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Miscellanea

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MISCELLANEA.

Tom-Tit-Tot.—I remember the following verses, which clearly refer to some form of this story (see *Folk-Lore Journal*, vii, 138-143) :

“Merrily my course I take,
To-day I brew, to-morrow bake ;
Merrily I'll dance and sing,
For next day will a stranger bring.
Little does my lady wot
That my name is Trit-a-trot.”

I do not remember the source, but am nearly sure it was in print.

W. F. KIRBY.

A Basque Superstition.—Can any reader of FOLK-LORE throw any light on a superstition prevalent apparently among the Basques of Navarre and the Aragonese of the Pyrenees, to the effect that the bear acts as a sort of watch-dog to St. Peter at the gate of Heaven. My informants are two Navarese Basques, a man and woman, whom I saw exhibiting a bear in Biarritz. I have no doubt that, if I could have spoken Basque, I could have extracted much more information than I did, but it was difficult for them to speak Spanish, the only language except their own with which they were at all acquainted, and also they were shy and reticent, and it required a good deal of persuasion to win their confidence in the slightest degree. They told me that their bear, when they were not travelling about, lived with them in their hut in the mountains, and that they were always careful to treat him kindly and feed him well. For example, if they had not enough of fish (which they looked upon as a luxury) for themselves and the bear, the latter must be fed and satisfied first. They declared that the animal understands all that is said about him, and observes and comprehends any household work, trade or occupation which may be going on ; “and that is the reason that a bear who has lived with men should never be allowed to return to the forest and mountains, for he will tell the other bears of what he has seen and learnt, and they, being very cunning, will come down into the valleys, and by means of their great strength, added to the knowledge they have thus gained, will be able to rule men *as they did*

before!" I endeavoured to learn when this sad state of affairs existed, but could only ascertain that it was *antes*—before, in other times. "El Orso," said his keepers, "is el perso de Dios, el perso de San Pedro; he is very wise and thoughtful; he sits beside the blessed saint at the gate of Heaven, and if those who seek to enter have been cruel and unkind to the bears in this world, the saint will turn them away, and they will have to go and live in hell, with the devils and the *wolves*." "Que ay mas per deer!" concluded the woman, "el orso es el perso de Dios." The bear's name was *Belis*; I spell it as it was pronounced. Throughout the conversation the peasants would constantly interrupt themselves to speak to the animal, assuring me that he perfectly understood all that was said.

What is the origin of the custom which prevails in Hyères, and which I have also seen in Bagnères de Bigorre, of driving two oxen decorated with collars and green wreaths or branches through the town on one or more of the days of Holy Week? The oxen are accompanied by men and boys beating a drum or blowing horns.

TH. HOLLINGSWORTH.

"Making Weather" in Denmark.—A most curious custom is still observed in some parts of Denmark. During the months of February and March, the farmer, housewives, thereafter their husbands, and at last their servants, female and male, "make weather". Commonly, the parsonage being No. 1 on the list, the parson's wife "makes weather" on the first of February. Is the weather that day good, Mrs. N. N. is said to be a very benevolent lady, in good humour, and neighbours go visiting her, congratulating on the fair weather, and are friendly received, treated to coffee and cakes. Is the weather on the contrary foul, Mrs. N. N. is in bad humour; we will go to punish her or to divert her. Maybe she is pulled out into the yard and tied to the waterpump, that she may herself try her own weather. Her neighbours come wrapped up in large cloaks and shawls, whereas they come summerclad when the weather is fair. Otherwise a neighbour may creep cautiously along the housewall and tie some hards on the doorlatch. It is instantly understood, and everything ends with a cup of coffee, given by the person who "makes" the foul weather, some jokes, and everybody goes home again. For further particulars see Feilberg's *Bondeliv*, p. 255. I possess but one quotation pointing indistinctly to a similar custom: Kuhn, *Sagen aus Westphalen*, ii, 91, 284: "Die Frauen sind im Februar wetterregentinnen." Is this custom known anywhere else? Wherefrom may this "making weather" be derived? Why in the months of February and March?

H. T. FEILBERG.

"Liver-rhyme" in Denmark.—A century or so ago it has been customary in Denmark, for instance at the marriage table, and certainly on other festivals, that a liver taken from a hen or another fowl or animal was passed from hand to hand on a plate. The person to whom the liver was handed had to pronounce a rhyme—"liver-rhyme". Most part of those were senseless—for instance, "This liver is not from a fish; may God give us all His Holy Ghost!" Many of them are still remembered by old people. In Norway and Sweden a spoonful of boiled rice was passed; on the Faroë islands a cowtail trimmed up with coloured ribbons, quite for the same purpose. I take the liberty of asking, May any such custom be recorded from Brittany? From North Germany I know the same, but from nowhere else.

H. T. FEILBERG.

Italian Peeping Toms.—Bearing on the facts given in the article, "Peeping Tom and Lady Godiva", in *FOLK-LORE*, vol. i, p. 207, *seq.*, seems to be the following from *Roma Antiqua et Recens*; or, *The Conformity of Ancient and Modern Ceremonies*, a republication by Elliot Stock of a last-century book:—

"I will, moreover, affirm this, that as, in the procession of the sacrament, the streets through which that is to pass are hung with tapestry, pursuant to an order of the Roman ritual, so did the pagans also. 'All the places through which the pomp was to pass were hung as is practised by us,' says Blondus and Polidore Virgil. This last acquaints us that in Italy boys and girls are forbidden to see the procession from windows—that is, from on high downwards. The pagans forbade the same, for which Verrius Flaccus assigns this reason: That when the plague was at Rome, the oracles answered that it was because the gods were gazed at from on high downwards. The Latin word *despicere*, made use of in the oracle, having a double meaning, and signifying 'to look down', as well as to condemn or despise, the whole city was uneasy to know the true meaning of the oracle; whereupon it happened that, on the day of the procession of Diana, a lad, who had seen the show from the highest story of the house, and told his mother that he had seen in what order the mysteries, which were carried in a chariot, were disposed; the Senate being informed of this, it was ordered that all places hereafter through which the procession was to pass should be blinded with tapestry. The lad having cleared up the ambiguity of the oracle, the plague presently ceased. And thus it was discovered that the gods complained they were gazed at from on high, which was a matter, it seems, that polluted the sacred ceremonies. 'From thence,' saith Polidore Virgil, 'it is that boys and girls are forbidden to look upon the procession from windows.' (P. 63.)

L. KENNEDY.

St. John's Eve Custom.—The Stromberg, with Druidical remains and traditions, is a noted place for worship of the sun. Until recently, perhaps at the present day, every Midsummer night saw the historic *cérémonie de la roue enflammée* observed on its summit. On St. John's Eve a colossal sheaf was manufactured of straw, contributed from neighbouring farms, and fixed on a big pole as on a pivot, that it might turn round and round. After the sounding of the Angelus, some hundreds of men marched up to the mountain-top carrying lighted torches. No women were allowed to take part. When quite dark, the sheaf was set on fire and turned rapidly round so as to present the appearance of a huge fiery wheel—symbol of the sun. Similar customs, not unlike the old Celtic *belltan* or *belstein*, survive likewise in Alsace and the Black Forest. (Notes from article in *National Review*, Dec. 1890, p. 536, *Château Malbrouk*, by Henry W. Wolff.)
MARIAN ROALFE COX.

An Irish Variant of "Master of all Masters."—A scholar called one evening at the house of a farmer and asked for a night's lodging. The farmer, to test his progress in his studies, asked him the names of various things in Irish.

Farmer. Now, what do you call me?

Scholar. Fear an Tighe—"Man of the house."

F. No. Rígh 'n tighe—"King of the house." What do you call that—the dog?

S. Madadh no cu no gadhair.

F. No. Soclair—"Trotting." A dog trots. What do you call these—shoes?

S. Bróga.

F. No. Socair boinn—"Comfort of the soles." What do you call that—the fire?

S. Teinne no lasair.

F. No. Glóir—"Glory": a fire sparkles and shines like glory. What do you call that—the end of the house?

S. Beam tighe—"Peaked end of the house."

F. No. Zóin an tighe—"Buttock of the house." What do you call that—water?

S. Uisce—"Water."

F. No. Iomadamlacht—"Abundance": because water is so abundant. What do you call this—house?

S. Teach—"House."

F. No. Sómás—"Comfort": a house is comfortable.

After they had gone to bed, the scholar rose, greased the farmer's

shoes, which the dog then began to eat. The scholar went out and set fire to the end of the house, and spoke the following lines :

“Rígh 'n tighe biodh do shuidhe,
Dúadh sodar socair boinn,
Tá colladh trom air Aillín,
Tá an glóire id-tóin sómás,
Mar a sábhálfhadh an iomadamlacht,
Béidh do rioghacht dóite.”

Translation.

“King of the house, be sitting (getting) up,
The trotting (dog) has eaten the comfort of the soles (shoes),
There is heavy sleep on Aillín (the housekeep, ‘the fair one’),
The glory is in the buttock of the comfort (end of the house),
If the plenty (water) will not save (it)
Thy kingdom will be burned.”

This queer pedagoguish puzzle I got from a Fr. Moran, born about fifty years ago in Fermanagh ; he heard it from his mother.

St. Louis.

JAMES KEEGAN.

Folk-names of British Birds.—Mr. Swainson's *Folk-lore of British Birds* is an interesting and useful work ; yet, like every other book of folk-lore, it may be supplemented. He seems to have omitted to consult Gray's *Birds of the West of Scotland*, Glasgow, 1871, 520 pp., from which I take the following notes :—

Kestrel.—“I find, from Don's *Fauna of Forfarshire*, that this bird in his day was, not inappropriately, called *Willie Whip the Wind*,” p. 36.

Kite, “or *salmon-tailed gled*, as it is called,” p. 42.

Golden Oriole.—“A recent contributor to *Chambers's Journal* remarks that ‘the song of this splendid bird—a flute-like whistle, with a cadence not unlike speech—sounds ominous to the Low German short of coin ; for Hans, drinking before the ale-house door, hears the Oriole sing from the lindens, *Hast du gesopen ? so betahl du* (Hast thou quaffed ? then pay),’” p. 81.

Common Whitethroat, “or *Whiskey whey beard*, as it is called in many parts of Scotland,” p. 95.

Great Tit.—Its note “has obtained for it the name of *Jacksaw* in many parts of the country,” p. 102.

Pied Wagtail.—“The Gaelic name of the bird—*Breac-an-P-sil*—signifies a *plaid*, and has probably been applied to this wagtail from a resemblance which the contrasting colours of its plumage on the breast bears to that article of apparel when wrapped closely round

the upper part of the body, as many Highlanders are in the habit of wearing it," p. 111.

Snow Bunting.—"Numbers are taken at this season [end of April] to the bird-stuffers of Brechin and Kerriemuir, and are called in these towns *mountain finches*," p. 128.

Yellow Hammer.—"The familiar *Yellow Yite* or *Yeldrin*, as it is called in Scotland," p. 130. [Mr. Swainson gives *Yellow Yale*, but not the second form.]

Hooded Crow.—

"The Guil, the Gordon, and the Hooded Crow,
Were the three worst things Murray ever saw.

The gule is a well-known weed infecting growing crops, and Lord Lewis Gordon, who made plundering excursions into Morayshire from the Castle of Rothes, is referred to as the second 'worst thing' in the county." [A variant of lines and explanation as given by Swainson, pp. 178, 179.] "The Gaelic name of this bird is *Feannag*, which means *to skin*, or *play*," p. 178.

Jackdaw, called *Kay*, p. 183.

Magpie.—"Not more than thirty years ago a worthy Dunbar bailie, whose residence was about two miles distant from the town, was in the habit of turning back if he happened to encounter a pair of magpies on his way either to administer justice or attend divine service," p. 187.

Ringdove.—"Throughout western Scotland the Ring Dove is best known by the name of *Cushat*," p. 219. [Mr. Swainson gives "*Cushat* (Berks; Bucks; Craven; Westmoreland). *Cruchet* (North.)," p. 165; yet certainly *Cushat*, and not *Cruchet*, is the usual Scottish name. Cf. Burns—

"On lofty aiks the *cushats* wail,
And echo cons the doolful tale;
The lintwhites in the hazel braes,
Delighted, rival ither's lays."

Bessie and Her Spinning-wheel.

By-the-way, Mr. Swainson attributes, p. 65, *lintwhite* for *linnet* only to "Orkney Isles." "'Wood-pigeons should be kept down, they are so destructive.' 'Very true,' rejoined my friend; 'but that's not the name we gi'e the bird here.' 'And what name do you give it?' I inquired. 'Oh,' said he, apparently unconscious of any parody, 'we just ca' them *Timmer doos*!'" p. 219. [Timmer = wood. Cf. Burns—

"Except for breaking o' their *timmer*,
Or speaking lightly o' their *limmer*,
Or shootin' o' a hare or moor-cock,
The ne'er-a-bit they're ill to poor folk."

The Twa Dogs.]

Virginian Colin.—"This beautiful quail, which is so well known in North America under the name of *Bob White*, was introduced into East Lothian in 1857," p. 244.

Common Sandpiper.—"In some places it is called *killileepie*, a name evidently derived from its oft-repeated cry," p. 297. [*Killie-leepsie* in Swainson, p. 196.]

Dunlin.—"The Gaelic name of *Pollaireun*, given to the Dunlin in the Long Island, signifying *bird of the mud-pits*, expresses in a single word its habits better than any English or Scottish synonym," p. 322.

Sclavonian Grebe.—"The suggestive names of *Water Witch* and *Hell Diver*, applied to this bird in various parts of America, would lead us to suppose that collectors have had some difficulty in securing specimens for their cabinets," p. 407.

Black-throated Diver.—"Its cry in dry weather. "The natives of Benbecula and North Uist compare it to *Deoch! deoch! deoch! tha'n loch a traoghadh*, which may be interpreted by the words 'Drink! drink! drink! the lake is nearly dried up!'" p. 415.

Common Guillemot, as the Gaelic *Eun an t' a Sgadan* "implies, is the *Herring-bird* of the Hebrides," p. 420.

Ringed Guillemot.—"Weeping *guillemot*, *silver-eyed scout*, and *bridled marrot*, are instances of local distinction among the fishermen; but these names have evidently been acquired through intercourse with collectors," p. 425.

Little Auk.—"Seafaring people on the shores of East Lothian and Fifeshire "call it the *rotchie* or sea-dove," p. 432. [They are "thought to indicate rough weather out at sea," says Dr. Wm. Anderson, writing from Brigus, Newfoundland, to Mr. Gray, on 8th Nov. 1869, p. 433.]

Fulmar.—"The oil which this bird yields by vomiting when caught is highly valued by the natives of St. Kilda as a cure for all diseases," p. 502. [A chemical analysis of the oil is given: "It is certainly a fish-oil, and it possesses nearly all the properties of cod-liver oil," etc.]

WILLIAM GEORGE BLACK.