself often being the easiest blockade of all to cross. It is also a lesson to the believer that just because you believe strongly that something is so, that doesn't necessarily make it so.

On the whole, this was an enjoyable, well-written, if not well thought out, book that I was very close to giving five stars simply for the first chapter alone, but it does drag a bit in the end when Conan Doyle dedicates an entire chapter to other people's experiences with fairies; as if these stories bring more weight to the case for the photographs. If you eat that type of stuff up with a spoon, however, then go ahead and add an extra star.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to go set up a webcam in my backyard. If you're interested in hunting for "wee folk" from the safety of your living room, you can do so for the low, low price of five dollars a month!

Leah says

"If you believe in fairies, clap your hands..."

In this short book, Conan Doyle tells the story of the famous 'Cottingley Fairies' – 5 photographs taken over a three-year period purporting to show fairies and gnomes sporting in a valley in Yorkshire. The photos were taken by two young girls, but it was only when Conan Doyle got his hands on them that they became a cause célèbre.

By the time the first photos surfaced in 1917, Conan Doyle had already become a firm supporter of spiritualism and, while he makes it clear that he doesn't consider the existence of fairies to be directly related to people communicating from beyond the grave, he expresses his hope that this 'proof' of one thing thought to be a myth might open people's minds to considering the truth of the other. In short, he was motivated to accept the photos as genuine and to dismiss any other explanation. And sadly, that's exactly what he does.

"Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

Unlike the revered Mr Holmes, Conan Doyle decided to believe the improbable by assuming that it was impossible for the girls to fake the photos. Fortunately, by the time the girls admitted that the fairies were copied from a magazine, cut out from cardboard and held in place by hatpins, Conan Doyle had long since died – though of course one of his medium friends may have passed on the shock news.

"We received [psychic] communications from a fairy named Bebel several times, one of them lasting nearly an hour. The communication was as decided and swift as from the most powerful spirit. He told us that he was a Leprechaun (male), but that in a ruined fort near us dwelt the Pixies. Our demesne had been the habitation of Leprechauns always, and they with their Queen Picel, mounted on her gorgeous dragon-fly, found all they required in our grounds." Extract of a letter from one of Conan Doyle's 'witnesses'.

The book itself is less interesting than I hoped. Conan Doyle includes his own magazine article and copies of the correspondence between himself and Edward Gardner, the man who carried out the investigation. But he also includes copies of lots of correspondence he received from other people also claiming to have seen fairies and his acceptance of even the tallest of these tales becomes somewhat uncomfortable after a time. There's also a long chapter in the form of a report from a clairvoyant who sees so many fairies, goblins and gnomes cavorting in the valley that it's hard to understand how a man of Conan Doyle's undoubtedly intelligence couldn't see it for the sham it so clearly is. Unless of course, you believe in fairies...

www.fictionfanblog.wordpress.com

Timothy Ferguson says

This is, in some ways, a terribly sad book. Conan Doyle turned to spiritualism to help him deal with the vast wave of senseless death which had ravaged his family. His views made him, and I hope not to offend any spiritualists reading, terribly gullible, because the way spiritualists demonstrated the veracity of their claims was so poor. Conan Doyle does not realise how credulous he is.

At one point, toward the end of Chapter One, he explains how the investigation of the Cottingley fairy photographs occurred, and says he puts the technique before the public so any error on his part can be identified. He's just spent some time describing how a particular person is similar to the revelations given by a spiritualist claiming the aid of a spirit guide. As a detached observer we can say "Well, you discounted all of the features which did not fit, and your spiritualist has described the person who took the photographs as a professional photographer (who takes photographs?) of the predominant gender in the profession (male),

of average height, of average build, with a popular haircut (“hair brushed back” while staring into a camera) and using the average equipment for the time (owns expensive cameras, has many cameras, and some have crankable handles on them). The one distinctive characteristic is “fair hair”, but that’s hardly a postal address.” He then asks how the “best experts” could be fooled by the photographs, but he’s excluded from “best” the experts who have pointed out that the faeries have elaborate Parisian hairstyles.

The sad thing is that Conan Doyle hopes that faeries will crack the wall of scientists around him who say “You cannot prove that you are speaking to the dead. Therefore, you cannot prove that all of your dead relatives are still, in some sense, alive.” If the methods used to prove fairies existed were sound, then the same methods must be sound when used to prove the existence of ghosts. His advocacy for fairies comes from a place of terrible pain, which opens him up to humiliation.

Originally reviewed on book coasters

Bill FromPA says

I read *The Coming of the Fairies* to try to answer for myself the question of how Sir Arthur Conan Doyle could bring himself to believe in fairies.

Since the book is not well-known I’ll first give a summary of its contents.

This is a relatively short book (196 pages) containing the 5 “fairy photographs” taken in 1917 and 1920 in Cottingley, Yorkshire by Elsie Wright (age 16 in 1917) and Frances Griffiths (age 10 in 1917), as well as additional photographs taken in the same area. Though the book is by Doyle he quotes extensively from the letters and notes of others, so I would say that his actual writing makes up no more than half the text. Here’s a breakdown of the contents:

Chapter 1. A description of the sequence of conversations and correspondence that brought the first 2 photos to Doyle’s attention.

Chapter 2. The original article on the photographs Doyle wrote for The Strand, describing the girls (under pseudonyms) and the circumstances of their taking the photos using Elsie’s father’s camera. Doyle’s role here is that of someone summarizing events, as he had not actually talked to the girls or visited the site. The investigation of the photographs was made by Edward L. Gardner of the London Theosophical Society, letters from whom are extensively quoted and whose portrait serves as the book’s frontispiece.

Chapter 3. The public reaction to Doyle’s article, quoting at length from skeptical reviews, a few of which are quite wrongheaded, but some which are quite perceptive about the telltale indications of the actual circumstances under which the photos were taken.

Chapter 4. A description of the circumstances and images of the last 3 photographs. These were taken in 1920 at the prompting of Gardner who provided the girls with a camera and is, again, the principal on-the-scene investigator of the phenomena.

Chapter 5. “Observations of a Clairvoyant”. These are purportedly notes taken in the field by a man “whom I will call Mr. Sergeant, who held a commission in the Tank Corps in the war, and is an honorable gentleman with neither the will to deceive nor any conceivable object in doing so.” “Sergeant” spent a week in August

1921 with the two girls in Cottingley where he accompanied them into the fields and woods and shared their (unphotographed) encounters with fairies. The events described here are as if seen in a theater – there may be occasional eye contact, but otherwise there is no interaction described between the mortals and fairies, who, in a variety of forms, all tentatively classified, put on spectacular displays of dancing and acrobatics. It seems as if during these outings “Sergeant” and the girls generally saw different events and beings – it is not clear whether all 3 ever witnessed the same things at the same time. I was left with the impression, later confirmed in chapter 6, that the visualization of these events depended upon the “clairvoyance” of the participants and that the inability of a fourth party, were any present, to see the beings being described would not, in Doyle’s eyes, provide any counter-argument to their reality.

Chapter 6. Descriptions of fairy sightings which Doyle had collected and written about before hearing of the Cottingley photographs. Here Doyle documents his previous interest in the subject. The article shows his inclination toward belief in fairies even before being aware of the photographs.

Chapter 7. Descriptions of fairy sightings which came to Doyle’s attention after the publication of the Cottingley photographs. Publication of The Strand article encouraged fairy-seers from around the world to write accounts of their experiences to Doyle. Excluding “one or two … more or less ingenious practical jokes”, he here presents “some which appear to be altogether reliable”.

Chapter 8. The Theosophic View of Fairies. This final chapter is given over almost completely to descriptions of fairies by Theosophists Gardner and Bishop Leadbeater. Gardner attempts to explain the nature of fairies and their vital role in the natural world: “The function of the nature spirit of woodland, meadow and garden, indeed in connection with vegetation generally, is to furnish the vital connecting link between the stimulating energy of the sun and the raw material of the form. That growth of a plant which we regard as the customary and inevitable result of associating the three factors of sun, seed, and soil would never take place if the fairy builders were absent.”

Leadbeater describes “nature spirits” encountered throughout the world, each locality having its unique inhabitants, distinguished, it would seem, primarily by color. Much of this section reads like a very, very bad imitation of Lord Dunsany,

I well remember, when climbing Slieve-na-mon, one of the traditionally sacred hills of Ireland, noticing the very definite lines of demarcation between the different types. The lower slopes, like the surrounding plains, were alive with the intensely active and mischievous little red-and-black race which swarms all over the south and west of Ireland, being especially attracted to the magnetic centres established nearly two thousand years ago by the magic-working priests of the old Milesian race to ensure and perpetuate their domination over the people by keeping them under the influence of the great illusion. After half an hour’s climbing, however, not one of these red-and-black gentry was to be seen, but instead the hill-side was populous with the gentler blue-and-brown type which long ago owed special allegiance to the Tuatha-de-Danaan.

To be fair to Doyle, he doesn’t explicitly endorse this nonsense, but he seems incapable of turning a critical eye on the writings of two men who were personal friends and in their own way fellow evangelists of the truth of Spiritualism.

Now to the question that inspired this reading: How could Doyle believe in fairies?

Doyle’s Fairies – The Foundations of Belief

1. Spiritualism and Theosophy. There were religious-philosophical reasons for Doyle having an inclination toward belief in the existence of fairies. He does not consider the fairies to be flesh-and-blood beings like humans and animals, but instead thinks that their physical forms, when visible to humans, are composed of

ectoplasm, a non-material substance which requires the presence of both human mediums (in this case the two girls) and spiritual beings to manifest. Having long accepted the reality of mediumistic manifestations and most of the photographs taken of the phenomena, Doyle was quite prepared to accept the ectoplasmic appearance of beings that were not the returned spirits of deceased human beings. The existence of such beings was an established doctrine of Theosophy, a belief that Doyle seems to have respected while not being an avowed follower. The Theosophists consulted by Doyle were able to apply their existing beliefs to explain some of the oddities of the photographs (inconsistency of the shadows on the fairy figures) as well as some of the gaps in the girls' explanations, such as their inability to describe exactly how the fairies arrived and departed the scenes of the photographs. Thus it seemed that these beings fit into a sort of pre-existing spiritual "phylum" and were, in this way, no more out of the ordinary than a previously undiscovered species of butterfly.

2. Popular Culture. A review of British popular art in the 20 years preceding the photographs, and well into the previous century, shows a number of works depicting fairies, such as, to pick three examples with which I am familiar, Peter Pan, the illustrations of Arthur Rackham, and the play The Starlight Express. These established the appearance and behavior of fairies, much as Theosophy had established their (super)nature, making it impossible not to recognize one when it appeared. I suspect that it may be the case that regularly seeing fictional representations of something makes its acceptance as an actual phenomenon more likely than would occur with something of a more obscure nature, such as Wells' Martians (who would have their day of belief two decades hence). Of course, Doyle would counter, as he basically does in chapter 6, that I was confusing cause and effect here, and that the popular fictional depictions of fairies were ultimately based on factual reports that had been transmitted as folklore and legend.

3. Modernism. "There's an east wind coming all the same, such a wind as never blew on England yet. It will be cold and bitter, Watson and a good many of us may wither before its blast. But it's God's own wind none the less, and a cleaner, better, stronger land will lie in the sunshine when the storm has cleared." Doyle, along with many others, may not have thought the winds of change as divine at the end of the war as he did at its beginning. Where the post-war world was busy enthroning materialism as its new ideal, Doyle yearned for a spiritual transformation of Western civilization. He speaks of the events in his book as "epoch-making" and, still hoping for "God's own wind", he looks to the irrefutable establishment of fairies' existence as a large step in achieving the assertion of the spiritual realm over the material.

4. Projection.

Such tricks hath strong imagination,
That if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy;

Doyle desires mankind to have an "I / Thou" relationship with the natural world, rather than the "I / It" view promoted by science, and the fairies are an embodiment and personification of nature and its forces. At the end of chapter 2 he writes of the fairies,

The thought of them, even when unseen, will add a charm to every brook and valley and give romantic interest to every country walk. The recognition of their existence will jolt the material twentieth-century mind out of its heavy ruts in the mud, and will make it admit there is a glamour and mystery to life. Having discovered this, the world will not find it so difficult to accept that spiritual message supported by physical facts which has already been so convincingly put before it.

