Correspondence

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CORRESPONDENCE.

FOLKLORE FROM THE HEBRIDES: A DISCLAIMER.

(Vol. xiii., p. 29.)

IN a paper entitled "More Folklore from the Hebrides," by Miss A. Goodrich-Freer, read at a meeting of 6th November, 1901, and published 25th March, 1902, occur the following words: "In the very few cases in which I have presented examples already published by Mr. Carmichael in his *Carmina Gadelica*, it is because we have both borrowed from a common fount, the Rev. Allan Macdonald, &c."

I should be guilty of an injustice to my good friend Mr. Carmichael if I were to allow the statement to pass without comment. The author of *Carmina Gadelica* borrowed nothing from me. I did put a book of notes at his disposal, as he courteously mentions in the introduction of his great work, but, as he tells us in the same paragraph, he was unable to make use of these notes, having so much material of his own. Mr. Carmichael has done more for the collection of Island folklore than any living man.

ALLAN M'DONALD.

Eriskay, South Uist, 7th January, 1903.

THE FIJIAN FIRE-WALK

(Vol. xiii., p. 29.)

Mr. Alfred Haggard has kindly sent me this most recent account of the Fire-Walk in Fiji. As we learn from Miss Teneira Henry and other writers, the Fijian ceremony used to be one of First

Fruits, and in this case cooking the fruits was practised. The time of exposure of the men to the heat was not taken by a watch, or is not here recorded ; nor is any attempt to ascertain the surface heat mentioned. But other witnesses may have taken more exact records.

A. LANG.

Extract from Letter from Lieut. Vernon H. Haggard, R.N.,
H.M.S. *Royal Arthur*, Australian Squadron.

Dated August 24th, 1902, Suva, Viti Levu.

"Yesterday was a most interesting day. Some of us landed at the invitation of the Governor to see a fire-walking ceremony which he had arranged. This fire-walking is done only by a tribe which lives in an island a few miles away, and they very seldom do it. One old inhabitant told me he had never seen it in the thirty-two years he had lived in Fiji ; so we were in luck.

"There is not much in it, but it was a picturesque sight. It was carried out in a disused quarry, shaped something like an amphitheatre, quite near Government House ; in the centre was the oven, a pit in which a large heap of rounded stones had been heated up over a wood fire since dawn. The charred and glowing logs had been removed from the top so that we could go and inspect the stones and satisfy ourselves that they were hot. They were.

"The first part of the ceremony consisted of spreading the heap of stones to the necessary flatness. This was done by about forty handsome, frizzy-headed Fijians, splendid fellows, naked from the waist up except for a necklace of flowers, and clothed with a bushy skirt of dyed leaves and flowers. They look very well with their glistening brown skins and rippling muscles, and walk with the swing of a Highlander. These men spread the stones with the help of a long pliant creeper as thick as one's arm, which was dragged backwards and forwards across the heap. It was a long business, and took at least an hour.

"When they were at last satisfied their headman gave a shout, and out of a reed-brake on the far side of the quarry the fire-walkers came running in single file. They went on to the stones (with feet bare) and walked round the heap once, when the other men rushed up with armfuls of leaves and branches which they

flung on the stones. Bundles of yams wrapped in leaves were also thrown on to be cooked, and on top of these, almost hidden in the dense clouds of smoke, the fire-walkers stood, and it was over. They could not have been on the hot stones more than three-quarters of a minute, but it was probably quite enough for them. The explanation of how it can be done probably lies in the fact that the stones are not *very* hot, and that these men come from a place where the rocks are so uncomfortable to walk on that their feet welcome the hot brick as a pleasant change."

True copy.

ALFRED H. HAGGARD.

14 . 10 . 02.

FIFTH OF NOVEMBER CUSTOMS.

Mr. H., who is more than seventy, told me at the beginning of November, 1902, that when he was a lad all the young men of Kirton-in-Lindsey claimed the right of shooting over the whole parish on the 5th of November. "When the sport was over," he added, "they met together in the market place to fire off their guns."

The belief that the people of a parish may legally shoot "all over the lordship" on this day is not uncommon in North Lincolnshire.

Does it rest on some old folk-custom? So far as I am aware, manorial records do not speak of such a practice.

At the present time the boys of Kirton have a 5th of November bonfire on the green, but I am told by Mr. G., a septuagenarian, who has lived all his life in the little town, that according to his experience they have never made effigies of Guy Fawkes. Some of the boys of the middle class once burnt a figure representing an unpopular schoolmaster, and representations of notorious public characters are occasionally offered to the flames, but a genuine Gunpowder Plot Guy he believes to be unknown. Whether Guys are rare in Lincolnshire I cannot say, for my experience happens to be small, but in fact all the Guys I have seen were beyond the borders of the county.

A correspondent of mine writing from Hampshire says: "This is November 5th, 'bonfire night.' It always astonishes me how little Liphook and many other places know of a Guy Fawkes." The boys, it appears, let off fireworks, light a public bonfire, and for days beforehand run about in masks, but they have no Guy. "In my life I never saw one; they never had one at Wakefield (Yorkshire). On the other hand, at Southampton, and within a few miles of here, the Guy is the great feature and the fire the necessary second; though at Bosham, near Chichester, I am told, certain men are called 'bonfire boys,' and they dress up every year in fancy dresses and have a procession, and wind up with a bonfire; but there is no Guy. I suppose it shows that the bonfire is the older institution; yet when history is taught in every school it is strange that the children should so soon forget the later idea of 'Guy Fawkes Day.'" Then my friend goes on to inquire, "Which is the commoner, 'Guy Fawkes Day' with a Guy to carry round, or 'Bonfire Night' with no Guy to burn?"

It may be that originally Guy was only burnt in effigy in the parishes where the Reformation and its results were popular. No doubt, in many counties the religious sympathies of the people would prevent any great detestation of Fawkes and his fellow-plotters. For instance, we should scarcely expect to find Guys in the Roman Catholic parts of Lancashire or Yorkshire, or even in those villages of now Wesley-following Lincolnshire which furnished men to help in the rising against Henry VIII.'s innovations, for long after that king's death a grudge against the Reformation and all its promoters must have rankled.

Where can information be found on the British and the continental autumn-fires, and are November autumn-fires mentioned in manorial records, &c., before the time of the Gunpowder Plot?

In Würtemberg, some twenty years ago, I heard a great explosion of firearms, which I was told signified that the grape-harvest was over, but I do not remember whether bonfires were lighted or not.

MABEL PEACOCK.

Very little seems to have been recorded as to the details of Guy Fawkes celebrations. When I was making collections for *Shropshire Folklore* I was told that it was or had been customary at the farmhouses to have a bonfire on the 5th of November, which agreed with the impression I had derived in childhood

from servants and labourers. I only heard of carrying or burning effigies at Ludlow; and personally I have only seen them in *seaport towns* (London being one). I have a childish, but distinct, memory of parties of boys carrying effigies at Ilfracombe on 5th November, 1859. They brought them round to the houses, rang at the door, and asked for money for them; as the girls did with dolls on the 1st of May. One party, I remember, carried not an effigy, but a living man with his face blacked. What I noted on the south-east coast in 1894 will be found in *Folklore*, v., 38. A *quondam* "Bonfire Boy" of Hastings now tells me that the rhyme they sang at and about that date was as follows:

Remember, remember, the fifth of November,
 Gunpowder treason and plot;
 I see no reason why Gunpowder Treason
 Should ever be forgot.
 A stick and a stake
 For King George's sake,
 Holla, boys! holla, boys! make the town ring!
 Holla, boys! holla, boys! God save the King!
 Hip, hip, hooray!

They carried effigies and burnt them afterwards.

At Eastbourne, as he tells me from local knowledge, the festival is postponed till the 9th November ("Lord Mayor's Day"). The rhyme is practically the same as that I learnt at Ilfracombe; but in Kensington, in 1901, I heard and saw boys carrying a "Guy" and singing the following debased formula:

Please to remember
 The fifth of November
 Should never be forgot.
 Guy, Guy, Guy!
 Hit 'im in the eye!
 Stick 'im up the chimney-pots and there let 'im lie!

Others will no doubt be able to give further evidence of the local distribution of the effigy-burning. Guy Fawkes doubtless "took over" a pre-existent custom, but what? And how is he related to the torchlight processions of some of our Northern fishermen?

C. S. BURNE.

MID-LENT BONFIRE IN VENICE, 1819.

I have much pleasure in sending you the following extract referring to a sort of Guy Fawkes celebration prevalent in Italy before 1820. I believe the book from which it is taken is somewhat rare.

C. J. TABOR.

"This season of peace and penitence [*i.e.* Lent] is, however, interrupted by a very odd popular festival which takes place (according to our university slang) on the day that term divides. The origin of it seems lost; for though common in the greater part of Italy, with some variety of circumstance, I never met with a person, from the professor to the barber, who could suggest any probable explanation. There is, I believe, some sort of popular festival at this period in France, but I shall describe it as it is performed in Venice.

"A small stage, with a covering, is erected in the most spacious *campo* of the parishes which celebrate the festival. Upon this appears the effigy of an old woman, and seated before her are two men, one habited as a notary, the other as a sort of military Jack-Pudding with a drawn sabre. These two eat and drink, and dispute about her fate, one being apparently the advocate and the other the accuser of the dame. This insists on her being burnt; and that declares she shall be saved. An appeal is at length made to the people, who unanimously condemn her to the flames. At length, after some necessary games, such as running in sacks, swarming up a greased pole for fowls, flasks of wine, &c., lashed to the top, the figure is set fire to amidst a volley of squibs and burnt, much as Guy Fawkes is with us."—*Letters from the North of Italy addressed to Henry Hallam, Esq., by W. P. Rose.* 2 vols. London, 1819. Vol. ii., pp. 173-4.

HARVEST BONFIRES IN THE EAST RIDING.

It was only last month that I came into contact with one who had seen and actually burnt "The Old Witch."

He told me that they twisted together the last few standing stalks of corn, making it into a little sheaf, and then setting fire

to it. This was "burning the old witch." I will quote his letter. He says:

"The custom of 'bonnin awd witch' was often referred to during the early part of my country life, even if the custom was not observed. I have heard harvesters say, 'We ought to burn the last bit of this year's crop,' and suggest that 'we do it now,' but the ganger or master would say, 'Ah weeant hev it! Thoo'll set clooase hod mebbe!' (I won't have it! You'll set the field on fire perhaps).

"I have, however, a distinct recollection of witnessing 'bonnin t' awd witch,' and could point out the very spot in the field in Weaverthop Parish. A labourer had taken part of a field of barley to cut, tie, and stook, and [it] being the last piece to cut on the farm, his wife, who was 'gathering,' said, 'At doon dinner tahm (time) you tway (two) lads sall see t' awd witch bont, if we ger (get) all doon ti neet.'¹ When we came to the last 'swathe' (breadth) the man was about fifteen yards before his wife, who was gathering and laying into sheaves, so that before she saw he had finished he had cut the last, tied it into a sheaf, and lighted it with, I think, the first lucifer I had seen. He was a smoker, and I think his wife did not know that he'd got the new light; and, I think, partly because of his extravagance in using a lucifer, and also accomplishing the business so much more quickly than she would have done with flint and tunder [*sic*] or peter paper,² she shouted out to him, 'Thoo greeat cloothhead, thoo owt ti ha bont it stannin!' (while still uncut). 'Thoo's deean it wrang! That weeant flay d'witch!' (won't frighten the witch).

"This happened in September, 1850, but as to your question, Is it done now? I can't remember having heard it mentioned during my nine years here (South Cave). It was often referred to as a custom when I was at Bonwick (near Hornsea), and I remember particularly, in the wet harvest of 1880, that Willie Crozer (who was over fifty then, and is living still at Skipsea Brough) and I were cutting the last acre of barley a few days before St. Martin's Day, and when he came to the last few strokes he stopped short, and looking up, said, 'What am Ah ti deeah

¹ This is rather obscure, but I think it means that the woman promised at dinner time they should see the witch burnt at night if all were cut.

² Paper saturated in a solution of saltpetre.

wi't? Ah think we'd betther bon it, if it wad bring us betther luck next tahm.' (What am I to do with it? I think we had better burn it, &c)."

There is a Hornsea rhyme sung by men and children as they bring in the last load :

" We hev her, we hev her
A coo iv a tether," &c.

The last sheaf bound round tightly with its thick straw band is well described as "a cow in a tether."

The following Harvest Home song was supplied to me by Mrs. Gardner, School House, Bilton, East Yorkshire :

1. Here we hev her, as tite ¹ as nip,
We niver threw ower, but yance iv a grip,²
Grip was seeah wide, hosses cudn't sthride,
Hip, hip, hooray !
2. Here we hev her, at oor toon end,
A sup o' good yal, an a croon ti spend,
We rave ³ oor shets, we tare ⁴ oor skins,
Ti get oor maisthers ⁵ harvest in.
Hip, hip, hooray !

This song, so far as I know, has never been in print, although I have part of it in *Folk Speech of East Yorkshire*, p. 12.

J. NICHOLSON.

50, Berkeley Street, Hull, 5th January, 1903.

ST. MARK'S EVE (APRIL 24TH).

In what districts of the British Isles is St Mark's Eve of paramount importance compared with other eves? In Lincolnshire, apparently, St. Mark's is the day of days for all divination, though St. Agnes' Eve and Hallow Eve have their adherents. Not long since I was told—not for the first time—that all cattle "bow the knee" on St. Mark's, with the addition that on the same eve the bracken shoots up, flowers, and seeds. As to the cattle, I know that in continental folklore the idea is not necessarily limited to Christmas, as most people imagine.

MABEL PEACOCK.

¹ Icel. tittr, soon.

² Ditch, drain.

³ Rent, did rive.

⁴ Tore, did tear.

⁵ No possessive case.