

Popular tales - Old Traditions

“Tir nam Beann, ’s nan Gleann, s nan Gaisgeach.”

The land of Hills, and Glens, and Heroes

Popular tales of the west Highlands : orally collected

John Francis Campbell

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Again, supposing tales to be old traditions, something may be gleaned from them of the past. Horses, for example, must once have been strange and rare, or sacred, amongst the Celts, as among other races.

The horses of the Vedas, which drew the chariot of the sun, appear to have been confused with the sun-god of Indian mythology. Horses decided the fate of kingdoms in Persia, according to Herodotus. They were sacred when Phæton drove the chariot of the sun. The Scandinavian gods had horses, according to the Edda. They are generally supernatural in Grimm’s German stories, in Norse tales, in French, and in many other collections. They are wonderful in Breton tales.

When the followers of Columbus first took horses to America, they struck terror into the Indians, and they and their riders were demigods ; because strange and terrible.

Horses were surely feared, or worshipped, or prized, by Celts, for places are named after them. Penmarch in Brittany, means horse-head or hill. Ardincaple in Scotland means the mare’s height, and there are many other places with similar names.

In Gaelic tales, horses are frequently mentioned, and more magic properties are attributed to them than elsewhere in popular lore.

In No. 1, horses play a very prominent part ; and in some versions of that tale, the heroine is a lady transformed into a grey mare. It is to be hoped, for the hero’s sake, that she did not prove herself the better horse when she resumed her human form.

In No. 3, there is a horse race. In No. 4, there are mythical horses ; and in an Irish version of that story, told me in August 1860, by an Irish blind fiddler on board the Lochgoilhead boat, horses again play their part, with hounds and hawks. In No. 14, there are horses ; in one version there is a magic “ powney.” In 22, a horse again appears, and gives the foundation for the riddle on which the story turns. In 40, a horse is one of the prizes to be gained. In 41, the horse plays the part of bluebeard. In 48, a horse is to be hanged as a thief. In 51, the hero assumes the form of a horse. In many other tales which I have in manuscript, men appear as horses, and reappear as men ; and horses are marvellous. In one tale, a man’s son is sent to a warlock and becomes a horse, and all sorts of creatures besides. In another, a man gets a wishing grey filly from the wind, in return for some meal which the wind had blown away ; and there is a whole series of tales which relate to water-horses, and which seem, more than all the rest, to shew the horse as a degraded god, and as it would seem, a water-god, and a destroyer.

I had intended to group all these stories together, as an illustration of this part of the subject, but time and space are wanting. These shew that in the Isle of Man, and in the Highlands of Scotland, people still firmly believe in the existence of a water-horse. In Sutherland and elsewhere, many believe that they have seen these fancied animals. I have been told of English sportsmen who went in pursuit of them, so circumstantial were the accounts of those who believed that they had seen them. The witnesses are so numerous, and their testimony agrees so well, that there must be some old deeply-rooted Celtic belief which clothes every dark object with the dreaded form of the EACH UISGE. The legends of the doings of the water kelpie all point to some river god reduced to be a fuath or bogle. The bay or grey horse grazes at the lake-side, and when he is mounted, rushes into the loch and devours his rider. His back lengthens to suit any number ; men's hands stick to his skin ; he is harnessed to a plough, and drags the team and the plough into the loch, and tears the horses to bits ; he is killed, and nothing remains but a pool of water ; he falls in love with a lady, and when he appears as a man and lays his head on her knee to be dressed, the frightened lady finds him out by the sand amongst his hair. "Tha gainmheach ann." There is sand in it, she says, and when he sleeps she makes her escape. He appears as an old woman, and is put to bed with a bevy of damsels in a mountain shealing, and he sucks the blood of all, save one, who escapes over a burn, which, water horse as he is, he dare not cross. In short, these tales and beliefs have led me to think that the old Celts must have had a destroying water-god, to whom the horse was sacred, or who had the form of a horse.

Unless there is some such foundation for the stories, it is strange to find the romances of boatmen and fishermen inhabiting small islands, filled with incidents which seem rather to belong to a wandering, horse-riding tribe. But the tales of Norwegian sailors are similar in this respect ; and the Celtic character has in fact much which savours of a tribe who are boatmen by compulsion, and would be horsemen if they could. Though the Western islanders are fearless boatmen, and brave a terrible sea in very frail boats, very few of them are in the royal navy, and there are not many who are professed sailors. On the other hand, they are bold huntsmen in the far north of America. I do not think that they are successful farmers anywhere, though they cling fondly to a spot of land, but they are famous herdsmen at home and abroad. On the misty hills of old Scotland or the dry plains of Australia, they still retain the qualities which made a race of hunters, and warriors, and herdsmen, such as are represented in the poems of Ossian, and described in history ; and even within the small bounds which now contain the Celtic race in Europe, their national tastes appear in strong relief. Every deer-stalker will bear witness to the eagerness of Highlanders in pursuit of their old favourite game, the dun deer ; the mountaineer shews what he is when his eye kindles and his nostril dilates at the sight of a noble stag ; when the gillie forgets his master in his keenness, and the southern lags behind ; when it is "bellows to mend," and London dinners are remembered with regret, Tyree is famous for its breed of ponies : it is a common bit of Highland "chaff" to neigh at a Tyree man, and other islands have famous breeds also. It is said that men almost starving rode to ask for meal in a certain place, and would not sell their ponies ; and though this is surely a fiction, it rests on the fact that the islanders are fond of horses. At fairs and markets all over the Highlands ponies abound. Nothing seems to amaze a Highlander more than to see any one walk who can afford to ride ; and he will chase a pony over a hill, and sit in misery on a packsaddle when he catches the beast, and endure discomfort, that he may ride in state along a level road for a short distance.

Irish Celts, who have more room for locomotion, cultivate their national taste for horse flesh in a higher degree. An Irish hunter is valued by many an English Nimrod ; all novels which purport to represent Irish character paint Irishmen as bold riders, and Irish peasants as men who take a keen interest in all that belongs to hunting and racing. There is not, so far as I know, a single novel founded on the adventures of an Irish or Highland sailor or farmer,

though there are plenty of fictitious warriors and sportsmen in prose and in verse. There are endless novels about English sailors, and sportsmen, and farmers, and though novels are fictions, they too rest on facts. The Celts, and Saxons, and Normans, and Danes, and Romans, who help to form the English race, are at home on shore and afloat, whether their steeds are of flesh and blood, or, as the Gaelic poets say, of brine. The Celtic race are most at home amongst their cattle and on the hills, and I believe it to be strictly in accordance with the Celtic character to find horses and chariots playing a part in their national traditions and poems of all ages.

I do not know enough of our Welsh cousins to be able to speak of their tastes in this respect ; but I know that horse racing excites a keen interest in Brittany, though the French navy is chiefly manned by Breton and Norman sailors, and Breton ballads and old Welsh romances are full of equestrian adventures. And all this supports the theory that Celts came from the east, and came overland ; for horses would be prized by a wandering race.

So hounds would be prized by the race of hunters who chased the Caledonian boars as well as the stags ; and here again tradition is in accordance with probability, and supported by other testimony. In No. 4 there are mystical dogs ; a hound, GADHAR is one of the links in No. 8 ; a dog appears in No, 11 ; a dog, who is an enchanted man, in No. 12 ; there is a phantom dog in No. 23 ; there was a “ spectre hound in Man ;” and there are similar ghostly dogs in England, and in many European countries besides.

In 19, 20, 31, 38, and a great many other tales which I have in manuscript, the hound plays an important part. Sometimes he befriends his master, at other times he appears to have something diabolical about him ; it seems as if his real honest nature had overcome a deeply-rooted prejudice, for there is much which savours of detestation as well as of strong affection. Dog, or son of the dog, is a term of abuse in Gaelic as elsewhere, though cuilein is a form of endearment, and the hound is figured beside his master, or at his feet, on many a tombstone in the Western Isles.

Hounds are mentioned in Gaelic poetry and in Gaelic tales, and in the earliest accounts of the Western Isles ; and one breed still survives in these long-legged, rough, wiry-haired stag-hounds, which Landseer so loves to paint.

In one story, for which I have no room, but which is well worthy of preservation, a step-mother sends two step-children, a brother and sister, out into the world to seek their fortune. They live in a cottage with three bare yellow porkers, which belong to the sister. The brother sells one to a man for a dog with a green string, and so gets three dogs, whose names are Knowledge, FIOS ; Swift, LUTH ; Weighty, TROM. The sister is enraged, and allies herself with a giant who has a hot coal in his mouth. Knowledge tells his master the danger which awaits him : how the giant and his sister had set a venomous dart over the door. Swiftness runs in first, and saves his master at the expense of his own tail, and then the three dogs upset a caldron of boiling water over the giant, who is hid in a hole in the floor, and so at the third time the giant is killed, and the only loss is a bit of the tail of Luath.

Then the king's son goes to dwell with a beautiful lady ; and after a time he goes back to visit his sister, armed with three magic apples. The sister sets three venomous porkers at him, and he, by throwing the apples behind him, hinders them with woods, and moors, and lakes, which grow up from the apples ; but they follow. The three dogs come out and beat the three pigs, and kill them, and then the king's son gets his sister to come with him, and she was as a servant-maid to the prince and the fine woman with whom he lived. Then the sister put GATH NIMH, a poisonous sting or thorn into the bed, and the prince was as though he were dead for

three days, and he was buried. But Knowledge told the other two dogs what to do, and they scraped up the prince, and took out the thorn ; and he came alive again and went home, and set on a fire of grey oak, and burned his sister. And John Crawford, fisherman at Lochlong-head, told John Dewar “ that he left the man, and the woman, and the dogs all happy and well pleased together.” This curious story seems to shew the hog and the dog as foes. Perhaps they were but the emblems of rival tribes, perhaps they were sacred amongst rival races ; at all events, they were both important personages at some time or other, for there is a great deal about them in Gaelic lore.

The boar was the animal which Diarmid slew, and which caused his death when he paced his length against the bristles,—the venomous bristles pierced a mole in his foot. It was a boar which was sent out to find the body of the thief in that curious story, an gillie currach ; and in a great many other stories, boars appear as animals of the chase. The Fiantaichean or Feen, whomsoever they were, are always represented as hunting wild boars, as tearing a boar to bits by main force, or eating a whole boar. Cairns, said to have been raised over boars, are shewn in many parts of Scotland still. I myself once found a boar’s tusk in a grave accidentally discovered, close to the bridge at Pool-Ewe. There were many other bones, and a rough flint, and a lot of charcoal, in what seemed to be a shallow human grave, a kind of stone coffin built up with loose slabs.

“ Little pigs” play their part in the nursery lore of England. Everybody who has been young and has toes, must know how

“ This little pig went to market,
And this little pig staid at home —
This little pig got roast beef,
And this little pig got none ;
And this little pig went wee, wee, wee, all the way home.”

There is a long and tragic story which has been current amongst at least three generations of my own family regarding a lot of little pigs who had a wise mother, who told them where they were to build their houses, and how, so as to avoid the fox. Some of the little pigs would not follow their mother’s counsel, and built houses of leaves, and the fox got in and said, “ I will gallop, and I’ll trample, and I’ll knock down your house,” and he ate the foolish, little, proud pigs ; but the youngest was a wise little pig, and, after many adventures, she put an end to the wicked fox when she was almost vanquished, bidding him look into the caldron to see if the dinner was ready, and then tilting him in headforemost. In short, pigs are very important personages in the popular lore of Great Britain.

We are told by history that they were sacred amongst the Gauls, and fed on acorns in the sacred oak groves of the Druids, and there is a strong prejudice now amongst Highlanders against eating pig’s flesh.

So oak trees are mythical. Whenever a man is to be burned for some evil deed, and men are always going to be roasted, fagots of “ grey,” probably green oak, are fetched. There is a curious story which the Rev. Mr. MacLachlan took down from the recitation of an old man in Edinburgh, in which a mythical old man is shut up in an oak tree, which grows in the court of the king’s palace ; and when the king’s son lets his ball roll into a split in the tree by chance, the old man tells the boy to fetch an axe and he will give him the ball, and so he gets out, and endows the Prince with power and valour. He sets out on his journey with a red-headed cook, who personates him, and he goes to lodge with a swine-herd ; but by the help of the old man

of the great tree, BODACH NA CRAOIBHE MOIRE, he overcomes a boar, a bull, and a stallion, and marries the king's daughter, and the red-headed cook is burnt.

So then, in these traditions, swine and oak trees are associated together with mythical old men and deeds of valour, such as a race of hunters might perform, and admire, and remember. Is it too much to suppose that these are dim recollections of pagan times ? DRUIDH is the name for a magician, DRAOCHD for magic. It is surely not too much to suppose that the magicians were the Druids, and the magic their mysteries ; that my peasant collectors are right, when they maintain that GRUAGACH, the long-haired one, was “ a professor” or “ master of arts,” or “ one that taught feats of arms ;” that the learned Gruagach, who is so often mentioned, was a Druid in his glory, and the other, who in the days of Johnson, haunted the island of Troda as “ Greogaca,” who haunted the small island of Inch, near Easdale, in the girlhood of Mrs. Mactavish, who is remembered still, and is still supposed to haunt many a desolate island in the far west, is the phantom of the same Druid, fallen from his high estate, skulking from his pursuers, and really living on milk left for him by those whose priest he had once been.

“ The small island of Inch, near Easdale, is inhabited by a brownie, which has followed the MacDougalls of Ardincaple for ages, and takes a great interest in them. He takes care of their cattle in that island night and day, unless the dairymaid, when there in summer with the milk cattle, neglects to leave warm milk for him at night in a knocking-stone in the cave, where she and the herd live during their stay in the island. Should this perquisite be for a night forgot, they will be sure in the morning to find one of the cattle fallen over the rocks with which the place abounds. It is a question whether the brownie has not a friend with whom he shares the contents of the stone, which will, I daresay, hold from two to three Scotch pints.”

Mrs. MacTavish, 1859, Islay.

If the manners and customs of druids are described as correctly as modern manners really are, then something may be gathered concerning druidical worship ; but without knowledge, which I have no time to acquire, the full bearing of traditions on such a subject cannot be estimated.

The horse and the boar, the oak tree and the apple, then, are often referred to. Of mistletoe I have found no trace, unless it be the sour herb which brings men to life, but that might be the “ soma,” which plays such a part in the mythology of the Vedas, or the shamrock, which was sacred in Ireland.

Wells are indicated as mysterious in a great many tales—poison wells and healing wells—and some are still frequented with a half belief in their virtue ; but such wells now often have the name of some saint affixed to them.

Birds are very often referred to as soothsayers—in No. 39 especially ; the man catches a bird and says it is a diviner, and a gentleman buys it as such. It was a bird of prey, for it lit on a hide, and birds of prey are continually appearing as bringing aid to men, such as the raven, the hoodie, and the falcon. The little birds especially are frequently mentioned. I should therefore gather from the stories that the ancient Celts drew augury from birds as other nations did, and as it is asserted by historians that the Gauls really did. I should be inclined to think that they possessed the domestic fowl before they became acquainted with the country of the wild grouse, and that the cock may have been sacred, for he is a foe and a terror to uncanny beings, and the hero of many a story ; while the grouse and similar birds peculiar to this country are barely mentioned. The cat plays a considerable part, and appears as a trans-

formed princess ; and the cat also may have been sacred to some power, for cats are the companions of Highland witches, and of hags all the world over, and they were sacred to gods in other lands ; they were made into mummies in Egypt, together with hawks and other creatures which appear in Highland tales. Ravens were Odin's messengers ; they may have been pages to some Celtic divinity also. Foxes, and otters, and wolves, and bears all appear in mythical characters. Serpents were probably held in abhorrence, as they have been by other races, but the serpent gave wisdom, and is very mythical.

Old Macdonald, travelling tinker, told me a long story, of which one scene represented an incantation more vividly to me than anything I have ever read or heard. " There was a king and a knight, as there was and will be, and as grows the fir tree, some of it crooked and some of it straight, and he was a king of Eirinn," said the old tinker, and then came a wicked step-mother, who was incited to evil by a wicked hen-wife. The son of the first queen was at school with twelve comrades, and they used to play at shinny every day with silver shinnies and a golden ball. The henwife, for certain curious rewards, gave the stepdame a magic shirt, and she sent it to her step son, " Sheen Billy," and persuaded him to put it on ; he refused at first, but complied at last, and the shirt was a BEITHIR (great snake) about his neck. Then he was enchanted and under spells, and all manner of adventures followed ; but at last he came to the house of a wise woman who had a beautiful daughter, who fell in love with the enchanted prince, and said she must and would have him.

" It will cost thee much sorrow," said the mother.

" I care not," said the girl, " I must have him."

" It will cost thee thy hair."

" I care not."

" It will cost thee thy right breast."

" I care not if it should cost me my life," said the girl.

And the old woman agreed to help her to her will. A caldron was prepared and filled with plants ; and the king's son was put into it stripped to the magic shirt, and the girl was stripped to the waist. And the mother stood by with a great knife, which she gave to her daughter.

Then the king's son was put down in the caldron, and the great serpent, which appeared to be a shirt about his neck, changed into its own form, and sprang on the girl and fastened on her ; and she cut away the hold, and the king's son was freed from the spells. Then they were married, and a golden breast was made for the lady. And then they went through more adventures, which I do not well remember, and which the old tinker's son vainly strove to repeat in August 1860, for he is far behind his father in the telling of old Highland tales.

The serpent, then, would seem to be an emblem of evil and wisdom in Celtic popular mythology.

There is something mysterious about rushes. The fairies are found in a bush of rushes ; the great caldron of the Feen is hid under a bush of rushes ; and in a great many other instances TOM LUACHARACH appears.

I do not know that the plant is mentioned in foreign tales, but it occurs several times in border minstrelsy.

If the Druids worshipped the sun and moon, there is very little direct reference to such worship in highland stories now. There are many highland customs which point to solar worship, but these have been treated of by abler pens, and I have nothing to add on that head.

There is yet another animal which is mythical—the water-bull. He certainly belongs to Celtic mythology, as the water-horse does, for he is known in the Isle of Man and all over the islands.

There are numerous lakes where the water-bulls are supposed to exist, and their progeny are supposed to be easily known by their short ears. When the water-bull appears in a story he is generally represented as friendly to man. I have a great many accounts of him, and his name in Skye is Tarbh Eithre.

There is a gigantic water bird, called the Boobrie, which is supposed to inhabit the fresh water and sea lochs of Argyllshire. I have heard of him nowhere else ; but I have heard of him from several people.

He is ravenous and gigantic, gobbles up sheep and cows, has webbed feet, a very loud hoarse voice, and is somewhat like a cormorant. He is reported to have terrified a minister out of his propriety, and it is therefore to be assumed that he is of the powers of evil. And there are a vast number of other fancied inhabitants of earth, air, and water, enough to form a volume of supernatural history, and all or any of these may have figured in Celtic mythology ; for it is hard to suppose that men living at opposite ends of Scotland, and peasants in the Isle of Man, should invent the same fancies unless their ideas had some common foundation.

Besides these animals, there is a whole supernatural world with superhuman gigantic inhabitants.

There are continual fights with these giants, which are often carried on without arms at all—mere wrestling matches, which seem to have had certain rules. It is somewhere told of the Germans that they in their forests fought with clubs, and the Celtic giants may once have been real men. Hercules fought with a club. Irishmen use shillelahs still, and my west country friends, when they fight now-a-days, use barrel staves instead of swords, and use them well, if not wisely ; but whether giants were men or myths, they are always represented as strange lubberly beings, whose dealings with men invariably end in their discomfiture. There are giants in Herodotus and, I believe, in every popular mythology known. There are giants in Holy Writ. They spoke an unknown tongue everywhere. They said “ Fee fo fum ” in Cornwall. They say “ Fiaw fiaw foaghrich ” in Argyll, and these sounds may possibly be corruptions of the language of real big burly savages, now magnified into giants.

The last word might be the vocative of the Gaelic for stranger, ill pronounced, and the intention may be to mimic the dialect of a foreigner speaking Gaelic.

An Italian organ-grinder once found his way to the west, and sang “ Fideli, fidela, fidelin-lin-la.” The lioys caught the tune, and sang it to the words, “ Deese creepe Signaveete ha,” words with as much meaning as “ Fee fo fum,” but which retain a certain resemblance to an Italian sound.

If the giants were once real savages, they had the sense of smell peculiarly sharp, according to the Gaelic tales, as they had in all others which treat of them, and they ate their captives, as it is asserted that the early inhabitants of Scotland did, as Herodotus says that Scythians did in his time, and as the Feejee islanders did very lately, and still do. A relative of mine once offered me a tooth as a relic of such a feast ; it had been presented to him in the Feejee islands by a charming dark young lady, who had just left the banquet, but had not shared in it. The Highland giants were not so big but that their conquerors wore their clothes ; they were not so strong that men could not beat them, even by wrestling. They were not quite savages ; for though some lived in caves, others had houses and cattle, and hoards of spoil. They had slaves, as we are told that Scotch proprietors had within historic times. In “ Scotland in the Middle Ages,” p. 141, we learn that Earl Waldey of Dunbar made over a whole tribe to the Abbot of Kelso in 1170, and in the next page it is implied that these slaves were mostly Celts. Perhaps those Celts who were not enslaved had their own mountain view of the matter, and looked down on the Gall as intrusive, savage, uncultivated, slave-owning giants.

Perhaps the mountain mists in like manner impeded the view of the dwellers on the mountain and the plain, for Fin MacCoul was a “ God in Ireland,” as they say, and is a “ rawhead and bloody bones” in the Scottish lowlands now.

Whatever the giants were they knew some magic arts, but they were always beaten in the end by men.

The combats with them are a Gaelic proverb in action : —

“ Theid seoltachd thar spionnadh.”

Skill goes over might, and probably, as it seems to me, giants are simply the nearest savage race at war with the race who tell the tales. If they performed impossible feats of strength, they did no more than Rob Roy, whose “ putting stone” is now shewn to Saxon tourists by a Celtic coachman, near Bunawe, in the shape of a boulder of many tons, though Rob Ruadh lived only a hundred years ago, near Inverary, in a cottage which is now standing, and which was lately inhabited by a shepherd.

The Gaelic giants are very like those of Norse and German tales, but they are much nearer to real men than the giants of Germany and Scandinavia, and Greece and Rome, who are almost, if not quite, equal to the gods. Famhairan are little more than very strong men, but some have only one eye like the Cyclops.

Their world is generally, but not always, under ground ; it has castles, and parks, and pasture, and all that is to be found above the earth. Gold, and silver, and copper, abound in the giant’s land ; jewels are seldom mentioned, but cattle, and horses, and spoil of dresses, and arms, and armour, combs, and basins, apples, shields, bows, spears, and horses, are all to be gained by a fight with the giants. Still, now and then a giant does some feat quite beyond the power of man ; such as a giant in Barra, who fished up a hero, boat and all, with his fishing-rod, from a rock, and threw him over his head, as little boys do “ cuddies” from a pier-end. So the giants may be degraded gods after all.

But besides “ popular tales,” there are fairy tales, which are not told as stories, but facts. At all events, the creed is too *recent* to be lightly spoken of.

Men do believe in fairies, though they will not readily confess the fact. And though I do not myself believe that fairies *are*, in spite of the strong evidence offered, I believe there once was a small race of people in these islands, who are remembered as fairies, for the fairy belief is not confined to the Highlanders of Scotland. I have given a few of the tales which have come to me as illustrations in No. 27.

“*They*” are always represented as living in green mounds. They pop up their heads when disturbed by people treading on their houses. They steal children. They seem to live on familiar terms with the people about them when they treat them well, to punish them when they ill treat them. If giants are magnified, these are but men seen through the other end of the telescope, and there are such people now. A Lapp is such a man—he is a little flesh-eating mortal—having control over the beasts, and living in a green mound—when he is not living in a tent, or sleeping out of doors, wrapped in his deer-skin shirt. I have lived amongst them and know them and their dwellings pretty well. I know one which would answer to the description of a fairy mound exactly. It is on the most northern peninsula in Europe, to the east of the North Cape, close to the sea, in a sandy hollow near a burn. It is round—say, twelve feet in diameter—and it is sunk three feet in the sand ; the roof is made of sticks and covered with turf. The whole structure, at a short distance, looks exactly like a conical green mound about four feet high. There was a famous crop of grass on it when I was there, and the children and dogs ran out at the door and up to the top when we approached, as ants run on an ant hill when disturbed. Their fire was in the middle of the floor, and the pot hung over it from the roof. I lately saw a house in south Uist found in the sand hills close to the sea. It was built of loose boulders, it was circular, and had recesses in the sides, it was covered when found, and it was full of sand ; when that was removed, stone querns and combs of bone were found, together with ashes, and near the level of the top there was a stratum of bones and teeth of large grass-eating animals. I know not what they were, but the bones were splintered and broken, and mingled with ashes and shells, oysters, cockles, and wilks (periwinkles), shewing clearly the original level of the ground, and proving that this was a dwelling almost the same as a Lapp “*Gam*” at Hopseidet.

Now, let us see what the people of the Hebrides say of the fairies. There was a woman benighted with a pair of calves, “ and she went for shelter to a knoll, and she began driving the peg of the tether into it. The hill opened, and she heard as though there was a pot hook ‘ glee-gashing,’ on the side of the pot. A woman put up her head, and as much as was above her waist, and said, ‘ What business hast thou to disturb this tulman, in which I make my dwelling.’ ” This might be a description of one of my Lapp friends, and probably is a description of such a dwelling as I saw in South Uist. If the people slept as Lapps sleep, with their feet to the fire, a woman outside might have driven a peg very near one of the sleepers, and she might have stood on a seat and poked her head out of the chimney.

The magic about the beasts is but the mist of antiquity ; and the fairy was probably a Pict. Who will say who the Pict may have been ? Probably the great Clibric hag was one, and of the same tribe.

“ In the early morning she was busy milking the hinds ; they were standing all about the door of the hut, till one of them ate a hank of *blue* worsted hanging from a nail in it.” So says the “*fiction*,” which it is considered a sin to relate. Let me place some facts from my own journal beside it.

“ Wednesday, August 22, 1850. Quickjok, Swedish Lapland.—In the evening the effect of the sunlight through the mist and showers was most beautiful. I was sketching, when a small man made his appearance on the opposite side of the river and began to shout for a boat. The

priest exclaimed that the Lapps had come down, and accordingly the diminutive human specimen was fetched, and proved to be a Lapp who had established his camp about seven miles off, near Vallespik. He was about twenty-five years old, and with his high blue cap on could stand upright under my arm."

I had been wandering about Quickjok for a week, out on Vallespik frequently, searching for the Lapps, with the very glass which I had previously used to find deer close to Clibric, which is but a small copy of the Lapland mountain.

" Thursday, 23rd.—Started to see the deer, with the priest and the Clockar, and Marcus, and the Lapp. The Lapp walked like a deer himself, aided by a very long birch pole, which he took from its hiding place in a fir tree. I had hard work to keep up with him. Marcus and the priest were left behind. Once up through the forest, it was cutting cold, and we walked up to the ' cota' in two hours and a quarter. The deer was seen in the distance, like a brown speck on the shoulder of Vallespik ; and with the glass I could make out that a small mortal and two dogs were driving them home. The cota is a permanent one, made in the shape of a sugar loaf, with birch sticks, and long flat stones and turf. There are two exactly alike, and each has a door, a mere narrow slit, opening to the west, and a hole in the roof to let out the smoke. I crept in, and found a girl of about fifteen, with very pretty eyes, sitting crouched up in a corner, and looking as scared as one of her own fawns. The priest said, that if we had come without our attendant genius, the small Lapp, she would have fainted, or run away to the hills. I began to sketch her, as she sat looking modest in her dark corner, and was rejoicing in the extreme stillness of my sitter, when, on looking up from some careful touch, I found that she had vanished through the door-way. I had to bribe her with bread and butter before she could be coaxed back. A tremendous row of shouting and barking outside now announced the arrival of the deer, so I let my sitter go, and off she ran as fast as she could. I followed more leisurely to the spot where the deer were gathered, on a stony hillside. There were only about 200 ; the rest had run off up wind on the way from the mountains, and all the other Lapps were off after them, leaving only my pretty sitter, the boy, and a small woman with bleared eyes, as ugly as sin, his sister.

" How I wished for Landseer's pencil as I looked at that scene ! Most of the deer were huddled close together ; hinds and calves chewing the cud with the greatest placidity, but here and there some grand old fellows, with wide antlers, stood up against the sky line, looking magnificent. I tried to draw, but it was hopeless ; so I sat down, and watched the proceedings of my hosts.

" First, each of the girls took a coil of rope from about her neck, and in a twinkling it was pitched over the horns of a hind. The noose was then slipped round the neck, and a couple of turns of rope round the nose, and then the wild milkmaid set her foot on the halter and proceeded TO MILK THE HIND, into a round birch bowl with a handle. Sometimes she sat, at others she leant her head on the deer's dark side, and knelt beside her. I never saw such a succession of beautiful groups.

" Every now and then some half-dozen deer would break out of the herd and set off to the mountain, and then came a general skurry. The small Lapp man, with his long birch pole, would rush screaming after the stragglers ; and his two gaunt, black, rough, half-starved dogs would scour off, yelping, in pursuit. It generally ended in the hasty return of the truants, with well-bitten houghs for their pains ; but some fairly made off, at a determined long trot, and vanished over the hill. It was very curious to be thus in the midst of a whole herd of creatures so like our own wild deer, to have them treading on my feet and poking their horns against my sketch-book as I vainly tried to draw them, and to think that they who had the power to

bid defiance to the fleetest hound in Sweden should be so perfectly tame as to let the small beings who herded them so thump, and bully, and tease them. The milking, in the meantime, had been progressing rapidly ; and after about an hour the pretty girl, who had been dipping her fingers in the milk-pail and licking up the milk all the time, took her piece of bread and butter, and departed with her charge, munching as she went.

“ The blear-eyed one, and the boy, and our party, went into the cota, and dined on cold roast reiper and reindeer milk. The boy poured the milk from a small keg, which contained the whole product of the flock ; and having given us our share, he carefully licked up all that remained on the outside of the keg, and set it down in a corner. It was sweet and delicious, like thick cream. Dinner over, we desired the Lapp to be ready in the morning (to accompany me), and with the docker’s dog, ‘ Gueppe,’ went reiper-shooting. The clocker himself, with a newly-slaughtered reindeer calf on his shoulders, followed ; and so we went home.”

A few days afterwards, I was at another camp, on another hill, where the same scene was going on. “ In a tent I found a fine-looking Lapp woman sitting on a heap of skins, serving out coffee, and handing reindeer cream to the clocker with a silver spoon. She had silver bracelets, and a couple of silver rings ; and altogether, with her black hair, and dark brown eyes glittering in the fire-light, she looked eastern and magnificent.” Her husband had many trinkets, and they had, amongst other articles, a comb, which the rest seemed much to need.

Her dress was blue, so were most of the dresses, and one of her possessions was a bone contrivance for weaving the bands which all wore round their ankles. She must have had blue yarn somewhere, for her garters were partly blue.

I spent the whole of the next day in the camp, and watched the whole operations of the day.

“ After dinner, the children cracked the bones with stones and a knife, after they had polished the outside, and sucked up the marrow ; and then the dogs, which did not dare to steal, were called in their turn, and got the remains of the food in wooden bowls, set apart for their especial use.”

The bones in the hut in South Uist might have been the remains of such a feast by their appearance.

“ The cota was a pyramid of sods and birch sticks, about seven feet high, and twelve or fourteen in diameter. There were three children, five dogs, an old woman, Marcus, and myself, inside ; and all day long the handsome lady from the tent next door, with her husband, and a couple of quaint-looking old fellows in deer-skin shirts, kept popping in to see how I got on. It was impossible to sit upright for the slope of the walls, as I sat cross-legged on the ground.”

This might be a description of the Uist hut itself, and its inhabitants, as I can fancy them.

“ The three dogs (in the tent), at the smallest symptom of a disturbance, plunged out, barking, to add to the row ; they popped in by the same way under the canvas, so they had no need of a door.”

So did the dogs in the story of Seantraigh ; they ran after the stranger, and stopped to eat the bones. And it is remarkable that all civilized dogs fall upon and worry the half-savage black Lapp dogs, and bark at their masters whenever they descend from their mountains, as

the town dogs did at the fairy dogs. In short, these extracts might be a fair description of the people, and the dwellings, and the food, and the dogs described as fairies, and the hag, and the tulman, in stories which I have grouped together ; told in Scotland within this year by persons who can have no knowledge of what is called the “ Finn theory,” and given in the very words in which they came to me, from various sources.

Lord Reay’s forester must surely have passed the night in a Lapp cota on Ben Gilbric, in Sutherland, when Lapps were Picts ; but when was that ? Perhaps in the youth of the fairy of whom the following story was told by a Sutherland gamekeeper of my acquaintance.

THE HERDS OF GLEN ODHAR.—A wild romantic glen in Strath Carron is called Glen Garaig, and it was through this that a woman was passing carrying an infant wrapped in her plaid. Below the path, overhung with weeping birches, and nearly opposite, run a very deep ravine, known as Glen Odhar, the dun glen. The child, not yet a year old, and which had not spoken or attempted speech, suddenly addressed his mother thus :—

S lionmhor bo mhaol odhar,
Le laogh na gobhal
Chunnaic mise ga’m bleoghan
Anns a’ ghleann odhar ud thall,
Gun Chu, gun duine,
Gun bhean, gun ghille,
Ach aon duine.
'S e liath.

Many a dun hummel cow,
With a calf below he,
Have I seen milking
In that dan glen yonder,
Without dog, without man.
Without woman, without gillie,
But one man,
And he hoary.

The good woman flung down the child and plaid and ran home, where, to her great joy, her baby boy lay smiling in its cradle.

Fairies then milked deer, as Lapps do. They lived under ground, like them. They worked at trades especially smith work and weaving. They had hammers and anvils, and excelled in their use, but though good weavers, they had to steal wool and borrow looms. Lapps do work in metal on their own account ; they make their own skin dresses, but buy their summer clothes. A race of wanderers could not be weavers on a large scale, but they can and do weave small bands very neatly on hand-loom ; and they alone make these. There are savages now in South Africa, who are smiths and miners, though they neither weave nor wear clothes. Fairies had hoards of treasure—so have Lapps. A man died shortly before one of my Tana trips, and the whole country side had been out searching for his buried wealth in vain. Some years ago the old silver shops of Bergen and Trondhjem over-flowed with queer cups and spoons, and rings, silver plates for waist belts, old plate that had been hidden amongst the mountains, black old silver coins that had not seen the light for years. I saw the plate and bought some, and was told that, in consequence of a religious movement, the Lapps had dug up and sold their hoards. Fairies are supposed to shoot flint arrows, and arrows of other kinds, at people now. Men have told me several times that they had been shot at : one man had

found the flint arrow in an ash tree ; another had heard it whiz past his ear ; a third had pulled a slender arrow from a friend's head. If that be so, my argument fails, and fairies are not of the past ; but Californian Indians now use arrow-heads which closely resemble those dug up in Scotland, in Denmark, and, I believe, all over Europe. Fairies are conquered by Christian symbols. They were probably Pagans, and, if so, they may have existed when Christianity was introduced. They steal men, women, and children, and keep them in their haunts. They are not the only slave owners in the world. They are supernatural, and objects of a sort of respect and wonder. So are gipsies where they are rare, as in Sweden and Norway ; so are the Lapps themselves, for they are professed wizards. I have known a terrified Swedish lassie whip her horse and gallop away in her cart from a band of gipsies, and I have had the advantage of living in the same house with a Lapp wizard at Quickjok, who had prophesied the arrival of many strangers, of whom I was one. Spaniards were gods amongst the Indians till they taught them to know better. Horses were supernatural when they came, and on the whole, as it appears, there is much more reason to believe that fairies were a real people, like the Lapps, who are still remembered, than that they are “ creatures of imagination” or “ spirits in prison,” or “ fallen angels ;” and the evidence of their actual existence is very much more direct and substantial than that which has driven, and seems still to be driving, people to the very verge of insanity, if not beyond it, in the matter of those palpable-impalpable, visible-invisible spirits who rap double knocks upon dancing deal boards.

I am inclined to believe in the former existence of fairies in this sense, and if for no other reason, because all the nations of Europe have had some such belief, and they cannot all have invented the same fancy. The habitation of Highland fairies are green mounds, they therefore, like the giants, resemble the “ under jordiske” of the north, and they too may be degraded divinities.

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