Harvest Customs

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price. "Very well," said the man, "now this is what you must do. Carry a hogshead of cider down to the Fairy Ring in the Big Meadow, and pour it out there on to the grass within the ring." With that he paid and went away. As soon as he was gone, the farmer began to think what a shame it was to waste so much good cider, and the more he thought the less he felt inclined to do it. He had the money safe, and the Fairy Folk would never know the difference, so when evening came he rolled down a hogshead of water and poured that out within the ring. No sooner, however, did he step outside the ring than he saw the same man who had bargained with him in the morning, very angry and threatening. He cursed John Jones and all his family, saying that as he had tried to cheat, the curse should not be lifted until he and his had lost as much blood as water had been poured down the ring. "And they *do* say," my informant told me cheerfully, "as how a power o' that family did bleed to death!"

There is only one nursery rhyme that I have found, and to my mind it explains why some of the local babies look so pale and sad.

"By, By, Baby Bunting,
Your Daddy gone a-hunting,
Your Mammy gone the other way
To beg a jug of sour whey
For little Baby Bunting."

I will conclude with a rhyme obviously composed by our envious neighbours.

"St. Briavel's stands upon a hill.
It has a church without a steeple,
Looks down on the River Wye,
With most deceitful people."

L. M. EYRE.

HARVEST CUSTOMS.

(*Ante*, vol. xii., p. 215, and *supra*, p. 113.)

Continuing my notes on Berwickshire Harvest Customs, I send the following extracts from a letter of Mr. W. Lockie of Kelso, recently forwarded to me by Mr. A. Falconer of Duns.

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"In reference to cutting the last straws of corn during harvest at Spottiswoode (Westruther parish) the term 'cutting the queen' was almost as often used as 'cutting the kirn.' The process of cutting the kirn at Spottiswoode was as follows. After dinner on the rig, all the shearers being assembled, one of the shearers submitted himself to be blindfolded; then a reaping-hook was put into his hand. After being turned twice or thrice about by his brother shearers, he was ordered to go and cut the 'kirn.' His bamboozlement in failing to reach the standing corn as well as his often going in the opposite direction and cutting imaginary straws added greatly to the hilarity. After he had tired himself out or given up his task as hopeless, another man took his place; this continued until the 'kirn' was cut. The successful competitor was tossed up in the air with 'three times three' on the arms of his brother harvesters. To decorate the room in which the kirn supper was held at Spottiswoode as well as the dancing-room (granary) two women on the Spottiswoode estate every year made 'kirn dollies' or 'queens.' From the great number of kirn-suppers and dances held at Spottiswoode the large number of kirn dollies looked like a rustic portrait gallery." [This implies that the kirn queens were kept from year to year.]

"In Westruther parish it was considered a most unlucky thing for a mower or shearer during hay or corn harvest to cut with his scythe or reaping hook while making his first swathe a grey or coloured snail through the middle. Such a thing was looked upon as making the scythe or hook so blunt that in spite of the most prodigious efforts the worker might make his whole day's work would be effectually retarded. The only way to break the spell was to leave work and go home and rest for that day. An old man, now dead many years, who was parish beadle, firmly believed in that. If he cut a snail in the morning he immediately knocked off and went home saying 'his scythe was as blunt as a bittle' (an instrument used for beating or beetling clothes) 'and wodna cut a winnelstrae' (flower-stalk, or withered grass). The reason he assigned was that grey or coloured snails as well as grey cats were great favourites of the fairies. He said the fairies often held their revels in the stubble-fields. The harvesters coming early to work often disturbed the fairy revels, upon which the fairies, to conceal themselves, hid in the shells of the snails; the latter always making room for them. He said if you cut a grey or

coloured snail the fairies cast a spell on the scythe for the rest of the day. The only way to remove this was by leaving work, thereby showing your sorrow for the offence. If you did this and were careful not to injure a snail the next morning you would have one of the luckiest of days, which would quite make up the previous day's loss."

I was not previously aware that the snail was in any way associated with harvest customs. It is not, I think, mentioned by Mr. Frazer. I shall be glad to know whether any members of the Society have met with it in this connection elsewhere.

ALICE B. GOMME.

Mr. J. G. Frazer in the *Golden Bough* quotes (ii., 264) an expression used in the north-east of France. "When a harvester, through sickness, weariness, or laziness, cannot or will not keep up with the reaper in front of him, they say, 'The White Dog passed near him,' 'He has the White Bitch,' or 'The White Bitch has bitten him.'"

I remember, when living at Culham, near Oxford, some fifteen to twenty years ago, hearing almost exactly the same expression used by (among others) a labourer, whom I know well, and who used it at hay-time of anyone who was lazy in the hayfield. My impression, however, was that the saying was "He has *lost* that little White Dog," and accordingly I took the opportunity of seeing the man in question at Culham this last December and asking him what the expression was and what it meant. At first he could not remember much about it, and was inclined to think that the form "he has lost the Little White Dog" was the phrase used, but on my happening to see him again a few days later he told me he had since remembered it all, and the usual expression was "He's got the Little White Dog." (I took these words down verbatim at the time; this also applies to all of the following that is between inverted commas.) He added that they "used to say it sometimes in haymaking," chiefly at harvest and hay time and "when the weather's hot," of a lazy man, "or one as wouldn't work;" but the expression was sometimes used on other occasions. It is still in occasional use I understand. "Some say 'the Dog got 'old of 'ee,' you know; that means you can't get to work." Again "they say sometimes 'the Lawrence got 'im;,' it means

just the same thing." He said he did not know what the "Dog" or the "Lawrence" meant. The latter, he told me, was meant for the proper name.

I should explain that I was most careful to ask no leading questions and to mention no other form of the saying to him than the one which he had at first on the spur of the moment thought to be the right one (viz. "he has *lost* that Little White Dog"), so that it may be taken as certain that the form which he gave afterwards, "He's got the Little White Dog," is the correct one, and that it could not have been suggested by what I said. There seems no reason to doubt then that we have here a true parallel to the French examples given in the *Golden Bough*, although they are used at harvest time, whereas in the Oxfordshire case the use is more general.

E. H. BINNEY.

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The following particulars were told me in the June of 1898, in Oxfordshire, by our landlady, who was then just over 70 years of age. When a little girl, there was in her village (Ducklington, near Witney) an old farmer who was, she thought, the last in the parish to observe the ceremony. On the last night of harvest, when the last load was to be carted, it was the custom to send down to the field a number of band-boxes containing women's dresses and a good deal of finery for the men and horses. Four young men then dressed themselves up, two to represent women, and they sat in couples on the four horses that drew the load. Some of the village children sat on the top of the load (my informant said that she and her sisters had often done so), and on reaching the house were treated to cakes, &c. The old farmer himself was bedridden, and lay on the ground floor of the house. On these occasions his bed was drawn up to the window, and the wagon stopped in front of it for the old man to see, but as the window was small they had to stop three times for him to see both pairs of horses and the wagon. After this I believe the men had a supper.

CLARA J. JEWITT.