

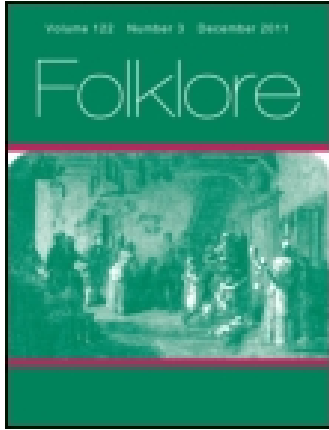
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“Tommy on the Tub's Grave.”

Alfred Nutt

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Folk-Lore.

TRANSACTIONS OF THE FOLK-LORE SOCIETY.

VOL. V.]

DECEMBER, 1894.

[No. IV.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 20th, 1894.

THE President (Mr. G. Laurence Gomme, F.S.A.) in the chair.

The minutes of the last meeting were read and confirmed.

The admission of the Public Library, Providence, U.S.A., was announced.

The following books, which had been presented to the Society, were laid on the table, viz.: "Introduction to the Popular Religion and Folk-lore of N.W. India," by Mr. Crooke, B.A.; "Les travaux publics et les mines," by M. Paul Sébillot.

Mrs. E. F. Andrews exhibited the following, viz.: Kafir bangles for the arm and leg, a Kafir pipe, Kafir snuffboxes, a Kafir porridge spoon, a club used by Kafir women for despatching the wounded, a necklace of ant's eggs made by aged Kafir women, a pair of Basuto bangles, a silver bracelet (North American demon and totem), a specimen of Kafir sculpture, and a photograph of Kafir dressing skins with sharp stones.

A note by Mr. R. Weir Schultz, on a London popular custom called "Tommy on the Tub's Grave," communicated by Mr. J. G. Frazer, was read by the President (see *infra*, p. 290).

A note by Mr. Babington Smith on an Indian custom, communicated by Mr. J. G. Frazer, was also read (see *infra*, p. 340).

VOL. V.

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Mr. M. J. Walhouse read a paper, entitled "Ghostly Lights" (*infra* p. 293), and a discussion followed, in which Miss Burne, Messrs. Nutt and Higgens, Dr. Gaster, and the President took part.

Prof. Kuno Meyer then read his paper on "The Old Norwegian Speculum Regale" (*infra*, p. 299), and in the discussion which followed, the President, Mr. Nutt, Dr. Gaster, and Miss Burne took part.

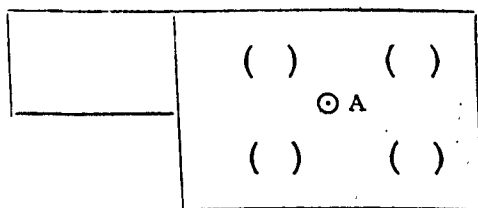
A hearty vote of thanks was accorded to Professor Meyer for his paper.

Mr. Brabrook presented a report of the progress of the work of the Ethnographical Committee.

"TOMMY ON THE TUB'S GRAVE."

Mr. Robert Weir Schultz, of 14, Gray's Inn Square, wrote on the 24th May 1894, to Mr. J. G. Frazer as follows:—

"Last evening I was much interested, in passing through Bloomsbury Square, by some children coming up to me with hand extended, and saying, "Please to remember Tommy on the tub's grave." I found that they had got, set out on the pavement, a little arrangement like a cemetery, made principally of sand, and of this shape—



It was enclosed with sand walls, and there were various hieroglyphics arranged in sand inside, and having flowers (cowslips, I think) laid on them. In the centre, at A, was a large bunch of flowers on a bigger heap, and this was pointed out to me as the "tub's grave". On asking what it

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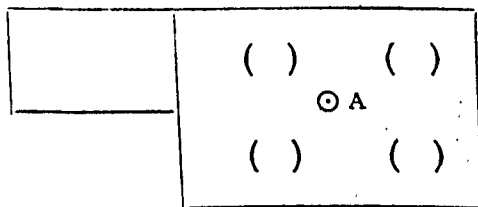
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was all about they could not tell me, but this I learned, that they only did it once a year, and that they had always done it, *i.e.*, I suppose that it was handed down by the older boys to the younger ones, and so on. I thought perhaps it might be some old survival, and that you might be interested to hear of it, but of course it may have no significance. I shall be glad to know if there is anything in it.

Writing further on May 25th Mr. Schultz adds:—

"I am glad my information interested you. I have been out this evening trying to glean further information, but with small result. I interviewed a group of boys in Red Lion Passage, and I found that they all knew about it, but could not throw much light on the subject. I gathered this much, that it is only done at the time the flowers come out. One boy said, "It's to welcome the spring"; they call it a "show". The children do it and then ask for coppers for the show: this is what I found. They said I would see it in Lincoln's Inn Fields, probably, to-morrow night. They all called it "Tommy on the Tub", and their description tallied with the one I saw. It seems to be done not on any particular day, but just about this time of year, and no doubt they get tired of it after doing it once or twice. I asked what it meant, and one boy volunteered the information that no one knew what it meant, but that they all learnt it, and so it is passed on. They say it is done in different ways by different children, but they all call it by the same name."

In forwarding the letter, Mr. Frazer notes as interesting the fact that the custom is observed at the time when the flowers come out, as a way of welcoming the spring. He also states that the custom is quite new to him.

In the discussion which followed the reading of Mr. Frazer's communication, Mr. Emslie mentioned that he had recently become acquainted with the custom in a street leading out of Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Since the above was put in type, the following informa-

tion has been obtained from Mr. Edward Field, of 11, Old Square, Lincoln's Inn, who writes as follows :—

“I have on several occasions early in Spring seen children playing a game called ‘Tommy on the Tub’s Grave’ against the wall on the east side of Lincoln’s Inn Fields. The ‘properties’ are grass, flowers, and sand or earth. A square is made on the pavement, sometimes of grass, sometimes of flowers, and inside are little heaps of sand or earth, on the top of which flowers are placed, and these heaps are called the graves. One grave, placed in the middle, is usually larger than the others, and has more flowers on it. The proprietors of this ‘show’ are usually armed with a shell, in which they hope to collect money from the passers-by. How much money they get, and what they do with it when they get it, I know not. I will keep a particular look-out for this game next spring, and if I can glean any useful information on it and its origin from the children I will let you have it.”

[It is, I think, unnecessary to dwell upon the interest of the foregoing communications. Here we have a game which has escaped the attention of all previous observers noted by three independent witnesses, in the same district of London, within the last three years at the farthest. The conclusion would seem obvious that the game or custom is of recent origin, and has not yet had time to spread beyond its centre of origin. Yet it presents features of an undoubtedly primitive character, and may be, apart from the question of recent origin, as legitimately connected with archaic custom as many of the games studied by Mrs. Gomme in her *Dictionary of British Folk-lore*.

It is very desirable to collect all possible information concerning this game, and communications are asked from all who can throw any light upon the subject. Has the game or custom been noticed elsewhere in London or in the country, at what date, and at what season of the year? Can a more detailed description be given than that of Mr. Schultz and Mr. Field?—ALFRED NUTT.]