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MISCELLANEA

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MISCELLANEA.

Notes on Professor J. Rhys's Manx Folk-lore and Superstitions.—
The following notes relative to the old beliefs which still survive among the descendants of the Vikings in Lincolnshire have been put together to show the striking affinity existing between the eastern counties folk-lore and the Manx superstitions recorded by Professor Rhys.

Whether the water-bull still inhabits our streams is doubtful, but the deep pools formed by the action of the down-flowing water at the bends of our country becks are known as "bull-holes", and the Tatter-foal, Tatter-colt, or Shag-foal, as he is variously named, is still to be heard of, although his visits are rarer than they were before the fens and cars were drained, and the open fields and commons enclosed. This Tatter-foal is a goblin, who appears in the shape of a small horse, or yearling foal, in its rough, unkempt coat, and beguiles lonely travellers with innumerable tricks; a favourite device with him being to lure an unsuspecting wayfarer into a stream, swamp, or water-hole, after which exploit he vanishes with a long outburst of mockery, half neigh, half human laughter. With reference to the Manx Fenodyree, I may mention, that he had till lately a diminutive Lincolnshire cousin, who, like the Yorkshire Hob, and Robin-Round-Cap, and the Danish Niss, used to befriend the people of the house in which he dwelt. The story runs that "not so very many years gone by" a farm in the parish of Goxhill (or in the neighbouring parish of East Halton, for accounts differ) was haunted by a weeny bit of a fellow who used to do all kinds of work about the fields, stackyard, and dairy. Once, it is said, at shearing-time, the master of the house forgot to order his men to drive the sheep up over-night ready for the clippers, so he rose early and was just setting out to fetch them from the pasture when he heard a sound of bleating in the barn. Hastening to open the door, he found that not an animal was wanting. Every sheep had been brought in from the field; and, what was stranger still, a fine hare was imprisoned along with the flock. While he was wondering at the sight before him, a shrill voice from the rafters above-head declared that *the little grey sheep* had been more difficult to drive than all the rest of the herd together, and, lo and behold! there sat the manikin on one of the cross-beams of the roof. In gratitude for his help and

good-will the farmer promised the little creature a linen shirt every New Year's Eve, and for many years he kept his word. But after a time he began to think that such a mite could do very little, and that his aid was scarcely worth the wages given, so when the last evening of the year came round again a rough harden shirt was left on the kitchen-floor in place of the usual linen garment, and the family went to bed, listening the while to hear how the little workman would receive his fee. Presently the clock struck twelve, and in an instant a sharp angry wail went up from the household hearth, where the despised shirt lay showing all its coarse ugliness in the light of the dwindling fire.

" Harden, harden, harden hemp !
I will neither grind nor stamp !
Had you given me linen gear,
I would have served you many a year ! "

Such was the lament and the last-heard words of the house-sprite. Whither he went no one knows, but one thing is certain, the dairy-maids, garthmen, thatchers, and plough-lads had from that time forward to do their work unhelped. He had vanished for ever.¹

A twig of rowan, or, as we call it, *wicken*, is held to be marvellously effective against all ill-things, and therefore against witches. When laid on the churn it will prevent malign influences retarding the process of butter-making, and it is of use in twenty different manners for guarding the welfare of a household, and preserving the live-stock and crops about a farm. Fairies seem to be rare, but witches and wizards are abundant—so abundant, that I myself have been acquainted with at least four people suspected of "knowing more than they should". One of these students of unholy lore could, according to popular belief, assume the shape of a dog or a toad at will, when bent on injuring his neighbours' cattle. As a dog he was supposed to worry oxen and sheep, while under the form of a toad he poisoned the feeding-trough of the pigs. Curiously enough, I never heard him accused of adopting the guise of a hare, although it is well known that it is a favourite animal with those who practise the black-arts. Witchcraft is often hereditary in a family, most frequently passing down from mother to daughter. When a witch has no daughter

¹ Cf. the account of the goblin who cries, "What have we here? Hemton hamten, here will I never more tread nor stampen," when supplied with clothing (Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, p. 67, edition 1886). Cf. also the Rev. J. C. Atkinson, *Glossary of the Cleveland Dialect*, p. 263, 1868; and J. Nicholson, *Folk-lore of East Yorkshire*, p. 80, 1890.

however, her power may appear in a son, and revert again to the female line after his death, instead of transmitting itself to his male descendants. Only three or four years ago an old man died who had seen blood drawn from a witch because she laid a spell on a team of horses and rendered them immovable. "As soon as my mate struck her with his fork, and the blood came," said the witness, "the horses and waggon were free to go on." Fragments of iron are lucky, and are of great use in counteracting the blasts and glances of witches. The evil-eye is prevalent in certain families, and cases are known in which naturally benevolent people are afflicted with the dreadful gift of "over-looking".

Traces of animal sacrifice may still be found in Lincolnshire. The heart of a small animal, or of a bird, is necessary for the efficient performance of several counter-charms, especially in torturing a witch by the reversal of her spells, and warding off evil from houses or other buildings. Sometimes—but rarely it is to be hoped—the heart is still torn from the breast of a living creature; but this savage and loathsome custom seems to have died out of general knowledge, and it is deemed sufficient if the victim be specially slaughtered with the intention of obtaining the object in view.

Several pin and rag-wells exist in Lincolnshire, whose waters are esteemed as possessing healing virtues, particularly with regard to ailments affecting the eyes. I have been informed that people come from "as far away as Sheffield" to bottle the water of "Eye George", or "High George", a spring on Manton Common; but whether they leave any gift behind them to propitiate the powers controlling the precious fluid is uncertain.

Professor Rhys's mention of the foot-mark in the ashes reminds me of a love-spell current in the Wapentake of Manley in North Lincolnshire. Properly speaking, it should be put in practice on St. Mark's E'en, that eerie spring-tide festival when those who are skilled may watch the church-porch and learn who will die in the ensuing twelve-month; but there is little doubt that the charm is also used at Hallow-E'en, and at other suitable seasons of the year. The spell consists in riddling ashes on the hearthstone, or beans on the floor of the barn, with proper ceremonies and at the proper time, with the result that the girl who works her incantation correctly finds the footprint of the man she is to marry clearly marked on the sifted mass the following morning. It is to be supposed that the spirit of the lover is responsible for the mark, as, according to another folk-belief, any girl who watches her supper on St. Mark's E'en will see the spirit of the man she will wed come into the room at midnight to partake of the food provided. "The room must be one with the door and window in dif-

ferent walls, and both must be open. The spirit comes in by the door (and goes out by the window?). Each girl who undertakes to keep watch must have a separate supper and a separate candle, and all talking is to end before the clock goes twelve, for there must not be any speaking before the spirits." From these superstitions, and from the generally received idea that the spirits of all the parishioners are to be observed entering the church on St. Mark's E'en, it may be inferred that the Manx footprint is made by the wraith of the person doomed to death.

Another Hallowmas custom was lately mentioned to me by a woman between seventy and eighty, who has spent all her life in the district lying between the Trent and the Ancholme. "When I was a girl", she said, "I had no more sense than to make dumb-cake with the other lasses on Hallow-E'en. Three of us made it with a virgin-egg (that is, the first egg laid by a pullet), flour, and a little water—not more than a spoonful. We mixed the cake, and baked it on a shovel over the fire, without speaking; but just as it was fit, the shovel fell backwards with a clatter, and wakened master, who slept in the room above. Down he came to see what the noise below-stairs was, and we ran and hid in the dairy; so the spell was broken, and the cake was no good. Another time, though, I and two or three other lasses cooked a red-herring, without speaking, and ate it all, head, tail, and everything. Then we walked upstairs backwards without a word, and backwards to bed. One girl broke the spell at the stair-foot, but the rest of us managed all right, and that night when I was asleep I saw G. . . . as plain as anything. He came with a great brown jug, and offered me a drink—that is the way the man you are bound to marry always shows himself. I had never seen him before, and never saw him again till years after, and then I nearly let the dish I had in my hands go slap into the floor at the sight of him, for I knew him again in a minute. I almost fainted away with it, and says I to myself, 'I will never marry the like of him', but you know how it ended."

From another source I learn that the quality of the vessel containing the draught offered by the spirit foreshows his position in life. If it should be common earthenware, he is poor; if china, he is fairly well supplied with the goods of this world; if a silver beaker, he is a man of great wealth.

MABEL GERALDINE W. PEACOCK.

Negro Superstition.—"When anything about a plantation is missing they [the negro slaves] have a solemn kind of oath, which the eldest negro always administers, and which by them is accounted so sacred that, except they have the express command of their master or overseer, they never set about it, and then they go very solemnly to work. They range themselves in that spot of ground which is appropriated for the negroes' burying-place, and one of them opens a grave. He who acts as priest takes a little of the earth and puts it into every one of their mouths; they say that if anyone has been guilty, their belly swells and occasions their death. I never saw any instance of this but one; and it was certainly a fact that a boy did swell, and acknowledged the theft when he was dying." (*A New History of Jamaica*, 1740, let. 11, p. 306.)