Reviews

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REVIEWS.

THE TRIBAL SYSTEM IN WALES, BEING PART OF AN INQUIRY
INTO THE STRUCTURE AND METHODS OF TRIBAL SOCIETY.
By FREDERIC SEEBOHM, LL.D., F.S.A. London: Longmans,
Green & Co., 1895.

MR. SEEBOHM has undertaken a difficult and very important task, namely, the investigation of the tribal system of ancient society; and this volume, limited to the Welsh portion of the subject, is a first instalment. It would be presumptuous on my part to pretend to criticise Mr. Seebohm's work from exactly the standpoint he has adopted, but it may not be altogether so if I attempt to consider it by the light of its extreme importance to the student of folklore. There is no more fruitful source of error to our science than to suppose that folklore is limited to myth, belief and custom unconnected with the social organisations which formed the shell within which all the life of early man was moulded. I would add that there is as much possibility of error to those who study institutions without the aid that folklore has the power to give.

Now it would be affectation to deny that Mr. Seebohm has produced a masterly study of early Welsh tribal society without apparently being much indebted to folklore. But I very much question whether his is not an unacknowledged debt of greater value than perhaps he is aware. It is quite true that he claims an economic value only (p. 238) for his results, and therefore seems to forestall any objections which might be raised by those who consider that economics cannot claim all; but he treads dangerously near the territory of institutional folklore when he notices the customs which tell so forcibly of the worship of the hearth. And it is exactly here that Mr. Seebohm just misses the full output of his own research. The economical conditions of early tribal societies were not the result of the free development of

natural economic laws; and perhaps the most powerful factor operating against such a development must be looked for in what is now known as folklore. Mr. Seebohm somewhat tardily recognises this when he says: "We may be thankful even to folklore for reminding us that the ties of Cymric blood relationship may have had religious sanctions long ago obscured, if not altogether obliterated by Christian and ecclesiastical influences" (p. 86). And, again, when he admits that legends of Irish chieftainship "are not without value when real history is wanting" (p. 143). I fancy that before the students of early institutions have finished their labours they will have to be more respectful to a science which will yield them as much fruitful material as, if not more than, the meagre and often misleading sentences of legal deeds and monkish chronicles.

But I do not wish to lay too much stress upon this deficiency of Mr. Seebohm's book. It is in truth a deficiency that almost any one of us might supply for himself; and no greater testimony can be given to the value of Mr. Seebohm's researches than this fact. He has worked so carefully and so correctly through the manuscripts by which he has been guided, that his results might be taken up at any point and continued by students of other branches of institutional history. There would be little or no going back upon Mr. Seebohm's work. All that would be necessary would be to gather up the ends of the threads as he has left them, and to weave on to them the new work.

Mr. Seebohm's method is quite familiar to us now. He takes up the details supplied by some late legal documents—in this case the "Extents," temp. Edward I. and Edward III.—and after exhaustively analysing them and getting from them all the conclusions that they can give of themselves, he turns back to some earlier documents—in this case the codes of Welsh law and the traditions supplied by chronicles—and ascertains how much of the later evidence is represented also in the earlier, and what additional evidence is supplied. Nothing could be better stated than such an argument as this. It must convince even the most sceptical that the society depicted in legal documents is not depicted in full, that the description is merely that of the framework—a framework, too, which is so well known to the scribes and the persons interested in the documents under examination, that it does not need and does not obtain anything more than

a most cursory and elementary description. Mr. Seeböhm has proved once for all that documentary evidence can only be studied by the light of other evidence, and by the same scientific process as one studies other material for the history of man. He has proved once for all that evidence recorded of a later period is evidence also of unchanged facts of an early period. What this early period may be, and how far back we may in turn trace it, is a question yet to be solved. At all events we have in Mr. Seeböhm's work a solid basis upon which to begin investigation into this part of the subject.

Mr. Seeböhm finds that under the Welsh tribal system "there were two great classes, those of Cymric blood and those who were strangers in blood. There was a deep if not impassable gulf between these two classes quite apart from any question of land or of conquest. It was a division in blood. And it soon becomes apparent that the tenacity with which the distinction was maintained was at once one of the strong distinctive marks of the tribal system and one of the main secrets of its strength" (p. 55). If to this we add the words "and of its origin," I think we have as good a definition of the essentials of the tribal system everywhere as could well be found. Through the interesting evidence as to the kin-shattered person, the holding together of the kindred, the marrying of daughters, and other necessary elements, Mr. Seeböhm traces out the structure of tribal society with masterly force and directness of purpose. He misses the significance of tribal rights having been secured through maternal kinship when a full tribeswoman married a non-tribesman; he understates the significance of the hearth cult; but he nowhere leads the student beyond the line marked by the evidence upon which he almost exclusively relies. The relation of the tribe to the land is the portion of the subject which Mr. Seeböhm treats with the greatest possible skill and success, and we arrive finally at the cluster of homesteads into groups from which the *gwesta*, or *tunc* pound in lieu of it, was due—that clustering which in his earlier book, the *English Village Community*, he defined as supplying "obviously distinctive features arising from the tribal holding of land, and that the system was adopted apparently to facilitate the division of the land among the families in the tribe." On the whole Mr. Seeböhm's new researches do not seem to have enabled him to advance upon this definition. He takes the clustering

and the food-rents connected therewith as an inherent part of the tribal system, going back to the earliest Cymric times, and by inference to the earliest tribal times (see p. 230). It is this inference which I venture to think is not proven. The Cymric conquerors of Wales under Cunedda, from whom Mr. Seebohm dates his evidence as to the Welsh tribal system (p. 148), were not only not the first occupiers of Welsh territory, but not the first Celtic occupiers, for they drove out their cousins the Goidelic Celts. But, more than this, they were post-Roman conquerors of Wales, and probably, as Professor Rhys points out with some force, saturated with Roman ceremonial, aided by Roman organisation, and descended from Roman fathers (*Celtic Britain*, p. 120). Nowhere perhaps in all Britain was the Roman power more consolidated than in Wales; and it is just here that we meet with the curious artificial grouping of tax-paying units. The evidence of India affords many examples of the same sort of artificial grouping arising out of primitive tribes coming under the taxation system of Imperial Britain, as, for instance, in the Kangra district, so well described by Mr. Lyall; and there seems to me little doubt that the artificial grouping in the Cymric tribal system is due to the iron hand of the Roman tax-gatherer. If this is so, it is not an essential part of the ancient tribal system, but a form into which the tribal system would become moulded under similar circumstances, wherever it might meet with them.

I have thought it right to emphasise these points in taking stock of Mr. Seebohm's contribution to the early history of the tribe, because they are all essential to those who may be taking up the subject from where Mr. Seebohm leaves off and going back further into the past. Mr. Seebohm himself seems to think that students of his book will take up the subject from the economical point of view only, and will be chiefly interested in the modern economic evolution of society in Wales, which must start from the Celtic tribal system (p. 171). I am assuredly doing him only justice when I state that his book will be used far and wide by all who wish to deal adequately with the early history of man in Western Europe, and in Britain in particular; and if I have ventured to disagree with some of his conclusions, I have done so only in the spirit which conduces to further investigation.

LAURENCE GOMME.

EGYPTIAN TALES TRANSLATED FROM THE PAPYRI. Second Series, XVIIIth to XIXth Dynasty. Edited by W. M. FLINDERS PETRIE, Hon. D.C.L., LL.D. London: Methuen & Co., 1895.

THIS second series of the translation of Egyptian tales, of which we reviewed the first series in June last, contains, like its predecessor, four tales, accompanied by the Editor's comments. The four stories are The Taking of Joppa, The Doomed Prince, Anpu and Bata (hitherto known as The Two Brothers), and Setna and the Magic Book: all of them stories of much intrinsic interest. It is greatly to be regretted that three out of the four are only known from imperfect papyri. The openings of the first and last are wanting. The second breaks off at the most interesting part, and has besides a whole paragraph obviously misplaced. We may add to Dr. Petrie's conjectures, as to the probable close of this tale, that perhaps the Doomed Prince was put to death after all by the dog, and restored to life by his faithful wife. This would fulfil the prediction of the Hathors, without violating poetical justice or the Egyptian notion of probability.

The tales present a variety of points highly interesting to the student of folklore, and the Editor's notes are most useful in elucidating many obscurities. The translations of three out of the four may be profitably compared with those of M. Maspero. It is perhaps to be regretted that Dr. Petrie has felt it needful to soften some of the expressions, and in the case of one of the tales in this and the previous volume to give a mere abstract of an important episode. But as a whole the volume, like its predecessor, will not fail to be highly appreciated by students alike of literature and folklore.

We have noted a few printer's errors, chiefly concerned with the concord of nominative and verb; and our glass has not been strong enough to discover the star referred to on page 7.

KILNS, MILLS, MILLERS, MEAL, AND BREAD. By the Rev. WALTER GREGOR, M.A., LL.D. London: David Nutt, 1894.

WHEN we see Dr. Gregor's name attached to any work, we know what to expect, namely, original collections from the mouth of the folk, set down in business-like catalogues, with unrivalled precision of detail as to localities and variants, and withal not a word from the writer himself, nothing to show what is the special purpose or the outcome of the collection. The present pamphlet takes a somewhat original line. It is an exhaustive collection of the folklore pertaining to that universal human necessity, *Bread*, in the writer's special district, North-east Scotland. Drying, grinding, baking, every stage in the process, has its own lore. Fairies and kelpies stop the mill, borrow the meal, or spoil the baking; luck-rules must be observed for fear of dearth; divinations and omens are drawn from cakes and loaves; cakes must be provided for all family events and yearly festivals; games, riddles, and proverbs turn on grinding and baking. Bread and cheese were carried in the wedding procession to treat the first person met; the bride on arriving at her new home must plunge her hand into the meal-chest. Bread and cheese were in like manner carried with a newborn babe, and meal or bread put into its hand in the first house it visited. Iron must be put into the meal in a house where a dead body is lying, and no baking done in the house lest the meal or bread turn mouldy. Bread and water were placed in the death chamber the night after the funeral for the use of the spirit of the dead expected to return that night. The principal ceremonial, eating of bread and cheese or bread and butter, was at the *first ploughing* of the year, when sometimes the plough-horses, and generally the birds, shared the feast. The Yule Bread, at Christmas, was chiefly remarkable for the care with which it was baked. It was generally done during the night, and a supply sufficient to last throughout the festival must be ready before daybreak. The cakes of bread must not be counted. A bannock was named for each of the family, and if it broke in the baking the one who owned it would die before next Christmas. The other days for which special cakes were baked were *Fastern's Even* (Shrove Tuesday), when they were used for divination, and May Day, when they were also so used, but in a peculiar way, by rolling them downhill to see if they would break. They were afterwards eaten

out of doors. (Easter eggs are thus treated in Furness, Lancashire.) In one place it was held necessary to knead a May Day bannock entirely in the hand, never to set it down except for baking, and to lift it from the fire into the hand of the recipient, otherwise it had no more virtue than ordinary bread. May Day, it should be said, was the occasion of first driving out the cattle to pasture after the winter. It is difficult for a southerner to realise that none of these varieties of "bread," "cakes," and "bannocks," are baked in an oven, but that they are all varieties of what we should call "oatcake," and are baked either on a "girdle" or on the hearth.

One very marked case of "survival" is noted by Dr. Gregor. On two hills in the Highlands of Aberdeenshire, travellers had to propitiate "the Banshee" by placing a barley meal cake, marked on one side by a round O, beside a well at the top of each hill. If this was not done, death or some great misfortune would be the consequence. Instances of such results are related. We wish that Dr. Gregor had been able to inform us how lately this custom was in use.

LEGENDS OF FLORENCE COLLECTED FROM THE PEOPLE, AND
RETOLD BY C. G. LELAND. First Series. D. Nutt, 1895.

THE greater number of the pieces in this book are local legends; they grew up as attempts to explain something odd in the name of a street, or some queer statute, or some part of a coat of arms. We have a tale to show how the Via delle Serre Smarrite got its name (p. 41); the Enchanted Cow of the Via Vacchereccia (109); the Bronze Boar of the Old Market (47); the pills of the Medicean escutcheon (6), and armorial bearings of other families, gentle and simple (83, &c.). The bridges of Florence have their ghosts. Many of these stories are old friends in a new dress, or contain elements which the student of folklore will recognise at once. The legend of the Via della Mosca, for instance (p. 188), has a good girl, and a wicked girl with a witch-mother; the witch enchants a comb of thorns, so that whoever was combed with it turns into a fly. The fly in this case sings of its own transformation. We are reminded of the wicked old woman who sticks a pin into the bride's head, and turns her into a bird; and it is a

common feature in tales that an ill-treated innocent, transformed or in the form of dead bones, sings its fate to those dear to it (e.g., Grimm, No. 47). In the legend of the Via del Fico, a fig-tree grows from a dog's bones (205); in it was the luck of the master of the ground, and ill luck came to him who plucked its fruit or did it damage. Then there is Beauty and the Beast (47), with silence taboo, and the boar-man who doffs his hide and becomes human.

The sacrifice of life at founding of a bridge seems to be referred to in the legend of the Ponte alla Carraia, which is haunted by the ghost of a goat, that when seen sinks into the ground at a certain spot (77). The "secret chamber" incident is varied on page 114. And there are many others scattered through the book.

Not the least interesting are such legends as recall those of classical times. We have Echo, the voice of spirits of the dead (78); Orpheus and Eurydice (227); and Intialo, whom the author identifies with an Etruscan word Hinthial, written on tombstones after the name of the dead man. Orpheus is invoked by those who wish for skill to play upon the shepherd's pipe; he is asked for "the skill he won from hell"; a difference from the classical variant, when he uses his skill to charm the lords of Hades. Part of the ritual consists of *burying the pipe* three days in the earth, as Orpheus himself went down into the earth to Hades.

There are a number of extraordinary incantations and accounts of witches and witch-ritual. Besides that of Orpheus already mentioned, there is a love-charm done by aid of the *mirror* (254) and a *glass* negative of the lover's photograph, with bits of his hair. Cain is invoked in this charm; and it appears that he lives in the moon, with a bundle of thorns on his back. But the most striking, and to my mind a really fine poem, is the invocation to Intialo (238); where a demon threatens a man that he will haunt him, and the man replies in a splendid piece of malignant scorn, that he is a greater wizard than the demon, by virtue of a "lovely witch" who protects him.

Of other odd pieces of lore, I may mention that it is explained why a horseshoe brings good luck (123); the *earth of your footprint* is weighed to try your guilt (118); and *stolen oil* is used for love charms (269). The author avers that there are churches

about Rome where the oil is purposely left to be stolen or taken, though the thief is supposed to leave a copper to pay for it (*ibid.*). The special efficacy of things stolen has already been discussed in this journal. In the Shoemaker and St. John (125), a man treats the saint like a fetish.

Of more modern elements, besides the cross (which is constantly occurring), we have Dante and Michael Angelo as spirits (69, 52).

As regards the authenticity of the matter a word may be said. Mr. Leland has often been found fault with for "cooking" what he learns, and there is good reason for the censure. He distinctly states (pref. p. xi.) that he has in many cases worked up the stories from "a very slight foundation of tradition—often a mere hint" (see also p. 204). But we ought to be told exactly where this is done, and we ask for the "slight foundation" or the "mere hint" *verbatim*. Where he says that his familiar witch, Maddalena, has given him the document in writing, we can be satisfied; and this is often said. But we would beg Mr. Leland in his next book, which he promises soon, to tell us exactly how much is tradition and how much Leland, even if it be in a note. We shall enjoy the book none the less, and we shall know where we are. Enjoyable the book is, and rarely; read, for instance, the capital tales of the Egg-woman (11), St. Peter and the Smith (124), or Cheating the Devil (91). Every page is full of racy phrases and quaint proverbs. The verse translations, though sometimes free (p. 3), are pretty and idiomatic. But we protest against anything careless or slipshod. There is no call for Mr. Leland's unworthy sneer at what he calls the "second-rate folklorist" (p. xi). If any one deserves this title, it is he who designedly alters his material. We could also do without Flaxius. Flaxius always has something to say about the stories, and he is a dreary bore. Let Mr. Leland give us his other book soon, but with notes, and no Flaxius.

W. H. D. R.