

Myths and Folklore of Ireland.

Jeremiah Curtin

1890

THE myth tales in the present volume were collected by me personally in the West of Ireland, in Kerry, Galway, and Donegal, during the year 1887.

All the tales in my collection, of which those printed in this volume form but a part, were taken down from the mouths of men who, with one or two exceptions, spoke only Gaelic, or but little English, and that imperfectly. These men belong to a group of persons, all of whom are well advanced in years, and some very old ; with them will pass away the majority of the story-tellers of Ireland, unless new interest in the ancient language and lore of the country is roused.

For years previous to my visit of 1887 I was not without hope of finding some myth tales in a good state of preservation. I was led to entertain this hope by indications in the few Irish stories already published, and by certain tales and beliefs that I had taken down myself from old Irish persons in the United States. Still, during the earlier part of my visit in Ireland I was greatly afraid that the best myth materials had perished. Inquiries as to who might be in possession of these old stories seemed fruitless for a considerable time. The persons whom I met that were capable of reading the Gaelic language had never collected stories, and could refer only in a general way to the districts in which the ancient language was still living. All that was left was to seek out the old people for whom Gaelic is the everyday speech, and trust to fortune to find the story-tellers.

Comforting myself with the old Russian proverb that “ game runs to meet the hunter,” I set out on my pilgrimage, giving more prominence to the study and investigation of Gaelic, which, though one of the two objects of my visit, was not the first. In this way I thought to come more surely upon men who had myth tales in their minds than if I went directly seeking for them. I was not disappointed, for in all my journeyings I did not meet a single person who knew a myth tale or an old story who was not fond of Gaelic and specially expert in the use of it ; while I found very few story-tellers from whom a myth tale could be obtained unless in the Gaelic language ; and in no case have I found a story in the possession of a man or woman who knew only English.

Any one who reads the myth tales contained in this volume will find that they are well preserved. At first thought it may seem quite wonderful that tales of this kind should be found in such condition while the whole body of tales are passing away so rapidly ; on examination, however, this will appear not only reasonable, but as the inevitable outcome of the political and social condition of the people.

There is no country in Europe so special in its conditions as Ireland, none in which hitherto there has been in some things a more resolute conservatism, coupled with such a frivolous surrender of the chief mental possession of the people, cherished during so many centuries of time,—a frivolous surrender of the possession which beyond all others distinguishes a nation ; for the character and mould of a nation’s thought are found in its language as nowhere else, and the position of a nation in the scale of humanity is determined irrevocably by its thought.

Owing to this conservatism of a part of the people, for which science should be grateful, there are still some myth tales left in Ireland, as well, if not better, preserved than any in the remotest corners of eastern and northern Europe.

Since all mental training in Ireland is directed by powers both foreign and hostile to everything Gaelic, the moment a man leaves the sphere of that class which uses Gaelic as an everyday language and which clings to the ancient ideas of the people, everything which he left behind seems to him valueless, senseless, and vulgar ; consequently he takes no care to retain it either in whole or in part. Hence the clean sweep of myth tales in one part of the country,—the greater part, occupied by a majority of the people ; while they are still preserved in other and remoter districts, inhabited by men who for the scholar and the student of mankind are by far the most interesting in Ireland.

Though in some countries of Europe the languages of the earlier inhabitants, and notably those of the Western Slavs, are forced into inferior political positions, no language has been treated with such cruelty and insult by its enemies and with such treasonable indifference by the majority of the people to whom it belongs as the Gaelic

In modern times no language of Aryan stock has been driven first from public use, and then dropped from the worship of God and the life of the fireside, but the Gaelic alone. On the European mainland myth tales continue to be told in the language of the country to which they belong,—the language in which they have been told for centuries ; and if these tales become blurred and less distinct, they become so in proportion as the conditions for their existence disappear : but they are not cut down as a forest is felled by the axe.

This, it seems to me, explains the peculiar condition of myth tales in Ireland, so well preserved where the Gaelic language is still living, and swept away completely where the language has perished.

A notable characteristic of Irish tales is the definiteness of names and places in a majority of them. In the Irish myths we are told who the characters are, what their condition of life is, and where they lived and acted ; the heroes and their fields of action are brought before us with as much definiteness as if they were persons of to-day or yesterday. This is a characteristic much less frequently met with in middle and eastern Europe. In the Magyar stories the usual formula is, “ Where there was or where there was not, there was in the world.”

Even the Russian stories, which are much more definite than the Magyar, and which have a good number of local myth-heroes, are less definite than the Gaelic. “ In a certain State in a certain kingdom there was, or there lived, there was a man,” is a very frequent formula ; and so on through all Europe. The actor is often unspecified, and the place unknown. If he goes anywhere, he simply travels across forty-nine kingdoms or beyond thrice nine lands. But in the Irish tales he is always a person of known condition in a specified place.

This is a very interesting characteristic ; since in all the mythologies which are intact, such as those of America, the myth is a story in which the characters are persons as definite as if they were actual neighbors of the people who tell the stories and listen to them. This alone would seem to prove that the Gaelic mythology, so far as it is preserved in Ireland, is better preserved than the mythology of any other European country.

A mythology in the time of its greatest vigor puts its imprint on the whole region to which it belongs ; the hills, rivers, mountains, plains, villages, trees, rocks, springs, and plants are all made sacred. The country of the mythology becomes, in the fullest sense of the word, a “ holy land.”

When by invasion and the superposition of strange races, by change of religion or other causes, myths are lost, or nothing retained save the argument, the statement of the myth, and that but in part, then all precision and details with reference to persons and places vanish, they become indefinite, are in some kingdom, some place,—nowhere in particular.

A myth tale may be considered a thing of value from three different points of view, and consequently for three different classes of readers. To one class it is valuable for its wonderful story and the way in which this story is told. So that a beautiful tale has a value for most men, irrespective of its scientific worth, and considered apart altogether from how well or ill the primitive character of its personages is preserved; just as a paragraph in a given language may be valuable to the general reader, irrespective of the form or philological value of its words.

To a second class of readers a tale is interesting for the social or antiquarian data which it preserves, or for purposes of comparison with tales of another race.

To a third, and very small class as yet, a tale is valuable for the myth material which it contains,—for the amount of its contribution to the history of the human mind.

The first class of readers will, it seems to me, accord a high value to Gaelic tales, and when a sufficient number of them is presented to the world, they will receive their proper rank among the myth tales of Europe.

The second class of readers will find a large amount of interesting material in Gaelic myth tales, and they will know how to find what they want without further comment.

To students of mythology, forming the third—the most restricted, but in the eye of science the most important—class of readers, some remarks concerning mythology, myth, and myth tale may not be out of place nor unwelcome.

First, as to the origin of the term “ mythology.”

There are two nouns in the Greek language which have a long and interesting history behind them ; these are *mythos* and *logos*. Originally they had the same power in ordinary speech ; for in Homer’s time they were used indifferently, sometimes one being taken, and sometimes the other, with the meaning that “ word” has in our language.

Strictly speaking, there was of course a difference from the very beginning, which, though slight enough to be disregarded in ordinary use, or by poets, was sure to be developed in proportion as men felt the need of making precise distinctions.

Logos grew to mean the inward constitution as well as the outward form of thought, and consequently became the expression of exact thought,—which is exact because it corresponds to universal and unchanging principles,—and reached its highest exaltation in becoming not only the reason in man, but the reason in the universe,—the Divine *Logos*, the thought of God, the Son of God, God himself. Thus we have in the Gospel of Saint John, “ In the beginning was the Word (*logos*), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

Mythos meant, in the widest sense, everything uttered by the mouth of man,—a word, an account of something, a story as understood by the narrator.

In Attic Greek *mythos* signified a prehistoric story of the Greeks ; with Aristotle it was the plot of a tragedy,—which is the Attic meaning with a narrower application ; for the tragedies were all taken from the prehistoric stories of Greece, and the prehistoric stories of Greece were narratives of divinities and heroes,—that is, forces and principles of Nature ; though this was not known to the Greeks of that time.

When *mythos* received its most definite as well as its most important application as a story of prehistoric Greece, its fate was settled ; for these stories, on account of being understood neither in their origin nor true character, fell into discredit among the Greeks themselves before the Christian era. After the Christian era they found a lower deep still: they were not only fables, but wicked and harmful fables,—the lies and absurdities of a false religion.

Logos and *mythos*, two words with such a long history, words starting with the same value, but reaching results diametrically opposite,—one becoming during its career the reason of the universe, everything ; the other, a fiction, nothing,—gave us the term “ mythology,” which, analyzed in dictionary fashion, means, “ an account of myths, a body of myths,” or, as some define it, “ the science of myths.” But no man, I think, who knows the present vagueness of opinion as to the origin and nature of myths would venture to call mythology a science. It will undoubtedly become a science, but it is not a science yet, and cannot be till we are in a position to give a scientific statement of what myths are.

The application of the word “ myth” among scholars is plain enough up to a certain point ; for from being a myth of Greece only, it is now used to mean a myth of any tribe or people on earth. So far there is no misunderstanding ; but then we have not gone very far. When we ask what is the nature and origin of the story to which the name “ myth” is given, different and contradictory answers are re-

turned. Hence the perplexity of those who take an interest in mythology, and believe that it contains something of value, without knowing precisely in what that value consists.

The result is that mythology, considered as a whole, is supposed in a certain rough kind of way to be a species of codification of the errors of primitive men, out of which, by some method as yet unexplained, curious and interesting conclusions are to be drawn.

The word "myth," taken apart from mythology and used in the ordinary language of the day, means "non-existent." A myth is a nothing with a name. For instance, if a man is said to be possessed of wealth, and is really without a dollar, it is said that his wealth is a myth; in other words, his wealth is non-wealth, nothing, a myth. Some months ago the newspapers contained an account of a marvelous cradle of mother-of-pearl and gold, owned by the wife of a railroad millionaire. A few days later it was stated that this cradle was a myth, for the wife of the millionaire rocked her baby in a wicker basket. This last illustration is an excellent one; the popular idea being that a myth is a nonentity of which an entity is affirmed, a nothing which is said to be something.

Let us examine, not the scientific definition of a myth, for we have none such to examine, but a couple of myth theories put forward by two men in England, each a leader in his own sphere,—Professor Max Müller and Herbert Spencer.

The first of these theories, which might be called "the theory of oblivion," though it is usually called "the linguistic theory," is founded on the hypothesis that men did not and could not make myths till they had forgotten who the chief actors in these myths were; that myth-makers only began to work when they had no means of knowing what they were really working with, or with whom they had to deal in making their stories; Müller's dictum being: It is the essential character of a true myth that it should no longer be intelligible by reference to spoken language.

According to this theory the origin of myths is to be sought in what is called "a disease of language." Now Professor Max Müller's disease of language is merely an incident in the history of mythology, not the great central and germinal principle which he makes it. Neither from Max Müller's theory of oblivion nor Herbert Spencer's theory of confusion can a definition be obtained which would apply to the myths of America, nor to the great body of myths of India and Persia, nor, for that matter, to any body of myths on earth.

If we examine closely these two theories, we shall find that they owe their origin to the overpowering influence of the previous pursuits of the two men, and the scant and faulty materials at their command. Max Müller, when he published his essays on mythology, was fresh from the occupation of comparing portions of the Aryan languages with each other, especially Sanscrit and Greek. When he found, or fancied he found, certain names of Greek mythology in Sanscrit, some of which were meaningless names in Greek, but significant in Sanscrit, he thought he had discovered the origin of myths, which he found in the misinterpretation of names whose meanings were really forgotten, but whose forms misled men into identifying them with names whose meanings were known, but altogether different from the forgotten meanings for which they were now substituted.

Mythology, according to his theory, is an outgrowth of error founded on mistaken identity of names; and the explanation of mythology follows on the discovery of the real meaning of those names by the aid of kindred languages in which their meanings are preserved.

Some stories connected with mythology have arisen in the way mentioned, and such stories cannot be explained, if explained at all, without the aid of kindred languages; but these stories no more constitute mythology than the bayous and creeks of the Amazon constitute the main body of that great river. Even if all that Professor Max Müller advances regarding Greek and Sanscrit names were demonstrated beyond a doubt, it would explain, not the origin of myths, but the origin of the particular stories with which he connects these names; for he has put in the place of mythology as a whole, the outcroppings of a part of mythology at a comparatively late period of its history, and has not touched the real origin of mythology, which, at the time he fixes for its birth, had already attained a most vigorous growth.

Herbert Spencer's theory of confusion is founded on the hypothesis that myths owe their origin to a confusion in the minds of primitive people, who worship their own earthly and natural ancestors under the guise of beasts, birds, reptiles, and plants, these ancestors when alive having received the names of beasts, birds, reptiles, and plants because they resembled them in some way, and after being dead two or three generations were confounded by their descendants with the creatures or plants after which they were named. So the people who began by worshipping the ghosts of ordinary human beings, their own fathers, fell to worshipping wild beasts, snakes, birds, and insects, from which they thought themselves descended by the ordinary process of fleshly generation. To fill out the whole list, men, if their ancestors came from the East, were descended from the sun ; if from a mountain, the mountain was their ancestor ; if from beyond the sea, they were descended from the sea.

This theory is discussed with as much seriousness as if it had foundation or proof in the world, as if it had ascertained facts on which to rest ; and on the basis of this theory it is shown that the ghost of a savage chief grows, through accretions of respect and awe, to be an ethnic god of incalculable power.

Now, what is a myth ?

The oldest myth, or rather cycle of myths, in America is that which refers to an order of things which preceded the present order, and a race of beings who inhabited the earth and the country beyond the sky before man existed. At that period the earth—a sort of featureless region, without the characteristic marks which it now possesses, though not infrequently it is represented as having at least some of them—was occupied by personages who are called people, though it is well understood at all times that they were not human ; they were persons, individuals. These people had great power : whatever they wished for they had ; all they needed was to name a thing, and it was there before them ; they knew in their own minds when any one was thinking about them, and what that one thought ; they knew of the approach of people without seeing them, and knew why they were coming. After they had lived on an indefinite period, they appear as a vast number of groups, which form two camps, which may be called the good and the bad. In the good camp are the persons who originate all the different kinds of food, establish all institutions, arts, games, amusements, dances, and religious ceremonies for the coming race.

In the other camp are cunning, deceitful beings, ferocious and hungry man-eaters,—the harmful powers of every description. The heroes of the good camp overcome these one after another by stratagem, superior skill, swiftness, or the use of the all-powerful wish ; but they are immortal, and, though overcome, cannot be destroyed. At the moment when the contest is decided, the victor says to the conquered : “ You will be nothing hereafter but a—” and here he mentions the beast, bird, insect, plant, rock, or element into which his opponent is to be changed. But though the word has been uttered which nothing in the universe can turn aside or resist, the conquered uses in some cases his equally effective word ; he turns at once to use it for the last time, and says to the victor : “Henceforth you'll be nothing but a—” and here he tells the conqueror what he is to be.

These struggles are described variously in different American mythologies, but the results are similar in all.

When the present race of men (that is, Indians) appear on the scene, the people of the previous order of affairs have vanished. One division, vast in number, a part of the good and all the bad ones, have become the beasts, birds, fishes, reptiles, insects, plants, stones, cold, heat, light, darkness, fire, rain, snow, earthquake, sun, moon, stars,—have become, in fact, every living thing, object, agency, phenomenon, process, and power outside of man. Another party much smaller in number, who succeeded in avoiding entanglement in the struggle of preparing the world for man, left the earth. According to some myths they went beyond the sky to the upper land ; according to others they sailed in boats over the ocean to the West,—sailed till they went out beyond the setting sun, beyond the line where the sky touches the earth. There they are living now free from pain, disease, and death, which came into the world just before they left, but before the coming of man and through the agency of this first people.

The final voyage over the ocean of that remnant of the elemental people, the gods of America, is described with considerable detail in some myths. It is on the eve of man's appearance. The smoke that preceded his coming was rising from the ground and curling up the hillsides ; the distant shout of his approach was heard as the boats moved quickly to the West.

This earliest American myth-cycle really describes a period in the beginning of which all things—and there was no thing then which was not a person—lived in company without danger to each other or trouble. This was the period of primæval innocence, of which we hear so many echoes in tradition and early literature, when that infinite variety of character and quality now manifest in the universe was still dormant and hidden, practically uncreated. This was the “ golden age” of so many mythologies,—the “ golden age” dreamed of so often, but never seen by mortal man ; a period when, in their original form and power, the panther and the deer, the wolf and the antelope, lay down together, when the rattlesnake was as harmless as the rabbit, when trees could talk and flowers sing, when both could move as nimbly as the swiftest on earth.

Such, in a sketch exceedingly meagre and imperfect, a hint rather than a sketch, is the first great cycle of American mythology,—the creation-myth of the New World. From this cycle are borrowed the characters and machinery for myths of later construction and stories of inferior importance ; myths relating to the action of all observed forces and phenomena ; struggles of the seasons, winds, light and darkness ; and stories in great number containing adventures without end of the present animals, birds, reptiles, and insects,—people of the former world in their fallen state.

Some of these stories contain a certain amount of what might be termed broken myth material, while others correspond exactly to the amusing or satirical fables of literature in which beasts, birds, and plants take the place of men.

To whatever race they may belong, the earliest myths, whether of ancient record or recent collection, point with unerring indication to the same source as those of America, for the one reason that there is no other source. The personages of any given body of myths are such manifestations of force in the world around them, or the result of such manifestations, as the ancient myth-makers observed ; and whether they went backwards or forwards, these were the only personages possible to them, because they were the only personages accessible to their senses or conceivable to their minds.

The primitive myth-makers, therefore, had no choice but to take that crowd of what to them were independent and unconnected forces, each being an individual person having its spring of action within itself, as the personages of their stories, in which were told the tale of all things.

Since they had passions varying like those of men, the myth-makers narrate the origin of these passions, and carried their personages back to a period of peaceful and innocent chaos, when there was no motive as yet in existence. After awhile the shock came. The motive appeared in the form of revenge for acts done through cupidity or ignorance ; strife began, and never left the world of the gods till one quota of them was turned into animals, plants, heavenly bodies, everything in the universe, and the other went away unchanged to a place of happy enjoyment.

All myths have the same origin, and all run parallel up to a certain point, which may be taken as the point to which the least-developed people have risen. After this the number in the company decreases till the Aryan mythology in its highest development stands alone, containing myths and myth-conceptions of the loftiest and purest character connected with religions of Europe and Asia.

It is to the explanation of the Aryan mythology that we are to turn our efforts, and in explaining it, create a science. In this work there is no mythology that will not bear its part, for the highest forms of Aryan myth-thought have beginnings as simple as those of the lowliest race on earth. These Aryan beginnings are partly preserved, partly blurred, and partly lost ; but we may come to see in various degrees, from absolute accuracy to different kinds of approximation, what the lost and blurred beginnings were, and we shall continue to find this aid till we have parted company with the last of the non-Aryan myths.

Gaelic mythology contains many myth facts which have perished elsewhere. The Gaelic language shows that the Kelts left the home of the Aryan race at a period far anterior to any of the other migrations.

The present of the verb “to be” and the pronouns would suffice to prove this without reference to the body of the language, which even in present use preserves through its whole structure remarkable traces of antiquity in that freedom of arranging word-elements which is common to all languages at an early period of growth, but which in the other forms of Aryan speech has disappeared, though still common in so many non-Aryan languages. There is not in the oldest books of Persia and India, nor in any Aryan language, dead or alive, except Gaelic, a single instance of the substantive verb with the predicate between that part which is called the root and the pronominal particle.

The Gaelic speaker of to-day, if he wishes to say “I am a man,” says, “Is fear me ;” where, if he followed the usage of other Aryan languages, he would say, “Fear isme.” The Sanscrit speaker in the earliest literary period had to say “Nri asmi.” There was a time when in Sanscrit it was proper to put the predicate between the two parts of the verb, as it is yet in Gaelic, and say “As nri mi,” instead of “Nri asmi ;” assuming, of course, that these were the correct forms of that early period.

It cannot well be less than three, and in all likelihood it is nearer four than three, thousand years since Sanscrit and all other Aryan languages, except those of the Keltic migration, lost this ancient freedom of verbal arrangement.

Gaelic mythology, removed from the home of the race before this very important linguistic change, shows survivals of that ancient time which will throw light on many myths, and aid in connecting non-Aryan with Aryan mythology ; thus rendering a service which we should look for in vain elsewhere.

The reason is of ancient date why myths have come, in vulgar estimation, to be synonymous with lies ; though true myths—and there are many such—are the most comprehensive and splendid statements of truth known to man.

A myth, even when it contains a universal principle, expresses it in a special form, using with its peculiar personages the language and accessories of a particular people, time, and place ; persons to whom this particular people, with the connected accidents of time and place, are familiar and dear, receive the highest enjoyment from the myth, and the truth goes with it as the soul with the body. But another people, to whom all things connected with this myth are unknown and incredible, regard it as absurd and untrue,—that is, if they consider it at all. This people, however, have a myth of the same character, and perhaps containing the same principle, as that expressed in the first myth, and they are as much attached to it as the first people are to theirs. This phenomenon is repeated all over the world. And for each people in a certain state of development the myths and beliefs of their neighbors are untrue, because the personages and actions in them are not identical with their own, though expressing in most cases identical things in a different way.

It is only when we come to examine them in the light of the general principle which they contain, each in its own special form, that myths reveal the truth that is in them. When thus treated they become an object of vast interest, and a source of unceasing delight to the mind.

The time, perhaps, may not be so distant when, on the basis of correct information, the erroneous opinions on myths and mythology now held by most men will be reversed,—a thing quite possible in this America of ours, where the printed word is so far reaching and so strong.

Jeremiah Curtin.

Hoopa Valley, Humboldt County,
California, 1889.

The Fisherman's son and the Gruagach of Tricks.

THERE was an old fisherman once in Erin who had a wife and one son.

The old fisherman used to go about with a fishing-rod and tackle to the rivers and lochs and every place where fish resort, and he was killing salmon and other fish to keep the life in himself and his wife and son.

The son was not so keen nor so wise as another, and the father was instructing him every day in fishing, so that if himself should be taken from the world, the son would be able to support the old mother and get his own living.

One day when the father and son were fishing in a river near the sea, they looked out over the water and saw a small dark speck on the waves. It grew larger and larger, till they saw a boat, and when the boat drew near they saw a man sitting in the stern of it.

There was a nice beach near the place where they were fishing. The man brought the boat straight to the beach, and stepping out drew it up on the sand.

They saw then that the stranger was a man of high degree (*duine uasal*).

After he had put the boat high on the sand, he came to where the two were at work, and said : " Old fisherman, you'd better let this son of yours with me for a year and a day, and I will make a very wise man of him. I am the Gruagach na g-cleasan [1] (Gruagach of tricks), and I'll bind myself to be here with your son this day year."

" I can't let him go," said the old fisherman, " till he gets his mother's advice."

" Whatever goes as far as women I'll have nothing to do with," said the Gruagach. "You had better give him to me now, and let the mother alone."

They talked till at last the fisherman promised to let his son go for the year and a day. Then the Gruagach gave his word to have the boy there at the seashore that day year.

The Gruagach and the boy went into the boat and sailed away.

When the year and a day were over, the old fisherman went to the same place where he had parted with his son and the Gruagach, and stood looking over the sea, thinking would he see his son that day.

At last he saw a black spot on the water, then a boat. When it was near he saw two men sitting in the stern of the boat. When it touched land, the two, who were *duine uasal* in appearance, jumped out, and one of them pulled the boat to the top of the strand. Then that one, followed by the other, came to where the old fisherman was waiting, and asked : " What trouble is on you now, my good man ?"

" I had a son that wasn't so keen nor so wise as another, and myself and this son were here fishing, and a stranger came, like yourself to-day, and asked would I let my son with him for a year and a day. I let the son go, and the man promised to be here with him to-day, and that's why I am waiting at this place now."

" Well," said the Gruagach, "am I your son ?"

" You are not," said the fisherman.

" Is this man here your son ?"

" I don't know him," said the fisherman.

“ Well, then, he is all you will have in place of your son,” said the Gruagach.

The old man looked again, and knew his son. He caught hold of him and welcomed him home.

“ Now,” said the Gruagach, “ isn’t he a better man than he was a year ago ?”

“ Oh, he’s nearly a smart man now !” said the old fisherman.

“ Well,” said the Gruagach, “ will you let him with me for another year and a day ?”

“ I will not,” said the old man ; “ I want him myself.”

The Gruagach then begged and craved till the fisherman promised to let the son with him for a year and a day again. But the old man forgot to take his word of the Gruagach to bring back the son at the end of the time ; and when the Gruagach and the boy were in the boat, and had pushed out to sea, the Gruagach shouted to the old man : “ I kept my promise to bring back your son today. I haven’t given you my word at all now. I’ll not bring him back, and you’ll never see him again.”

The fisherman went home with a heavy and sorrowful heart, and the old woman scolded him all that night till next morning for letting her son go with the Gruagach a second time.

Then himself and the old woman were lamenting a quarter of a year ; and when another quarter had passed, he said to her : “ I’ll leave you here now, and I’ll be walking on myself till I wear my legs off up to my knees, and from my knees to my waist, till I find where is my son.”

So away went the old man walking, and he used to spend but one night in a house, and not two nights in any house, till his feet were all in blisters. One evening late he came to a hut where there was an old woman sitting at a fire.

“ Poor man !” said she, when she laid eyes on him, “ it’s a great distress you are in, to be so disfigured with wounds and sores. What is the trouble that’s on you ?”

“ I had a son,” said the old man, “and the Gruagach na g-cleasan came on a day and took him from me.”

“ Oh, poor man !” said she. “ I have a son with that same Gruagach these twelve years, and I have never been able to get him back or get sight of him, and I’m in dread you’ll not be able to get your son either. But to-morrow, in the morning, I’ll tell you all I know, and show you the road you must go to find the house of the Gruagach na g-cleasan.”

Next morning she showed the old fisherman the road. He was to come to the place by evening.

When he came and entered the house, the Gruagach shook hands with him, and said : “ You are welcome, old fisherman. It was I that put this journey on you, and made you come here looking for your son.”

“ It was no one else but you,” said the fisherman.

“ Well,” said the Gruagach, “ you won’t see your son to-day. At noon to-morrow I’ll put a whistle in my mouth and call together all the birds in my place, and they’ll come. Among others will be twelve doves. I’ll put my hand in my pocket, this way, and take out wheat and throw it before them on the ground. The doves will eat the wheat, and you must pick your son out of the twelve. If you find him, you’ll have him ; if you don’t, you’ll never get him again.”

After the Gruagach had said these words the old man ate his supper and went to bed.

In the dead of night the old fisherman’s son came. “ Oh, father !” said he, “ it would be hard for you to pick me out among the twelve doves, if you had to do it alone ; but I’ll tell you. When the

Gruagach calls us in, and we go to pick up the wheat, I'll make a ring around the others, walking for myself ; and as I go I'll give some of them a tip of my bill, and I'll lift my wings when I'm striking them. There was a spot under one of my arms when I left home, and you'll see that spot under my wing when I raise it to-morrow. Don't miss the bird that I'll be, and don't let your eyes off it ; if you do, you'll lose me forever."

Next morning the old man rose, had his breakfast, and kept thinking of what his son had told him.

At midday the Gruagach took his whistle and blew. Birds came to him from every part, and among others the twelve doves.

He took wheat from his pocket, threw it to the doves, and said to the father : " Now pick out your son from the twelve."

The old man was watching, and soon he saw one of the doves walking around the other eleven and hitting some of them a clip of its bill, and then it raised its wings, and the old man saw the spot. The bird let its wings down again, and went to eating with the rest.

The father never let his eyes off the bird. After a while he said to the Gruagach : " I'll have that bird there for my son."

" Well," said the Gruagach, " that is your son. I can't blame you for having him ; but I blame your instructor for the information he gave you, and I give him my curse."

So the old fisherman got his son back in his proper shape, and away they went, father and son, from the house of the Gruagach. The old man felt stronger now, and they never stopped travelling a day till they came home.

The old mother was very glad to see her son, and see him such a wise, smart man.

After coming home they had no means but the fishing ; they were as poor as ever before.

At this time it was given out at every crossroad in Erin, and in all public places in the kingdom, that there were to be great horse-races. Now, when the day came, the old fisherman's son said :

" Come away with me, father, to the races."

The old man went with him, and when they were near the race-course, the son said : " Stop here till I tell you this : I'll make myself into the best horse that's here today, and do you take me to the place where the races are to be, and when you take me in, I'll open my mouth, trying to kill and eat every man that'll be near me, I'll have such life and swiftness ; and do you find a rider for me that'll ride me, and don't let me go till the other horses are far ahead on the course. Then let me go. I'll come up to them, and I'll run ahead of them and win the race. After that every rich man there will want to buy me of you ; but don't you sell me to any man for less than five hundred pounds ; and be sure you get that price for me. And when you have the gold, and you are giving me up, take the bit out of my mouth, and don't sell the bridle for any money. Then come to this spot, shake the bridle, and I'll be here in my own form before you."

The son made himself a horse, and the old fisherman took him to the race. He reared and snorted, trying to take the head off every man that came near him.

The old man shouted for a rider. A rider came ; he mounted the horse and held him in. The old man didn't let him start till the other horses were well ahead on the course ; then he let him go.

The new horse caught up with the others and shot past them. So they had not gone half way when he was in at the winning-post.

When the race was ended, there was a great noise over the strange horse. Men crowded around the old fisherman from every corner of the field, asking what would he take for the horse.

“ Five hundred pounds,” said he.

“ Here ’t is for you,” said the next man to him.

In a moment the horse was sold, and the money in the old man’s pocket. Then he pulled the bridle off the horse’s head, and made his way out of the place as fast as ever he could.

It was not long till he was at the spot where the son had told him what to do. The minute he came, he shook the bridle, and the son was there before him in his own shape and features.

Oh, but the old fisherman was glad when he had his son with him again, and the money in his pocket !

The two went home together. They had money enough now to live, and quit the fishing. They had plenty to eat and drink, and they spent their lives in ease and comfort till the next year, when it was given out at all the cross-roads in Erin, and every public place in the kingdom, that there was to be a great hunting with hounds, in the same place where the races had been the year before.

When the day came, the fisherman’s son said : “ Come, father, let us go away to this hunting.”

“ Ah !” said the old man, “ what do we want to go for ? Haven’t we plenty to eat at home, with money enough and to spare ? What do we care for hunting with hounds ?”

“ Oh ! they’ll give us more money,” said the son, “ if we go.”

The fisherman listened to his son, and away they went. When the two came to the spot where the son had made a horse of himself the year before, he stopped, and said to the father : “ I’ll make a hound of myself to-day, and when you bring me in sight of the game, you’ll see me wild with jumping and trying to get away ; but do you hold me fast till the right time comes, then let go. I’ll sweep ahead of every hound in the field, catch the game, and win the prize for you.

“ When the hunt is over, so many men will come to buy me that they’ll put you in a maze ; but be sure you get three hundred pounds for me, and when you have the money, and are giving me up, don’t forget to keep my rope. Come to this place, shake the rope, and I’ll be here before you, as I am now. If you don’t keep the rope, you’ll go home without me.”

The son made a hound of himself, and the old father took him to the hunting-ground.

When the hunt began, the hound was springing and jumping like mad ; but the father held him till the others were far out in the field. Then he let him loose, and away went the son.

Soon he was up with the pack, then in front of the pack, and never stopped till he caught the game and won the prize.

When the hunt was over, and the dogs and game brought in, all the people crowded around the old fisherman, saying : “ What do you want of that hound ? Better sell him ; he’s no good to you.”

They put the old man in a maze, there were so many of them, and they pressed him so hard.

He said at last : “ I’ll sell the hound ; and three hundred pounds is the price I want for him.”

“ Here ’t is for you,” said a stranger, putting the money into his hand.

The old man took the money and gave up the dog, without taking off the rope. He forgot his son’s warning.

That minute the Gruagach na g-cleasan called out : “ I’ll take the worth of my money out of your son now ;” and away he went with the hound.

The old man walked home alone that night, and it is a heavy heart he had in him when he came to the old woman without the son. And the two were lamenting their lot till morning.

Still and all, they were better off than the first time they lost their son, as they had plenty of every-thing, and could live at their ease.

The Gruagach went away home, and put the fisherman’s son in a cave of concealment that he had, bound him hand and foot, and tied hard knots on his neck up to the chin. From above there fell on him drops of poison, and every drop that fell went from the skin to the flesh, from the flesh to the bone, from the bone to the marrow, and he sat there under the poison drops, without meat, drink, or rest.

In the Gruagach’s house was a servant-maid, and the fisherman’s son had been kind to her the time he was in the place before.

On a day when the Gruagach and his eleven sons were out hunting, the maid was going with a tub of dirty water to throw it into the river that ran by the side of the house. She went through the cave of concealment where the fisherman’s son was bound, and he asked of her the wetting of his mouth from the tub.

“ Oh ! the Gruagach would take the life of me,” said she, “ when he comes home, if I gave you as much as one drop.”

“ Well,” said he, “ when I was in this house before, and when I had power in my hands, it’s good and kind I was to you ; and when I get out of this confinement I’ll do you a turn, if you give me the wetting of my mouth now.”

The maid put the tub near his lips.

“ Oh ! I can’t stoop to drink unless you untie one knot from my throat,” said he.

Then she put the tub down, stooped to him, and loosed one knot from his throat. When she loosed the one knot he made an eel of himself, and dropped into the tub. There he began shaking the water, till he put some of it on the ground, and when he had the place about him wet, he sprang from the tub, and slipped along out under the door. The maid caught him; but could not hold him, he was so slippery. He made his way from the door to the river, which ran near the side of the house.

When the Gruagach na g-cleasan came home in the evening with his eleven sons, they went to take a look at the fisherman’s son ; but he was not to be seen.

Then the Gruagach called the maid, and taking his sword, said : “ I’ll take the head off you if you don’t tell me this minute what happened while I was gone.”

“ Oh !” said the maid, “ he begged so hard for a drop of dirty water to wet his mouth that I hadn’t the heart to refuse, for ’t is good he was to me and kind each time he saw me when he was here in the house before. When the water touched his mouth, he made an eel of himself, spilled water out of the tub, and slipped along over the wet place to the river outside. I caught him to bring him back, but I couldn’t hold him ; in spite of all I could do, he made away.”

The Gruagach dropped his sword, and went to the water side with his sons.

The sons made eleven eels of themselves, and the Gruagach their father was the twelfth. They went around in the water, searching in every place, and there was not a stone in the river that they passed without looking under and around it for the old fisherman’s son.

And when he knew that they were after him, he made himself into a salmon ; and when they knew he was a salmon, the sons made eleven otters of themselves, and the Gruagach made himself the twelfth.

When the fisherman's son found that twelve otters were after him, he was weak with hunger, and when they had come near, he made himself a whale. But the eleven brothers and their father made twelve cannon whales of themselves, for they had all gone out of the river, and were in the sea now.

When they were coming near him, the fisherman's son was weak from pursuit and hunger, so he jumped up out of the water, and made a swallow of himself ; but the Gruagach and his sons became twelve hawks, and chased the swallow through the air ; and as they whirled round and darted, they pressed him hard, till all of them came near the castle of the king of Erin.

Now the king had made a summer-house for his daughter; and where should she be at this time but sitting on the top of the summer-house.

The old fisherman's son dropped down till he was near her ; then he fell into her lap in the form of a ring. The daughter of the king of Erin took up the ring, looked at it, and put it on her finger. The ring took her fancy, and she was glad.

When the Gruagach and his sons saw this, they let themselves down at the king's castle, having the form of the finest men that could be seen in the kingdom.

When the king's daughter had the ring on her finger she looked at it and liked it. Then the ring spoke, and said : " My life is in your hands now ; don't part from the ring, and don't let it go to any man, and you'll give me a long life."

The Gruagach na g-cleasan and his eleven sons went into the king's castle and played on every instrument known to man, and they showed every sport that could be shown before a king. This they did for three days and three nights. When that time was over, and they were going away, the king spoke up and asked:

" What is the reward that you would like, and. what would be pleasing to you from me ?"

" We want neither gold nor silver," said the Gruagach ; " all the reward we ask of you is the ring that I lost on a time, and which is now on your daughter's finger."

" If my daughter has the ring that you lost, it shall be given to you," said the king.

Now the ring spoke to the king's daughter and said : " Don't part with me for anything till you send your trusted man for three gallons of strong spirits and a gallon of wheat ; put the spirits and the wheat together in an open barrel before the fire. When your father says you must give up the ring, do you answer back that you have never left the summer-house, that you have nothing on your hand but what is your own and paid for.

Your father will say then that you must part with me, and give me up to the stranger. When he forces you in this way, and you can keep me no longer, then throw me into the fire ; and you'll see great sport and strange things."

The king's daughter sent for the spirits and the wheat, had them mixed together, and put in an open barrel before the fire.

The king called the daughter in, and asked : " Have you the ring which this stranger lost ?"

" I have a ring," said she, " but it's my own, and I'll not part with it. I'll not give it to him nor to any man."

" You must," said the king, " for my word is pledged, and you must part with the ring !"

When she heard this, she slipped the ring from her finger and threw it into the fire.

That moment the eleven brothers made eleven pairs of tongs of themselves ; their father, the old Gruagach, was the twelfth pair.

The twelve jumped into the fire to know in what spark of it would they find the old fisherman's son ; and they were a long time working and searching through the fire, when out flew a spark, and into the barrel.

The twelve made themselves men, turned over the barrel, and spilled the wheat on the floor. Then in a twinkling they were twelve cocks strutting around.

They fell to and picked away at the wheat to know which one would find the fisherman's son. Soon one dropped on one side, and a second on the opposite side, until all twelve were lying drunk from the wheat.

Then the old fisherman's son made a fox of himself, and the first cock he came to was the old Gruagach na g-cleasan himself. He took the head off the Gruagach with one bite, and the heads off the eleven brothers with eleven other bites.

When the twelve were dead, the old fisherman's son made himself the finest-looking man in Erin, and began to give music and sport to the king ; and he entertained him five times better than had the Gruagach and his eleven sons.

Then the king's daughter fell in love with him, and she set her mind on him to that degree that there was no life for her without him.

When the king saw the straits that his daughter was in, he ordered the marriage without delay.

The wedding lasted for nine days and nine nights, and the ninth night was the best of all.

When the wedding was over, the king felt he was losing his strength, so he took the crown off his own head, and put it on the head of the old fisherman's son, and made him king of Erin in place of himself.

The young couple were the luck, and we the stepping-stones. The presents we got at the marriage were stockings of buttermilk and shoes of paper, and these were worn to the soles of our feet when we got home from the wedding.

[1] Pronounced ná glásson.

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