

I have edited Clive Gilson's books for over a decade now – he's prolific and can turn his hand to many genres: poetry, short fiction, contemporary novels, folklore and science fiction – and the common theme is that none of them ever fails to take my breath away. There's something in each story that is either memorably poignant, hauntingly unnerving or sidesplittingly funny.

Lorna Howarth, *The Write Factor*

Also by Clive Gilson

NOVELS

Songs of Bliss (2011)

A Solitude of Stars (2018)

SHORT STORY COLLECTIONS

In For A Penny (2015)

In For A Pound (2016)

In Full Flow (2017)

POETRY COLLECTIONS

Out of the walled Garden (2015)

AS EDITOR – FIRESIDE TALES

Tales from the Land of Dragons (2018)

# Tales from the Land of Dragons

*Traditional tales, fables and sagas from Wales, a Celtic  
heartland...*

*Compiled, Adapted & Edited by Clive Gilson*

*Book 1 in the series:*

***‘Tales from the World’s Firesides’***





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*For Morgan, who was, after all, named for a Welsh Sorceress...*

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## Preface

I've been collecting and telling stories for many years now, having had a number of my own works published in recent years, particularly focused on short story writing in the realms of magical realities and science fiction fantasies.

I've always drawn heavily on traditional folk and fairy tales, and in so doing have amassed a collection of many thousands of these tales from around the world. It has always been a long-standing intention to gather these stories together and to create a library of tales that tell the stories of places and peoples around the world.

Now that I've got a digitised archive up and running, I'm finally in a position to start on the great project... and this volume, *Tales from the Land of Dragons*, is the first in a set of collections covering the whole of the British Isles.

Time and facility allowing, I fully intend to go northwards next, covering the lands of ice and snow, before then heading south and east across Europe. Even then we'll just be scratching the surface. Far flung continents, lands and peoples beckon us ever onwards in our journey.

That's the great gift in storytelling. Since the first of our ancestors sat around in a cave somewhere, contemplating an

ape's place in the world, we have, as a species, told each other stories of magic and cunning and caution and love. When I began to read through tales from the Celts, tales from Indonesia, tales from Africa and the Far East, tales from everywhere, one of the things that struck me clearly was just how similar are the roots.

We share characters and characteristics. The natures of these tales are so similar underneath the local camouflage. We clearly share a storytelling heritage so much deeper than the world that we see superficially as always having been just as it is now.

These tales, whenever and wherever their origin, were originally told by firelight as a way of preserving histories and educating both adult and child. These tales form part of our shared heritage, witches, warts and all. They can be dark and violent. They can be sweet and loving. They are we and we are they in many, many ways.

Every story does, by the way, have a brief attribution, both of the original collector / writer and the title that this particular version has been adapted from. I've loved reading and re-reading all of these stories. I hope you do too.

Clive

Bath, May 2018



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## A Boy That Visited Fairyland

*Adapted from Welsh Fairy Tales by William Elliot Griffis.*

MANY ARE THE PLACES IN WALES where the ground is lumpy and humpy with tumuli, or little artificial mounds. Among these the sheep graze, the donkeys bray, and the cows chew the cud. Here the ground is strewn with the ruins of cromlechs, or Cymric strongholds, of old Roman camps, of chapels and monasteries, showing that many different races of men have come and gone, while the birds still fly and the flowers bloom.

Centuries ago, the good monks of St. David had a school where lads were taught Latin and good manners. One of their pupils was a boy named Elidyr. He was such a poor scholar and he so hated books and loved play, that in his case spankings and whippings were almost of daily occurrence.

Still he made no improvement. He was in the habit also of playing truant, or what one of the monks called "traveling to Baghdad." One of the consequences was that certain soft parts of his body, apparently provided by nature for this express purpose, often received a warming from his daddy.

His mother loved her boy dearly, and she often gently chided him, but he would not listen to her, and when she urged him to be more diligent, he ran out of the room. The monks did not spare the birch rod, and soon it was a case of a whipping for every lesson not learned.

One day, though he was only twelve years old, the boy started on a long run into the country. The further he got, the happier he felt, at least for one day. At night, tired out, he crept into a cave. When he woke up, in the morning, he thought it was glorious to be as free as the wild asses. So, like them, he quenched his thirst at the brook. But when, towards noon, he could find nothing to eat, and his inside cavity seemed to enlarge with very emptiness, his hunger grew every minute. Then he thought that a bit of oat cake, a leek, or a bowl of oatmeal, whether porridge or flummery, might suit a king.

He dared not go out far and pick berries, for, by this time, he saw that people were out searching for him. He did not feel yet, like going back to books, rods and scoldings, but the day seemed as long as a week. Meanwhile, he discovered that he had a stomach, which seemed to grow more and more into an aching void. He was glad when the sunset and darkness

came. His bed was no softer in the cave, as he lay down with a stone for his pillow. Yet he had no dreams like those of Jacob and the angels.

When daylight came, the question in his mind was still, whether to stay and starve, or to go home and get two thrashings, one from his daddy, and another from the monks. But how about that thing inside of him, which seemed to be a live creature gnawing away, and which only something to eat would quiet? Finally, he came to a stern resolve. He started out, ready to face two whippings, rather than one death by starvation.

But he did not have to go home yet, for at the cave's mouth, he met two elves, who delivered a most welcome message. "Come with us to a land full of fun, play, and good things to eat."

All at once, his hunger left him, and he forgot that he ever wanted to swallow anything. All fear, or desire to go home, or to risk either schooling or a thrashing, passed away also. Into a dark passage all three went, but they soon came out into a beautiful country. How the birds sang, and the flowers bloomed! All around could be heard the joyful shouts of little folks at play. Never did things look so lovely.

Soon, in front of the broad path along which they were traveling, there rose up before him a glorious palace. It had a splendid gateway, and the silver-topped towers seemed to touch the blue sky. "What building is this?" asked the lad of his two guides.

They made answer that it was the palace of the King of Fairyland. Then they led him into the throne room, where, sat in golden splendour, a king, of august figure and of majestic presence, who was clad in resplendent robes. He was surrounded by courtiers in rich apparel, and all about him was magnificence, such as this boy, Elidyr, had never even read about or dreamed.

Yet everything was so small that it looked like Toy Land, and he felt like a giant among them, even though many of the little men around him were old enough to have whiskers on their cheeks and beards on their chins. The King spoke kindly to Elidyr, asking him who he was, and whence he had come.

While talking thus, the Prince, the King's only son appeared. He was dressed in white velvet and gold, and had a long feather in his cap. In the pleasantest way, he took Elidyr's hand and said, "Glad to see you. Come and let us play together."

That was just what Elidyr liked to hear. The King smiled and said to his visitor, "You will attend my son?" Then, with a wave of his hand, he signified to the boys to run out and play games, and a right merry time they did have, for there were many other little fellows for playmates.

These wee folks, with whom Elidyr played, were hardly as big as our babies, and certainly would not reach up to his mother's knee. To them, he looked like a giant, and he richly enjoyed the fun of having such little men, but with beards

growing on their faces, look up to him. They played with golden balls, and rode little horses, with silver saddles and bridles, but these pretty animals were no larger than small dogs, or greyhounds.

No meat was ever seen on the table, but always plenty of milk. They never told a lie, nor used bad language, or swear-words. They often talked about mortal men, but usually to despise them; because what they liked to do, seemed so absurd and they always wanted foolish and useless things. To the elves, human beings were never satisfied, or long happy, even when they got what they wanted.

Everything in this part of fairyland was lovely, but it was always cloudy. No sun, star or moon was ever seen, yet the little men did not seem to mind it and enjoyed themselves every day. There was no end of play, and that suited Elidyr.

Yet by and by, he got tired even of games and play, and grew very homesick. He wanted to see his mother. So, he asked the King to let him visit his old home. He promised solemnly to come back, after a few hours. His Majesty gave his permission but charged him not to take with him anything whatever from fairyland, and to go with only the clothes on his back.

The same two elves or dwarfs, who had brought him into fairyland, were chosen to conduct him back. When they had led him again through the underground passage into the sunlight, they made him invisible until he arrived at his mother's cottage. She was overjoyed to find that no wolf had



torn him to pieces, or wild bull had pushed him over a precipice. She asked him many questions, and he told her all he had seen, felt, or known.

When he rose up to go, she begged him to stay longer, but he said he must keep his word. Besides, he feared the rod of the monks, or his daddy, if he remained. So, he made his mother agree not to tell anything, not even to his father, as to where he was, or what he was doing. Then he made off and reported again to his playmates in fairyland.

The King was so pleased at the lad's promptness in returning, and keeping his word, and telling the truth, that he allowed him to go see his mother as often as he wanted to do so. He even gave orders releasing the two little men from constantly guarding him and told them to let the lad go alone, and when he would, for he always kept his word.

Many times did Elidyr visit his mother. By one road, or another, he made his way, keeping himself invisible all the time, until he got inside her cottage. He ran off, when anyone called in to pay a visit, or when he thought his daddy, or one of the monks was coming. He never saw any of these men.

One day, in telling his mother of the fun and good times he had in fairyland, he spoke of the heavy yellow balls, with which he and the King's sons played, and how these rolled around. Before leaving home, this boy had never seen any gold, and did not know what it was, but his mother guessed that it was the precious metal, of which the coins called

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