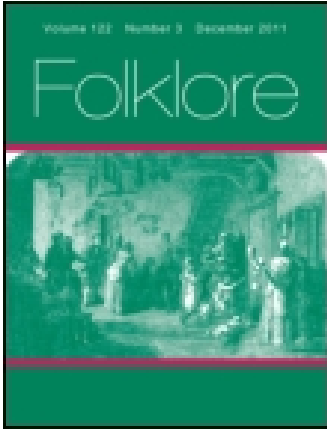


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CORRESPONDENCE.

STAFFORDSHIRE SUPERSTITIONS.

(Vol. vii., p. 398.)

THE Staffordshire "Hobthirst" is, no doubt, the Yorkshire "Hobthrust," a Robin-Goodfellow or Robin-Round-Cap, who resembles the Scotch Brownie on the domestic side of his character,¹ although in other aspects he seems to be a woodland-goblin.² According to a lady who is well acquainted with the village spoken of, there is a farm—the Manor Farm—at East Halton, in Lincolnshire, which was popularly said to be haunted by a Hobthrust till three or four years ago, if not at the present time. "Mrs. —, who lived in the house, used to believe that its appearance was in some way connected with an old iron cauldron in the cellar, which was full of sand and bones. These bones she supposed to be 'children's thumb-bones.' If the bones and sand were stirred, the Hobthrust would show himself at twelve o'clock. What he was like I do not know, nor what he did. When we were children I and my brother used to tell Mrs. — we were going to the cellar to stir the contents of the cauldron, a threat which always troubled her very much. After Mrs. — left the farm, the cauldron was brought up from the cellar to be used, and no evil results followed. There is another Hobthrust at Lindholme, near Wroot, but I do not know what the stories connected with him are."

It has been suggested to me that *thrust* is Anglo-Saxon þurs, Icelandic þurs, þuss, the giant or goblin of English fable; hence thurs-house or thurse-hole, a rock-cave serving for a dwelling (Kennet in Halliwell, s. v. Thurs-house). So in the Metrical Life of St. Cuthbert, 2178:

"Cuthbert in a priue place began
In a place with oute his celle,
Now calde þe thrus house men tell."

MABEL PEACOCK.

Dunstan House, Kirton-in-Lindsey.

¹ J. Nicholson, *Folk-Lore of East Yorkshire* (1890), p. 80.

² Atkinson's *Glossary of the Cleveland Dialect*, under *Hobtrush*.

The following extract from a letter dated 31st October, 1893, from East Halton, Ulceby, Lincolnshire, may be of some interest:—

"I have waited to answer your letter, as I wanted to get a little more information about old "Hob Thrust." When the S——'s lived on the hill they always burnt a light in one of the bedroom windows to keep Hob Thrust quiet at night. I have seen the light myself many times, coming home; and there is still an iron pot in the cellar which had sand in it, but they took it out and left the pot in the cellar. They have often heard noises in the house like chairs falling and someone coming down stairs and across the floor to the fireplace. This is what they have told my husband.

"I will now, as well as I can remember, tell you all the old tales that I have heard since I came here, near 50 years ago. I once heard the Rev. J. Byron also name the legend in one of his lectures. One old tale is that they began to build the church in the centre of the village, but what they built in the day-time Hob Thrust removed at night, so that they were obliged to build it where it is. Once upon the time, as the story goes, the people in the house got tired of it and were removing their furniture, when they met some one on the road. They remarked that they were flitting, and Hob Thrust popped up its head out of an old churn, and said: "Yes, we're flutting." So the people said: "Oh, if you are going with us, we'll go back again." So they returned. It was sometimes very useful, as it would fetch up the horses in a morning, also the sheep up overnight into the barn for clipping. One night he told them that the little brown sheep had taken more getting up than them all; and when the men looked it was a hare.

"Hob Thrust was also at times very mischievous and did some wonderful things, such as putting the wagon on the top of the barn, &c. The tale is that they used to leave it a clean shirt on a Saturday night; but they offended it in not leaving one to its liking, for in the morning ashes were scattered all about the floor and the words were written:

'Harden, harden, hemp,
Harden, harden, gear,
If you'd have given me linen to wear
I'd have served you faithfully many a year.'

So I suppose that hemp was too coarse for him, and by gear he would mean his clothes. I think this is all about our old Hob Thrust."

LELAND L. DUNCAN.

May I send you another version of the All Souls' Day rhyme given by Miss Burne in her Staffordshire Notes?

At Hilderstone, on the borders of Derbyshire, forty years ago, the boys used to sing—

“ A soul cake, a soul cake,
Give me a penny for a soul cake.
One for Peter,
One for Paul,
One for Him who made us all.
Put your hand in your pocket
And pull out your keys,
Go down to your cellar
And fetch what you please.
An apple, a pear, a plum, or a cherry,
Or any good thing to make us merry.
A soul cake,” &c., *ad lib.*

This was called “going souling.”

I do not think we had any May-day observances, but Christmas brought guisers; one of them was St. George, who fought and killed the Prince of Paradise. Our mistletoe bush was quite “a golden bough,” decorated with oranges and coloured ribbons, and it hung till Shrove Tuesday, when the pancakes were supposed to be cooked over it.

Trusting you will pardon my troubling you with these old memories,

DOROTHEA TOWNSHEND.

80, *Woodstock Road, Oxford.*

THE STAFFORDSHIRE HORN-DANCE.

(Vol. vii., p. 382.)

After describing the horn-dance at Abbot's Bromley, in her article on “Staffordshire Folk and their Lore,” Miss Burne draws the conclusion that the primary intention of the performance was the assertion of some ancient common right or privilege in regard to the chase. May not this be the secondary rather than the first signification of the custom? Is it not possible that in origin the dance resembled the buffalo-dance of some North American Indian tribes, and that by natural evolution and transformation

it gradually acquired a different meaning? I have no proper books of reference on the subject at hand, but I find in the Rev. J. G. Wood's account of the Mandan Indians,¹ which is probably taken from Catlin, that the buffalo-dance was a sacred exercise performed to bring the bison, commonly known as buffalo, within reach, when hunters failed to find game. Among the Mandans every man had a buffalo mask, *i.e.* the skin of the head, *with the horns attached to it*, and to the head was usually added a strip of skin, some four or five inches wide, extending along the whole length of the animal, and including the tail. When the wearer put on his mask, the strip of skin hung down his back, and the tail dragged on the ground behind him. Thus accoutred the dancers moved in a circle imitating the actions of the buffalo; and the dance went on without cessation till the longed-for animals were discovered, and all fear of death from hunger was over for the time being.

No doubt other instances of procuring game by prefiguring its appearance might easily be found. The idea that to imitate or to speak of a thing, or event, causes it to appear, or to happen, is very common. The prejudice against direct mention of the Devil springs, in a great degree, from the feeling that he will become visible after his name has been uttered. It is also a widely-accepted belief that to allude to one's good fortune in escaping sorrow or vexation of any kind brings the trouble to pass. A merely verbal representation of the evil suffices to cause its arrival.

Has anyone ever attempted to trace back the hobby-horse of the horn-dance and other similar festivals to pre-Christian days? At Padstow, in Cornwall, the hobby-horse, after being taken round the town during the Maytide *fête*, was submerged in the sea,² which suggests that the sacrifice of horses, or their mimic representatives, to water was once practised in Britain. This idea is further confirmed by the fact that many sprites connected with rivers, lakes, and marshes are equine in form, although others are bovine, because, it is to be assumed, cattle were also used as offerings.

M. PEACOCK.

¹ *The Natural History of Man*, 1870, pp. 668, 669, of the volume relating to America.

² Hunt, *Popular Romances of the West of England* (1881), p. 194.

THE HOOD-GAME AT HAXEY.

(Vol. vii., p. 330.)

Since my paper on "Haxe-hood" went to press, my attention has been drawn to the fact that the game has a remarkable analogy with Cornish hurling, although in the latter amusement a ball, not a roll of sacking or leather, is the centre of interest.

According to an account given of the Cornish custom in *The Sketch*, November 11, 1896, p. 109, hurling is still kept up at St. Columb Major, and playing is annually commenced on Shrove-Tuesday. A ball of apple-wood with a thick coating of silver is the object contended for, and there are two goals each a mile distant from the place where the ball is thrown up, being thus two miles apart from each other. One is designated the "town goal" and the other the "country goal"; and the aim of each party of players is to get the ball to its own goal. Hurling must have formerly been a quasi-ecclesiastical amusement, as it appears to have always been indulged in at some sacred season, or on Sunday, the east window of the parish church being commonly a goal; while tradition says that in one parish at least the ball was thrown up in the church itself, and that the clergy took a leading part in the game. Hunt in his *Popular Romances of the West of England* (edition 1881), p. 400, speaks of hurling as recently practised in the parishes west of Penzance on Sunday afternoon. The game was usually between two parishes, "sometimes between Burian and Sancreed, or against St. Leven and Sennen, or the higher side of the parish played against the lower."

The game had its name from "hurling" a wooden ball about three inches in diameter, covered with a plate of silver, which was sometimes gilt and had commonly a motto, "Gware wheag yeo gware teag," *i.e.* Fair play is good play. The sport was formerly practised annually by those who attended corporate bodies in surveying the bounds of parishes; but from the many accidents that usually resulted it is now rarely played. A St. Ives correspondent informed Mr. Hunt that the game had not yet died out at St. Ives, St. Columb, and St. Blazey, on the anniversary of the dedication of the church.

In another interesting description of the custom,¹ the St. Ives hurling-match is spoken of as having been held on the sands on the Monday after Quinquagesima Sunday, the ball being formed of cork, or light wood, covered with silver. And it is noted that in early days the mimic contention used to be commonly between two or more parishes, or between one parish and another, but that now one part of a parish hurls against another, the Helston instance being among the examples quoted, in which two streets play all the other streets on the 2nd May, when the town-bounds are renewed. In some private families the balls carried off by their ancestors in the early years of the last century are still religiously preserved as heirlooms. Yet a Druidic circle at St. Cleer, in East Cornwall, is known as "the Hurlers," from a tradition that a party of men hurling on a Sunday were for their wickedness turned into stone. This story has probably superseded an older legend, which embodied a more correct idea of some ancient relationship between the prehistoric remains and the popular game.

The analogy between Cornish hurling, the Lincolnshire hood-game, and the Eastertide ball-play of France, described by Souvestre and Laisnel de la Salle, is obvious. They are all examples of ancient solar ritual which have survived to modern times under the regis of Christianity. The hood-game, however, is conspicuous among them on account of the curiously barbaric scene with which it ought properly to conclude. "Smoking the fool" appears to be known at Haxey alone. Yet there is no reason why similar practices may not be found to exist on some of the scattered islets of folk-custom, that still manage to lift their crests above the tide of modern thought, which now washes over the sinking continent of European myth. Instances of symbolic sacrifice to the sun may yet be chronicled. Wherever flaming wheels, or bonfires, are kindled in connection with some sacred day representing a prehistoric festival of the seasons, there is a possibility that traces of archaic blood-offering may linger in recognisable form.

Cabsow, the ball-game which till some few years ago was played at Cleethorpes on Christmas-Day, seems to be almost identical in name with *scabshew* or *scobshew*, the Cumbrian word for hockey or

¹ M. A. Courtney, *Cornish Feasts and Folk-Lore* (1890), pp. 20, 21, 25, 26.

bandy, which is mentioned in an article describing the method of playing golf in the seventeenth century in the *Gentleman's Magazine Library: Manners and Customs*, p. 250.

In the January number of the *Reliquary and Illustrated Archaeologist* (vol. iii., p. 48), Mr. J. M. Mackinlay says, in commenting on an article on *Churchyard Games in Wales*, which appeared in the same publication last July, that at the hamlet of Tullich, near Ballater, is a ruined church standing in a circular graveyard. "Outside the ruin, but within an iron railing, is a collection of five or six ancient sculptured stones, some showing a cross incised on them, and one having the curious mirror-like symbol so puzzling to antiquaries. St. Nathalan, said to have been born in the district, was the patron saint of the church. His day was kept as a holiday in the parish till within the last twenty-five or thirty years. It fell on the 8th of January, and was held on or about the 19th, according to the old style of reckoning. Football was the favourite amusement on the occasion. The churchyard, which had then no wall round it, was the place selected for the game, and the ball was kicked about over the tombs, often amid snow."

In reference to ball-play on Scotch festivals, Mr. Mackinlay informs me that football is a common sport on New Year's Day, and that it is believed that most of the practices now in vogue in Scotland on the first day of the year were "transferred to that day from Christmas at a time when the Church set its face against Yule-tide observances at the end of the sixteenth century and later. Napier," he adds, "has worked out this point in his *Folklore of the West of Scotland*. Football used to be common also on Fastern's-E'en (Shrove Tuesday), notably at Scone, in Perthshire."

In the *Glasgow Herald*, January 2, 1897, football is mentioned as having been played in many parishes on the preceding day. At Kirkwall, we are informed, ball-playing "began on the streets" at half-past eight in the morning. "The first two balls were easily got by players from the harbour end of the town, but the adult ball at one o'clock went to the upper end."

At Kirkcaldy "the ruins of Ravenscraig Castle and adjacent grounds were, in accordance with an old custom, thrown open by the new proprietor of Dysart House, Mr. M. B. Nairn. There the ancient Scottish game of "She Kyles was played." "She Kyles," Mr. Mackinlay tells me, is nine-pins; and he notes a

curious fact which may be connected with ball-games on holy-days. Mr. Thistleton Dyer, it appears, mentions, in his *Popular British Customs*, that at Tenby, on St. Crispin's Day, the 25th October, a figure of the saint used to be hung up, and after being taken down it was kicked about as a football. What is his authority for the statement?

M. PEACOCK.

It is interesting, in connection with the description of the plough-bullocks and their cry of "Largus," to compare what is said by Clement Scott in his "Poppy Land" (4th ed., Jarrold, pp. 20, 37), papers descriptive of scenery on the East Coast. He says: "I might here note one of the curious harvest customs that must have come down direct from Norman times. When the reapers are in the field they are allowed, or rather it is the custom, to demand 'largesse' from the passer-by. Indeed, the very same old French word is used. The phrase goes, 'Please da me a largesse, Sir!' which I made a brown-cheeked labourer translate, 'Please give me something to drink your jolly good health with.'"

H. F. JACOB.

DOZZILS.

(Vol. vii., p. 399.)

Are not the Dozzils mentioned by Miss Peacock identical with the Roman Oscilla, "faces or heads of Bacchus, which were suspended in the vineyards, to be turned in every direction by the wind. Whichever way they looked they were supposed to make the vines in that direction fruitful." (Smith, *Dictionary of Antiquities*, s.v., with illustrations.)

The *locus classicus* is Virgil, *Georgics*, ii., 388, sqq.

*Et te, Bacche, vocant per carmina læta, tibique
Oscilla ex alta suspendunt mollia pinu,
Hinc omnis largo pubescit vinea fetu ;
Complentur vallesque cavæ saltusque profundi,
Et quocumque deus circum caput egit honestum.*

With Conington's note *sub loco*.

W. CROOKE.

IRISH FUNERAL CUSTOM.

Recently in the county Cork a gentleman died. The coffin was about to be removed for interment in a distant graveyard; and before the friends left, the son of the deceased asked the old family housekeeper to have the death-chamber cleared out that day, so that on his return the mournful associations might be absent. She replied that it was contrary to rule that the room of the dead man should be touched until the mourners returned after the funeral.

Does this imply that the spirit was in the neighbourhood of the scene of death until the funeral rites were concluded?

W. CROOKE.

 THE TEN WAZIRS.

Being engaged at the present moment on the preparation of an edition and translation of the Uigur text of the *Bakhtiyar-namah*, in the introduction to which a full treatment of the story of The Ten Wazirs will be attempted (special attention being paid to the Malay versions), I should be much obliged to any one engaged in the same work for communicating with me as soon as possible.

L. GOLDMERSTEIN.

4, Walton Well Road, Oxford.
