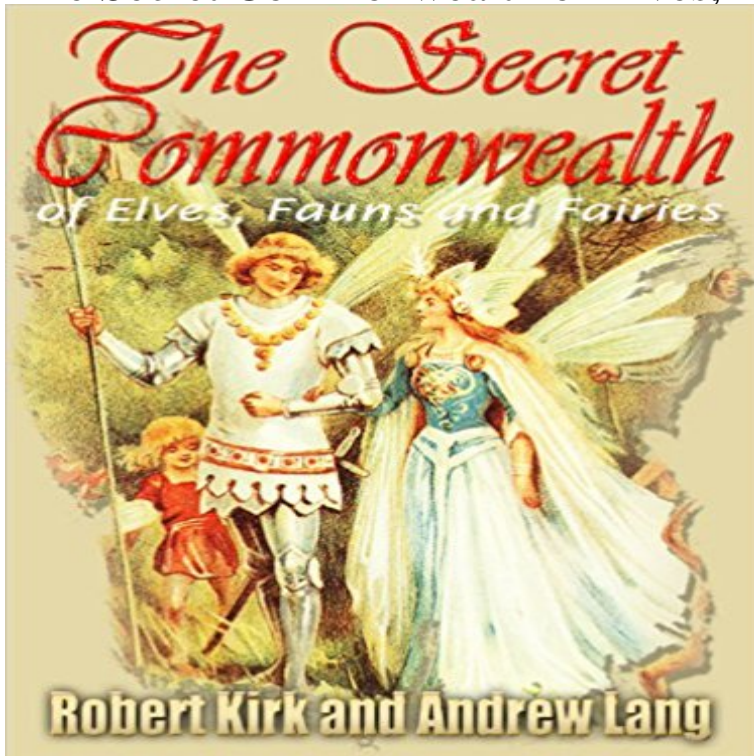


The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies (Illustrated)



THE bibliography of the following little tract is extremely obscure. The title-page of the edition of 1815, which we reproduce, gives the date as 1691. Sir Walter Scott says in his *Demonology and Witchcraft*, (1830, p. 163, note), It was printed with the authors name in 1691, and reprinted, in 1815, for Longman & Co. But was there really a printed edition of 1691? Scott says that he never met with an example. Research in our great libraries has discovered none, and there is none save that of 1815 at Abbotsford. The reprint, of one hundred copies, was made, as it states, from no printed text, but from a manuscript copy preserved in the Advocates Library. On page 45 of the edition of 1815, p. xat the end of the comments on Lord Tarbotts Letters, there is a Note by the Transcriber--that is, the person who wrote out the manuscript in the Advocates Library: See the rest in a little manuscript belonging to Coline Kirk. Now Coline or Colin Kirk, Writer to the Signet, was the son of the Rev. Mr. Kirk, author of the tract. If the son had his fathers book only in manuscript, it seems very probable that it was not printed in 1691; that the title-page is only the title-page of a manuscript. Till some printed text of 1691 is discovered, we may doubt, then, whether the hundred copies published in 1815, and now somewhat rare, be not the original printed edition. The editor has a copy of 1815, but it is the only one which he has met with for sale. The Rev. Robert Kirk, the author of *The Secret Commonwealth*, was a student of theology at St. Andrews: his Masters degree, however, he took at Edinburgh. He was (and this is notable) the youngest and seventh son of Mr. James Kirk, minister of Aberfoyle, the place familiar to all readers of *Rob Roy*. As a seventh son, he was, no doubt, specially gifted, and in *The Secret Commonwealth* he lays some stress on p. xithe mystic privileges of such birth. There may be some secret virtue in the womb of

the parent, which increaseth until the seventh son be borne, and decreaseth by the same degree afterwards. It would not surprise us if Mr. Kirk, no less than the Rev. Robert Blair of St. Andrews (1650-60), could heal scrofula by the touch, like royal persons--Charles III. in Italy, for example. As is well known to all, the House of Brunswick has no such powers. However this may have been, Mr. Kirk was probably drawn, by his seventh sonship, to a more careful study of psychical phenomena than most of his brethren bestowed. Little is known of his life. He was minister originally of Balquidder, whence, in 1685, he was transferred to Aberfoyle. This was no Covenanting district, and there is no bigotry in Mr. Kirks dissertation. He was employed on an Irish translation of the Bible, and he published a Psalter in Gaelic (1684). He married, first, Isobel, daughter of Sir Colin Campbell of Mochester, who died in 1680, and, secondly, the daughter of Campbell of Fordy: this lady survived him. From his connection with Campbells, we may misdoubt him for a Whig. By his first wife he had a son, Colin Kirk, W.S.; by his second wife, a son who was minister of Dornoch. He died (if he did die, which is disputed) in 1692, aged about fifty-one; his tomb was inscribed--ROBERTUS KIRK, A.M.Lingu? Hiberni? Lumen.

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