

Folk and Hero Tales

The Rev. J. Mac Dougall

1891

“The poor despised popular Tales, which are branded as wicked lies in the West Highlands, and which such men as Grimm and De la Villemarqué believe to be some of the oldest known products of the human mind.” — Campbell of Islay’s *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, vol. iv, p. 27

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IN the year 1890, my friend, the Reverend James Mac Dougall, of Duror, Ballachulish, generously made over to me his fine collection of “Folk-lore Tales”, taken down by him from the lips of the narrator, whose whole stock came from what he had orally received in childhood, and from no other source.

With indefatigable patience, Mr. Mac Dougall has rescued these Tales herein given.

They are a splendid contribution to the folk-lore of the Western Highlands, and second to none in picturesque and graphic description of events herein detailed.

ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL.

Introduction.

THE following tales were collected in the district of Duror between the summer of 1889 and the spring of 1890. They were obtained from Alexander Cameron, a native of Ardnamurchan, who was then roadman between Duror and Ballachulish. Cameron learned them from Donald McPhie and other old men whom he had known in his boyhood, but who died many years ago.

Some of the tales could have been got from other storytellers residing not far from this neighbourhood, but too often only in an imperfect state. Fragments, or bare outlines, were all that they remembered, and these they generally related in their own words, and not in the language in which they had received them from their predecessors. But it was not so with Cameron. Gifted with a good memory, he could repeat some of the tales in this collection almost word for word as he heard them told in his native place more than forty years before. For this reason, as well as on account of the excellent Ardnamurchan Gaelic in which they are expressed, none but his versions are given in this volume.

At the same time, the names of those who either knew the tales, or who, in their youth, heard them related by others, are mentioned in the notes in the Appendix. The advantage to collector and reader of adopting this course is too obvious to require any explanation.

The tales were collected at different intervals within the period already indicated. Sometimes they were taken down at the roadside, at other times in my house. In this part of the work, particular care was taken to secure accuracy. No tale was committed to writing until it had been first rehearsed from beginning to end by the narrator. Once this had been done, the task of taking it down in pencil began. The frequent interruptions which then occurred, sometimes caused Cameron to pass over some minor incident or unusual expression, but the previous rehearsal generally enabled me to remind him of the omission. When the tale had been taken down in pencil, the work of slowly transcribing it in ink followed. This also was carefully done, the first copy being closely adhered to. The only departures from it were for the sake of clearness ; and they consisted in an occasional omission or insertion of an unimportant word or phrase. The transcript thus made was afterwards read to Cameron ; and not until it had received his final approval was it considered to be ready for the press.

The translation was intended to be literal. How far this intention has been carried out, it is for others to judge. From it, however, there are at least seeming departures. For instance, the future—a tense of frequent occurrence in Gaelic—is sometimes translated by the present indicative and at other times by the present subjunctive. But this is done only when the substitution of these tenses is allowable. Again, Gaelic idioms are generally rendered into their English equivalents. Had they been rendered word for word the translation would hardly be intelligible. For who would then imagine that “the rock of the chest” (*carraig an uchd*) was the breastbone, and “the black sole of the foot” (*bonn dubh na coise*) the part of the sole under the instep? Or who would recognise in “he lifted on him” (*thog e air*), he set out on his journey; in “he made earth-hiding on him” (*rinn e falach-talmhainn air*) he stole towards him under cover of the ground; and in “he gave them a turn round a bush” (*thug e car mu thorn dhoibh*) he slipped away from them? But when there is no such danger of being misunderstood, interesting idiomatic passages are translated verbally. Thus, “An cadal dhuit, ’ille Rìgh Eirionn”, is rendered “Is it sleep to thee, Son of the King of Ireland?” and “Dh’ éirich inntinn cho mòr” becomes “His mind rose so high”.

There is, however, one instance of close adherence to the original to which some may object. This is the literal rendering of *tu* or *thu* into *thou*, and not into *you*. It is, notwithstanding, justifiable on the ground of the difference between the usage in common conversation and the dialogues of the folk- and hero-tales. In the former, an inferior or equal in age and rank is addressed *thu* (thou), but a superior in these relations is honoured with *sibh* (you). In the latter, however, this distinction is quite unknown, so that the very king’s son is called *thu*, and that even by his own servant. If the difference which thus exists between the two usages ought to be preserved in the translation, then *thu* must be rendered *thou*, as it is in the following tales, and in those of the late Islay.

The notes at the end of the volume were written by me while the tales were passing through the press.

Mr. Alfred Nutt has contributed an Introduction in which certain questions suggested by the notes are discussed by him.

The publication of the volume is entirely due to Lord Archibald Campbell. Every Highlander knows his lordship’s zeal for the preservation of Gaelic tales and traditions, and what he has already done in that direction. Being anxious to assist him in his later efforts, I gathered the following tales for him, and I now take this opportunity of thanking him for giving them a place in his series of *Waifs and Strays*.

In bringing this short Introduction to a close, I must also thank Mr. Nutt for his many useful suggestions. Nor may I forget Alexander Cameron, to whose kindness I am indebted for the tales, and whose patience I must have often sorely tried while I slowly and wearisomely wrote them down to his dictation.

JAMES MACDOUGALL.

THE study of folk-lore has a twofold object—corresponding to two different views of the facts connoted by the term folk-lore. We may regard these as being especially indicative of the genius and temperament of a race, especially indicative because they are furnished by that portion of the race which is in closest contact with nature, and is most removed from the influence of that uniform system of culture which tends to equalise the educated classes of all civilised people. Again, we may feel more interest in the facts themselves than in the people by whom they are furnished; struck by their apparent evidence to a state of culture profoundly different from our own, we may essay to trace their growth, to determine their origin, and to lay bare the ideas of which they are the expression. As a rule, folk-lore students have aimed at this second object, perhaps as being more easily brought into line with the historical studies, the development of which has been such a marked feature of nineteenth-century science. As a natural consequence they have had to adopt the methods of research and criticism generally accepted among historical students, and have thereby laid themselves open to the charge of pedantry and formalism from those who maintain that the study of folk-lore should be directed solely by sympathetic comprehension of the feelings of living men. The folklorist, to whom

peasants or savages are of more interest than the superstitions by which their life is ruled or the legends by which it is cheered, is always ready to tax his brother student of the other school with securing, it may be, the bones and husks, but with missing the living power and charm of his subject.

At a comparative early stage of the study the searcher after facts as facts came to see the importance of getting them in the most genuine form obtainable. This, too, has been set down to his innate pedantry. And yet a moment's reflection shows that, important as a rigorous and accurate method is to him, it is yet more important to the student who values folk-lore as the expression of what is most essential and intimate in the consciousness of a race. If by its means we can indeed diagnose the spiritual and intellectual temper of mankind before it has been transformed and levelled by modern culture, is it not absolutely necessary that the diagnosis should be based upon ascertained fact? Yet, strange to say, men who profess the most enthusiastic sympathy for the "folk", are content to ground their enthusiasm upon material which has as much claim to be called folk-lore as the majority of circulating-library novels. Stranger still, this particular form of cant is always sure of outside countenance, and the writers are many to bewail as dreadful or shocking the desire for accurate knowledge of folk-lore, and the refusal to indulge in pretty but unmeaning generalities.

It is time to recognise that folk-lore cannot be studied piecemeal, that any attempt at making its phenomena the basis of far-reaching ethnological or sociological hypotheses, or at utilising them for the purposes of the philosopher or the artist, must be preceded by exact knowledge of these phenomena, of their origin as far as it can be determined, of their meaning as far as it can be explained. True it is, we must never forget that they are the outcome of human thought and fancy, that we must not treat them as lifeless specimens, but must strive to keep in touch with the organism to which they owe their being.

As regards Celtic "folk-psychology", to use a convenient German term, the existing materials are many, and I am far from denying that a useful as well as a most interesting work might be written by one who combined thorough knowledge of the Celt in past and present with equally thorough knowledge of comparative folk-lore, always provided the writer was fully conscious of the necessarily provisional nature of the work. But I regard the other branch of folk-lore study as by far the more important and pressing. To accurately set forth the belief and practices of the Celtic-speaking peoples, to trace their evolution, whether of form or significance, to connect them with what we know of the historic and prehistoric past of the race, this is a task to tax the energy of many scholars, a task, too, which it will soon be too late to accomplish, as many of the traditional links necessary to enable us to reconstruct the chain of testimony will have vanished with the present holders. If I have gladly availed myself of the offer made to me by Lord Archibald Campbell, and by the editors of this series, and have become their fellow-worker in the preservation of these waifs and strays of Celtic tradition, it is in the belief and hope that I am thereby furthering the achievement of that task.

To the student and lover of folk-lore, be his interest, his aims, what they may, volumes such as these, which present absolutely trustworthy material, are the first requisite. But, indeed, their interest is not confined to the folk-lorist. I venture to think that no lover of the speech and fancy of the Gael can afford to overlook these tales.

I had occasion, in the second volume of this series, to dwell at some length upon the relations between the legendary literature of modern Gaeldom and that oldest stratum of legend which is preserved in the Irish MSS., and which may be dated back to a period ranging from the 8th to the 15th century. I purpose adding but little upon the subject. Rather am I tempted, in view of certain opinions expressed by Mr. MacDougall in his notes, to discuss the original significance of much of this body of legend, and the methods of interpretation which he has preconised.

In several instances (*e.g.*, Notes, page 270) Mr. MacDougall applies the nature-myth theory to the Gaelic tales. Under the special form of the solar myth this system of interpretation was the dominant and orthodox one until a comparatively recent period. The great collections which form the basis of folk-lore research were animated by its spirit, as still is much of the doctrine which necessarily enters into these as into all historical investigations. It is worth while reviewing the fortunes of this theory, and examining the reasons of its present discredit.

In his recent work on the Arthurian legend. Prof. Rhys pathetically laments this discredit : “ The terms of the solar-myth theory are so convenient,” he says, “ and whatever may eventually happen to the theory, nothing has as yet been found exactly to take its place.” This is quite true. The solar-myth theory was an organic hypothesis which explained a vast number of facts, if once its premises were admitted, and which fitted in with the dominant conceptions, in ethnology and pre-historic archaeology. It has, indeed, owed its fall rather to the fact that these conceptions have varied than to its inherent weakness, or to the reaction begot by the extravagance with which its claims were urged. But as the changes in our knowledge of the past history of mankind have mostly been effected without reference to the studies of mythology and folk-lore, their effect upon these studies has never been set forth clearly, and no homogeneous theory has taken the place of the one they dispossessed. The consequences are doctrinal anarchy in both departments of study, and party grouping of scholars according to insignificant side-issues rather than according to well-defined general principles.

The modern study of folk-lore owes its origin to Jacob and William Grimm. Most valuable work, illustrative as well as theoretical, had indeed been done by such Frenchmen as Fontenelle, Des Brosses, and Dupuis, who so largely anticipated the methods and results of the modern anthropological school. But these were men of the eighteenth century, and they lacked that sympathy with the folk-mind, that romantic enthusiasm which enabled the Grimms to divine, to interpret, and to reveal the treasures of folk-fancy. It was, indeed, this enthusiasm which endeared the new study to the men of the Romantic revival, and it was but natural that the methods which approved themselves to the Grimms should commend themselves to their generation and to that which followed.

Briefly speaking, the Grimms may be said to have looked upon European folk-lore generally as the detritus of beliefs and imaginings common to all Aryan peoples, upon much of Teutonic folk-lore specially as the detritus of those beliefs and imaginings as they found expression in the Scandinavian mythological texts, which were held to be among the oldest and most authentic monuments of Teutonic myth and cult. In the fifty years which followed the first labours of the Grimms, the idea of the community of the Aryan peoples assumed definite shape ; it was regarded as beyond cavil that they had their origin in some district of Central Asia ; that they colonised Europe in successive swarms, the more westerly settlements representing the oldest strata of immigration ; and that in race, speech, religious belief and social practice, the Sanskrit-speaking peoples of India, to whom we owe the Vedic poems, represented as early a stage in Aryan evolution as any we know of.

Naturally, the ideas revealed by an examination of these Vedic poems were used to interpret other monuments of Aryan mythic belief ; naturally, the Vedic creed was treated as a standard to which other Aryan creeds were referred. That much both of Vedic and of other early forms of Aryan religion was legitimately explained by the solar-myth theory, is, I think, undoubted, and although many results were fallacious, yet, on the whole, the theory approved itself as a valuable instrument of investigation.

It will be seen that there was no necessary connection between the detritus theory of folk-lore and the solar interpretation of myths. But each was made to support the other, and a logical and coherent view of folk-lore was the result. The question of diffusion—the crux of the study at present—did not arise. The Aryans had once lived all together, and possessed a common fund of beliefs and practice ; the similarity in the folk-lore of the descendants of the primitive undivided Aryan race was but what might be expected. The interpretation valid for the myths in their pristine purity, was equally valid for them in their degenerated forms. The nursery-tale or jingle of to-day was the last echo of a god-myth or a priestly incantation, so that, to take an extreme instance, the four-and-twenty blackbirds baked in a pie became representatives of the hours made vocal by the incoming dawn.

But it soon became apparent that Aryan peoples (or, rather, those peoples assumed to be Aryans) had no monopoly of similarity in folk-lore, and as the special historical conditions which had been postulated in the case of the Aryans could obviously not have existed everywhere, the necessity was felt for a theory of wider scope. On the one hand, investigations into the beliefs and practices of existing savage races revealed a vast number of primitive ideas akin to those expressed in European folk-lore, and led to the hypothesis that the latter, so far from being the detritus of the great organised systems of antiquity, rather represented the protoplasm out of which those systems were themselves formed. On the other hand, the partisans of the diffusion theory, according to which the various

manifestations—religious, social, artistic—of man’s activity assume shape among a definite race, at a definite centre from which they radiate, applied this theory, with great satisfaction to themselves, to various classes of folk-lore, in particular to tales, ballads, and other examples of what may be called folk-literature. Meanwhile grave doubt had been thrown upon the Asiatic origin of the Aryans, as well as upon the existence of a pan-Aryan culture, and it was urged that in any case the Vedic poems represented a late rather than an early stage of such culture, and that the method of myth-interpretation based upon them was not valid in the case of older and less complex systems. The extreme lengths to which the nature-myth theory had been pushed likewise begot a legitimate reaction, and it was further discredited by the fact that it had been made dependent upon philological equations, of which advancing knowledge demonstrated the unsoundness in many cases. The “diffusionists” were at work here likewise. Hellenic myth was largely claimed as a loan from the older civilisations of the East ; Teutonic myth, at least as presented in the Scandinavian documents, as an artificial admixture of original paganism with classic and Christian conceptions.

Just as there was no logical connection between the nature-myth system and the detritus theory of folk-lore, yet they easily fell into their places as part of one whole, and yielded each other mutual support, so the assailing arguments and researches lent each other aid, though often based upon radically opposed principles. The coherent and shapely structure of 1815-70 had to be levelled and the ground cleared of its ruins, and this work of demolition was carried on both by those whose only quarrel was with gargoyle and weathercock, and by those who condemned the building from the ground-plan upwards. The task of reconstruction has hardly begun, nor have friends or foes fully learnt to recognise each other again.

I take it there is some truth in all these views of folk-lore, certainly far more than is supposed at present in the view which was still fashionable twenty years ago. Amongst the vast mass of facts roughly classed together under the one term folk-lore, some belong to the most primitive stage of man’s intellectual and social consciousness, the stage in which men belonging to different races and inhabiting different portions of the globe are still living. In the essential manifestations of consciousness, these men show a kinship as marked as any that obtains among the folk-lore products of civilised races, and unless it be held that the doctrines conveniently (whether correctly or not, I do not prejudge) termed animism—*i.e.*, the recognition of a life common to man, animals, and what we call inanimate life originated in a definite centre, and spread all over the world by transmission, I fail to see why the latter explanation should be postulated in the case of European folk-lore. Other items, again, of European folk-lore seem to me distinctly traceable to survivals of the ideas and practices embodied in the religious and social systems of antiquity, with this distinction, however, that the “folk”, the uneducated classes in direct contact with nature, held these ideas in a much ruder and simpler form than that in which they have been preserved to us by systematising thinkers or by creative artists, and that the existing folk-beliefs go back to the folk-beliefs of 2,000 years ago, rather than to the creeds and legends which have come down to us in literature. It is also, I think, self-evident that the folk-consciousness has been enriched by many and varied elements since the establishment of Christianity, and I am quite prepared to admit that many of these elements were introduced into Christendom from the Orient. I would, however, point out that all over Europe folk-conceptions and folk-practices are still, in many instances, not only different from, but strongly opposed to, the spirit and teachings of Christianity. That this latter, surely the most tremendous and penetrating influence to which European civilisation has been subjected, has shown itself powerless against so many older conceptions, and has only been able to nominally oust others by accepting a compromise all in their favour, is a testimony, the weight of which cannot be over-estimated, to the stubborn persistency with which the folk has clung to its theory of life. One hypothesis, I confess, I cannot take seriously that which pictures the popular mind as a *tabula rasa*, and as deriving all its ideas and fancies from the higher culture of the race, and by some mysterious process transmuting them into the likeness of beliefs and practices held all over the world by races in a primitive stage of development.

With regard to the nature-myth theory, without accepting the particular mode in which it was presented, *e.g.*, by Sir George Cox, I cannot see why the “anthropological” folk-lorist should quarrel with it. If one thing seems proved, it is the existence of nature-myths among savage races. Why should the mythopœic tendency or faculty be supposed to have died out among the folk whose conditions of life and thought are so akin to those of the savage ? Nor do I see why the special favour

accorded to certain types of story among the folk may not be accounted for by their mythical origin and pristine significance, by their having once formed part of the religious and philosophical equipment of the race. The fact of this special favour is beyond question, and is surely more difficult to explain if the stories be denied all connection with primitive conceptions of the universe than if the connection be admitted. I know it will be said that stories which cannot possibly claim such an origin as is here indicated, are equally widespread. But these are stories of real life, stories which as a rule appeal to the sense of humour. The nature of their appeal is intelligible, their popularity needs no sanction ; but why the universal delight in stories which cannot be true, and which are everywhere untrue in the same kind of way ?

The disfavour attaching to the nature-myth interpretation of early legends (whether related of gods or heroes) is, I think, unmerited. The particular form which it assumed in the first half of this century was faulty, but the principle itself is legitimate, and no one has a right to reject it on *a priori* grounds. But it is evident that to apply it successfully requires caution and a most searching preliminary investigation into the history of the legend as far as it can be traced. Again, the principle may be true indirectly, but false directly. The tale of Troy divine might be, as some have claimed, the record of the sun's strife with the elements ; but if the tale were told in Scotland, or elsewhere, as a simple story concerning men and women, and lived on in tradition, suffering changes in the course of time, it would be obviously illegitimate to attribute any mythological value to those changes. All that could justly be observed was that the tale found favour because it was cast in a traditional mould, because it conformed to the conventions of folk-fancy ; it could hardly be cited as exemplifying the mythical beliefs of Scotland.

Mr. MacDougall interprets stories belonging to the Finn-cycle as nature-myths. The question at once arises, Has the cycle its roots in that dim past of the Gaelic race when the mythopœic impulse was vigorously creative instead of being the mere survival it is now ? If so, and if other proof is forthcoming that the Gaels had a religion of the same kind as Greeks, Teutons, or Aryan Indians, a religion in which nature-myths certainly played some part, there is no inherent impossibility in stories having lived on from that past unto our own time, and preserved with substantial fidelity the outlines of the primitive myths. But it should at once be noted that whatever theory be accepted concerning the origin of the Finn-cycle, it is certain that many of the stories belonging to it assumed a shape, probably not very different from that under which they are still current, in a period extending from the early 9th to the 15th century, and that they were influenced by events which cannot be older than the 9th or 10th century, *i.e.* by the struggle between the Irish and the invading Norsemen. When studying the Finn or Ossianic legend in the second volume of this series I emphasised this, the secondary historical element in its development. As for the primary historical element, I assumed, in common with all previous investigation, and in accordance with the apparent meaning of the earliest Irish records, that it was furnished by the life and deeds of a third-century Irishman, Finn son of Cumhal. At the same time I expressed the opinion that the historical elements in the cycle were of little importance in comparison with the romantic ones. Since then the distinguished German scholar, Professor H. Zimmer, to whom Celtic studies owe a deep debt of gratitude for his unwearied labours, and for the acuteness and ingenuity with which he has analysed the Irish records, has propounded the theory that the historical Finn was no third-century Irishman but a ninth-century Ersified Norseman, and that the non-historical elements in the Finn-cycle are Norse rather than Celtic. I have sketched the outline of this theory in the *Academy* for Feb. 14 last. I will here only say briefly that many of the philological and historical arguments upon which Professor Zimmer relies have been challenged by such eminent Celtic scholars as Mr. Whitley Stokes, Professor Kuno Meyer, and M. d'Arbois de Jubainville. Be the new hypothesis well founded or not, it has comparatively little bearing upon the question whether it is allowable to interpret part of the Finn-cycle as nature-myths. The constitutive elements of an heroic saga may easily be much older than the personality of the chief hero, who simply succeeds to earlier attributes and adventures. Nor would the assumed Norse origin conflict with the possible mythic nature of the tales which crystallised round Finn ; the ninth-century Norsemen were still heathens, and there is no reason to doubt the existence of many nature-myths in their heathenism.

Thus before the nature-myth system of interpretation can be applied extensively to stories of the Finn-cycle, the date and primitive form of these stories must be determined as far as possible—they

must be examined to see if they belong originally to the cycle, or if they are recent additions—their possible historic basis must be carefully discriminated. Finally, the results must be checked by what we know from other sources of Gaelic religion and social organisation. In the absence of such preliminary criticism no small degree of uncertainty must accompany every effort to interpret Gaelic legend. Yet every effort, if made with insight and sympathy, is of value as deepening our knowledge of, and quickening our interest in, the legends themselves.

In his notes (p. 261) on the supernatural realm into which the heroes of Celtic saga penetrate in search of adventure, and from which they return laden with magic treasures, Mr. MacDougall touches upon and materially advances the comprehension of some very interesting questions. The whole series of early Gaelic conceptions concerning the Otherworld has been studied by Professor Zimmer in his admirable discussion of the Brendan legend. His conclusions may be summarised as follows : The earliest Gaelic Elysium lies across the western main in the land of the setting sun : “ fair is that land to all eternity beneath its snowfall of blossoms ... the gleaming walls are bright with many colours, the plains are vocal with joyous cries, mirth and song are at home on the plain, the silver-clouded one. No wailing there for judgment, nought but sweet song to be heard. No pain, no grief, no death, no discord. Such is the land.” [1] “ No death, no sin, no decay, but ever we feast, and need none to serve us, ever we love, and no strife ensues,” says the fairy maiden who lures away Condla. [2] When one of the princes of Faery would win the mortal Etain to be his love, he thus pictures his land and its inhabitants : “ A magic land, and full of song ; primrose is the hue of the hair, snow-white the fair bodies, joy in every eye, the colour of the foxglove in every cheek.” [3] Such is the account preserved to us of the happy dwelling-place of the older Gaelic gods. But when Christianity prevailed there was bound to be a change in the conception ; the gods lived on, but, cast down from their Olympus, they retreated into the hollow hills, and to this very day are still believed in by the Irish peasant. The oldest texts we have, although they may date back to the seventh century, already confuse the earlier conception of the western ocean island with that of the fairy realm within the hills, but the former lived on nevertheless, and is still potent in texts the composition of which is probably not older than the twelfth or thirteenth centuries.

I am by no means sure that Professor Zimmer is right—I will not say in his exposition of the facts — but in his interpretation of them ; by no means sure that the belief in *Elysium*, the Otherworld peopled by wiser, more powerful, and, on the whole, happier beings than men, as a land within the hollow hill is not as early as that which placed it at the westernmost verge of the ocean. Be this as it may, it is interesting to compare the growth of early Gaelic belief, as recovered by Professor Zimmer from texts which are pre-Christian in their essence, with the belief of the modern Gael after sixteen centuries of Christianity. That western paradise, which, according to the German scholar, is found degraded from its pristine state in texts which go back to the seventh century of our era,—that western paradise is still, according to Mr. MacDougall, “ the world of enchantment and wonder in the eyes of the living Highlander” (see notes, p. 262). It is still regarded as an island, “ the green isle at the bounds of the uttermost world,” it is still a land of everlasting summer, of meadows ever green, of fruit-trees ever laden. Heroes journey to it, travel through it, return from it, in just the same way as did the warrior of pre-Christian Gaeldom. The eschatology of Christianity, that feature of the new creed which more than any other was calculated to impress the rude and simple minds of the folk, has apparently been powerless to shake the delight with which the folk have listened to tales of the Otherworld, powerless to modify the essential nature of the conceptions concerning it.

Mr. MacDougall goes on to note (p. 263) that the Otherworld is not figured as the abode of the dead ; that is placed within the hollow hill. Have we here the mingling of two strains of belief due to two different races, the one launching its dead warriors to their resting-place upon the western sea, sending them to the gods who were pictured as dwelling in the green isle, the other burying its dead in great mounds, and associating with *these* all the ideas connected with the spirit-world ? Or did the pre-Christian inhabitants of these islands distinguish between the land of the supernatural beings to whom they paid worship, and that to which mankind at large went after death ? Or is Professor Zimmer right, and is the hollow hill belief a secondary one originated by the disturbing influence which Christianity exercised upon the Gaelic conception of the super-natural ? It may be, we can never answer these questions satisfactorily ; but if they are to be answered, note must be taken as well of the belief and fancy of the modern peasant as of the mediæval poet or chronicler.

Enough has been said, I trust, to exemplify not only the nature of the problem which the folklorist essays to solve, but also the special value of Gaelic testimony in his eyes. Apart from all minor and secondary points, there is but one issue involved in the study of folk-lore—are the phenomena with which it deals, in the main, phenomena of growth or phenomena of decay—are they remains of successive stages of culture through which every race and all members of the race have at one time or another passed, and in which the folk-masses have lived on—ay, and are still living, to a great extent whereas the educated classes have long since grown out of them ; or are they the remains of definite systems of cult, custom, and art special to particular races, and transmitted from them to their neighbours, systems which we mostly possess at first hand, and in a form far more perfect than that recoverable from the distorted fragments preserved by the folk ? Advocates of the second view hold, for instance, that all folk-tales come from India, or all cosmogonies from Babylonia, or all municipal and manorial organisation from Rome ; that the Celt was incapable of conceiving the idea of blood-brotherhood, or the Norseman that of a future world of punishment and reward. The mind of every race was apparently a blank before it became fertilised by contact with other races, and every considerable manifestation of human thought and practice would seem to have sprung into existence fully grown, as Athene from Zeus' head.

Celtic legend, Celtic custom, afford, perhaps, the best means obtainable for testing the worth of these rival theories. The field of investigation is not so large that it may not be surveyed with thoroughness, and the historical factors in the problem are comparatively simple. We can trace with approximate accuracy the story of Gaeldom, whether in Ireland or Scotland, from the fourth century onwards ; and the facts that the Gaels were largely isolated from the remainder of Europe by a more powerful and a hostile race ; that for most of this period all their energies were exhausted in the struggle for simple racial existence ; that, geographically and historically, Gaeldom represents a backwater, so to speak, in the main stream of European life—these facts have contributed to perpetuate with singular vividness the archaic ideas which underlie the civilisation of the past, the modes of expression which differentiate primitive from modern art.

So much for the import of Celtic folk-lore (using the word in its widest sense) to the student of man's past. May I claim that it is of equal import to the present-day Briton ? However much it may be regretted in certain quarters, the Celt is an abiding element in the imperial life of the British race. Upon hearty sympathy, upon cordial co-operation between the Celtic, the Teutonic, and what other elements there may be in the fabric of our civilisation, depends more than upon aught else the continued existence, stability, and growth of that fabric. But whereas to know other races we must chiefly turn to the higher minds of the race, to the individual thinkers and artists, to know the Celt we must familiarise ourselves with a vast body of anonymous and traditional legend which has at all times faithfully reflected folk-beliefs and folk-aspirations, and which can be neither understood nor appreciated without constant reference to a conception of life and nature, the very existence of which is unknown to most men of the educated classes.

It hardly needs to speak of the intrinsic beauty of Celtic legend, of its subtle and far-reaching influence upon our national literature and art. There are many of us who amongst the dust and press of modern life have heard the voice which Condlá, son of the King of Ireland, heard two thousand years ago, the voice of the fairy maiden inviting them to the magic realm of never-ending summer, of strifeless love. Alas ! less fortunate than Prince Condlá, we can sojourn there but for a while. But we have at least this consolation : we can bring back tidings of the fairness of that land, we can urge upon others to journey thither likewise, sure that in this we are serving the cause alike of science and of that fellow-sympathy which should knit together all the heirs of a common imperial tradition.

ALFRED NUTT.

[1] From the Voyage of Bran Mac Febail, which Professor Zimmer thinks may be ascribed to the seventh century in the form under which it has come down to us. This and other translations are from renderings of Professor Zimmer's literal German version.

[2] The Voyage of Condlá Ruad is as old as that of Bran Mac Febail.

[3] The Wooing of Etain belongs to the very oldest stratum of Irish legend.

I.

HOW FINN KEPT HIS CHILDREN FOR THE BIG YOUNG HERO OF THE SHIP, AND HOW BRAN WAS FOUND.

A DAY Finn and his men were in the Hunting-hill they killed a great number of deer ; and when they were wearied after the chase they sat down on a pleasant green knoll, at the back of the wind and at the face of the sun, where they could see everyone, and no one at all could see them.

While they were sitting in that place Finn lifted his eyes towards the sea, and saw a ship making straight for the haven beneath the spot on which they were sitting. When the ship came to land, a Big Young Hero leaped out of her on the shore, seized her by the bows (breast), and drew her up, her own seven lengths, on (the) green grass, where the eldest son (*Macan*), of neither land-owner, nor (of holder) of large town-land dared mock or gibe at her. Then he ascended the hillside, leaping over the hollows and slanting the knolls, till he reached the spot on which Finn and his men were sitting.

He saluted Finn frankly, energetically, fluently ; and Finn saluted him with the equivalent of the same words. Finn then asked him whence did he come, or what was he wanting? He answered Finn that he had come through night-watching and tempest of sea where he was ; because he was losing his children, and it had been told him that there was not a man in the world who could keep his children for him but him, Finn, King of the Feinne. And he said to Finn, “ I lay on thee, as crosses and spells and seven fairy fetters of travelling and straying to be with me before thou shalt eat food, or drink a draught, or close an eye in sleep.”

Having said this, he turned away from them and descended the hillside the way he ascended it. When he reached the ship he placed his shoulder against her bow, and put her out. He then leaped into her, and departed in the direction he came until they lost sight of him.

Finn was now under great heaviness of mind, because the vows had been laid on him, and he must fulfil them or travel onwards until he would die. He knew not whither he should go, or what he should do. But he left farewell with his men, and descended the hillside to the seaside. When he reached that he could not go farther on the way in which he saw the Big Young Hero depart. He therefore began to walk along the shore, but before he had gone very far forward, he saw a company of seven men coming to meet him.

When he reached the men he asked the first of them what was he good at ? The man answered that he was a good Carpenter. Finn asked him how good was he at Carpentry ? The man said that, with three strokes of his axe, he could make a large, capacious, complete ship of the alder stock over yonder. “ Thou art good enough,” said Finn ; “ thou mayest pass by.”

He then asked of the second man, what was he good at ? The man said that he was a good Tracker. “ How good art thou ?” said Finn. “ I can track the wild duck over the crests of the nine waves within nine days,” said the man. “ Thou art good enough,” said Finn ; “ thou mayest pass by.”

Then he said to the third man, “ What art thou good at ?” The man replied that he was a good Gripper.

“ How good art thou ?” “ The hold I (once) get I will not let go until my two arms come from my shoulders, or until my hold comes with me.” “ Thou art good enough ; thou mayest pass by.”

Then he said to the fourth man, “ What art thou good at ?” He answered that he was a good Climber. “ How good art thou ?” “ I can climb on a filament of silk to the stars, although thou wert to tie it there.” “ Thou art good enough ; thou mayest pass by.”

He then said to the fifth man, “ What art thou good at ?” He replied, that he was a good Thief.

“ How good art thou ?” “ I can steal the egg from the heron while her two eyes are looking at me.” “ Thou art good enough ; thou mayest pass by.”

He asked of the sixth man, “ What art thou good at ?” He answered, that he was a good Listener. “ How good art thou ?” He said that he could hear what people were saying at the extremity of the Uttermost World (*Domhan Tor*). “ Thou art good enough ; thou mayest pass by.”

Then he said to the seventh man, “ What art thou good at ?” He replied, that he was a good Marksman. “ How good art thou ?” “ I could hit an egg as far away in the sky as bowstring could send or bow could carry (an arrow).” “ Thou art good enough ; thou mayest pass by.”

All this gave Finn great encouragement. He turned round and said to the Carpenter, “ Prove thy skill.” The Carpenter went where the stock was, and struck it with his axe thrice ; and as he had said, the Ship was ready.

When Finn saw the Ship ready he ordered his men to put her out. They did that, and went on board of her.

Finn now ordered the Tracker to go to the bow and prove himself. At the same time he told him that yesterday a Big Young Hero left yonder haven in his ship, and that he wanted to follow the Hero to the place in which he now was. Finn himself went to steer the Ship, and they departed. The Tracker was telling him to keep her that way or to keep her this way. They sailed a long time forward without seeing land, but they kept on their course until the evening was approaching. In the gloaming they noticed that land was ahead of them, and they made straight for it. When they reached the shore they leaped to land, and drew up the Ship.

Then they noticed a large fine house in the glen above the beach. They took their way up to the house ; and when they were nearing it they saw the Big Young Hero coming to meet them. He ran and placed his two arms about Finn’s neck, and said, “ Darling of all men in the world, hast thou come ?” “ If I had been thy darling of all the men in the world, it is not as thou didst leave me that thou wouldst have left me,” said Finn. “ Oh, it was not without a way of coming I left thee,” said the Big Young Hero. “ Did I not send a company of seven men to meet thee ?”

When they reached the house, the Big Young Hero told Finn and his men to go in. They accepted the invitation, and found abundance of meat and drink.

After they had quenched their hunger and thirst, the Big Young Hero came in where they were, and said to Finn, “ Six years from this night, my wife was in child-bed, and a child was born to me. As soon as the child came into the world, a large Hand came in at the chimney, and took the child with it in the cap (or hollow) of the hand. Three years from this night the same thing happened. And to-night she is going to be in child-bed again. It was told me that thou wert the only man in the world who could keep my children for me, and now I have courage since I have found thee.”

Finn and his men were tired and sleepy. Finn said to the men that they were to stretch themselves on the floor, and that he was going to keep watch. They did as they were told, and he remained sitting beside the fire. At last sleep began to come on him ; but he had a bar of iron in the fire, and as often as his eyes would begin to close with sleep, he would thrust the bar through the bone of his palm, and that was keeping him awake. About midnight the woman was delivered ; and as soon as the child came into the world the Hand came in at the chimney. Finn called on the Gripper to get up.

The Gripper sprang quickly on his feet, and laid hold of the Hand. He gave a pull on the Hand, and took it in to the two eye-brows at the chimney.

The Hand gave a pull on the Gripper, and took him out to the top of his two shoulders. The Gripper gave another pull on the Hand, and brought it in to the neck. The Hand gave a pull on the Gripper, and brought him out to the very middle. The Gripper gave a pull on the Hand, and took it in over the two armpits. The Hand gave a pull on the Gripper, and took him out to the smalls of his two feet. Then the

Gripper gave a brave pull on the Hand, and it came out of the shoulder. And when it fell on the floor the pulling of seven geldings was in it. But the big Giant outside put in the other hand, and took the child with him in the cap of the hand.

They were all very sorry that they lost the child. But Finn said, "We will not yield to this yet. I and my men will go away after the Hand before a sun shall rise on a dwelling to-morrow."

At break of dawn, Finn and his men turned out, and reached the beach, where they had left the Ship.

They launched the Ship, and leaped on board of her. The Tracker went to the bow, and Finn went to steer her. They departed, and now and again the Tracker would cry to Finn to keep her in that direction, or to keep her in this direction. They sailed onward a long distance without seeing anything before them, except the great sea. At the going down of the sun, Finn noticed a black spot in the ocean ahead of them. He thought it too little for an island, and too large for a bird, but he made straight for it. In the darkening of the night they reached it ; and it was a rock, and a Castle thatched with eel-skins was on its top.

They landed on the rock. They looked about the Castle, but they saw neither window nor door at which they could get in. At last they noticed that it was on the roof the door was. They did not now know how they could get up, because the thatch was so slippery. But the Climber cried, "Let me over, and I will not be long in climbing it." He sprang quickly towards the Castle, and in an instant was on its roof. He looked in at the door, and after taking particular notice of everything that he saw, he descended where the rest were waiting.

Finn asked of him what did he see ? He said that he saw a Big Giant lying on a bed, a silk covering over him and a satin covering under him, and his hand stretched out and an infant asleep in the cap of the hand ; that he saw two boys on the floor playing with shinties of gold and a ball of silver ; and that there was a very large deer-hound bitch lying beside the fire, and two pups sucking her.

Then said Finn, "I do not know how we shall get them out." The Thief answered and said, "If I get in I will not be long putting them out." The Climber said, "Come on my back, and I will take thee up to the door." The Thief did as he was told, and got into the Castle.

Instantly he began to prove his skill. The first thing he put out was the child that was in the cap of the hand. He then put out the two boys who were playing on the floor. He then stole the silk covering that was over the Giant, and the satin covering that was under him, and put them out. Then he put out the shinties of gold and the ball of silver. He then stole the two pups that were sucking the bitch beside the fire. These were the most valuable things which he saw inside. He left the Giant asleep, and turned out.

They placed the things which the Thief stole in the Ship, and departed. They were but a short time sailing when the Listener stood up and said, "'Tis I who am hearing him, 'tis I who am listening to him !" "What art thou hearing ?" said Finn. "He has just awakened," said the Listener, "and missed everything that was stolen from him. He is in great wrath, sending away the Bitch, and saying to her if she will not go that he will go himself. But it is the Bitch that is going."

In a short time they looked behind them, and saw the Bitch coming swimming. She was cleaving the sea on each side of her in red sparks of fire. They were seized with fear, and said that they did not know what they should do. But Finn considered, and then told them to throw out one of the pups ; perhaps when she would see the pup drowning she would return with it. They threw out the pup, and, as Finn said, it happened : the Bitch returned with the pup. This left them at the time pleased.

But shortly after that the Listener arose trembling, and said : "'Tis I who am hearing him ; 'tis I who am listening to him !" "What art thou saying now ?" said Finn. "He is again sending away the Bitch, and since she will not go he is coming himself."

When they heard this their eye was always behind them. At last they saw him coming, and the great sea reached not beyond his haunches. They were seized with fear and great horror, for they knew not what they should do. But Finn thought of his knowledge-set of teeth, and having put his finger under it, found out that the Giant was immortal, except in a mole which was in the hollow of his palm. The Marksman then stood up and said : “ If I get one look of it I will have him.”

The Giant came walking forward through the sea to the side of the Ship. Then he lifted up his hand to seize the top of the mast, in order to sink the Ship. But when the Hand was on high the Marksman noticed the mole, and he let an arrow off in its direction. The arrow struck the Giant in the death-spot, and he fell dead on the sea.

They were now very happy, for there was nothing more before them to make them afraid. They put about, and sailed back to the Castle. The Thief stole the pup again, and they took it with them along with the one they had. After that they returned to the place of the Big Young Hero. When they reached the haven they leaped on land, and drew up the Ship on dry ground.

Then Finn went away with the family of the Big Young Hero and with everything which he and his men took out of the Castle to the fine house of the Big Young Hero.

The Big Young Hero met him coming, and when he saw his children he went on his two knees to Finn, and said : “ What now is thy reward ?” Finn answered and said, that he was asking nothing but his choice of the two pups which they took from the Castle. The Big Young Hero said that he would get that and a great deal more if he would ask it. But Finn wanted nothing except the pup. This pup was Bran, and his brother, that the Big Young Hero got, was the Grey Dog.

The Big Young Hero took Finn and his men into his house, and made for them a great, joyous, merry feast, which was kept up for a day and year, and if the last day was not the best, it was not the worst.

That is how Finn kept his children for the Big Young Hero of the Ship, and how Bran was found.

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