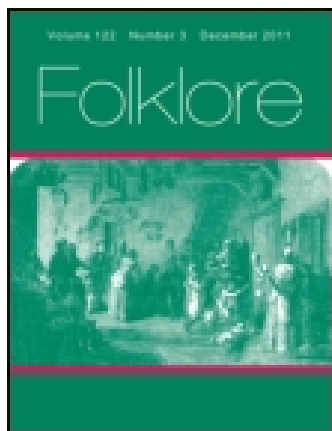


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FOLKLORE PARALLELS AND COINCIDENCES.

BY M. J. WALHOUSE.

[After relating the legend of Knockgrifton from Crofton Croker's *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland*, and a parallel Japanese tale, given by Mitford, *Tales of Old Japan*, vol. i. p. 276, called "The Elves and the Envious Neighbour," the writer turns to the German story of the Wild Huntsman, of whom he says: "Almost every European country has its legend." He then proceeds:—]

The same story, but with a more ghastly ending, is told, if we may trust an account which appeared in a Devonshire newspaper one day last spring, on the Dartmoor, where the foaming river Plym rushes through a ravine under the tall cliffs of the Dewerstone. This wild spot is haunted by the Black Huntsman, who with his "Wish-hounds" careers over the waste at night. A story is told of this phantom that a farmer, riding across the moor by night, encountered the Black Hunter, and being flushed with ale, shouted to him "Give us a share of your game!" The Huntsman thereupon threw him something that he supposed might be a fawn, which he caught and carried in his arms till he reached his home, one of the old moorland farms. There arrived, he shouted, and a man came out with a lantern. "Bad news, master," said the man; "you've had a loss since you went out this morning." "But I have gained something," answered the farmer, and getting down brought what he had carried to the lantern, and beheld—his own dead child! During the day his only little one had died. This version recalls the "Erl King," translated by Scott.

Nations have ever been unwilling to believe that their heroes, especially of legend and romance, could in death disappear and perish entirely. Nearly every country has its great king or famous chieftain, whose exploits once filled the popular ear, surviving still in charmed sleep in some

magic castle or cavern, unapproachable by vulgar steps, till awakened at a predestined signal at some season of extreme need. King Arthur in Avalon, the Emperor Barbarossa in the Kyffhäuser Cave, Holger the Dane under Kronenburg Castle, are familiar instances. In a cavern over the Lake of Lucerne the three Tells lie slumbering till called forth by Switzerland's greatest danger. In later classical times Achilles still dwelt in the White Island in the Pontic Sea, which, like Mona, none could find unless supernaturally guided. Passing mariners sometimes caught a glimpse of him with his flowing yellow hair and golden armour, and even heard him sing. Once a young sailor, coming upon the mystic islet unawares and landing, fell asleep, when he was aroused by Achilles himself, who led him to a splendid tent and set him to a feast, at which Patroclus poured out wine and Achilles sang to a harp. The youth soon slumbered, and on awaking all had disappeared.¹ This is quite in accordance with many mediæval stories. Very similar legends have arisen even in our own day. In that most beautiful and luxuriant part of the lovely Lake of Como, known as the Tremezzina, where the mountains, retreating backward from the lake, leave a wide level space of extreme fertility, there is a cave some 600 or 700 feet above on the mountain-side, very visible from below. The ascent to it is precipitous, and the country people relate that in the time of the Austrian occupation a band of insurgents, obnoxious to the authorities, had fled to the mountains, and being closely pursued entered the cave, followed by the Austrian soldiers; but none have ever since come out. They are believed to be there still, whether laid in trance and expected ever to reappear I could not clearly ascertain. Anyway, it seemed to me an instance of a legend originating in modern days akin to many mediæval beliefs.

¹ Maximus Tyrius, Dissertation XXVII.

Many years ago, when in charge of the Trichinopoly district in Southern India, whilst encamped near a large village on the furthestmost border, I was struck by the extraordinary prevalence of one and the same name amongst the villagers. The males, young and middle-aged, appeared to bear the same name to an extent confusing and inconvenient in conducting business matters. On asking the reason of this, I was told that some thirty years back there had been a notorious much-dreaded robber of that name, the leader of a gang infamous for "torch-light robberies," that is when the house of some well-to-do man was surrounded at dead of night by a score or more desperadoes, who at a signal lighting torches, with shouts and threats forced their way in and compelled the inmates, too often with violence and cruel tortures, to give up money, jewels, &c., and after outrages, and sometimes murder, would depart, not unfrequently leaving the house in flames. After a long course of such crimes the leader, named Periya Vêrappa, was at last caught and executed. Now in that part of India, when a man noted for cruel and violent temper dies, he very often becomes a Bhûta; that is, he reappears as a malignant goblin, working all kinds of spiteful and mischievous tricks and injuries, especially to children and cattle. Even a person of good life and repute who happens to die an unnatural or violent death, by accident or otherwise, is liable to become a Bhûta, and work out spiteful and evil deeds in his old neighbourhood. Much more then would a pre-eminently wicked character like the robber-chief.

Periya Vêrappa became a Bhûta of especial power and malignancy; and so, though hanged for his crimes thirty years or more previously, he was held in dread as the most powerful and evil Bhûta in all that country-side; and it was believed that giving his name to any new-born male child would cause him to regard the child and the house that held it with some favour and turn any evil intent aside. Hence the extraordinary multiplication of his

name, which probably still goes on. A feeling very like this is described in an interesting article in a recent number of *Folk-Lore*¹ on "Executed Criminals and Folk-Medicine," by Mabel Peacock, in which it is related that in Sicily there is a kind of criminal worship of the most notorious felons and cut-throats, the belief being that men who had slain many victims carried into the other world an evil power which they had won by blood, and that murderers are even regarded as sainted, and miracles wrought by them! In the case of the Indian brigand, hanged long years before, I was told that in Bhûta-form he was believed still to haunt the villages in which his worst crimes had been committed, and on certain nights, particularly the anniversary of his execution, he might be seen striding about in dark giant-shape and trampling over the tops of houses, making the tiles clatter, and crashing in the thatched roofs of cocoa-tree leaves. This was recalled to memory when lately reading the Icelandic legend of "Grettir the Outlaw," in which the huge grim thrall Glam, killed in an unearthly struggle with a demon, is described as coming by night from his burial-mound, bestriding the house and making it shake, tearing open doors and windows, and breaking the backs of some of the inmates; in short, a frightful Bhûta. This shows the same idea prevailing in frozen Iceland as in torrid India. Indeed, a variant of it appears in the old barbarous custom of burying suicides at cross-roads, with a stake driven through their breasts and a heavy stone on their faces to prevent them "walking." Nearly allied too is the superstition about Vampires still prevalent in Greece and the Levant; they seem a species of Bhûta, and stories about them are, as Lord Byron remarked, sometimes "most *incredibly* attested."

A popular belief has long and widely prevailed in European folklore that under certain lakes and rivers there exist

¹ *Folk-Lore*, vol. vii. p. 268.

beautiful regions and cities, inhabited by beings of the fairy race, and occasionally made accessible to mortals, who, after staying for a time amid splendid sights and entertainments, were allowed to return to upper air. In Ireland and Wales there are many lakes of which such stories are told, and various forms of allied beliefs are found in classical and mediæval traditions. In India nothing corresponding to the poetical fairy mythology of Europe is known, and all popular superstitions are forms of devil-worship and belief in beings always evil and malevolent, personified diseases, and spiteful goblins. Once, however, I was surprised by meeting with an account much resembling the legends of under-water countries in Europe. It appeared in an Indian newspaper, from which this is taken verbatim :

“ To the Editor of *The Bengalee*.

“ A private letter from Shahpore informs me that more than three years ago a boy named Gholam Hussein, of the family of Syud, an inhabitant of Chandna, was supposed to have been drowned on the 22nd June, 1860, in the River Jhelum, one of the tributaries of the Indus. Now he has come safely to his home. His relations were, of course, very glad to see him. He told them in reply that no sooner had he sank in the river than he reached the bottom, where he found a prodigious empire and met with its “ Khiser ” (chief or prophet), who took him on his knees and gave him shelter. There he with great pomp and joy passed more than three years ; and now two followers of the king caused him to return to the shore of the river whence he came. Now people of every colour and creed, from every creek and corner of the world, are flocking to his house to see him.

“ Yours obediently,

“ MUZHUR ALI.

“ Calcutta, Nov. 12, 1863.”

This bears a remarkable resemblance to the well-known tale of Elidurus, related by Giraldus Cambrensis, and is, I think, worth preserving as a modern instance of the belief on which that legend is founded. For even if we suppose the boy to have been a conscious romancer, his tale seems to have been implicitly believed by the people of his neighbourhood.