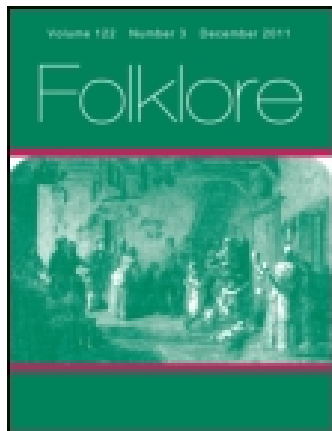


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"FIRST-FOOT" IN THE BRITISH ISLES.

IN his paper on Manx Folk-lore (*supra*, pp. 74-91), Professor Rhys drew attention to the importance attached to the sex or complexion of the first person who enters the house on New Year's Day. In Man, objection is made to a woman or fair man being the first to enter on that day. Considerable interest was shown in the subject by the speakers on Prof. Rhys's paper, and a certain amount of evidence was forthcoming, showing that a like superstition existed in many places in the British Isles. An appeal was accordingly made in the last number of FOLK-LORE for information on the subject from its readers. The Editor cannot report that he has been overwhelmed with correspondence on the subject, and some of the letters dealt with superstitions somewhat different from the "first-foot"—*e.g.*, the custom of giving a handsel to the first person met with on the way to a christening; the habit of bringing fresh water into the house on New Year's Day, etc.

Sufficient material has been sent in, however, to make the subject both more important and, at the same time, more precise. Reserving some of the communications for more detailed notice later, we may summarise the information given in the following table, in which the kind of person *preferred* to enter a house as first-foot on New Year's Day has been classified. In the few instances no preference is expressed, but only the person to be avoided: a short line is put where no information is given. It is possible, too, that in many of the cases referred to there was some preference for either sex, though only complexion is mentioned. Our table gives, we believe, all the pertinent information in the communications sent.

Locality and Period, if other than present day.	Complexion, etc., of Person preferred as "First-Foot".	Sex and Age.	Reference.	Authority.	Remarks.
Malvern, 1877..	—	Boy	Mrs. Gutch	Letter from friend.	
Northallerton ..	—	Man	"	—	Master of the house used to go out few minutes before, and re-enter few minutes after midnight on Dec. 31st.
Lancashire ..	Dark	Boy	—	—	Chimneys used to be swept New Year's Day for this purpose. Used to sand doorstep and passage "for luck".
Worcester and Herefordshire.	—	Boy			
Cornwall	—	Boy			
Preston	Fair	—			
Blackburn ..	Dark	—			
Midland Counties.	Dark	—			
W. England ..	—	—	—	—	A widower objected to.
Yorkshire.. ..	Dark	—	{ Mrs. Gutch E. Clodd	Morris, <i>Yorks. Folk-talk</i> , 218-19.	Unusual name objected to, as it prefigured the husband's name.
"	Fair	—	{ Mrs. Gutch E. Clodd	—	
Isle of Man ..	Dark	—	E. Clodd	Moore, <i>Folklore Isle of Man</i> , 102-3.	
E. Yorkshire ..	Dark	Man	"	Nicholson, <i>F. L. East Yorks.</i> , 20.	Called "lucky bird".
Bradwell (Northumb.)	Light-haired and flat-footed.	Man	Miss Broadwood.	Letter from Miss Craster.	Red-haired man, or one with eyebrows joined, objected to.
N. England ..	—	Man	C. J. Clark	Letter from Mrs. Lawrence-Archer.	Women cannot get out a house till a man has come in on New Year's Day.
Aldeburgh (Suffolk) ..	—	Man	E. Clodd	—	
Carnarvon ..	Dark	Man	T.W.E. Higgins	—	
Leuchars, Fife	Red hair and flat foot avoided.	—	W. Anderson (Leuchars)	Letter to W. A. Craigie, Merton Coll., Oxford.	See Letter, p. 256.
Forfarshire ..	—	Women not objected to.	"	"	
Athlone, 1854 ..	—	Young women (?)	Rev. J. Edmington.	Letter to Prof. Rhys.	
Craven, Yorks..	Fair	Man.	Mrs. F. L. Nicholson	Information from Mrs. Slingsby.	

It is obvious from all this that more information, and that more definite, is required before coming to any conclusion on the main question raised, whether the "first-foot" superstition is a survival of race hatred, or contempt for the fairer sex. Especially it is necessary to have more direct information derived from persons who can be further questioned, rather than from books, which probably tell all their authors know. The Editor of FOLK-LORE will, therefore, be glad to receive answers to the following series of questions about the "First-Foot":

1. Is any belief or custom associated with the first person who enters the house on New Year's Day (or any other specific day)? [Call such person *First-Foot*.]
2. Should the first-foot be man or woman?
3. Should the first-foot be dark or fair?
4. Is a red-haired first-foot considered very unlucky?
5. Is a flat-footed first-foot considered unlucky?
6. Must the first-foot bring any gift into the house?
7. What kind of things must be brought into the house on New Year's Day?
8. Must something be brought in on New Year's Day before anything can be carried out?

Answers to these questions, giving name and address of informant, should be sent to the Editor, at the office of FOLK-LORE, 270, Strand, before Aug. 1, marked *First-Foot* on the envelope.

Meanwhile we may proceed to print two papers on the subject that deal with it at some length; one by Prof. Rhys, who started the inquiry, and has collected further information about it, and the other an ingenious suggestion as to the origin of the custom, which was read before the Folk-lore Society.

NOTES ON THE FIRST-FOOT AND ALLIED SUPERSTITIONS.

It gives me great pleasure to be able to respond to the Editor's appeal by presenting for publication in *FOLK-LORE* the following contributions which I have received from friends of mine interested in the question of the "first-foot". I may mention first a friend of Mr. Craigie's, of Oriel College here, who writes to him from his native neighbourhood of Leuchars as follows :

"In Fife, we object to red hair and flat feet, but not to women, so far as I know. Carrying in a knife or a pointed tool is very bad, and, of course, borrowing or lending on that day is impossible. To give fire out of the house would be disastrous. I shall make further inquiries, but our custom is to carry in food and drink when first-footing. Empty hands are doubly disastrous."—W. ANDERSON.

There is no objection to a woman as a first-foot, Mr. Craigie tells me, in Forfarshire ; he has heard women saying to their neighbours, "I'll come and first-foot you ; mind you, I have a lucky foot." The favourite thing to take is a red herring, but it is somewhat regarded as a joke, and if you arrive before the family is up, which is very probable, as the first-foot sets out usually soon after twelve, you may tie the red herring to the door-handle. The first-foot is not unfrequently trysted, in other words, arranged for beforehand. The usual thing in the town of Dundee is for the first-foots to muster in the High Street, which they do in such numbers that the place is crowded. When it strikes twelve, they skail in all directions, and there is a special tramcar to take some of them to Lochee, a suburb about two miles off, the idea being that it is the right thing to await the new year in the High Street.

Handsel Monday, *i.e.*, first Monday after New Year's Day, or that day itself (in case it be Monday), is the day for making presents. Christmas Day was formerly of no

account in Forfarshire, but Mr. Craigie has heard of the Aberdeenshire people keeping "Yeel", *i.e.*, Yule, on Jan. 5, or Christmas Day, Old Style, which he puts down to a probable Norse element in the population.

The Gaelic festival in Dundee is always held on Jan. 12, if possible (for they try to have it on a Friday): this means Jan. 1, Old Style. Mr. Craigie, however, wrote to me next day to modify this, in the following terms, and the correction is very instructive as to the struggle going on, so to say, between the old Celtic year and the Roman calendar :

"I remembered yesterday that I had made a slight mistake in what I had said about the Gaelic Festival in Dundee. The regular meeting was, and is, held on or near Nov. 12 (*i.e.*, *Oidhche Samhna*, Old Style), and the one on Jan. 12 or so was an extra one, which has been given up for some time now. The 'Hallow-E'en' one still goes on.

"We, of course, call the day before the New Year, *Hogmanay* (in Gaelic, *Oidhche Callain*). The old New Year's Day is pretty well given up in the Lowlands now.

"In a number of *The Gael* (a magazine which came out from 1871-77) there was a list of the different seasons of the year according to the Celtic calendar, with the places of all the chief days, like Beltane, Samhuinn, etc., given."—W. A. CRAIGIE.

The next communication (dated March 29, 1892) is from the Rev. John M. Gillington, Yarmouth, Isle of Wight :

"My acquaintance with the custom is on this wise :—When I was assistant-curate of St. Peter's, Athlone, the 1st Royal Regiment was in barracks there. This regiment was originally the Royal Scots Guards, the body-guard of the Scottish kings. They came to London with James VI, when he became King of England. Eventually they became the 1st Regiment of Foot in the Standing Army.

"When they ceased to be formed of Scotchmen, I have no idea, but when I knew them they had nothing Scotch about them except the regimental traditions. These are kept up, and amongst them the custom of first-foot. I lodged in the house of a widow of a sergeant-major of that corps. He had served with

it at Waterloo, and she had told me of the traditions among them.

"On the last night of 1854, I was sitting up till midnight, reading, when, just as the clock struck twelve, I was startled by an uproar breaking out in the neighbouring barracks, shouts, and beating of drums. I thought a fire had broken out, and threw open the window; but I then perceived that the shouts were of hilarity, and mixed with laughter, while the band was playing a lively tune up and down the barrack-square.

"While I was wondering what all this could mean, my room-door opened, and two of the girls of the house came in with cake and wine, exclaiming that they were first-foot in my quarters. Then it all came back to my mind what their mother had told me—how that everybody rushed into everybody's house or room, bearing cake, wine, or whiskey, each striving to be first-foot, first in the house or quarters on New Year's Day. All together uproariously partook of the refreshments brought in. Some people were reckoned to bring good luck to the house for the rest of the year; some were accredited with being unlucky first-foots. This was the custom as kept up by tradition in the 1st Royals, which had been Scotch 250 years before.

"Afterwards I heard of it amongst Scotch people of a higher grade, who observed it, but with more decorum and propriety, perhaps. They told me that they knew well-educated people who looked out anxiously as to who should be first-foot in their house, and would turn pale if a person whose luck was doubtful should be the first to come in."

My next correspondent is Mr. Tierney, of the *Welshman* Office, Carmarthen, who writes as follows:

"I see that you have been speaking of a Manx prejudice against *flat* feet. I expect that must be a strong prejudice in the really *Irish* parts of Ireland, for, in the most Anglicised part of Ulster, where my boyhood was spent, no 'clane' peasant-girl with her wits about her would dream of marrying a flat-footed 'boy', unless there were very strong temptations to do so. Not only flat feet, but anything like bandy legs, would deter a girl from marrying a man.

"When two young fellows are rivals for the hand of one of

these fair damsels, the one who can speak of the other as 'that flat-footed craythur' is pretty sure to win, although the flat-footed man may have three acres and a cow, and the other 'nothing but the rags on his back'. So strong is the feeling, and so deep is the impression made by this prejudice, that, although I have not been a fortnight in Ireland for the past twenty years or nearly, I can hardly help *now* feeling, when people look downwards to where I stand, that they are inspecting my feet. You see I am, for the most part, of Teutonic descent, and, I suppose, a tendency to flat-footedness is one of the results of that misfortune.¹

"Another is that I have reddish hair, and that was another cause of heart-burning. The red-haired people, even in Ulster (it may be worse elsewhere, but I don't know—yes, I know it is worse in Connaught, where they are savagely disliked), are all "Danes" or foreigners of some kind, who can never, somehow, come to be liked in a brotherly way, or altogether trusted. I inherit my ruddy locks from a *Carleton* family; though many Welsh people, when told where I was born, suppose it to be a mark of Gwyddel blood. Even if it were, it would be just as bad in Ireland as if it were Saxon or Norman. Red-haired men are bad, but to meet a red-haired woman as you go out on any important journey, is such a terrible omen—or was in some parishes in my boyhood—that the man who will not turn back home again, must have nerve enough to face the devil.

"This mention of the Gwyddel reminds me that, although the Welsh make the term synonymous with 'Irish', the Goidels can never have been numerous in Ireland—or, if they were, the conquering race has grown very scarce—almost died out. Is it not held that the genuine Cymry, although they gave Wales their language, and taught the original dolichocephalic people to call themselves Cymry too, were but a *hardy few*? I do not know enough of these things to be sure whether you are one of those who hold the Cymry to be scarce in Cymru at the present day.

¹ Mr. Tierney is joking: since this letter was written I have had the pleasure of meeting him, but I do not recollect staring at his "understandings". I conclude that there is nothing peculiar about them.

"I have a theory—perhaps others have it without my knowledge, and perhaps it may seem utterly foolish to you, but I assure you I could write a whole volume in support of it—that whether the Gwyddyl were numerous in Ireland, and the Cymry in Wales, or not, it would not have altered matters very much ; that they are, more or less, like the Teutons, an artificial race, which can only be kept up to the proper level of existence by favourable circumstances and surroundings ; that the little old dark race have, like the Welsh black cattle, reached the degree of development which Nature, under ordinary conditions, will tolerate ; that they have already nearly stamped the Gwyddyl out in Ireland, and the Cymry in Wales, and that they will in time clear the Teutons out as well, becoming once more full possessors of Britain."

To begin at the end of the foregoing letter, I may observe that the writer is by no means alone in his idea, that the purer Aryan element in Celtic countries is decreasing numerically. Penka for instance, gives his readers reasons for believing that the tall, blond, blue-eyed Aryan has lost ground since the early Middle Ages in North Italy, in France, and one might probably add Spain ; but I am only reproducing Penka's views very roughly, as it is some time since I read them. I shall, however, not be misrepresenting him, when I say that he regards the Aryans as a northern people who in the long run have no chance in the competition for existence in certain tracts of Europe, as against the smaller and duskier aborigines, with thousands of years more of acclimatisation to the credit of their race. I have been for some time of opinion that in the population of Wales we have, at the present day, but a very small Aryan element. Our Aryans in the Principality were very lively in the time of Sir John Wynn of Gwydyr : one of their amusements appears to have been to burn one another's houses about their owners' ears ; but they fared badly in the days of Cromwell, and ever since they seem to have been dwindling in numbers and importance in proportion to the representatives of the aboriginal race. I picture to myself the Welsh Aryan as a fine tall fellow

with a somewhat aquiline nose, and a complexion rather less blond than I should expect in the case of a Teutonic Aryan. He has a landed estate or traditions about one that ought to be his, and he boasts a long pedigree.

This talk of mine about races threatens to put wholly out of sight the question *à propos* of which it began, namely, that of the superstition about flat feet. So I return to the Manx *qualtagh*, and my suggestion of his being to some extent a race representative, and I may mention that, one day last term, I read my remarks on the difference between Welsh and English feet, as shown in the matter of shoes, at a meeting of about a dozen Welsh undergraduates. They all agreed with me that English shoes did not, as a rule, fit Welsh feet, and this because they are made too low in the instep: I ought to have said that they all agreed except one undergraduate, who held his peace. He is a tall man of no dark complexion, and I have never dared to look in the direction of his feet since, lest he should detect me cruelly carrying my comparisons to extremes. In the Manx paper referred to, I suggested that perhaps the flatness of the feet of the one race was not to be emphasized so much as the height of the instep in those of the other. I find this way of looking at the question somewhat countenanced in an appreciative article which appeared on the 29th March in the *Liverpool Post*, in reference to my remarks and the discussion elicited by them. The writer refers to Henderson's notes on the *Folk-lore of the Northern Counties*, and quotes a passage referring more particularly to Northumberland, as follows: "In some districts, however, special weight is attached to the 'first-foot' being that of a person with a high-arched instep, a foot that 'water runs under'. A flat-footed person would bring great ill-luck for the coming year." Before leaving this, there is another point I wish to mention: the writer of the article considers that Dr. Karl Blind's experience as a South German, that an English shoemaker does not make his shoes high enough in the instep, and his admission that North Germans "have,

perhaps, slightly flatter feet" than those of the South, spoils my suggestion as to race. This struck me as rather strange, as I flattered myself that Dr. Blind's words were entirely on my side. The explanation is that I took for granted that nobody now regards the bulk of the South Germans as of the same race as the tall, light-haired people of North Germany, or the Teutonic element of a somewhat similar type in this country. If, therefore, Dr. Blind's words have been accurately reported, I claim the benefit of them for my suggestion as to a race-distinction underlying the Manx superstition concerning the *qualtagh*; but as to that suggestion itself, I must confess that I attach but little importance to it. It is gratifying to me, however, that it is likely to lead to an exhaustive discussion of the subject on the basis of an ampler collection of facts.

JOHN RHYS.

Oxford, April 18th, 1892.

NOTES ON THE FIRST-FOOT SUPERSTITION.

It has generally been considered that the first-foot superstition originated in the warfare of races, and that *race* is the distinctive feature. May it not be *sex*?

There are no superstitions apart from this one which imply that it is unlucky to meet an enemy on New Year's Day. There are superstitious reasons why a *woman* should not be met.

We should not dissociate this superstition from others connected with New Year's Day.

We find that a great many customs and superstitions connected with New Year's Day are also observed on May Day.—A.

The ceremony of the Claivie-burning (FOLK-LORE, 1891, p. 19) belongs to a cycle of superstitious customs common to both days.—A. B.

Some of the details of these ceremonies find parallels in

a Kolarian festival, to propitiate the Rain goddess (*Primitive Folk*, p. 332).—C. B.

The Kolarian festival contains a trace of the Godiva ceremony.—C.

The Roumanians observe the ceremony in time of drought (*Nineteenth Century*, July 1885).—C. D.

In Pembrokeshire, people sprinkle each other on New Year's Day; and in Siam there is a "Water Feast" on New Year's Day, when people drench each other (*Church Times*, Jan. 15, 1892).—C.

In India, in time of drought, women have been known to strip themselves, and men have been kept out of the way, in case they brought trouble on the village by prying (*Science of Fairy Tales*, p. 84).—D.

The Western Innoits, and also the Apache Indians, celebrate a hunting-festival on New Year's Day. The sexes are separated, and curiosity by the opposite sex is punishable by death (*Primitive Folk*, pp. 92 and 138).—D. E.

The presence of women at these festivals would destroy the efficacy of the rites (FOLK-LORE, 1891, pp. 426 and 439).—D. E.

In the Isle of Lewis (Scotland), a woman was not permitted to cross the river until a man had crossed, or she would frighten away the fish.—E.

The evidence seems to point in the following directions, viz.:

A. The overlapping of the folk-lore of New Year's Day and May Day seems to show that the latter day was once the commencement of the New Year.

B. The survival of similar sacrificial rites on New Year's Day and May Day seem to show that the New Year was ushered in by a great festival, to propitiate the goddess of the Waters.

C. The identity between these survivals and existing heathen propitiatory sacrifices to the Rain goddess seem

to show that the New Year's festival contained similar rites and sacrifices.

D. The traces in the folk-lore survivals of these ceremonies, and also in the prevailing heathen rites of a procession of women in a state of nudity, give evidence of the separation of sexes at this New Year's festival.

E. The existence of certain New Year's hunting-festivals, at which the presence of women would render nugatory the efficacy of the rites, and also the fact that it is considered that men prying at the women's processions before referred to would bring evil upon the village, are evidence to show that the presence of the opposite sex has been considered unlucky on New Year's Day.

T. W. E. HIGGENS.
