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CORRESPONDENCE.

THE ROMANCE OF MÉLUSINE, AND ABSENCE OF MEN DURING CHILDBED.

In *Folk-Lore* (vol. xxiv., p. 194), Mr. E. S. Hartland, in mentioning how Pressine stipulated that her husband should not intrude upon her childbed, touches on the general seclusion of women from men at such times, both amongst savage peoples and generally throughout Europe.

It is of interest, perhaps, to note how this is insisted upon in ballad literature. Taking a few cases at random we find in "Leesome Brand" that the lady says:—

"O gin I had but a gude midwife
Here this day to save my life,
And ease me o' my misery
O dear, how happy I would be!"

To which her lover replies:—

"My love, we're far frae ony town
There is nae midwife to be foun'.
But if ye'll be content wi' me,
I'll do for you what man can dee."

But the lady insists:—

"'For no, for no, this maunna be,'
Wi' a sigh, replied this gay ladye.
'When I endure my grief and pain,
My company ye maun refrain.'"

The lover is sent to hunt while she is in labour, with the proviso:—

"Be sure ye touch not the white hynde,
For she is of the woman kynde."

In "Bonnie Annie" the lady refuses her lover's help at a similar time, but apparently more on the ground of his inexperience :—

"She hadna sailed far till the young thing cried 'Women!'
 'What women can do, my dear, I'll do for you.'
 'O haud your tongue, foolish man, dinna talk vainly,
 For ye never kent what a woman driet for you.'"

Again in "Willie and Earl Richard's Daughter" we have, under like circumstances :—

"O for a few of yon junipers
 To cheer my heart again,
 And likewise for a gude midwife,
 To ease me of my pain."

When the lover proffers his services the lady replies :—

"Had far away frae me, Archibald,
 For this will never dee,
 That's nae the fashion o' our land
 And it's nae be used by me."

In "Rose the Red and White Lily" the lady refuses small help thus :—

"'Twas never my mither's fashion,' she says,
 'Nor sall it ever be mine,
 That belted knights should e'er remain,
 Where ladies dreed their pine.'"

In "Prince Heathen" the coarseness of the lover in outraging the woman's feelings is shewn by the fact that he refuses female aid to her :—

"He's taen her out upon the green,
 When she saw women never ane,
 But only him and's merry young men
 Till she brought hame a bonny young son."

The reverse of this is shewn in "Burd Isabel and Earl Patrick" when the proper course is carried out :—

"It fell ance upon a day
 She fell in travail pain,
 He has gane to the stair-head,
 Some ladies to call in."

But while the man himself is banished at such times, it is curious to note how his clothing may exercise a protective and beneficial

influence. Gregor (*Folklore of North-East Scotland*, p. 5) mentions how a pair of trousers was hung at the foot of the bed to protect mother, and child when it arrived, from the fairies. Henderson (*Folklore of the Northern Counties*, p. 14) relates how at Selkirk, Scotland, a mother saved her child from the fairies by seizing her husband's waistcoat and placing it over herself and the child. Similarly we have the custom in Scotland and elsewhere of the newly-born female child being received in the father's shirt. This is not so much, however, with the idea of protection, as of securing future fertility for the child, as the male child is placed in the mother's petticoat.

In Spain,¹ if there is difficulty in getting the milk to flow, it may be induced by the mother putting on her husband's shirt immediately after he has taken it off. In Holland,² for inflamed nipples, the newly-worn woollen night-cap of the husband is applied to the affected part. In France³ the husband's hat is frequently, amongst the peasantry, put on to hasten labour, the hat being in some cases first turned inside out (Lorraine and Tours). In the same districts, and in parts of the country round Toulouse, the husband's entire clothing is donned as an assistance to rapid labour.

DAVID RORIE, M.D.

THE WILD HUNTSMAN AND YULE-TIDE.

In Mr. Percy Maylam's *Hooden Horse*, the author quotes a passage from Tille's *Yule and Christmas*, p. 115, stating "that the Christmas rides of the Wild Huntsman and his host cannot be proved to be older than the sixteenth century."

An English peasant woman, who probably never heard of the German legend, told me a few years ago in Lincolnshire, that there

¹ *British Medical Journal*, Oct. 15, 1910, quoting articles by Dr. Martin Carrera y Dellunder in *Gaceta Medica Catalana* of Feb. 15 and March 15, 1910.

² *Ibid.* Nov. 19, 1910, quoting article by Dr. A. Van Audel of Govinchen in July, Sept. and Oct. numbers of *Janus*.

³ *Ibid.* Aug. 12, 1905, quoting Dr. Isambert of Tours in *Journal d'Obstét. de Gynec.*, etc., July 20, 1905. (See p. 341 *supra*.)

was a saying you should never leave clothes out to dry on New-Year's-Eve. If you did drops of blood would be found on them in the morning.

If I remember rightly, such drops of blood fall in France when the equivalent of the German Wild Hunt rages through the air.

Does not Tille consider that the custom of the Christmas-tree did not prevail in ancient times, because he has failed to find any mention of it in literature of an earlier date?

If he is correct the English Christmas-bough, or Christmas-bush, must have originated apart from the German tree, both descending from his ancestral rod or twig of blessing, but in different lines.

But how far may lack of evidence be trusted? How little we know of English November-fires before the Gunpowder Plot. Yet the probability is that we had autumnal-fires long before the days of Guy Fawkes.

M. PEACOCK.

NURSERY RHYMES.

The rhymes in *Folk-Lore*, vol. xxiv. p. 74 *et seq.*, recall several which I heard as a child, but did not know to be old or popular. I give the provenance of each as nearly as I know it.

(1) Cf. p. 81.—This I often heard from my mother who was born about 1852 near Ballyshannon. Hence the version is probably Northern Irish. Unfortunately I have forgotten several lines. What I can remember runs :

“There was a man of double deed,
Who sowed a garden full of seed ;
When the seed began to grow,
He sowed a garden full of snow.
When the snow began to melt,
He sowed a garden full of felt (?spelt).”

Some lines which followed I have forgotten ; the rhyme then goes on, “Like an eagle in the sky,” and so, omitting “’twas ’ in all cases down to “Like a stick about your back,” where it ends, the last line being given very emphatically, and accompanied with a pretence of a slap.

(2) Cf. p. 82.—This I had from my nurse's daughter, about 1888. We were then living in Brantford, Ontario, where she was at school and got the rhyme from some of her schoolmates. Naturally there are no Cromwell legends in Ontario, so the name has become changed :

“ Old Grumble is dead and in his grave,
 H'm, ha, in his grave ;
 There grew an old appletree over his head
 H'm, ha, over his head ;
 The apples grew ripe and ready to fall,
 H'm, ha, etc.,
 There came an old woman and gathered them all ;
 Up jumped old Grumble and hit her a knock
 And made the old woman go hippity-hop ;
 And then she sat down on a strawberry hill,
 And while she sat there she made her will ;
 And all her effects they lay on the shelf,
 If you want any more you can sing it yourself.”

“ A strawberry hill ” is, of course, nonsense ; it would appear to be the place-name, Strawberry Hill, made into a common noun by persons whose knowledge of English geography is, like that of most Canadians, not very perfect.

(3) An interesting example of the transference of a festival is the occasional use of a modification of the rhyme for May 29. Among Ontario school children it sometimes became :

“ The twenty-fourth of May
 Is the Queen's birthday.
 If you don't give us a holiday
 We'll all run away.”

Royal Oak Day is completely forgotten, indeed popular sentiment would most likely be against, not for, Charles II. But the immense popularity of Queen Victoria and the fact of her birthday coming near the right time filled the gap.

H. J. ROSE.

THE DEATH COACH.

Mr. Westropp says in *Folklore*, June 30th, 1910, p. 192, that "the 'headless coach' or 'coach a bower' seems of far later date than the banshee." If so, it must still be of a very respectable antiquity.

Death-carts are to be heard of in Lancashire and Lincolnshire, from which fact it may be argued that they are sure to be known in other English counties.

Death-carts driven by the last person buried in the churchyard, or by some other personification of the King of Terrors, may be said to swarm in Brittany, where, I believe, there are also death-boats.

The following quotation from the *Lapp who cheated Death*, which was published in the *Manchester Guardian*, April 20th, 1909, shows that the North of Europe cherishes the same superstition :

"Summer had come. The dwarf birches were in leaf, the Arctic brambles in blossom. Svänti, my Lapp host, lay at full length chewing tobacco. . . . Such a question as "Why is snow white?" never failed to draw forth some of his legendary lore.

"Snow is white and ice is white because white is the colour of death. Ice and snow come from the home of the dead, the land of darkness, far away in the north. There dwells the Reindeer of Death. When he comes south his sledge is empty, driverless; when he goes north it is filled with the souls of the dead, and the chief among them holds the rein. Sometimes on still winter nights one may hear the click of hoofs, though the herd is far off, and no living creature stirs; then it is that the mother hushes her child and whispers, 'Be still, lest the Reindeer of Death should hear you, for he is roaming about seeking souls to fill the empty sledge.' Only once has a living man sat in that sledge." Svänti paused tantalisingly.

[Here follows the story of Joukko.]

"Tell me one thing," I begged. "If the White Reindeer carries off the dead in its sledge across the snow, what happens to the souls of those Samelats [*i.e.* Lapps] who die in summer?" Svänti looked at me sideways with a puckered brow and muttered something in Lappish. "It is not lucky to speak so much of the dead," he said at last in Norwegian, "for we know that the souls of Samelats wander about during the days of sunshine, waiting until the sledge comes to fetch them in the dark months. So now let us rather talk of snaring birds or trapping lynxes."

H. MACKENZIE.

Once again one may say of popular lore, "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose". In Lincolnshire, I may add, a four-wheeled waggon is now used in country parishes to take the dead to the grave-yard, if a hearse is too costly. Yet I never heard the ghostly vehicle which comes to forebode the passing of a soul spoken of as the "death-waggon."

Are there no representations of chariots carrying away souls in the art of Rome, Greece (with its colonies), and Egypt?

MABEL PEACOCK.