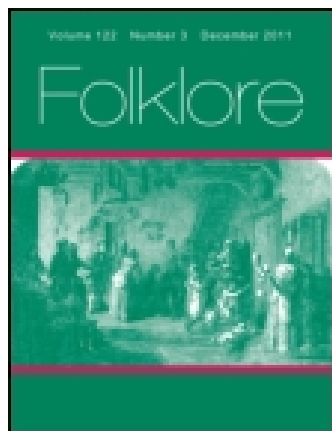


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Folk-Lore Miscellanea

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FOLK-LORE MISCELLANEA.

I HAVE lately had so many pieces of folk-lore communicated to me, that perhaps it will, on the whole, be best to keep them together. So, in the hope that the Editor will agree with me that they are worth publishing, I undertake to preside over the paste and scissors. I need only premise that some of the communications have been sent to me in writing, while others I have had to jot down myself.

The first thing I have to offer our readers is a translation of a very curious poem published in a collection of Gaelic poetry made by Donald MacMhuirich, and entitled *an Duanaire* (Maclachlan and Stewart, Edinburgh, 1868). The original of the following piece will be found on pp. 123-6, and the translation is from the pen of Mr. W. A. Craigie, a scholar of Oriel College, and a native of Dundee:—

GLAISTIG LIANACHAIN.

(*The Field-Sprite.*)

One night, when the Gille-dubh-mór Mac Cuaraig was going home from the smithy, the Glaistig met him as he was going over Cúrr at Bial-áth Chroisg.

“Hail! big, black-haired lad,” said she,
“Would you be better of one behind you?”
“Yes, and of one before me,” said he,
And he gave her a little bit lift
Off the bare beach,
And bound her before him
Surely and firmly
On the back of his fine horse

With the charm-belt of Fillan.
And he vowed and he swore
Firmly and sternly
That he would not let her out of his grasp
Till he showed her in the presence of men.

"Let me off," she said ; "and you'll get from me
As indemnity and ransom
A fold full of speckled cows,
White-bellied, black, white-faced,
The choice of hillocks and of fairs,
For yourself and your kind after you."

"I have that without you," said he,
"And it will not suffice to free you."
"Let me off, and I will leave your land
Where I was dwelling in the hillocks,
And I will raise for you to-night
On the Foich over there
A big, strong, stone house :
A house that fire will not injure,
Nor water, nor arrow, nor iron,
And that will keep you dry and warm,
Without fear or dread, and a charm on you
From poison, and robbers, and fairies."

"Fulfil your words," said he,
"And you will get your freedom from me."

She gave a cry with sorrow
That was heard over seven hills.
One would think it was the Horn of might,
That Fionn had, that gave a blast.
And there was neither knoll nor hillock
That did not waken and answer :
They collected on the other side of the Lón (*meadow*),
Awaiting her orders.

She put them to work in haste,
Soberly and orderly,
And they brought flags and stones

From the beach at Steall Chlianaig,
Passing them from hand to hand.

In Tóim Innis of the beach
Beams and rafters were cut,
And long couples
Smooth and stout, in the rowan wood ;
While she kept constantly saying :
"One stone above two stones,
And two stones above one stone ;
Pins, and turf, and wattle,
Every tree in the wood
Except wild cherry.
Pity it should not be found as placed,
And not placed as found."

At the greying of the day
There was turt on the ridge
And smoke from out of it.

He put the coultter on the fire
To keep him from mischief,
Since he knew the tricks
And the spells of the fairies.

When the house now was ready,
And she had fulfilled each condition,
He released the Siren
And suffered no harm.

She stretched out her hands to him
To take farewell of him,
But it was to take him to the fairy hill.

But he stretched out the coultter,
And the skin of her palm stuck to it,
And she leapt on a grey stone
Of the Foich to pass sentence on him.

She gave him the curse of the people
And the curse of the proud ;

And if we believe what we hear,
She got her desire :

“Grow like the rushes,
Wither like the fern,
Grey in your childhood,
Fading in the flower of your strength ;

But I pray not that you may have no son in your place.
I am a sprite of sorrow,
That dwelt in the meadow-land ;
I raised a big house on the Foich,
And it has made a pain in my body.
I will pour out my heart's blood
On Sgurr Finisgeig up there,
On three rushy hillocks,
And they will be red till the day of doom.”

And she leapt in a green flame
Over the shoulder of the crag.

Mr. Craigie appends the following note :

“The *Glaistig* is apparently a land-fairy, as I gather from the epithet *Lianachain* (which seems to be a diminutive of *Lian*, “a field”; but may here be a local name), and from her speaking of living in the hillocks. The name *Siren*, however (*Suire* in Gaelic), would indicate a sea-nymph.”

I have also to thank Mr. Craigie for the following verses of folk-lore :—

I.

Oidhch' an Fhéill' Bríde
Thu'irt an nathair anns an tóim,
“Cha bhean mi ri Clann Iomhair
Mur bean Clann Iomhair rium.”

On the night of St. Bridget's day
Said the adder in the knoll,
“I'll not meddle with Clan Ivar,
If they meddle not with me.”

2.

Gach sgolb 's gach sgráth
Gu taigh Mhic Ráth
Ach eidheann mu chrann
Is fiodhagach.

Every wattle and every turf
To the house of MacRae
Except ivy round the tree
And wild-cherry.

3.

The "trump", or Jew's harp, was believed to be a good protection against witches. One time, a young fellow who had been sitting alone in the bothy playing it, began to sing these words :

'S math an ceol an tromba Ghalld',
An tromba Ghalld', an tromba Ghalld',
'S math an ceol an tromba Ghalld'
A h-uile h-uair 'g an cluichear i.

'Tis a good music the Lowland trump
Every time that it 's played.
The Lowland trump, etc.
'Tis a good music, etc.

Bheir i buaidh air Buidseachan
Air Buidseachan, etc.
Bheir i buaidh, etc.
A huile h-uair 'g an cluichear i.

It will get victory over witches, etc.
'S gun cuir i ruaig air Raidseachan,
Air Raidseachan, etc.
And it will put hags to flight, etc.

But the Bana-bhuidseach was listening outside, and put in a verse when he stopped :

'S math an céol an tromba Ghalld',
An tromba, etc.

'Tis a good music, etc.

'S math an céol, etc.

Mur bitheadh pong a tha 'n a deigh.

Were it not for the *point*¹ that's after it.

The next communication is a note by Mr. Davies of Lincoln College. I received it last term, and it relates to a Glamorgan holy well, situated on the pathway leading from Coychurch to Bredgled.

It is the custom, he writes, for people suffering from any malady to dip a rag in the water and bathe the affected part. The rag is then placed on a tree close to the well. When I passed it about three years' ago there were hundreds of these shreds covering the tree, and some had evidently been placed there very recently.

My next correspondent speaks also about wells, and of other things as well. He is Mr. D. J. Jones of Jesus College, a native of the Rhondda Valley in Glamorgan. His letter contains the following particulars:

"There are three interesting wells in our county. Ffynnon Pen Rhys is only about two miles distant from my home. The custom there is for the person who wishes to be benefited, first to wash in the water, and afterwards to throw a pin into the well.

"Dafydd Morganwg, in his *Hanes Morganwy*, speaks as follows of Ffynnon Marcros, or Marcros Well: 'Mae zu arferiad gan y rhai a iacheir ynddi i glymu darn bychan o lian neu gotwm wrth frigau pren sydd gerllau ac y masnt yno môr aml ár dail braidd.' (It is the custom for those who are healed in it to tie a shred of linen or cotton to the branches of a tree that stands close by; and there the shreds are as numerous nearly as the leaves.) Marcros is near Nash Point, about eight miles from Bridgend, on the map.

"Another well is that of Llancarfan, which is five or six miles from Cowbridge. The custom there is the same as

¹ No one seems to know the meaning of this *pong*, or point, now.

at Ffynnon Marcros, and a tree near by is covered with rags, etc., tied to it.

"In my neighbourhood, on seeing a white horse, you made sure of good luck by spitting on your boot, and not looking at the horse again.

"A native of Caerleon, in Monmouthshire, says that it is a sure sign of death to see a robin near the house. I suppose exceptions would be made in case of a hard winter.

"It is in my neighbourhood a foreboding of death also to hear a dog howl or a cock crow at night; and an old fellow near here went so far as to bury alive a pair of young fowls because the cock crew one night. On his neighbours asking him why he did it, he replied: 'Beth oedd yr hen, grad-wriaid jawl yn neid 'rhen swn ra 'ta?' (But why did those demons of fowls make that hateful noise then?) You must excuse a little flowery language, as it is a characteristic of the neighbourhood.

"With regard to New Year's Day, it is much the same all over the country, as regards seeing a male first. South Cardiganshire specialises red-haired males as unlucky. While in the neighbourhood of Cardigan town a man of the name of Thomas was also among the unlucky ones.

Bwyddeyn dwm
Wrth weled Twm.

The year will be heavy
From seeing Tommie.

"About Llanybyther, Carmarthenshire, males were divided into *Brythwyr* and *unwyr*. *Unwyr* were men of the names of *Shôn*, *Shencyn*, *Dafydd*, and *Ifan*. Here, only *unwyr* were considered lucky.

"In Brecon, and some other places, to see a magpie cross your way was a sure sign of approaching ill-luck. A crow brought good luck, but some will have it cross your way only in one particular direction, from right to left, I believe. The Llanybyther district young ladies have a way of finding

out their future husbands by tying a handkerchief, or something of the kind, round the stem of a bush [a gooseberry one generally], round which they walk seven times, or nine, sowing seeds, after which the future husband will come and untie the handkerchief."

Mr. Jones adds that the Rhondda district is a good one for collecting folk-lore, as people from every county in Wales live there.

The last two communications were received in response to appeals of mine on the subject of wells, and to dispel my doubts as to whether the habit of tying rags to trees near holy wells is known in Wales. Of course I cannot possibly entertain such doubts any longer as regards Glamorgan, at any rate.

"Lunaria, or moon-fern, was, in old times, believed to possess such a singular affinity for iron that it is often mentioned as drawing the shoes from the feet of horses grazing in fields where it grew. Culpepper, the famous herbalist, tells of a troop of Cromwell's horse, under the command of the Earl of Essex, who lost all their shoes from this cause while passing over a Devonshire moor. In Sylvester's translation of Du Barta's poems, this supposed dangerous property of moon-fern is likewise alluded to. In grubbing up old stumps of ash-trees, from which many successive trees have sprung, in the parish of Scotton, there was found, in many instances, an iron horse-shoe. One shown measured $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches by $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The workmen seemed to be familiar with this fact, and gave the following account:—The shoe is placed to 'charm' the tree, so that a twig of it might be used in curing cattle over which a shrew-mouse had run, or which had been 'overlooked'. If they were stroked by one of these twigs, the disease would be charmed away."

My interest at present in this is chiefly confined to the allusion it makes to the shrew-mouse, which, I presume, is the little rodent called in Welsh a *llyg*. For, in my native county of Cardigan, nothing can have been held more unlucky than to be run over by this beast. I have never heard of any man who had undergone such a misfortune;

but it is a standing expression applied to an unlucky person or a good-for-nothing kind of fellow—*ma' fe fel tae llyg wedi min'd drorts fe* ("he has just been run over by a *llyg*")—and my wife knows the same saying in Gwynedd. Perhaps some member of the Society will enlighten me on the origin of the unluckiness attaching to the *llyg*. I am not well up in field-life, but I notice that Pugh explains *llyg* as "a mouse; the shrew, or field-mouse"; and Davies, in his Welsh-Latin Dictionary, gives it as *mus araneus*. But one thing is certain: it never now means the domestic mouse, which is known by the name of *llygoden*. Thus the *llyg* or shrew-mouse (if it be the shrew) takes the first place, and the house-mouse is known only by a name derived from that of the *llyg*. What is the significance of that sequence?

Some time ago I had the pleasure of taking Sir John Evans over the Pitt-Rivers Museum, a unique feature of modern Oxford, as those folk-lorists can testify who made a visit to it in the course of last year's Congress. There I called his attention to some "mythological totem-sculptures from British Columbia". One of these is labelled an "Ancestral Totem of the Bear Tribe", and further described as "Hoorts the Bear killing Towats the Hunter". A second, and more intelligible one to me, is described as representing the demon Scana residing within the killer-whale (*orca ater*). The whole piece of timber is rather longer than that of Hoorts, and measures, as Mr. Balfour thinks, from 9 to 10 feet by about 2 broad. The two ends are fashioned into two mouths, each partially open, and showing two formidable rows of teeth. In the belly of the whale sits Scana, across in a squatting posture, with his broad mouth close to his knees. I had found upon a previous occasion, what I regard as a miniature of the same sort of savage Jonah from the same part of the world. It is labelled an "Ivory Fetish for containing disembodied Spirits (Haidah)". The ivory is about 6 inches long, and a portion of the middle is occupied by a demon

sitting across like Scana, and the ends of the fetish are carved into open mouths, with the teeth regularly indicated, as in the case of Scana's residence. I should like to suggest that the carving here indicates the same animal forms, but the identity of the idea in the two cases is most striking and impossible to miss. I led my friend to look at the ivory fetish, and he made a remark which seemed to me well worth bearing in mind, namely, that the fetish for collecting disembodied spirits reminded him of Welsh stories relating how demons of the crockery-breaking species used to be exorcised in former days. Now one of the tasks of the exorcist was to make the demon reduce his dimensions, and when this was done, he got him, by hook or by crook, into some small receptacle or other, for the spirits then appear to have been quite as stupid as those with whom our modern spiritualists busy themselves. The most usual sort of receptacle was, perhaps, the exorcist's own snuff-box or tobacco-box, whence the offending demon might be transferred to a bottle, and safely corked for centuries to come. Is it possible that the snuff-box or tobacco-box only took the place of a specially-constructed contrivance for spirit-catching?

It is, in any case, fairly evident that no casual box could be equal to the ivory fetish with its open mouths, which emphasise the impossibility of backing out on the part of any demon prisoner who once begins to enter the portals of their teeth. It would not be to the point to say that the Christian exorcist availed himself of the aid of terrible formulæ of words, unless it could be shown that the medicine-men of savage nations are badly equipped in this respect, which I should fancy highly improbable. Hoorts and Scana were presented to the Museum by Dr. Tylor in 1887, and it is much to be wished that he would publish a full account of them, if he has not already done so. To make it thoroughly intelligible, it should be accompanied with woodcuts or photographs of both; also of the Haidah ivory, and other things of the same

class, of which Mr. Balfour showed me several the other day. One would then be in a better position to judge how far the ideas of the natives of British Columbia can be matched by ideas of the same order underlying the folk-lore of the British Isles.

Whilst at the Pitt-Rivers Museum, I noticed a somewhat recent acquisition, consisting of a very rude clay model, about a yard long, of the human figure. It is labelled as follows: "*Corp creidh*, or clay figure, rudely shaped to a representation of a person whose death is desired. It is stuck with pins and nails, etc., in order that the person may suffer corresponding torments, and perish miserably. Such figures are usually placed in a stream, with the idea that, as the clay is wasted away, so the enemy will waste and perish."

The specimen is from G. . . . , in the county of Inverness, and it is the gift of Major G—— of that place. The history of the present specimen is, however, not that it was found in a stream, but discovered early one morning placed at Major G——'s door. The workmen who found it there were horrified by its presence, and threw it away. The Major, having come to hear of this design on his life—for he was the victim intended—took the very enlightened revenge on his ill-wishers of carefully collecting the *dissecta membra* of this rude model of himself, and of presenting it to our Museum.

Since this occurred, I have heard a still more remarkable story of the same kind. A minister in the Highlands—I forget his name and the name of his church—happened to offend some of his people by holding certain theological views not accepted by them. He, proving obdurate in his heresies, was suddenly observed to be wasting away like one whose strength and vigour were rapidly ebbing. His friends became anxious about him, and discovered the cause of his illness in a *corp creidh* deposited, by the theologians of the other party, in a stream that passed by his house.

Of course, I cannot vouch for the correctness of this story, which has travelled to Oxford from the Highlands. It may be taken as illustrative of practices which prevailed not so very long ago in other parts of Britain. And yet to what thoughts it must give rise in the mind of historians, who have eyes for other things than the intrigues alone of kings and their creatures! Here we are, as it were, witnesses to the fetching of rust-eaten weapons from the armoury of the most primitive religion in the world, in order to be used in the warfare of the most modern of theologies. What a strange *rencontre* between the medicine-man of hoary antiquity, with his bag of Druidic tricks, and the academical divine who fortifies John Knox's tenets with patches of fashionable philosophy!

JOHN RHYS.
