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HIGHLAND MYTHOLOGY

E. C. WATSON

CELTIC mythology and its mysteries afford a very wide field for investigation, and a field as yet almost untouched; but surmise must play an important part in any account of such mythology for the fragments remaining of ancient Celtic literature throw but a feeble light on the subject. The mythology of the Celt is in its very nature more abstruse than that of the ancient Greeks and Romans for example. The mysticism of the Celt has obscured the lineaments of his ancient beliefs. He has not committed his creeds to writing, nor has he carved the image of his gods in stone or wood.¹ Indeed one of the articles of the Druid faith was that nothing relating to it should be written. A misty veil hangs over the deities, good and bad alike, and probably much of what is only mediæval has been appropriated to mythology, while, on the other hand, it is certain that many features of ancient and prehistoric mythology appear in customs and beliefs continued to the present day.

The early Celtic missionaries, 'wise in their day and generation,' did not seek to eradicate the old beliefs and habits of the people to leave room for the doctrines of Christianity, but grafted the new cult on to the old, making the transference of faith easier.

To this we owe what remains to us of the old ways and customs, and let the scoffer say what he will of 'superstitious ignorance,' he cannot with truth say that these 'superstitions' interfere in any way with the Celt's Christianity. For who can deny to the Celt strong religiousness? 'Pagan or Christian religion, or both, permeate everything. The Celt is synthetic and sympathetic, unable to see and careless to know where the secular begins and the religious ends—an admirable union of elements in life, and for those who have lived it as truly and intensely as the Celt races everywhere

¹ I do not here speak of the Gaul, who did carve the image of his gods in stone.

have done, and none more truly or more intensely than our own Scottish Highlanders.'¹

Yet notwithstanding what we owe to the leniency of our early missionaries comparatively little remains to us of the ancient beliefs and customs of our fathers. In some cases we have little more than the names of the deities and we find it difficult to be certain of their attributes, as their cult is being gradually forgotten and the deities and their attributes become confused.

The greater personages of Celtic mythology have been treated of by Rhys, d'Arbois de Jubainville, Gaidoz, and others. I do not propose to deal with the deities written of by these learned gentlemen, but shall confine myself to the lesser divinities of the Highlands, corresponding rather to nymphs, naiads, fauns, and satyrs.

I should say here that most of my information is got from my father. Some of the material I have used is taken from his *Carmina Gadelica*. I am also much indebted to Mr. Kenneth Macleod, whose name is familiar to readers of the *Celtic Review*.

Water-spirits bulk largely in the minor mythology of the Celts. Of these some are pleasant in appearance, and some more or less repulsive, but often with the power of changing their appearance and pleasing the beholder—generally for evil purposes. The mermaid, who is sometimes seen seated on a rock combing her hair, is perhaps hardly to be classed among the divinities of the Celts. The 'bean-nighe,' washer is widely known. She is the nymph who presides over those about to die and washes their shrouds on the edge of a lake, the banks of a stream, or the stepping-stones of a ford. While washing the shroud the water-nymph sings the dirge and bewails the fate of the doomed. The 'nigheag' is so absorbed in her washing and singing that she is sometimes captured. When this occurs she will grant her captor three requests. Hence when a man is specially successful in life it is said of him, 'Mary! the man got the

¹ *Carmina Gadelica*.

better of the "nigheag," and she gave him his three choice desires.'

On a certain night, a handsome young man was going to visit his sweetheart at Houghgeary, near Uist, and, as was his usual custom, he took all the shortest cuts. When he was nearing the house, he saw a lovely woman whom he did not recognise. Immediately he turned and took a winding path amongst the houses in order to avoid her, but however he might keep out of the way, she was always before him. At last he stopped, and she came face to face with him, and said she, 'I know very well where you are going, but it is much better for you to turn, the day will not come when you will marry her. Before a year is out, you will be drowned, when it is half-tide at Sgeir Ròis.' Almost before the words were out of her mouth, she shrieked, and went to the stream with the shroud. The lad went on his way sick at heart, but, on thinking over the matter, he said to himself he need not be at all afraid, as the washer had said that he would be drowned at half-tide, and why should he not avoid the place at that time? He thought no more about it. A few weeks afterwards the lad, with three or four others, went to a wedding, and as a short cut took to the ford. A mist came on, and one of them was lost. It need not be said that at that time it was half-tide at Sgeir Ròis, and that the lost one was he who had seen the washer.

The 'caoineag' is sometimes confused with the 'bean-nighe.' The 'caoineag,' however, foretells the death of and weeps for those slain in battle, and cannot be approached or questioned. She is seldom seen, but is often heard in hill and glen, or in the corrie, by the lake, by the stream, and the waterfall. Her mourning causes much alarm to wayfarers and to relatives of those at the war. The sorrowful cry of the 'caoineag' was much feared before a foray or a battle. It is said that she was heard for several nights before the Massacre of Glencoe. This roused the suspicions of the people, and notwithstanding the assurance of the peace and friendship of the soldiery many of the people left the glen, and thus

escaped the fate of those who remained. The following is a verse of a song current there :—

‘Tha caoineag bheag a bhroin
A taomadh deoir a sula,
A gul 's a caoidh cor Clann Domhuill
Fath mo leoin ! nach d'eisd an cumha.’

Little caoineag of the sorrow
Is pouring the tears of her eyes,
Weeping and wailing the fate of Clan Donald,
Alas my grief ! that ye did not heed her cries.

When a sorrowful cry is heard, and the question is asked, ‘Co tha sid ? Who is that ?’ the answer was often, ‘Co ach caoineachag bheag a bhroin, Who but little caoinag of the sorrow.’ ‘Peallaidh’ is a mysterious being, with long, untidy hair, haunting streams. It does not seem to be specially uncanny, nor to have been of an interfering disposition, but very little can be learned about it. At least one of its favourite spots is now called after this mythological personage—namely, Aberfeldy, which in Gaelic is Aber Pheallaidh, the confluence of the Peallaidh. From the ragged, untidy appearance of this spirit we get several words—as ‘peallach,’ ‘peallag,’ ‘pealltag.’

Not unlike the ‘peallaidh’ apparently is the ‘uraig,’ which frequents glens, corries, reedy lakes, and sylvan streams. He is represented as a monster, half man, half goat, with abnormally long hair, long teeth, and long claws. He is not, however, unfriendly to those who do not annoy him beyond showing them scenes and telling them of events above and upon and below the world that fill them with terror. Strong men avoided the haunts of the ‘uraig’ at night.

Many places are called after the ‘uraig.’ In the Coolin Hills in Skye there is a place called ‘Coire nan Uraig,’ and another adjoining it called ‘Bealach nan Uraig.’ A glen in Kilninver, Argyll, is called ‘Gleann Uraig.’ Many stories are told of the ‘uraig’ possessing this glen—the appearance, action, and speech of the supernatural creature being graphically described.

So far as I am able to judge, the 'each-uisge,' 'tarbh-uisge' and 'tarbh baoidhre' represent the same imaginary person. The 'each-uisge' is perhaps the most widely known and the most strongly individualised of these supernatural beings. The stories of him are very numerous and circumstantial. He is pictured when in his natural shape as a huge, black, hairy monster, apparently something like a hippopotamus, at other times like a splendid horse in appearance, but able at will to change his shape and become a most handsome and attractive young man—generally for the purpose of deluding an equally attractive young woman and inducing her to accompany him to his submarine abode. He resorts to this trick especially in summer and near the shielings, when the women spend the long days tending the cattle and making butter and cheese for winter use, away from the protection of the men of their families. Stories of the 'each-uisge' are very numerous, and there are few districts in the Highlands where several such are not to be had.

In Eigg the 'each-uisge' dwells in a small, deep loch near the Scur. It often appears in the form of a handsome young man, and has more than once succeeded in carrying off a young woman. On one occasion he appeared as a strapping young fellow with golden hair and met 'Nighean Fear Ghrùdh-lainn' near the Scur. They sat down and chatted away for a while, but the sun was hot, and by-and-by the young man fell asleep with his head resting on the girl's knee. While he was asleep the girl had time to notice that his hair was full of sand, and that he had the queerest feet she had ever seen. Then it dawned upon her that she was being tricked, and that her companion was no other than the 'each-uisge.' She wished to get away, but he had her long, black hair so firmly gripped in his hand that she could not. She sat in a cold agony, unable to move, feeling that her end was near, and thinking of the terrible stories she had heard of young women similarly entrapped and carried off, and whose lungs and hearts were afterwards found floating on the loch, indicating all too surely what their fate had been. She did not

faint, however, nor cry out—Highland girls are made of better stuff—but considered how she could get away without disturbing the slumbers of her now much detested companion. Suddenly her eyes fell upon a very sharp stone, and, gently reaching for it, she patiently cut her hair free from his grasp, cautiously raised his head from her knee and escaped.

On another occasion the 'each-uisge' was more successful—he carried off a girl, and actually married her in his 'talla fo'n loch.' She lived with him for a year and a day and then managed to escape, leaving her baby behind. The 'each-uisge' found nursing 'gey ill wark,' and composed a most touching lullaby full of appeals to his wife to come back and to the child to stop its howls and shrieks. The lullaby begins 'A Mhor, a Mhor, till ri d' mhacan.' It is claimed by several places.

In many districts of the Highlands the 'each-uisge' is not by any means extinct. In many others the account of how the last water-horse was killed may be heard.

In Ireland and the Isle of Man the water-horse is equally well known, while the Norse have also the 'Myks' or 'Vatna Hestr,' river sprite or water-horse, which is entirely similar to the Highland one. The 'Vatna Hestr' is supposed to live in either salt or fresh water.

The people of Glen Meay in Man tell how the glen was haunted by the spirit of a man who had met the 'Capull (Cabbyl) Ushtey,' and, thinking it was an ordinary horse, got upon its back, when it ran off and disappeared into the sea and its rider was drowned.

Campbell of Islay says: 'I have been told of English sportsmen who went in pursuit of them, so circumstantial were the accounts of those who believed they had seen the "each-uisge." The witnesses are so numerous, and their testimony agrees so well, that there must be some old, deeply-rooted Celtic belief which clothes every dark object in the dreaded form of the "each-uisge." . . . These tales and beliefs have led me to think that the old Celts must have had a

destroying water-god to whom the horse was sacred, or who had the form of a horse.'

Sea-cows are also known in Gaelic mythology. They are represented as having red ears, one or both of which are notched, and probably are a tradition of the old Caledonian cattle.

Several sea-cows came ashore at Struth, Obbe, Harris. The sea-maiden was tending the cows, and singing as she sent them back to the sea and away through the sound of Harris:—

'Chualas nuall an cuan Canach,
Bo a Tiriodh, bo a Barraidh,
Bo a Ile, 's bo a Arrain,
'S a Cinntire mhin a bharraich.

Theid mi, theid mi, theid mi Mhuile,
Theid mi dh' Eire nam fear fuileach,
Theid mi Mhanain bheag nan culaidh,
'S theid mi ceum dh'an Fhraing 's cha chunnart.'

A low is heard in the sea of Canna.
A cow from Tiree, a cow from Barra,
A cow from Islay, a cow from Arran,
And from Green Kintyre of birches.

I will go, I will go, I will go to Mull,
I will go to Eirin of the bloody men,
I will go to little Man of the wherries,
And I will go to France and no mishap.

'Loireag' is a water-sprite who presides over the warping, weaving, waulking, and washing of the web. If the women omit any of the traditional usages and ceremonies of these occasions she resents their neglect in various ways. If a song is sung twice at a waulking the 'loireag' will come and render the web as thin as before, and all the work of the women of no avail. If a woman sings out of tune the 'loireag' is especially wrathful. A libation of milk is given to this creature. If this is not done she sucks the goats, sheep, and cows of the townland, placing a spell upon them so that they cannot move. The following story is from

Benbecula: 'Benmore was always eerie because of the "loireag" dwelling there. She is a small mite of womanhood, who does not belong to this world but to the world beyond. She used to drive the people distracted with fear when I first remember. But there is now no one in Benmore whom she can frighten unless the big sheep. She is a plaintive little thing but stubborn and cunning. There was once a little cross carle in Benmore, and the "loireag" was sucking his cow. His daughter tried to drive her away, but could not. So she went in and told her father that neither the "loireag" nor the cow heeded her. The little carle leapt out at the door in a red rage. He threw a boulder at the "loireag," but struck the cow and nearly killed her. He then seized the point of the cow's horn in the name of Columba, and immediately the cow leaped away from the "loireag," and she leaped away from the cow. The "loireag" betook herself to the corrie of Coradale, mocking the cross-grained carle, and singing as she went:—

‘Bhodaich bhig a Bhun a Choire,
Bhodaich bhig a chota ghioire,
Bhodaich bhig a Bhun a Bhealaich,
Mealam dhut do lamhach!’

Little carle of Corrie-foot,
Little carle of the short coat,
Little carle of the Foot of the Pass
Much I praise your aim.

One deity at least we Celts have borrowed from the Norse. This is Eigr, who in Norse mythology is king of the sea, while in Celtic he is god of tides, having to watch the tidal currents and see that ebb and flow occur at the right times and in the proper way. He is also king of the dwarfs and of the misers. The Norse root of the word is *eki* fear, dread.

In some places Eigr is appropriated to mean anything dwarfish or miserly 'iasg eigr,' a small fish; 'iasgach eigr,' a poor fishing; 'tiodhlachd eigr,' a miserly donation. It is also used in place names as 'Leac Eigr,' 'Loch Eigr,'

'Sgeir Eagir.' Carlyle in his *Heroes and Hero-Worship* tells how when the Ouse is in flood the Yorkshire boatmen hurry for the shore shouting 'Eager is coming, Eager is coming.' So also do the boatmen on the Severn. The phenomenon which they called 'Eager,' and represent as a deity to be dreaded is what is commonly known as a 'bore.' Probably the 'Eager' was known wherever the Norsemen had gained a hold—though its meaning is now lost sight of. Some years ago the German Emperor composed a 'Hymn to Eagir'—preliminary to increasing his navy. A deity called 'Eagir' is also god of the muses in Celtic mythology, but little is now to be learnt of him.

Fairies are the most widely known of all mythical creatures. I do not suppose there is a race which does not have fairies, and there are few people who could not tell some tale of them. Many surmises have been hazarded as to the origin of the idea of the existence of the 'little people'—that which gains most favour is that there really lived in these islands a small race similar to the Lapps, and that the underground houses so common in many parts of the country were their dwellings, hence the fairy 'bruth' or bower. The following tale told to my father and Mr. Campbell of Islay in Minglay, Barra, accounts for their origin in another way:—

'The Proud Angel fomented a rebellion among the angels of heaven where he had been a leading light. He declared that he would go and found a kingdom of his own. When going out at the door of heaven the Proud Angel brought "dealanaich dheilgnich agus beithir bheumnaich," prickly lightning and biting lightning, out of the door-step with his heels. Many angels followed him—so many that at last the Son called out, "Father! Father! the city is being emptied!" whereupon the Father ordered that the gates of heaven and of hell should be closed. This was instantly done; and those who were in were in, and those who were out were out; while the hosts who had left heaven and had not reached hell, flew into the holes of the earth "mar na famhlagan," like the stormy petrels.

‘These are the fairy folks—ever since doomed to live under the ground, and only permitted to emerge when and where the King permits. They are never allowed abroad on Thursday, that being Columba’s day, nor on Friday, that being the Son’s day, nor on Saturday, that being Mary’s day, nor on Sunday, that being the Lord’s day.

‘Dia eadar mi ’s gach siodha,
Gach mi-run ’s gach druidheachas,
An diugh an Daorn air muir ’s air tìr,
M’ earbs a Rìgh nach cluinn iad mi.’

God be between me and every fay,
Every ill wish and every druidism,
To-day is Thursday on sea and land,
I trust in the King that they do not hear me.

‘On certain nights when their “bruthain,” bowers, are open and their lamps are lit, and the song and the dance are moving merrily, the fairies may be heard singing light-heartedly :—

‘Cha ’n ann a shìol Adhamh sinn,
’S cha ’n Abram ar n-athair,
Ach shìol an ainghil uabharaich,
Chaidh fhuadach a fathas.’

Not of the seed of Adam are we,
And Abraham is not our father,
But of the seed of the Proud Angel,
Driven forth from heaven.

Fairies and human beings seem to have always been on intimate terms.

On a certain night a nurse was going home late, and when she was going past the fairy hill near the township, the hillocks opened and she was drawn in. While she was there some of the fairies carried away a fairy child, and after a short absence returned with a human child in its stead—as beautiful a child as ever the eye of man saw.

‘My little treasure! my little treasure!’ said every fairy woman in the ‘sithean’ when they saw the child, but he would not look at any one till at last he saw the nurse, and

then he lifted his little hands towards her and laughed and crowed. 'One would think,' said one of the fairy folk, 'that the child knew you.' 'And indeed,' said the nurse, 'it is no wonder if he does. I nursed him young for he is my own grandchild—the only grandchild I have. You must not keep him here. You must send him back where you got him.' 'Well,' said those who had brought him in, 'we travelled every corner in hill and townland and we did not get one child which had not been blessed by his mother before he slept but your own grandson, and as we had no power to bring one who had been blessed we brought him. But if we had known that he was your grandson we would not have interfered with him, and without more ado we will return him at once.' They did this, and they were not long away when they returned with a beautiful big cow, on which they meant to feast till morning. As soon as she saw it the woman recognised her own brown Bridein, the only cow she had. But she said nothing and the cow was killed and cooked. When it was ready the nurse got the best part of the shoulder and, as was the custom, she made a verse about it. When she was done the fairies said: 'One would almost think that you knew the cow we killed.' 'It were a wonder if I had not,' she said. 'She was young when I first put a shackle upon her and sent her to grass in the morning and to the fold at night. You have killed my only cow.' 'And was it not very stupid of you not to tell us that before we killed the cow and we would have returned it,' said the fairies. 'We searched six townships and we did not find a cow without a charm and a blessing, without a shackle but your cow, and we brought it with us.'

By way of compensation the woman got several lumps of gold, and was sent away happy. During her life her grandchild was never again meddled with by fairies, but on her death he was stolen again.

There is a proverb—'Na diult lamh sithiche,' 'Do not refuse the hand of a fairy'—the value of which is proved by the following story from Skye. Two men were once working

near a sithean and between the heat of the day and the hardness of the work they were nearly dead with thirst. Suddenly they heard a sound of churning from the hillock. Said one of them, 'I wish that I could get some of that buttermilk to drink.' No sooner said than the sithean opened and out came the little woman of the green kirtle and offered a drink of buttermilk to the man who had spoken. But he was afraid, and he did not take it from her hand. She turned to the other man and offered the drink to him. He took it politely from her hand and drank it. Turning again to the first man she said: 'Man who asked a drink and did not take it, a year from to-day you shall not drink a drop of either water or buttermilk.' Then to the second man: 'Man who did not ask a drink and who took it, you shall get from me any possession you choose.' He chose good seamanship for himself and his seed, and no one has ever heard of any of them being drowned. Perhaps this was from lack of opportunity, for Mr. Macleod, from whom I got this tale, adds a note—'I lodged with a descendant of the lucky man and he was the most timid seaman I ever met.' It is needless to say that the other man died within a year.

"Sluagh," "hosts," the spirit-world. The "hosts" are the spirits of mortals who have died. There are many curious stories on this subject. According to one informant, the spirits fly about "n'an sgrioslaich mhor, a sios agus a suas air uachdar an domhain mar na truidean"—in great clouds, up and down the face of the world like the starlings, and come back to the scenes of their earthly transgressions. No soul of them is without the clouds of earth, dimming the brightness of the works of God, nor can any win heaven till satisfaction is made for the sins of earth. In bad nights, the hosts shelter themselves, "fo sgath chuisseaga bheaga ruadha agus bhua-ghallain bheaga bhuidhe"—behind little russet docken stems and little yellow ragwort stalks. They fight battles in the air as men do on the earth. They may be heard and seen on clear frosty nights, advancing and retreating, retreating and advancing, against one another. After a battle their

crimson blood may be seen staining rocks and stones. "Fuil nan sluagh," the blood of the hosts, is the beautiful red "crotal" of the rocks melted by the frost. These spirits used to kill cats and dogs, sheep and cattle, with their unerring venomous darts. They commanded men to follow them, and men obeyed, having no alternative.'

'It was these men of earth who slew and maimed at the bidding of their spirit-masters, who in return ill-treated them in a most pitiless manner. "Bhiodh iad ga'n loireadh agus ga'n loineadh agus ga'n luidreadh anns gach lod, lud agus lon,"—They would be rolling and dragging and trouncing them in mud and mire and pools. "There is less faith now, and people see less, for seeing is of faith. God grant to thee and to me, my dear, the faith of the great Son of the lovely Mary." There are men to whom the spirits are partial, and who have been carried off by them more than once. A man in Benbecula was taken up several times. His friends assured me that night became a terror to this man, and that ultimately he would on no account cross the threshold after dusk. He died, they said, from the extreme exhaustion consequent on these excursions. When the spirits flew past his house the man would wince as if undergoing a great mental struggle, and fighting against forces unseen of those around him. A man in Lismore suffered under precisely similar conditions. More than once he disappeared mysteriously from the midst of his companions, and as mysteriously reappeared utterly exhausted and prostrate. He was under vows not to reveal what had occurred on these aerial travels.'

'The "sluagh" are supposed to come from the west; and therefore, when a person is dying, the door and the windows on the west side of the house are secured to keep out the malicious spirits. In parts of Ross-shire, the door and windows of a house in which a person is dying are opened, in order that the liberated soul may escape to heaven.'

Another half water, half land sprite is the 'glastic,' 'glaisnig, glaisric or glaislid,' called in Man 'glashtin.' It is a creature half woman, half goat, frequenting lonely lakes and

rivers. Harmless and loveable as a rule—especially in the older stories, in a few of the later stories she is represented as irritable, and once at any rate to have made an attempt on a man's life.

The 'glaistic's' greatest feat was an attempt to build a bridge across the Sound of Mull. She gathered a huge creelful of stones among the hills to the North of Morven and walked down to the Sound with her burden. When near her destination, however, the creel-rope snapped, and down fell the stones. They are still lying there, the heap being known as Carn-na-Caillich. The glaistic herself has related the incident in rhyme :—

' An aithne dhuibh Carn-na-Caillich
Air an leacainn ghlais ud thall?
'S mise chruinnich sid le cliabh,
A' h-uile spitheag riamh a th'ann.
Drochaid a chuir air Caol Muile,
'S bha i' furasd' a chuir ann.
'S mur briseadh an iris mhuneil
Bha i nis gun teagamh ann.'

The glaistic was rather fond of expressing herself in rhyme. In Glenborrodale where she usually appeared at twilight, the old folk invariably greeted her with the remark : ' An tus' tha sin, a ghlaistid ghlais, a chreutair ? ' to which the glaistic as invariably replied :—

' Tha is bithidh mi 'n Innis-na-Feoraig
Innis nam feadag 's an goireadh an smeorach.'¹

On one occasion she came to the Glenborrodale shore to be ferried across to the other side. As she reached the boat was leaving, and to her demand : ' A Mhic-a-Phi, thoir dhomh-s' an t-aisig ' : the ferryman replied that he was in a hurry and could not possibly put back. At once the glaistic began to coax him—ending up with the flattering appeal :—

' A Mhic-a-phi nan srol 's nam bratach
Cha 'n fhàg thu air a' chladach mi.'

¹ Innis-na-Feoraig is a Glenborrodale place-name.

'Fagaidh an trath so, a ghlaistid,' said the ferryman, and the glaistid swore an ugly oath!

On another occasion, however, the glaistic was more successful in getting the ferry. She was on her way to Lismore from Morven, and while crossing Ardtornish Bay saw a man all alone in a boat. She at once joined him, caught an oar, and shouted out to him: 'Hùgan oirre, Mhic-Ealathaich.'

'Hùgan eil' oirre, a ghalathead,' shouted the boatman in return—and so they rowed and shouted all the way to Lismore—a pull and a shout from the glaistic: 'Hùgan oirre, Mhic-Ealathaich': and a counter pull and shout from the boatman: 'Hùgan eil' oirre, a ghalathid.'

A pretty feature in the glaistic's character was her love for children. While the township women milked their cattle in the *Buaille*, the glaistic would play hide-and-peek with the children. 'A ghlaistic duibh cha bheir thu oirnn,' said the little ones, as they hid behind stones and bushes, and then the glaistic would pretend to be angry and would shower twigs and daisies on the imps.

In many of the stories the glaistic is associated with the famous pirates, Gilleasluig MacIain Ghlorr and his brother Ranald. She invariably found her way to their haunts after a successful raid and claimed a share of the spoil. When asked how she had discovered their whereabouts her reply usually was: 'Bha mi air Sgùrr Eige'—a phrase which is often used now as a proverb in the Western Isles. Once indeed, the pirate brothers flattered themselves they had got beyond the reach even of the glaistic. This was when they invaded Barra to make good their threat against the Macneill chief: 'Ge fad a mach Barraidh ruigear e.' The glaistic, however, was as adventurous as themselves, and no sooner had Mic Iain Ghlorr encamped for the night with all their booty around them than the glaistic suddenly appeared on the scene and congratulated them on the success of their raid. Evidently the lady was hungry after the flight across the Minch, for she began at once to nibble away at a carcass

which was being broiled on the camp fire. This so annoyed Raothull Mac Iain Ghlorr that he struck her across the knuckles with his wand, whereupon the glaistic appealed to Gilleasluig: 'A 'Laisbig (tradition has given the lady a childish lisp) nach caisg thu Raothull.' The end of it all, however, was that the glaistic got her usual share of the booty.

The people of each district are usually able to give the reason why the glaistic came to forsake that particular district. She had to leave Glenborrodale, it seems, because of her own love of mischief. There was a worthy blacksmith in the place whom she delighted to tease and bother on every possible occasion. At last she took to hammering away at his anvil during the night, and thus time after time disturbed the rest of the whole township. One night, however, the smith managed to enter the smithy unawares, and so caught the culprit. She had her 'isean' along with her (the only case in which I have heard the 'isean' mentioned, says Mr. Macleod), and the smith, seizing the little imp, thrust its right hand into the fire and threatened something worse still unless the glaistic swore to stop all her mad pranks. This she promised, and then she and her 'isean' disappeared for good from Glenborrodale, the 'isean,' while disappearing, crying out lustily: 'A mhathair, 's e Logaid a th'ann, 's e Logaid a th'ann.'

The glaistic forsook the township of Ach-na-Creige in Mull owing to a herdboy's trick. In the township cattle-fold there was a big stone with a round hole in it, and into this hole the milkmaid poured the glaistic's portion of the milk each evening. In return for this the glaistic looked after the cattle through the night—'a' buachailleachd na buaile.' One evening the herdboy poured boiling milk into the hole, with the result that the glaistic got her tongue burnt. So bitterly did she resent this trick that she has never since been seen at Ach-na-Criege.¹

A cup of tea is said to have chased the glaistic from

¹ The glaistic is called *Caristiona* in Mull.

Morven. One day she called at some house near Eignig and the goodwife, anxious to be as hospitable as possible, offered her a cup of tea. The glaistic considered the act a deadly insult, and at once decided to leave for ever the tea-country.

The more recent stories about the glaistic are rather unpleasant. She no longer plays with the children or sings rhymes—she has degenerated into a kind of female ruffian. Probably it would be nearer the truth to say that the change has been in the Highlands rather than in the glaistic.

The 'gruagach' was a supernatural female who presided over cattle, and took a kindly interest in all that pertained to them. In return she was offered a libation of milk when the women milked the cows in the evening. If the oblation were neglected, the cattle, notwithstanding all precautions, were found broken loose and in the corn, and if still omitted, the best cow in the fold was found dead in the morning. The offering was poured on 'clach na gruagaich,' the 'gruagach' stone. There is hardly a district in the Highlands which does not possess 'leac a gruagaich'—a 'gruagich' stone, a flagstone—whereon the milk libation was poured. All these oblation stones are erratic ice blocks. Some of them have a slight cavity into which the milk was poured, others have none, the libation being simply poured on the stone. In making the oblation the woman intoned a rune.

'There is probably no district in the Highlands where the "gruagach" could not be fully described. A woman living in the remote island of Heisgeir described her so graphically and picturesquely that her interested listener could almost see moving about in the silvery light of the kindly moon the "gruagach" with her tall conical hat, her rich golden hair falling about her like a mantle of shimmering gold, while with a slight swish of her wand she gracefully turned on her heel to admonish an unseen cow. At intervals he seemed to hear her mellow voice in snatches of eerie song as she moved about among the grassy ruins of the old nunnery—all silent now of the holy orisons of gentle sisters.'

'Connal' is represented as the Celtic Cupid and the

guardian deity of childhood. His protection is ever near the little ones, howsoever they may be in danger. As illustrating this, it is told in Skye that a child had got lost in the mist and was benighted on the wild moor when a storm came on. But the good Connal took the child by the hand and led him to safety. A poem composed to this protecting spirit is known in Skye, but I regret I have not yet got the words.

'Cairbre' is the name of the deity who carried the souls of those slain in battle to 'flathanas.' Gaelic usage seems to have closely resembled that of other countries in this, as it was customary to place a wax candle, a gold coin, a small hammer, and a pair of scales in the grave with the body. The candle was to light the pilgrim across the dark river of death, the coin to pay the services of the ferryman, the hammer to knock at the door of heaven, and the scales to weigh the soul, which last was done by St. Michael, while the chief of the nether regions endeavoured to weigh down his side of the balance.

'Cailleach' is a supernatural or malign influence dwelling in dark caves, woods and corries.

'Cailleach uisg,' water-woman, water-carlin; akin to the 'bean nigh,' 'uraisg,' 'peallaidh.' According to some people, 'cailleach' as a period of time is the first week of April, and is represented as a wild hag with a venomous temper, hurrying about with a magic wand in her withered hand switching the grass and keeping down vegetation, to the detriment of man and beast. When, however, the grass, upborne by the warm sun, the gentle dew and the fragrant rain, overcomes the 'cailleach,' she flies into a terrible temper, and throwing away her wand into the root of a whin bush, she disappears in a whirling cloud of angry passion till the beginning of April comes in again, saying, as she goes:—

'Dh' fhag e mhan mi, dh' fhag e 'n ard mi
Dh' fhag e eadar mo dha lamh mi,
Dh' fhag e bial mi, dh' fhag e cul mi,
Dh' fha e eadar mo dha shul mi.

Dh' fhag e shios mi, dh' fhag e shuas mi,
 Dh' fhag e eadar mo dha chluas mi,
 Dh' fhag e thall mi, dh' fhag e bhos mi,
 Dh' fhag e eadar mo dha chos mi.

Thilg mi 'n slacan druidh donai,
 Am bun preis crin cruaidh conuis,
 Far nach fas fionn no foinnidh,
 Ach fracan froinnidh feurach.'

It escaped me below, it escaped me above,
 It escaped me between my two hands,
 It escaped me before, it escaped me behind,
 It escaped me between my two eyes.

It escaped me down, it escaped me up,
 It escaped me between my two ears,
 It escaped me thither, it escaped me hither,
 It escaped me between my two feet.

I threw my druidic evil wand,
 Into the base of a withered hard whin bush,
 Where shall not grow 'fionn' nor 'fionnidh,'
 But fragments of grassy 'froinnidh.'

Faoilleach, Faoilteach, Foiltheachd, wolf-month, is the last month of winter, from 'faol,' wolf. During this proverbially hard period the wolf, driven from wood and mountain, approached dwellings. There are many sayings about this pressing period of the year:—

| | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ' Mi Faoillich, | Month of 'Faoilleach,' | [sharp, ravenous, tearing wind. |
| Naoi la Gearrain, | Nine days of 'Gearran,' | [galloping wind, like a garron. |
| Seachdain Feadaig, | A week of 'Feadaig,' | [sharp, piping wind. |
| Seachdain Caillich, | A week of 'Cailleach,' | [a few semi-calm days. |
| Tri la Sguabaig, | Three days of 'Sguabag,' | [the souging blast which |
| Suas an t-earrach!' | Up with the Spring! | ushers in the spring. |

These lines personify the weather under the names of animals and other figures. Here we see myths in the making.

' Tri la Iuchar 's an Fhaoilleach,
 Tri la Faoilleach 's an Iuchar.'

Three days of Dog-days in Wolf-month,
 Three days of Wolf-month in Dog-days.

'Thubhairt an Gearran ris an Fhaoilleach,
 "C'ait, a ghaoil, an gamhuinn bochd?"
 "Fhir a chuir mi chon an t-saoghail,
 Chuir mi mhaodal air an stochd."
 "Och mo leireadh," ors an Ceitein.
 "'S truagh an eirig a thig ort,
 Na 'n d' fhuair mise bogadh chluas dheth,
 Chuir mi suas e ris a chnoc."

The 'Gearran' said to the 'Faoilleach,'
 'Where, love, is the lean stirk?'
 'Thou who didst send me into the world,
 I placed his paunch upon the stake.'
 'O! my grief,' said the 'Ceitein,'
 'Great the ransom upon thee,
 Had I at all got hold of his ears,
 I would have sent him up the hill.'

The 'Gobag,' voracious one, began the day before the 'Faoilleach,' and is on this account called the mother of the 'Faoilleach':—

'Gobag, Gobag, mathair Faoillich fuair,
 A mharbh a chaor agus a chaol-uan,
 A mharbh a ghobhar ghlas ri dha,
 Agus an gamhuinn breac ri aon trath.'
 'Gobag!' Gobag! mother of the Wolf-month cold,
 That didst kill the sheep and the lean lamb,
 That didst kill the grey goat in two watches,
 And the speckled stirk in one.

There were further several beings of whom little or nothing is preserved except their names, such as 'Ceasg,' who was a creature of great beauty, half woman, half grilse, a sort of fresh water mermaid, with long flossy hair.

'Stic' was a fairy imp somewhat resembling the Puck of Shakspeare.

'Fuath' frequently occurs in the tales, and seems to have been rather a terrorising being.

The 'gobhar bacach,' lame goat, was also rather ill-omened. It travelled the country, and lay down on the best land. Several places are pointed out as having been lain upon by the 'gobhar bacach,' and it is still held to be a sign that a particular croft or farm is a good one.

'Beithir' was a venomous and destructive creature, who lived in dark caves and corries in the mountains. 'Beithir' is the lightning and also serpent, and probably the mythological legends have risen from the destructive characters of the element and the beast.

'Tacharan' was a water kelpie of very diminutive size even for a sprite. Several places are called after him, and many tales are told.

The 'cu sith,' fairy dog, had apparently the evil eye, but more information I have not been able to get.

'Frid, fride,' gnome, pigmy, elf, rock elfin. The people apply the term 'fride,' and its derivatives 'fridean,' 'frideag,' 'fridich,' to creatures which they allege dwell in the internal rocks and in the innermost parts of the earth. They say that these gnomes eat and drink like men, and that it is not right to deprive them of the crumbs that fall to the ground. When crumbs of food or drops of milk fall on the floor, the old people deprecate removing them, saying, 'gabh ealla ris, is ioma bial feumach tha feitheamh air'—'let it be, many are the needy mouths awaiting it.' 'Macmhuirich Mor' of Staoligearry was losing his cattle through 'dosgaidh,' mischance. As he sat on a rock musing over his losses he heard a gnome mother singing to her child:—

'Uist a lurain, uist a luaidh,
Uist a chuilean nan cas luath,
'D uair a shuidhichear clar Mhiemhuirich,
Gheobh mo luran iodh is uachdar.'

Hush, thou dearie, hush, thou pet,
Hush, thou darling of the rapid feet,
When Macvuirich's board is set,
My darling will get corn and cream.

'Macmhuirich Mor' went home, and though he never went into his kitchen before, he went in that day. His baking woman was making bread, and bits of dough and grains of meal were falling from her in the process. She took no notice of these till a piece fell from the bannock on her palm, and then she stooped down and lifted it. Macvuirich

noticed her, and he went over and gave her a tap on the back of the hand with the switch he had, saying, 'Gabh eallaris, a mhuirneag, is ioma bial feumach tha feitheamh air'— 'Leave it alone, maiden, many a needful mouth is waiting for it. And as long as thou shalt stand in my house never again remove the fragments of food from the floor, they are the rightful dues of "fridich nan creag," the gnomes of the rocks.' And as long as Macvuirich lived he went daily to the knoll with an offering of crumbs of bread and drops of milk to the gnomes. Never again did 'Macmhuirich Mor' lose his kine or his sheep or his horses. 'We must remember the smallest of God's creatures if we are to thrive in this world below and to live in the world beyond,' and the aged narrator had acted on her belief throughout her long life, though she had never once seen nor heard the recipients of her bounty.'

Glen Liadail in South Uist was much inhabited by gnomes who, while friendly to the people of the glen, resented the intrusion of strangers. It was necessary for a wayfarer to sing a propitiatory song before entering the glen. On one occasion the young wife of a crofter in the adjoining glen was left alone with her child when she felt the house becoming oppressively full of people. She knew that these were the 'fridich' who go about in clouds like midges, but invisible to mortal eyes. The woman was sore afraid, but retaining her presence of mind, she sang an extempore song in which she highly praised the gnomes. They, being intensely sensitive to flattery, did no harm to the lonely woman nor to the helpless child, but before the song was ended, had left the house as silently as they had come.

Such is some of the minor mythology of the Highlands. Many stories might be added, and instances of customs and ceremonies might be adduced, showing belief in, and, if not always worship, at least reverence for the supernatural creatures with which the Celts peopled every corner of the land. These creatures were characteristic of the country and

of its people, and they took, as will be seen even from this brief account, a large part in the life of the Highland people, whose minds are the poorer by the loss of their ancient tales and customs. Where the older people still retain some faith in the beings of whom their fathers have told them, they are for the most part careful to keep such to themselves, and so avoid laying themselves open to the scoffing of the younger generation and of incomers.

THE CLAN CAMERON

REV. A. MACLEAN SINCLAIR

THE ancestors of Sir Ewen Cameron of Lochiel and their approximate dates of birth were as follows:—

| | | | |
|------------------------|-------|--------------------------|-------|
| John, | 1600. | Millony, | 1285. |
| Allan, | 1565. | Paul, | 1255. |
| John Dubh, | 1535. | Patrick, | 1225. |
| Donald, | 1500. | Martin, | 1190. |
| Ewen, | 1470. | Paul, | 1160. |
| Allan, | 1440. | Millony, | 1125. |
| Donald Dubh, | 1410. | Gillaroith, | 1095. |
| Ewen, | 1380. | Martin Og, | 1065. |
| Donald Dubh, | 1350. | Gillacamsroin, | 1035. |
| Allan, | 1315. | Martin Mor, | 1000. |

In dealing with a long list of names it is necessary, as a general rule, to allow thirty-two years for a generation. Skene has Gillaganiorgan in place of Gillacamsroin. As Gillaganiorgan is a meaningless and unknown name, it is clearly a misreading. It is certain that there was a Gillacamsroin, and it is altogether probable that he was either the son and successor of Martin Mor or the eldest son of Gillaroith. As it was extremely difficult to read the MS. in which Skene found the pedigree of the Camerons and Macgillouies *msr* could easily be mistaken for *nior*. By counting *ni* as *m* we find the same number of letters in Gillaganiorgan as in Gillacamsroin. In his first version of the genealogy Skene omits all the names between Paul and Mor. In the