

Seannachas

“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

1890

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The popular lore which I found current in the west, and known all over the Highlands in a greater or less degree amongst the poorer classes, consists of : —

1st. That which is called Seanachas na Finne, or Feinne, or Fiann, that is, the tradition or old history of the Feene.

This is now the rarest of any, and is commonest, so far as I know, in Barra and South Uist. There are first fragments of poems which may have been taken from the printed book, which goes by the name of the History of the Finne in the Highlands, and the Poems of Ossian elsewhere. I never asked for these, but I was told that the words were “ sharper and deeper” than those in the printed book.

There are, secondly, poetical fragments about the same persons, which, to the best of my knowledge, are not in any printed book. I heard some of these repeated by three different men.

Patrick Smith, in South Uist, *intoned* a long fragment ; I should guess, about 200 lines. He recited it rapidly to a kind of chant. The subject was a fight with a Norway witch, and Fionn, Diarmaid, Oscar and Conan, were named as Irish heroes. There were “ ships fastened with silver chains, and kings holding them ;” swords, spears, helmets, shields, and battles, were mentioned ; in short, the fragment was the same in style and machinery as the famous Poems ; and it was attributed to Ossian. The repetition began with a short prose account of what was to follow. Smith is sixty, and says that he cannot read. He does not understand English. He says that such poems used to be so chanted commonly when he was young. The same account of the manner of reciting similar poems was given me by a clergyman in Argyllshire, who said that, within his recollection, the “ death of Cuchullin” used to be so recited by an old man at the head of Loch Awe.

Donald Macintyre, in Benbecula, recited a similar fragment, which has since been written and sent to me. The subject is a dialogue between a lady and a messenger returning from battle, with a number of heads on a withy ; the lady asks their story, and the messenger tells whose heads they were, and how the heroes fell. It sounded better than it reads, but the transcriber had never written Gaelic before.

John Campbell, generally known as “ Yellow John,” living in Strath Gearloch, about twelve miles west of Flowerdale, repeated a similar fragment, which lasted for a quarter of an hour. He said he had known it for half a century. He is a very old man, and it is difficult to follow him, and the poetry was mingled with prose, and with “ said he,” “ said she.” It was

the last remnant of something which the old man could only remember imperfectly, and which he gave in broken sentences ; but here again the combat was with a Norway witch, and the scene, Ireland. Fionn, Diarmaid and other such names appeared. Diarmaid had “ his golden helm on his head ;” his “ two spears on his shoulder ;” his “ narrow-pointed shield on his left arm ;” his “ small shield on his right ;” his sword was “ leafy,” (?) leaf-shaped. And the old man believed that Diarmaid, the Irish hero, was his ancestor, and his own real name O’Duine. He spoke of “ his chief MacCalain,” and treated me with extra kindness, as a kinsman. “ Will you not take some more” (milk and potatoes). “ Perhaps we may never see each other again. Are we not both Campbells ?”

I heard of other men who could repeat such poems, and I have heard of such men all my life ; but as I did not set out to gather poems, I took no trouble to get them.

Two chiefs, I think one was MacLeod, sent their two fools to gather bait on the shore ; and to settle a bet which fool was the best, they strewed gold on the path. One fool stopped to gather it, but the other said, “ When we are at ‘ golding,’ let us be ‘ golding,’ and when we are at bait-making, let us be bait-making,” and he stuck to his business. My business was prose, but it may not be out of place to state my own opinion about the Ossian controversy, for I have been asked more than once if I had found any trace of such poems.

I believe that there were poems of very old date, of which a few fragments still exist in Scotland as pure traditions. That these related to Celtic worthies who were popular heroes before the Celts came from Ireland, and answer to Arthur and his knights elsewhere. That the same personages have figured in poems composed, or altered, or improved, or spoilt by bards who lived in Scotland, and by Irish bards of all periods ; and that these personages have been mythical heroes amongst Celts from the earliest of times. That “ the poems” were orally collected by Macpherson, and by men before him, by Dr. Smith, by the committee of the Highland Society, and by others, and that the printed Gaelic is old poetry, mended and patched, and pieced together, and altered, but on the whole a genuine work. Manuscript evidence of the antiquity of similar Gaelic poems exists. Some were printed in 1807, under the authority of the Highland Society of London, with a Latin translation, notes, etc., and were reprinted in 1818. MacPherson’s “ translation” appeared between 1760 and 1762, and the controversy raged from the beginning, and is growling still ; but the dispute now is, whether the poems were originally *Scotch* or *Irish*, and how much MacPherson altered them. It is like the quarrel about the chameleon, for the languages spoken in Islay and Rathlin are identical, and the language of the poems is difficult for me, though I have *spoken* Gaelic from my childhood. There is no doubt at all that Gaelic poems on such subjects existed long before MacPherson was born ; and it is equally certain that there is no composition in the Gaelic language which bears the smallest resemblance in style to the peculiar kind of prose in which it pleased MacPherson to translate. The poems have a peculiar rhythm, and a style of their own which is altogether lost in his English translation. But what concerns me is the popular belief, and it seems to be this—MacPherson must have been a very dishonest person when he allowed himself to pass as the author of Ossian’s poems.” So said a lady, one of my earliest friends, whose age has not impaired her memory, and so say those who are best informed, and understand the language.

The illiterate seem to have no opinion on the subject. So far as I could ascertain, few had heard of the controversy, but they had all heard scraps of poems and stories about the Finne, all their lives ; and they are content to believe that “ Ossian, the last of the Finne,” composed the poems, wrote them, and burned his book in a pet, when he was old and blind, because St. Patrick, or St. Paul, or some other saint, would not believe his wonderful stories.

Those who would study “ the controversy,” will find plenty of discussion ; but the report of the Highland Society appears to settle the question on evidence. I cannot do better than quote from Johnson’s Poets the opinion of a great author, who was a great translator, who, in speaking of his own work, says : —

“ What must the world think . . . After such a judgment passed by so great a critick, the world who decides so often, and who examines so seldom ; the world who, even in matters of literature, is almost always the slave of authority ? Who will suspect that so much learning should mistake, that so much accuracy should be misled, or that so much candour should be biassed ? ... I think that no translation ought to be the ground of criticism, because no man ought to be condemned upon another man’s explanation of his meaning.”
(Postscript to the Odyssey, Pope’s Homer, Johnson’s Poets, pp. 279, 280).

And to that quotation let me add this manuscript note, which I found in a copy of the Report of the Highland Society on the poems of Ossian ; which I purchased in December 1859 ; and which came from the library of Colonel Hamilton Smith, at Plymouth.

“ The Reverend Dr. Campbell, of Halfway Tree, Lisuaua, in Jamaica, often repeated to me in the year 1799, 1801, and 1802, parts of Ossian in Gaelic ; and assured me that he had possessed a manuscript, long the property of his family, in which Gaelic poems, and in particular, whole pieces of Ossian’s compositions were contained. This he took out with him on his first voyage to the West Indies in 1780, when his ship was captured by a boat from the Santissima Trinidata flagship, of the whole Spanish fleet ; and he, together with all the other passengers, lost nearly the whole of their baggage, among which was the volume in question. In 1814, when I was on the staff of General Sir Thomas Graham, now Lord Lyndoch, I understood that Mr. MacPherson had been at one time his tutor ; and, therefore, I asked his opinion respecting the authenticity of the Poems. His lordship replied that he never had any doubts on the subject, he having seen in Mr. MacPherson’s possession several manuscripts in the Gaelic language, and heard him speak of them repeatedly ; he told me some stronger particulars, which I cannot now note down, for the conversation took place during the action of our winter campaign.

(Signed) “ Charles Hamn. Smith, Lt.-Col.”

The Colonel had the reputation of being a great antiquary, and had a valuable library. James MacPherson, a “ modest young man, who was master of Greek and Latin,” was “ procured” to be a preceptor to “ the boy Tommy,” who was afterwards Lord Lyndoch (according to a letter in a book printed for private circulation). As it appears to me, those who are ignorant of Gaelic, and now-a-days maintain that “ MacPherson composed Ossian’s Poems,” are like critics who, being ignorant of Greek, should maintain that Pope wrote the Odyssey, and was the father of Homer ; or, being ignorant of English, should declare that Tennyson was the father of King Arthur and all his knights, because he has published one of many poems which treat of them. It was different when Highlanders were “ rebels ;” and it was petty treason to deny that they were savages.

A glance at “ Johnson’s Tour in the Hebrides,” will show the feeling of the day. He heard Gaelic songs in plenty, but would not believe in Gaelic poems. He appreciated the kindness and hospitality with which he was treated ; he praised the politeness of all ranks, and yet maintained that their language was “ the rude speech of a barbarous people, who had few thoughts to express, and were content, as they conceived grossly, to be grossly understood.”

He could see no beauty in the mountains which men now flock to see. He saw no fish in fording northern rivers, and explains how the winter torrents sweep them away ; the stags were “ perhaps not bigger than our fallow-deer ;” the waves were not larger than those on the coast of Sussex ; and yet, though the Doctor would not believe in Gaelic poems, he did believe that peat grew as it was cut, and that the vegetable part of it probably caused a glowing redness in the earth of which it is mainly composed ; and he came away willing to believe in the second sight, though not quite convinced.

That sturdy old Briton, the great lexicographer, who is an honour to his country, was not wholly free from national prejudice ; he erred in some things ; he may have erred in a matter of which he could not well judge ; he did not understand Gaelic ; he did not believe in traditions ; he would not believe in the translations ; and MacPherson seems to have ended by encouraging the public belief that he was the author of poems which had gained so wide a celebrity.

Matters have changed for the better since those days ; Celt and Saxon are no longer deadly foes. There still exists, as I am informed, an anti-Celtic society, whose president, on state occasions, wears three pairs of trousers ; but it is no longer penal to dispense with these garments ; and there are Southerners who discard them altogether, when they go north to pursue the little stags on the ugly hills, and catch fish in the torrents.

There are Celtic names in high places, in India, and at home ; and an English Duke is turning the Gaelic of Ossian’s poems into English verse.

This, however, is foreign to my subject, though it bears somewhat on the rest of the traditions of the Finne. I have stated my own opinion because I hold it, not because I wish to influence those who differ from me. I have no wish to stir up the embers of an expiring controversy, which was besprinkled with peculiarly acrid ink, and obscured by acid fumes. I neither believe that MacPherson composed Ossian, nor that Ossian composed all the poems which bear his name. I am quite content to believe Ossian to have been an Irishman, or a Scotsman, or a myth, on sufficient evidence.

Besides these few remnants of poetry which still survive, I find a great many prose tales relating to the heroes of the poems ; and as these personages certainly were popular heroes in Ireland and in Scotland centuries ago, I give what I have gathered concerning them, with the conviction that it is purely Celtic tradition. [1]

The Seannachas of the Fine consists, then, of poetry already printed; fragments which are not in print, so far as I know, and which are now very rare ; and prose tales which are tolerably common, but rapidly disappearing.

In all these, according to tradition, Fionn, Diarmaid, and the rest, are generally represented as Irish worthies. The scene is often laid in Ireland ; but there are hundreds of places in Scotland in which some of the exploits are said to have been performed. I know not how many cairns are supposed to contain the bones of the wild boar, whose bristles wounded the feet of Diarmaid when he paced his length against the hair ; Kyle Reay, in Skye, is named after a giant warrior who leaped the strait. There are endless mountains bearing Ossianic names in all parts of Scotland, and even in the Isle of Man the same names are to be found mixed up with legends. In April 1860, I met a peasant near Ramsey who knew the name of Fin MacCoul, though he would not say a word about him to me. In Train’s history of the Island, published by Mary Quiggin, 1845, at page 359, is this note : —

“ In a letter, dated 20th September 1844, from a highly respected correspondent in the Isle of Man, he says—‘ Are you aware that the septennial appearance of the island, said to be submerged in the sea by enchantment near Port Soderick, is expected about the end of this month ?’ Though the spell by which this fancified island has been bound to the bottom of the ocean since the days of the great Fin M‘Coul. and its inhabitants transformed into blocks of granite, might, according to popular belief, be broke by placing a bible on any part of the enchanted land when at its original altitude above the waters of the deep, where it is permitted to remain only for the short space of thirty minutes. No person has yet had the hardihood to make the attempt, lest, in case of failure, the enchanter, in revenge, might cast his club over Mona also.”

And in Cregeen’s Manks dictionary, by the same publisher, 1835, is this Manks proverb —

“ Ny three geayghyn s’ feayrey dennee Fion M‘Cooil
Geay heuneu, as geay huill,
As geay fo ny sliiauill.”

Which I understand to mean —

The three coldest winds that came to Fion M‘Cooil,
Wind from a thaw, wind from a hole,
And wind from under the sails.

In short, I believe that the heroes of Ossian belong to the race, not to any one set of poems, or to any single branch of the Celtic language.

2d. There are tales, not necessarily about the Fin, consisting partly of plain narrative and dialogue, which vary with every narrator, and probably more or less every time the story is told ; and partly of a kind of measured prose, which is unlike anything I know in any other language. I suspect that these have been compositions at some time, but at what time I cannot even guess.

These almost always relate to Ireland and Scandinavia ; to boats, knights, swords, and shields. There are adventures under ground, much battle, generally an island with fire about it (perhaps Iceland), and a lady to be carried off. There is often an old woman who has some mysterious vessel of balsam which brings the dead to life, and a despised character who turns out to be the real hero, sometimes a boaster who is held up to ridicule. I believe these to be bardic recitations fast disappearing and changing into prose ; for the older the narrator is, the less educated, and the farther removed from the rest of the world, the more his stories are garnished with these passages. “ Fin MacCumhal goes go Graffee,” published in 1857, from Mayo, is evidently a translation of a tale of this kind. In all these, the scene is laid in Eirinn and Lochlan, now Ireland and Scandinavia ; and these would seem to have been border countries. Perhaps the stories relate to the time when the Scandinavians occupied part of the Western Isles.

3d. There is popular history of events which really happened within the last few centuries : of this, I have gathered none, but I heard a great deal in a very short time, and I have heard it all my life. It is a history devoid of dates, but with clear starting points. The event happened at the time of Shamas (James) at the battle of Shirra Muir ; at Inverlochty ; after Culloden. The battle was between MacNeill and MacLeod. MacLeod came from *that* castle. They met on *that* strand. The dead are buried *there*. Their descendants now live in

such a place. He was the last man hanged in Harris. *That* is called the slab of lamentation, from which the MacLeans embarked for Ireland when the MacDonalds had conquered them, and taken the land. MacLean exposed his wife on the Lady Rock because she had made his servant blow up one of the ships of the Spanish Armada, for jealousy of the Spanish lady who was on board. The history is minute and circumstantial, and might be very interesting if faithfully collected, but it is rather local than national, and is not within the scope of my work. It is by far the most abundant popular lore, and has still a great hold on the people. The decision of a magistrate in a late case of “Sapaid” (broken heads) was very effective, because he appealed to this feeling. It was thus described to me : “ Ah ! he gave it to them. He leant back in his chair, and spoke grandly for half an hour. He said you are as wild men fighting together in the days of King Shamas.”

4th. There are tales which relate to men and women only, and to events that might have happened anywhere at any time. They might possibly be true, and equally true, whether the incidents happened to an Eastern sage or a wise old Highlander. Such tales as Nos. 19 and 20. These are plentiful, and their characteristic is sagacity and hidden meaning.

5th. There are children’s tales, of which some are given. They are in poetry and prose as elsewhere, and bear a general resemblance to such tales all over the world. The cat and the mouse play parts in the nursery drama of the Western Isles, as well as in “Contes et Apologues Indiens inconnus jusqu’ a ce jour,” etc. ; a translation into French, by Mr. Stanislaus Julien, in 1860, of Chinese books, which were translated into that language from Sanscrit in 1565, by a Chinese doctor, and President of the Ministry of Justice, who composed “The Forest of Comparisons,” in twenty-four volumes, divided into 20 classes, and subdivided into 508 sections, after twenty years of hard labour, during which he abstracted about 400 works. This is the name of one : Fo-choue-kiun-nieou-pi-king.

Let those who call Gaelic hard, try that ; or this : Tchong-king-siouen-tsi-pi-yu-king.

Let those who condemn nursery rhymes, think of the French savant, and the Chinese cabinet minister, and the learning which they have bestowed on the conversations of cats and mice.

6th. Riddles and puzzles, of which there are a very great number. They are generally descriptive, such as, “No bigger than a barley corn, it covers the king’s board”—(the eye). I have given a few. If any despise riddles, let them bear in mind that the Queen of Sheba is believed to have propounded riddles to Solomon, and that Samson certainly proposed a riddle to the Philistines. I am told that riddles are common in India now.

7th. Proverbs, in prose and in verse, of which 1515 were printed in 1819, and many more are still to be got. Many are evidently very old from their construction, and some are explained by the stories, for example, “Blackberries in February” has no very evident meaning, but a long story explains that difficulties may be vanquished. A king’s son was sent by a step-mother to get “that which grew, and is neither crooked nor straight”—(sawdust) ; “Blackberries in February,” which he found growing in a charnel-house ; and a third thing, equally easy to find when the way was known.

8th. There are songs, of which there are a vast number, published and unpublished, of all sorts and kinds, sung to wild and peculiar tunes. They are condemned and forbidden in some districts, and are vanishing rapidly from all. These used to be sung continually within my recollection, and many of them are wild, and, to my ear, beautiful. There are songs composed in

a particular rhythm for rowing, for washing clothes by dancing on them ; songs whose rhythm resembles a piobroch ; love songs ; war songs ; songs which are nearly all chorus, and which are composed as they are sung. The composer gives out a single line applicable to anything then present, and the chorus fills up the time by singing and clapping hands, till the second line is prepared. I have known such lines fired at a sportsman by a bevy of girls who were waulking blankets in a byre, and who made the gun and the dog the theme of several stanzas. Reid's *Bibliotheca Scoto-Celtica*, 1832, gives a list of eighty-one Gaelic books of poetry printed since 1785. There are hymn books, song books, and poetry composed by known and unknown bards, male and female. Of the former, Mackenzie, in his *Beauties of Gaelic poetry*, gives a list of thirty-two, with specimens of their works and a short biography. Of the latter class, the unknown poets, there are many at the present day; and who is to guess their number in times when men did nothing but fight and sing about their battles ? A very few of these bards have become known to the world by name, and, in all probability their merits never will be known. Let any one translate Sir Patrick Spens or Annie Laurie into French or Greek, or read a French translation of Waverley, and the effect of translation on such compositions will be evident.

9th. The romantic popular tales of which this collection mainly consists.

I presume that I have said enough as to their collection, and that I may now point out what seems to me to be their bearing on the scientific part of the subject ; that I may take them as traditions, and argue from them as from established facts. I have endeavoured to show how, when, and where I got the stories ; each has its own separate pedigree, and I have given the original Gaelic, with the closest translation which I was able to make.

Now, let me mention the works in which I have found similar tales, and which are within the reach of all who can read English. First—*Tales from the Norse*, translated by G. W. Dasent, published 1859. Many of the Gaelic tales collected in 1859 resemble these very closely. The likeness is pointed out in the notes.

It is impossible that the book could have become known to the people who told the stories within the time, but if it were, a manuscript which has been lent to me by the translator, proves that the stories were known in Scotland before the translation from the Norse was made public.

It is a verbatim copy made by a clergyman from a collection of fourteen tales, gathered by " Peter Buchan, editor of the *Ancient Ballads and Songs of the North of Scotland*." It is dated 1847, Glasgow ; and signed, Alexander B. Grosart. The tales are written in English, and versions of all except three, had previously come to me in Gaelic. For example, (No. 2), *The Battle of the Birds* closely resembles " *The Master Maid*" from Norway, but it still more resembles Mr. Peter Buchan's " *Greensleeves*," found in Scotland thirteen years before the Norse tales were translated. The manuscript was sent by Mr. Grosart, after he had read the Norse tales, and it seems to be clearly proved that these stories are common to Norway and to Scotland.

I have found very few stories of the kind amongst the peasantry of the low country, though I have sought them. I find such names as Fingal in Mr. Buchan's stories, and I know them to be common in the islands where the scene is often laid. The language is not that of any peasantry, and I have come to the conclusion that this collection is mostly derived from Gaelic, directly or indirectly, perhaps from the shoals of West Highlanders and Irishmen who used to come down as shearers every harvest, and who are now scattered all over Scotland as

farm-servants and drovers, and settled in Edinburgh and Glasgow as porters. I know from one of these, a drover, who goes every year to the south with cattle, that he has often entertained lowland farm-servants by telling in English the stories which he learned as a child in South Uist. I know of men in Paisley, Greenock, and Edinburgh, who are noted for their knowledge of sgeulachd. But while I hold that this particular collection was not told in this form by lowland Scotch peasants, I know that they still do tell such stories occasionally, and I also know that Englishmen of the lower ranks do the same. I met two tinkers in St. James's Street in February with black faces and a pan of burning coals each. They were followed by a wife, and preceded by a mangy terrier with a stiff tail. I joined the party, and one told me a version of "the man who travelled to learn what shivering meant," while we walked together through the park to Westminster. It was clearly the popular tale which exists in Norse, and German, and Gaelic, and it bore the stamp of the mind of the class, and of the man, who told it in his own peculiar dialect, and who dressed the actors in his own ideas. A cutler and a tinker travel together, and sleep in an empty haunted house for a reward. They are beset by ghosts and spirits of murdered ladies and gentlemen, and the inferior, the tinker, shows most courage, and is the hero. "He went into the cellar to draw beer, and there he found a little chap a-sittin' on a barrel with a red cap on 'is 'ed ; and sez he, sez he, ' Buzz.' ' Wot's buzz ?' sez the tinker. ' Never you mind wot's buzz,' sez he. ' That's mine ; don't you go for to touch it,' " etc. etc. etc.

In a less degree many are like the German stories of the brothers Grimm. That collection has been translated, and a book so well known may possibly have found its way into the Highlands. It is impossible to speak with certainty ; but when all the narrators agree in saying that they have known their stories all their lives, and when the variation is so marked, the resemblance is rather to be attributed to common origin than to books. I only once heard of such a book in the Highlands. It was given to a gamekeeper in Sutherland for his children, and was condemned, and put out of the way as trash.

The Gaelic stories resemble in some few cases the well-known tales of Hans Andersen, founded on popular tales told in Denmark.

And they resemble sundry other books which are avowedly founded on popular tales collected in various countries.

Some are like the French tales of the Countess D'Aulnoy which have been translated. One is like part of Shakspeare, but it is still more like the Italian story in Boccaccio, from which part of Cymbeline is supposed to be taken. Perhaps Shakspeare may have founded Cymbeline on a popular tale then current in England as well as in Italy.

A few resemble the Arabian Nights, and in some cases I believe that the stories have been derived from early English translations of that well-known book. I used myself to read an edition of 1815 to my piper guardian, in return for his ursgeuls, but he seemed more inclined to blame the tyranny of the kings than to admire the Eastern stories.

MacLean has himself told the story of Aladdin in Gaelic as his share of a winter night's entertainment, and I have heard of several people of the poorer class who know the Arabian Nights well. But such stories are easily known after a little experience has been gained. The whole of a volume is run together, the incidents follow in their order, or in something like it. The difference in style is as marked as the contrast between a drift tree and a wrecked vessel, but as it is curious to trace the change from Eastern ways as seen through an English translation of a French view of the original Arabic, I give specimens. These contain the incidents

embodied in stories in the Arabian Nights, but the whole machinery and decoration, manners and customs, are now as completely West Highland as if the tales had grown there. But for a camel which appears, I would almost give up my opinion, and adopt that of MacLean, who holds that even these are pure traditions.

In support of his view it may be said that there are hundreds of other books as well known in England as those mentioned above, of which neither I nor my collectors have ever found a trace. Jack and the Bean-stalk, and Jack the Giant-killer, Beauty and the Beast, and the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood, as known in England, are unknown in the Highlands. None of the adventures of Mr. Pickwick, or Sam Weller, or Jack Shepherd, or Gulliver, or Robinson Crusoe, are mixed up with the prose tales. No part of the story of Wallace, as told in the "Scottish Chiefs," or of "Waverley," is to be found in popular history. There is nothing like "The Mysteries of London." There are none of the modern horrors of which ballads have been made, such as "Sad was the day when James Greenacre first got acquainted with Sarah Gale." There are no gorgeous palaces, and elegant fairies ; there are no enchanters flying in chariots drawn by winged griffins ; there are no gentle knights and noble dames ; no spruce cavaliers and well-dressed ladies ; no heroes and heroines of fashionable novels ; but, on the contrary, everything is popular. Heroes are as wild, and unkempt, and savage as they probably were in fact, and kings are men as they appear in Lane's translations of the Arabian Nights.

Eastern tale tellers knew what Haroun al Raschid must have suffered when he put on the fisherman's clothes, and Mr. Lane has not scrupled to follow the original Arabic.

If the people of the West Highlands have added book stories to their traditions, they have selected those only which were taken from peasants like themselves in other countries, and they have stripped off all that was foreign to their own manners. The people have but taken back their own.

Besides books accessible to all English readers, I find similar stories in books beyond the reach of the people. I have pointed out in the notes all that were within my reach, and came under my notice but this part of the subject is a study, and requires time to acquire knowledge which I do not possess.

Such, then, is the evidence which bears on the immediate origin of the stories. I believe them to be pure traditions, very little affected by modern books, and, if at all, only by those which are avowedly taken from popular tales. A trip of five days in the Isle of Man in April 1860 has but confirmed this opinion.

That island, in spite of its numerous rulers, is still peculiarly Celtic. It has belonged to Norwegians. English, Scotch, Welsh, and Irish have fought for it. It has a Law Court with a Norwegian name held on a mound ; half the names in the island are Norse, such as Laxey (Salmon isthmus), Langness, Snafell ; but these names are not understood by the people who live at the places. Peel has a descriptive Gaelic name, which means island port ; a Salmon is Braddan, not Lax ; and of the poorer classes living in the mountain farms, and on the points and distant corners of the island, there are still many who can hardly speak anything but Manks. Their hair is dark ; the sound of their voices, even their houses, are Celtic. I know one turf dwelling which might be a house in North Uist. There was the fire on the floor, the children seated around it, the black haired Celtic mother on a low stool in front,—the hens quarrelling about a nest under the table, in which several wanted to lay eggs at once.

“ Get out, Polly ! Drive her out, John !” And then John, the son, drove out Polly, the hen, with a stick ; and the hen said, “ Gurr-r-m ;” and ran in under the table again and said, “ Cluck, cluck,” and laid the egg then and there. There was the same kindly hospitable manner in the poorest cottage ; and I soon found that a Scotch Highlander could speak Manks as soon as he could acquire the art of mispronouncing his own language to the right amount, and learn where to introduce the proper English word. “ La fine” — fine day — was the salutation everywhere ; and the reply, “ Fine, fine.” But though nouns are almost the same, and the language is but a dialect of Gaelic, the foreigner was incomprehensible, because he could not pronounce as they did ; and I was reduced to English. Now this island is visited every summer by shoals of visitors from the mainland ; steam-boats bring them from Liverpool, a thousand at a time, and they sweep over the whole country. If visitors import stories, here there are plenty of strangers, and I was a stranger myself. If stories are imported in books, here are the books also. The first picture I saw on landing was a magnificent Blue-beard in a shop window. He was dressed as an Eastern potentate, and about to slice off his wife’s head with a crooked scimitar, while the two brothers rode up to the gate on prancing steeds, with horror on their faces and swords in their hands. But there was not a trace of any of that kind of story to be found amongst the peasants with whom I spoke in the Isle of Man.

I found them willing to talk, eager to question, kindly, homely folk, with whom it was easy to begin an acquaintance. I heard everywhere that it used to be common to hear old men telling stories about the fire in Manks ; but any attempt to extract a story, or search out a queer old custom, or a half-forgotten belief, seemed to act as a pinch of snuff does on a snail.

The Manksman would not trust the foreigner with his secrets ; his eye twinkled suspiciously, and his hand seemed unconsciously to grasp his mouth, as if to keep all fast. After getting quite at ease with one old fellow over a pipe, and having learned that a neighbour’s cow had born a calf to the “ Taroo ustey,” water bull, I thought I might fish for a story, and told one as a bait.

“ That man, if he had two pints, would tell you stories by the hour,” said a boy. “ Oh, yes, they used to tell plenty of stories,” said the old man, “ Skyll as we call them.”

Here was the very word mispronounced, “ sgeul,” so my hopes rose. “ Will you tell me a story now ?” “ Have you any churches in your country ?” “ Yes, and chapels ; but will you tell me a story ?” “ What you got to sell in your bag ?” “ What a shame now, for you, an old Mananach, not to tell me a story when I have told you one, and filled your pipe and all.” “ What do you pay for the tobacco ?” “ Oh, will you not tell the man a story !” said the boy. “ I must go and saw now,” said the old man ; and so we parted.

But though this was the usual thing, it was not always so ; and it soon became evident that the stories given in Train’s history of the Isle of Man, are nearly all known to the people now ; and these are of the same nature as some known in the Highlands of Scotland ; some are almost identical ; and nearly all the Manks customs are common to the Western Isles.

Thus I heard of Fairies, “ Ferish,” who live in green mounds, and are heard at times dressing mill-stones in haunted mills ; of Taroo Ustey, the water bull ; of Dinny Mara, the sea man, and of the Mermaid ; of Caval Ustey, the water horse ; of Fion MacCooil ; of a city under the waves ; of a magic island seen in the far west. I heard of giants. No one would tell about them ; but in a book I found how Goddard Crovan threw a vast boulder at his scolding wife, and how a Norman baron, named “ Kitter” and his cook ; “ Faoch,” and his magic sword, “ Macabuin,” made by “ Loan Maclibhuin, the dark smith of Drontheim ;” and

“Hiallus-nan-urd, the one-legged hammerman,”—are all woven into a story, and mixed up with such Norwegian names as Olave and Emergaid, exactly as a story is jumbled together in the Western Isles of Scotland.

I got some stories which I have not found in the Manks books, so I give them here, in the hope that some Manksman may be induced to gather the popular lore of his own country. This from a woman who lives near the Calf of Man.

“Did you ever hear tell of the Glashan?”

“No; tell me about the Glashan.”

“Well, you see, in the old times they used to be keeping the sheep in the folds; and one night an old man forgot to put them in, and he sent out his son, and he came back and said the sheep were all folded, but there was a year-old lamb, oasht, playing the mischief with them; and that was the glashan.

“You see they were very strong, and when they wanted a stack threshed, though it was a whole stack, the glashan would have it threshed for them in one night.

“And they were running after the women. There was one of them once caught a girl, and had a hould of her by the dress, and he sat down and he fell asleep; and then she cut away all the dress, you see, round about, this way, and left it in his fist and ran away; and when he awoke, he threw what he had over his shoulder, this way; and he said (something in Manks which I could not catch).

“Well, you see, one night the ould fellow sent all the women to bed, and he put on a cap and a woman’s dress, and he sat down by the fire and he began to spin; and the young glashans, they came in, and they began saying something in Manks that means ‘Are you turning the wheel? are you trying the reel?’ Well, the ould glashan, he was outside, and he knew better than the young ones; he knew it was the ould fellow himself, and he was telling them, but they did not mind him; and so the ould man threw a lot of hot turf, you see, it was turf they burned then, over them and burned them; and the ould one said (something in Manks). ‘You’ll not understand that now?’ ‘Yes, I do, pretty nearly.’ ‘Ah, well.’ And so the glashans went away and never came back any more.”

“Have you many stories like that, guidwife?” “Ah,” said she, “there were plenty of people that could tell these stories once. When I was a litle girl, I used to hear them telling them in Manks over the fire at night; but people is so changed with pride now that they care for nothing.”

Now here is a story which is all over the Highlands in various shapes. Sometimes it is a Brollichan son of the Fuath, or a young water horse transformed into the likeness of a man, which attacks a lonely woman and gets burned or scalded, and goes away to his friends outside. In the islands, the woman generally says her name is Myself; and the goblin answers, when asked who burned him, “Myself.” This Manks story is manifestly the same, though this incident is left out. I have heard it in Lewis, and in many places besides, and part of it is best omitted.

The Glashan, as I found out afterwards, frequented neighbouring farms till within a very late period. He wore no clothes, and was hairy; and, according to Train’s history, Phynod-

deree, which means something hairy, was frightened away by a gift of clothes—exactly as the Skipness long-haired Gruagach was frightened away by the offer of a coat and a cap. The Manks brownie and the Argyllshire one each repeated a rhyme over the clothes; but the rhymes are not the same, though they amount to the same thing.

Here, then, is a Gaelic popular tale and belief in Man ; and close to it I found a story which has a counterpart in Grimm. I heard it from my landlady at Port Erin, and I met two Manksmen afterwards who knew it —

“ The fish all gathered once to choose a king ; and the fluke, him that has the red spots on him, stayed at home to make himself pretty, putting on his red spots, to see if he would be king, and he was too late, for when he came the herring was king of the sea. So the fluke curled his mouth on one side, and said, ‘ A simple fish like the herring, king of the sea !’ and his mouth has been to one side ever since.”

It seems, too, that the Manks version of “ Jack the Giant Killer” varies from the English ; for

“ Jack the Giant Killer,
Varv a Vuchd in the river,”

killed a pig in the river ; and the English hero did nothing of the sort. In short, the Isle of Man has its own legends, which have their own peculiarities ; they resemble others, and do not seem to be taken from books. The same class of people tell them there as elsewhere ; the difficulty of getting at them is the same ; and the key to the secret is the native language. From what I gleaned in a five days’ walk, I am sure that a good Manksmen might yet gather a large harvest within a very narrow space.

[1] See page 256 of “ Scotland in the Middle Ages,” by Cosmo Innes, Edmonston and Douglas, 1860, for evidence taken from “ The fathers of our Scotch literature,” and the Report of the Highland Society.

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