THREE BROADCAST TALKS

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Highland Folklore

BY

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HIGHLAND FOLKLORE.

(I).

PRE-CELTIC ELEMENTS: CUSTOMS, RITES, BELIEFS.

When Caesar states that certain people in Britain were forbidden to eat the hare, the cock or the goose, he is not recording a mere dietetic peculiarity on the part of the ancient Britons. The words convey little or nothing to the modern reader, but Caesar must have felt that he was recording something of importance in the historical sense, as I hope to show presently. These ancient taboos are not quite the trifles they seem, and some of them are extant to this day in the Highlands, if not in other parts of Scotland. Has folk-lore of this type any contribution to make to the history of the civilised races? Evidence from archæology, language and tradition shows an original very widely spread race in the Highlands, and Scotland generally, prior to the advent of Picts, Gaels and Norsemen. These pre-Celts have left their remains in barrows and Megalithic monuments, weapons and utensils, and it is not difficult to this day, in some of the remoter parts, to recognise by headmark, people possessing their physical characteristics — slight build, swarthy complexion, comely features. The clash of these races is still represented in folk-lore, though history records only a few isolated scraps as to their presence, but the Highland section of folk-lore in particular is rich in traditional names, customs, rites, beliefs and folk-tales, all of which material, if cautiously studied, may be made to yield interesting information in point. The customs and superstitions in the Highlands are not the result of ignorance and stupidity, though compared with the knowledge and culture of an advanced civilisation they may appear to be—this is a comparison

which should never be made. Survivals such as those noted by Caesar are not so much a link between a primitive and a more advanced culture, as evidence of antagonism between the higher and the lower cultures. Such survivals reach us down the stream of time through people whose culture-stage is on a level with the culture to which the survivals belonged. Once the higher civilisation reaches them effectively, the survival and its connotation are lost; hence survivals are to be looked for nowadays only among the peasantry, the uneducated, and those who live a primitive life out of touch with our rapidly advancing civilisation. As the earliest race was, however, so widely spread, and as their physical characteristics still persist in modern Scotland (according to the anthropologists Burns, the national poet, was of this Iberian stock) it will not be without significance, racially, if we can segregate in our folk-lore, beliefs, rites or customs which are reasonably traceable to them.

THE EARLIEST NAMES.

The earliest names we have, such as Orkney, Caithness, contain significant roots. "Orc" signifies in old Celtic "boar," "Cat" means that animal, and Gaelic Cataibh (now Sutherland) means "among the Cats"; Gaelic Arcaibh (Orkney), "among the Orcs"; Inis Cat, Isle of Cats, was the pre-Norse name for Shetland. Other northern tribes noted by Ptolemy had names considered by Dr Watson to signify "sheep-folk" and "raven-folk." "Lorn," from the name of one of the sons of Erc, the original settler from Ireland, means "wolf." Banff and Elgin are both names whose roots in early Celtic mean "pig." So also the Epidii, "horse-folk" of Kintyre, the ancient home of the Maceacherns, "horse-lords." The crests of various Highland Clans contain figured animals, the Mackintosh (Clan Chattan) crest with its motto, "Touch not the Cat bot a glove," being typical. Again Ossian, the name of the great Celtic bard, means "little deer" (his mother having the animal form through being under a magic

spell), while Cuchulainn, the Celtic hero's name, means "hound of Culann." Totems, such as animal or bird crests, were individual or tribal; the symbol indicated the accepted origin of the bearer of it, or that he had some intimate peculiar connection with the animal or bird concerned. He was on no account to use the totem bird or animal as food; this is a peculiar custom among the rudest savage races to-day. Cuchulainn was forbidden to eat of the flesh of the dog, and he came by his death through transgressing the law. The Book of Leinster (1150) says: "And another of the things that he must not do was eating his namesake's flesh."

The hare, cock and goose were of this class in ancient times, and the evidence on Celtic ground explains Caesar's reference. Respect for the hare in one district did not mean respect for it in all districts, only in its own totem district. It served as an omen for tribesmen. Boadicea is said to have drawn an augury from a hare taken from her bosom; the course taken by it was deemed a lucky course for her army to take against the Romans. O'Curry (in his "Manners of the Ancient Irish") relates that Conaire, the Irish Chieftain, was interdicted from eating the flesh of a fowl, as he was regarded as descended from the bird; in Scotland, among some of the Hebrides, the goose was looked upon as sacred—too sacred to be eaten.

The same phase of belief is unconsciously seen in food prejudices still in the islands; some favour skate, others dog-fish, some limpets and razor fish; and those who do not, do not esteem greatly those who do. Caesar's remark therefore tells us something of the culture conditions of the early Britons.

TOTEM BELIEFS.

Tribal or hero names such as those mentioned, reaching us from the remotest times, are not adequately explained as occupation or quality names. They point probably to the primitive pre-Celtic totem organisation, which the Celtic invasions (Pictish and Gadelic)

arrested, or in part assimilated. Affinity of this nature between certain tribes and animals is exemplified in modern times by the MacCodrums of North Uist, who are popularly regarded as being derived from the seal race. There are now none of this name in the island, though the tradition that they were very brown-skinned and slim, in spite of their Norse name (Guttormr), is not without significance. Cf. also Mrs Kennedy-Fraser's "Seal Croon," recently recovered in the Hebrides. Beliefs of this kind were localised tribally in primitive times, and point to a culture easily paralleled among primitive races still existing, but traceably connected through their contact-cultures with British Neolithic peoples, such as the aborigines of the Scottish Highlands. They bring us back to a time when certain animals, birds, plants or natural features were regarded by the inhabitants as divinities, each locality or tribal district with its own form of animism or totem belief. It indicates also probably a time anterior to blood-kinship, when various tribes signalised their identities in this fashion, and when culture was so primitive that only motherhood was recognised. The megalithic cultures were general, the specialised forms of animism more or less local. This pre-Celtic recognition of motherhood only, shows its influence in the acceptance by the Picts, a people with some Aryan culture since they spoke a Celtic language, of the principle of Matriarchy, and we have an echo of it to this day in common expressions in Gaelic, such as that of which the English equivalent is "I'll call no man brother except the son of my mother." Various rivers, such as the Lochy, noted by as early a writer as Adamnan as the abode of the "black goddess" ("loch" in old Celtic means "black"), the Ness, &c., mountain tops, fords, valleys, lochs and tarns were all looked upon by this earlier race as the abodes of local deities, benevolent or otherwise, and to this day one may listen to tales of water-horses, river kelpies, sprites and such like, from the lips of old people who speak Gaelic only, and who, though living in the

midst of a Christian culture, are still thoroughly in touch with the traditional pagan beliefs of their earliest youth. These old people are nowadays extremely reluctant to speak of such things, and it requires much tact and the most careful approach in homely Gaelic to excite their memories and set them a-speaking.

HOLY WELLS.

There can be little doubt that Celtic poetry, song, legend and folk-tale that are so live with fancy, and so sympathetic with nature, owe much of their inspiration to the spirit-qualities and beliefs of this gifted early race. The most wide-spread water-cult of all, due to these pre-Celts, is in connection with the holy wells associated in historic times with various Christian saints. The early church efforts to Christianise the earlier races in the Scottish Highlands, and elsewhere throughout Britain, was long resisted by this pagan water-cult, and the success of the Church was due in part to the policy of consecrating such wells and other heathen foci for Christianising purposes, but to this day this well-cult persists, and it persists strongest of all in the remote Celtic-speaking areas of Wales, Ireland and the Scottish Highlands. The rites and ceremonies in connection with these wells are ultimately part and parcel of a common neolithic cult. After the Reformation it was noted that the Scottish wells "were all tapestried with old rags." Examples reaching well into modern times can be noted among the Hebrides and the northern counties, including Banff, Aberdeen, Perth, Inverness, Ross and Caithness. Kilmuir in Skye has Loch Seunta, where offerings of small rags, pins and coloured threads were made to the divinity of the Loch. At St Malruba's Well, Ross-shire, rags were left on bushes, nails driven into a neighbouring oak tree, or sometimes a copper coin was driven in. Have we an unconscious echo of this in the nails which contributors in Germany during the war were entitled to drive into the statue of Marshal Hindenburg? At a well in Gigha it was the custom to leave a piece of money, a

needle, pin, or one of the prettiest variegated stones that could be found; and at a well in Jura devotees left an offering of some small token, such as a pin, needle, farthing or the like. At Montblairie in Banffshire, the offerings of those who came to the fountain adorned the impending boughs with rags of linen and woollen garments, and the well was "enriched with farthings and bodles." In Aberdeenshire, at Fraserburgh, Sinclair records, in the Statistical Account, "the superstitious practice of leaving some small trifle." In Perthshire, at St Fillan's Well, Comrie, the worshippers left rags of linen or woollen cloth. In Caithness, at Dunnet, they threw pieces of money in the water, and at Wick it was the custom to leave a piece of bread and cheese and a silver coin, which the people alleged disappeared in some mysterious way. In Ross, at Alness, pieces of coloured cloth were left as offerings, and at Fodderty and at Kiltearn shreds of clothing were hung on the surrounding trees. At Penpont, in Dumfries, a part of the dress was left as an offering; in Kirkcudbright, at Buittle, either money or clothes was left, and at Houston, in Renfrewshire, pieces of cloth were left, as a present or offering to the saint, on the bushes. These wells or fountains were credited from the remotest times with healing properties, and the invalids approached the wells sunways, or "deiseal," as the Gaelic phrase has it. This was pre-eminently the custom in the Highlands in connection with other ceremonies, and is probably primarily connected with some form of primitive pre-Celtic sun-worship. A funeral procession in the Highlands in the olden days approached the cemetery in this fashion, and it is not unusual to note the custom at a burial still, in connection with placing the dead in the grave. Moderns unconsciously do something of the same kind when passing round a dram or dealing out cards.

WATER CURES.

Instances of the persistence to quite recent times of pagan faith in the water

cures are numerous. In Loch Maree, after patients had drunk from the well, they were towed round the island; in Strath Fillan the patient bathed after sunset and before sunrise, and was then laid on his back bound to a stone in the Chapel of St Fillan, and, if next morning he was found loose, the cure was considered perfect. In Ness Lewis, a somewhat similar operation was carried out at the old temple in Europie, in the case of those mentally afflicted. At Farr, in Sutherlandshire, the patient, after a plunge in the water, drinking thereof and making his offering, had to be away from the banks, so as to be out of sight of the water before the sun rose, otherwise the cure was ineffective. It is important to note that the ceremony had to take place during the absence of the sun; thus at Muthill, in Perthshire, the time for drinking the water was before the sun rose, or immediately after it set. There was also the condition that the water had to be drunk from a "quick cow's horn" (a horn taken from a live cow), "which indispensable horn was in the keeping of an old woman who lived near the well." This latter survival suggests an original custodian priestess. In the Island of Lewis, St Andrew's Well, in the village of Shader, was made a test by the natives to know if a sick person was to die from his affliction. They sent someone with a wooden dish containing some of the water to the patient, and the dish was thereafter laid gently upon the surface of the water; if it turned round sunways it was concluded that the patient would recover from his illness, but if not, he would die. There are not wanting examples where the primitive guardian deity of the sacred spring is found in animal form. At Kilbride, in Skye, was a well with "one trout only in it; the natives are very tender of it, and though they often chance to catch it in their wooden pails, they are very careful to preserve it from being destroyed"—Martin. In the well at Kilmore, in Lorne, were two fish called by the inhabitants, "Iasg Sianta" or holy fishes. Other guardian deities were represented by frogs, worms or flies. The

whole of this traditional evidence identifies the wells in question as the shrines of ancient local deities, in close touch with primitive non-Celtic ideas and thought. It is very significant in this respect that the area over which this cult is found is coterminous with that of megalithic monuments, a fact which suggests a megalithic date for such worship. It is also significant that it is so prominent in the Highlands of Scotland, in the country of the Picts, where St Columba, according to Adamnan, found a "fountain famous among this heathen people, worshipped as a god," and where in its waters he overcame the Druids, and "then blessed the fountain," and from that day the demon separated from the water. Similar research in the direction of mountain, tree or rock worship would no doubt confirm the foregoing conclusion. Analogous, but more savage, pagan sacrifices to propitiate the demons of sickness and murrains are numerous even in recent times.

SACRIFICES.

In 1678 the Presbytery of Dingwall note the proceedings against four Mackenzies "for sacrificing a bull in ane heathenish manner in the Island of St Ruffus, commonly called Ellan Moury, in Lochew, for the recovery of the health of Cirstane Mackenzie."

Within twenty miles of Edinburgh a relative of the late Professor Simpson, as related in P.S.A.S., vol. 4, offered up a live cow as a sacrifice to this spirit of murrain. Miss Gordon Cumming records a similar instance on her father's estate at Dallas, in Morayshire, about 1850. In Mull, in 1767, in consequence of a disease among the cattle, the people carried out a sacrifice of this type in an elaborate way, though they thought it wicked to do so. They carried to the top of a hill a wheel and nine spindles of wood. After extinguishing every fire in sight of the hill, the wheel was turned from East to West, long enough to produce fire by friction. If the fire was not produced before the moon, the incantation had no effect. A heifer was then sacrificed and the diseased

part burned. They then lighted their own hearths from the fire, and feasted on what remained of the heifer. An incantation was repeated by an old man from Morven during the whole time the fire was being raised. Keating records similar practices in Ireland to preserve the herds from contagious disorders. Similarly a commonly practised cure for epilepsy in the Highlands and Islands was to bury a black cock alive, under the spot upon which the patient had the last fit. The demon of illness was understood to pass into the body of the bird. This rite is not more than moribund yet. The principle clearly is a life for a life, and possibly points to a time of human sacrifice or substitution. (Cf. the belief that St Oran was sacrificed in St Columba's time). As this was one of the principles of the Druids, and as the sacrifice of one animal for the sake of the herd is not apparently recorded for primitive non-Aryan races, the survival here may not be pre-Celtic though in line with the practices of the early race. The term Druid (druvid—very wise, very knowing—Thurneysen) may have been extended, as Henderson suggests, to the "wise men" of the pre-Celtic peoples, who brought over their own rites when the incorporation of the various races took place.

WITCHCRAFT.

The cult of witchcraft, white or black, still with us in some form of magic belief in very remote areas, but disappearing fast, though not so fast as it is believed to be, is another belief which, along with its rites, seems firmly traceable by means of folk-lore to this pre-Celtic race which appears to have, archæologically, physically and psychologically, woven itself into the very web of our early history and racial qualities. Witchcraft has its own history, and not a very savoury one in even fairly recent Scottish annals. In the Highlands it had two main forms, white and black; white, benevolent and protective; black, malevolent and injurious. The protective form took the shape of incantations, charms and blessings, and many of them are really of

a Christian character, intended to invoke the Trinity to defy evil agencies or effect cures. These incantations are difficult to recover, but various useful collections, which may be consulted, have been made by MacBain, Mackenzie of the Crofters' Commission, and Carmichael. During the Great War, Hebridean soldiers setting out for the front were not unknown in some of the more outlandish and primitive communities to proceed to France fortified with an amulet, over which a magic "sian" or invocation had been made. An example of this white magic, which I personally witnessed not so long ago, was performed by a pious octogenarian lady. One of her cattle, which had been grazing on the hillside, had apparently become suddenly unwell. Her first inquiry, in her anxiety, was whether anybody had passed by in the animal's neighbourhood. On being informed by her daughter-in-law that a certain man, who was locally reputed to have the "droch shuil" or evil eye, had passed and made some complimentary remark about her cow, she immediately took a basin of water and, after placing a shilling in it, scattered the water over the animal's back. The animal, which had merely suffered from some temporary disability, quickly recovered, and the old lady and her neighbours were duly confirmed in their faith. Another form of magic cure, which I remember practised when animals were found suffering from wounds of any kind, consisted of washing the wounded parts with water, in which three ancient tiny stone whorls had been dipped. These whorls, which were really of soap stone (steatite) and had in an age long forgotten been used as spindle whorls, were believed, and are probably still believed, to be "clachan nathrach" (serpent stones), produced by snakes on rare occasions in the hills. The charm was always in the custody of an old woman, who was spoken of as "wise," and was frequently in demand by the people of the locality.

OMENS.

A very interesting form of magic horoscope is the Frith, belonging to the Outer

Isles only. It is, however, as the word indicates, of Norse origin (N. fret: an inquiry of the gods as to the future), though it had its apparently Celtic counterpart. This horoscope commences with an incantation, and the person making it looks out over the country-side, and from the omens which meet the eye divines the fate of the man or animal for whom the Frith is being made. The possible signs are very numerous. For example, a man approaching is an excellent sign, and so is a cock looking towards you. A man standing, means recovery; a man lying down, sickness; a beast lying down, illness or death; a beast rising up, recovery; a bird on the wing, a good sign; a woman standing, some untoward event; a woman passing or returning, fairly good; a woman with red hair, not lucky; a woman with black hair, lucky; a woman with brown hair, luckier; a lark or dove, a good sign; crow or raven, bad sign; a cat, good for Mackintoshes only; a pig, very good for Campbells and fairly good for others (there is a boar's head in the Campbell crest), &c. Love charms, charms to obtain justice, increase of stock, for recovery or protection against fairies, &c., are too numerous to more than mention. Not so long ago one of the lecturers in Irish in Dublin University showed me an old Gaelic prayer book containing an appeal for protection from the fairies and their darts. Malevolent witchcraft included specially the deprivation of milk of its substance, *i.e.* milk which did not produce cream was said to be bewitched. I have known of three worthy old church elders solemnly proceeding together to test all the milk basins of a whole village in order to detect the delinquent. A penny was gently placed upon the surface of the cream in each basin. If it sank, the milk was regarded as honest; if the cream was consistent enough to bear the weight of the penny, it came under suspicion, and the owner was regarded as having by some magic means added the cream rightly belonging to his neighbour's milk to his own. Various counter-charms, a list of which will be found in Campbell's "Witchcraft and Second Sight in

the Scottish Highlands," were practised, but the most effective of these was no doubt also the best disinfectant. Here we have in our own day a primitive cult arrested by a higher cult, but still found side by side with it.

WITCHES AND FAIRIES.

The supposed power of witches to raise winds, to transform themselves into animal shapes such as cats, hares, mice, is well known in the Highlands. The point to note is the close connection in this lore between witches and the lower animals. In primitive communities, originally non-Aryan, the same beliefs abound, and the close parallel clearly suggests that the contact between the conquering Celts and the older race resulted in a continuity of the latter's mythic influences or beliefs. We are carried a step further in this argument in connection with the well-known clay images of intended victims, which were injured in certain ways before being placed to waste away in a stream. In some cases stone arrow-heads, or elf-shots as they were called, were used by reputed witches for the purpose. Here we have a pre-historic implement, an untouched detail of early life, preserved for a peculiar use by witchcraft, and pointing directly to a pre-historic race.

They are supposed to be fairy darts, or arrows, thrown by the fairies at mortal man or beast, and always in folk-lore with deadly effect; and so, as Nilsson observes, it proves that it was not the Celts themselves, but a people considered by them to be versed in magic, who fabricated and used these stone arrows, and who were such a powerful racial factor as to inspire mythic conceptions in the minds of the conquering Celts. "Who," asks Mr Campbell, in his "Popular Tales," "were these powers of evil who cannot resist iron, these fairies who shoot stone arrows, and are of the foes to the human race? Is all this but a dim, hazy recollection of war between a people who had iron weapons and a race who had not—a race whose remains are found all over Europe?" In the Highlands the possession

of a piece of iron was, of old, sure protection against fairies or evil spirits. The theory that the fairies represent traditionally an ancient pigmy race has been favoured by some folk-lorists; it is worth noting that beliefs such as these originated, not with the primitive race, but with the conquering race which displaced them, if it did not absorb them. The conquered race driven out or despised would in time inspire their conquerors with mythic conceptions of their qualities and powers, or both, which ultimately developed along the lines of fairy folk-lore. Fairy craft itself may therefore be well explained in Scotland as Celtic beliefs regarding the powers, good and evil, of the aboriginal inhabitants.

(II).

HIGHLAND FOLK TALES: ORIGIN, STYLE, CONTENTS.

Verse Speaking Associations nowadays find favour among the most cultured circles, but they and our Musical Festivals find their prototypes among the most ancient and most characteristic institutions of the Gael. Not less important in giving us a bird's-eye view of the most ancient times were also the Prose Recitation Circles or Ceilidhs of the Highlanders. These story-telling circles remain to our own day, though in feeble form, in our remote glens and island villages. Nevertheless, a generation ago, they were still flourishing vigorously, and there lived Highlanders, men and women, with long memories for what they had heard from their fathers. Book lore for them had no meaning; they were the living books themselves, from which famous collectors and folklorists, such as J. F. Campbell, Gregorson Campbell, MacInnes, MacDougall, the late Dr Carmichael and many others, gathered in the most direct and reliable way the very large amount of Highland oral popular literature now available in the original Gaelic, or in translation, to the reading public of every country. Campbell of Islay, along with his assistants, spent some years wandering up and down the Highlands and Islands recording the Folk tales from the lips of the uneducated peasantry. Four large volumes published in 1860 and 1862 resulted. Much later five volumes, "The Waifs and Strays of Celtic Tradition," were published under the ægis of Lord Archibald Campbell, and last year a second edition of Carmichael's "Carmina Gadelica," two large handsome volumes, was issued. This last collection, the result of forty years' careful gleaning in the Hebrides among the people who then formed the last visible link between the remote past and the present, has compelled the admiration of Celtic scholars and comparative folk-lorists all over the world.

Still more recently we have the large five volumes of Folk Songs gathered by Mrs Kennedy Fraser and Kenneth Macleod. In addition, other publications, such as the "Celtic Review" and the "Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness" (32 vols., still proceeding), constitute a most valuable consulting library for those who may be desirous of extending their study of Highland folk-lore from original sources. Then again we now have the comprehensive Folk-lore Studies of Donald A. Mackenzie, a native born Highlander.

THE CEILIDH.

From oral sources in the last century were also obtained the very important collections of Gaelic proverbs made by Mackintosh and the late Sheriff Nicolson. Nicolson's work (1882) contains over 400 pages of Gaelic maxims with translations. It is one of the richest mines we have for enabling us to judge of the philosophy of life current among the old Highlanders. The long winter evenings, especially in the Isles, the lack of intercourse on any scale worth speaking of between the mass of the folk and strangers, the fact that they were shut up, so to speak, in their native Gaelic, their traditional custom from time immemorial in every village for cronies of the old seanachie type to gather together, evening after evening, round the large peat fire on the middle of the floor in their favourite ceilidh house, there to recount from memory in prose or poetry tales of the past, and perhaps discuss the present and the future, provided conditions favourable for the perpetuation of the Highland Folk tales. But for the collections mentioned, the present generation would lack the most valuable evidence they have of the social conditions of their fathers, and of many phases of cultural life, for which their present complicated domestic civilisation offers no adequate compensation. The training received, consciously and unconsciously, by young and old at these evening ceilidhs was invaluable in the direction of strengthening the memory, in cultivating rapid and fluent oral composition (for correct

and careful diction was much admired), in exercising the faculties of observation and reasoning and in inspiring, as many of the tales and poems do, love of kindred, country, hospitality, courtesy, physical prowess and self sacrifice. The tales, as we have them now, consist of various strata, such as those of the earliest or mythological type, the Ultonian with its central figures such as Conchobar Cuchulain (more concerned with Ireland than with Scotland, but Cuchulain is the recognised race hero), the Feinn-Ossianic Saga, and lastly the historical and, until recently, living folk tales.

THE BARDS.

The Dalriadic Scots, who ultimately gave its name to our own country, imported with them from Ireland much of the ancient Celtic pantheon from about the second century A.D., and, as a general rule, many of the tales in Ireland have very close parallels in Scottish Gaelic. This is only natural. But on the other hand, some of the Gaelic folk tales, especially those of unconscious genesis, have no doubt been bequeathed to Gaelic by the more ancient race displaced or absorbed by the Scottish Gaels. For centuries, until the plantation of Ulster, the cultural relationship between Ireland and the Scottish Highlands must have been very close, as many bards and professional story-tellers were in the habit of wandering up and down for purposes of entertainment in both lands, not to mention the Bardic or Ecclesiastical Schools which functioned until late medieval times. The most ancient of the tales clearly indicate that the Celts believed in a future Elysium, but apart from that central fact details are vague. There was at any rate a happy Other World accessible sometimes to people whilst still alive, and reached over the sea to the west, or by entering a sidh or fairy mound, or by diving under the waves. To the Tiree man it was the Green Island (An Eilean Uaine), to other islanders on the west it was Land under Waves (Tir fo Thuinn), Land of the Ever Young (Tir nan Og), and to this day the Barra man, in

intimate mood, tells tales with unconscious fervency of the mythic isle, visible on rare occasions to privileged fishermen, far on the dim west horizon, which he calls by the name of Roca Barraidh, a name of doubtful etymology. Our Scottish Gaelic Folk-lore, though so recently committed to writing, is not in itself recent, and no one can say definitely to what dim ages the original compositions belong, but there is a very graphic description in a very early folk poem of clearly pagan conceptions, which graphically describes the Celtic Valhalla. The MS. of this poem, recovered in Ireland, is definitely ascribed by both Thurneysen and Zimmer to not later than the 7th century, whatever the date of the original composition may be. Twenty-eight quatrains describe this wonderful land. I give Kuno Meyer's translation of several of the quatrains :

" There is a distant isle
Around which sea-horses glisten,
A fair course against the white-swelling surge,
Four feet uphold it.

Feet of white bronze under it,
Glittering through beautiful ages.
Lovely land throughout the world's age
On which the many blossoms drop.

An ancient tree there is with blossoms,
On which birds call to the Hours;
'Tis in harmony, it is their wont
To call together every Hour."

" Unknown is wailing or treachery
In the familiar cultivated land,
There is nothing rough or harsh,
But sweet music striking on the ear.

Wealth, treasures of every hue,
Are in the gentle land, a beauty of freshness,
Listening to sweet music,
Drinking the best of wine.

Golden chariots on the sea plain,
Rising with the tide to the sun,
Chariots of silver in the plain of sports
And of unblemished bronze.

There will come happiness with health
To the land against which laughter peals.
Into Imchiuin (the very calm place) at every season
Will come everlasting joy.

It is a day of lasting weather
That showers (down) silver on the land;
A pure-white cliff in the verge of the sea,
Which from the sun receives its heat."

BLOOD BROTHERHOOD.

Similar conceptions are to be noted from the most ancient Folk tales of other Celtic countries, notably those of Brittany (Le Braz: La Legende de la Mort), and while they partake, of course, of the mythology of other ancient Aryan peoples, they are naturally best conserved in those remote parts where the Celtic languages are living fossils, still able to bear relevant witness. Folk tales of the Highlanders also supply the Folk-lorist with evidence of other pagan religious beliefs, such as the bird and animal souls, the soul-forms of moths, butterflies, bees, trees, and even stones. Closely connected with the blood-soul is the blood-covenant of the old folk-tales. Blood brotherhood existed in the Highlands until at least the 18th century. Ancient leagues of friendship were confirmed "by drinking a drop of each other's blood, which was commonly drawn out of the little finger." This had a religious and sacred significance, and anyone breaking the pact became practically an outlaw. One old Gaelic song says:—

"Thy wounds I did staunch,
and many were they;
Thine heart's blood I drank—
sweeter than wine, I will say."

Another old Hebridean song, frequently still sung (Ailean Donn), says: "I could drink, though to the aversion of others, not of the red wine of Spain, but of the blood of thy body after being drowned." The earlier and more conscious heroic Sagas of Cuchulain, Fionn, Ossian, Oscar, Conan, always have a great central and historic figure, whose valour, deeds

and qualities form the main themes, and much vague legend, myth and magic lore is mixed up with elements of historical and social import. The dramatic element, especially in the Cuchulainn Saga, as in that of the Celtic Arthur and his Knights, is of a truly elemental type and contains material for the master hand to some day set forth on the world's stage.

FOLK-HEROIC POETRY.

The elements are certainly there for the dramatist who can use these themes for his play, as Malory in prose and Tennyson in poetry made use of King Arthur and his Knights. The style of this Gaelic folk-heroic poetry may be inferred from the following translation of a description of Cuchulainn's Chariot:—"It was not long until Ferdiad's charioteer heard the noise approaching, the clamour and the rattle and the whistling, and the tramp, and the thunder, and the clatter and the roar, namely the shield-noise of the light shields, and the hissing of the spears, and the loud clangour of the swords, and the tinkling of the helmet, and the ringing of the armour, and the friction of the arms; the dangling of the missive weapons, the straining of the ropes, and the loud clattering of the wheels, and the creaking of the chariot, and the trampling of the horses, and the triumphant advance of the champion and the warrior towards the ford approaching him." The Fionn-Ossianic Sagas are set forth in great detail and variety in the West Highland Popular Tales and Ballads. It is the later cycle of the two in folk-lore, and the manners and customs are changed. In the earlier Saga it is hero against hero, and their retinues are left in the shade. Cuchulainn, like Hercules or other demi-gods, stands isolated in his deeds of valour; in the latter cycle reaching our own day, the tales concern a body of heroes called the Feinn, understood to be a sort of standing army to defend the country against invaders. The Chief is Fionn, who does not outshine his companions in bravery or strength, but, by putting his thumb under his wisdom tooth, he is, when occasion needs it, omniscient. Hunt-

ing and the chase are a main theme, and the history in it is more easily separated from the supernatural. The qualifications for joining the Feinn were as follows :—The candidate must give security that no revenge is to be secured for his death; he must at least compose a war song, be a perfect master of his weapon, and his running and fighting qualities must pass test by his comrades; he must be able to hold out his weapon by the smaller end without a tremble; in the chase, through plain and wood, his hair must remain tied up—if it fell he was rejected. He must be so light and swift as not to break a rotten stick by standing on it; he must leap a tree as high as his forehead, and get under a tree no higher than his knee; without stopping he must be able to draw a thorn from his foot; he must not refuse a woman without a dowry; offer violence to no woman; be charitable to the poor and weak, and he must not refuse to fight nine men of any other nation that might set upon him.

TALES OF THE FEINN.

These folk-tales gather up references to the historical Norse invasions, though, of course, the historical Fionn and his heroes belong to a much earlier age. One of the popular Norse heroes, who figures honourably in these folk-tales and ballads, is Magnus Barefoot, King of Norway, who died in 1103. As his name implies, he favoured and assumed the Highland dress of the Islands, and along with his nobles introduced its use to Norway. In the folk-tales Fionn is not only the popular hero, but he embodies also the Highlanders' conception of the gentleman—a kind friend, an adviser of judgment, wise in counsel, able to solve doubts and difficulties, hospitable to all, ever ready to protect those who were weak or defenceless. His dog, Bran, and his famous sword, Mac an Luin, which never required to be swung twice on any occasion, have given rise to popular proverbs still current. The heroic song, "Brataichean na Feinne" ("Standards of the Feinn"), compares favourably for its operatic element with the best. It takes a first-class

singer to do it justice, and it is well worth hearing should the opportunity present itself. Oscar's banner "never went a foot back until the heavy grey earth trembled." The currency and popularity of these tales in mediæval and later times, when the Highlanders' religion was mainly a medley of the simpler elements of Christianity and his own superstitions, may be gauged from the fact that Bishop Carswell (1569), in his preface to his Gaelic translation of Knox's Liturgy, the first Gaelic book ever printed in Scotland or anywhere else, complains that his countrymen were fonder of listening to idle tales about the Feinn than they were of taking interest in the Word of God.

THE SAGAS.

These tales, then, reveal a real world, though they do so through the shadow of supernatural Celtic fancy. They show us how the Celts from time immemorial loved feasts, banqueting ceremonies show details of serving men, cup-bearers, wine, cask-shaped jars of earthenware or silver, meat served on platters of brass, or wood, or on plated baskets. The wine of Gaul appears very early in a Saga of the 8th century (Meyer). There are wheaten cakes with honey. Weapons, of course, are described from the spears and swords of the earliest times to the guns of the historical period. Several of the longer and more interesting Sagas contain "runs" of peculiar onomatopoetic rhythm, probably the oldest section of the tales. Narrators, relating these tales from time to time, added additional words of their own, and variants are numerous. Here is an old sea "run," as given in the Highland oral version, after the three warriors embark in their vessel:

"They gave her prow to sea and her stern to shore,
They hoisted the speckled, flapping, bare-topped sails,
Up against the tall, tough, splintering masts,
And they had a pleasant breeze as they might chose themselves,
Would bring heather from the hill, leaf from grove, willow from its roots,

Would put thatch of the houses in furrows of the ridges;
The day that neither the son nor the father could do it,
That same was neither little nor much for them,
But using it and taking it as it might come,
The sea plunging and surging,
The red sea, the blue sea lashing,
And striking thither and thither about her planks;
The whorled dun whelk that was down on the floor of the ocean,
Would give a snag on her gunwale and a crack on her floor,
She would cut a slender oaten straw with the excellence of her going."

Rhyming, including extempore rhyming to this day, was a favourite pastime of the Celts. His traditional laws were frequently handed down in oral rhyme, and even his property was divided in gifts, according to rhyme formula. The Chief of the Macdonalds, in a Gaelic traditional rhyme, says :—" I, Donald, chief of the Macdonalds, give here, in my castle, a right to Mackay, to Kilmahumag, from this day till to-morrow and so on for ever."

A FOLK-TALE.

The Folk tale latterly, as well as personal and local legend, comes into close contact with history. One of Campbell of Islay's tales, condensed, relates how a man, at one time well off, gave a well-stocked farm to each of his children. When old and a widower, he divided all that was left among his children, and lived with them turn about. His sons and daughters, ungrateful and tiring of him, tried to get rid of him when he came to stay with them. An old friend, finding him tearful by the wayside and learning the cause of his distress, took him home; there he gave him a bowl of gold, and a lesson upon which the old man acted. He went to a green hillock, where his grandchildren were at play, and, spreading out his gold, he muttered—" Ye are mouldy, ye are hoary, ye will be better for the sun." The

grandchildren told what they had seen, and thereafter all strove who should be kindest to the old grandfather. Still acting on the advice of his wise old friend, he carried a stout, little black chest about with him. When he was questioned as to its contents, he said—"That will be known when the chest is opened." When he died the chest was opened by the expectant heirs. In it were found broken potsherds and bits of slate and a wooden mallet, with a legend on its head in Gaelic rhyme, of which the English is :—

" Here is the fair mall
To give a knock on the skull
To the man who keeps no gear for himself,
But gives all to his bairns."

RESPECT FOR WOMEN.

Here is some historical matter, though, as the folk-lorist knows, not in its essence peculiar to Celtic lands. The sub-division of land among members of a family was and is well-known to the class who told this tale, but does it not also represent the very old custom of the tribal period of swarming off from the parent household? Then there is the actual handing over of the estate during the life of the owner, a well marked survival, in the Hebrides possibly, associated with Norse practice (Du Chaillu). The father living with the children probably points to the old Highland group of houses, worked by families in common. The desire to get rid of the old father suggests pre-historic native customs, very possibly also in close association with Norse Saga history (Elton). Cf. also the practice of savage primitive races. The hammer may be associated with the cult of Thor and with primitive practice in ancient Scandanavia. Nothing more truly indicates the grade of civilisation of a race than the esteem in which women are held; and no popular sayings or proverbs speak of women more respectfully than those of the Gaelic-speaking Highlander, though economic conditions have been as trying for them in their

social system as in corresponding peasant communities. These sayings, like the longer popular tales, are not wanting in humour, but they never regard women as inferior beings, or as mere sources of mischief, which is very often the point of view of the proverbs of greater nations. We may conclude then from a survey of the Highlanders' Folk tales, that he and his race are, in a very real way, mirrored in them, that if his character favours combat for the sake of glory, it favours it still more for the sake of fair play (Cothrom na Feinne), for the element of danger, and for the attraction of the unknown. Equally discernible is his spirit of indomitable personality everywhere.

(III).

DEATH OMENS AND PHANTOM FUNERALS.

It has been shown that Highland Folk-lore is not myth in the sense that it is imaginative only. The amalgam of races in the Highlands —Iberian, Pict, Gael, Norseman—has naturally produced a folk-culture with various ethnic bases and indeed explains the existence of the folk-lore itself. There is also the influence of the Christian culture, which, though not of ethnic significance, has arrested or held in suspense the earlier Pagan rites and beliefs. In addition to traditional materials, the folklorist must also take serious notice of the psychological conditions of the earlier race or races who remained satisfied with primitive explanations. Tradition in the Highlands has been strikingly persistent on account of remoteness and natural barriers. Roman culture itself did not penetrate north or west of the Grampians, and though the Highlands to-day are no more inhabited by uncivilised folk than other parts of Britain, contact with the modern world for the mass is a matter of yesterday. Remote communities still exist which are not quite in tune with the civilisation around them, and people exist who are capable of thinking as their forefathers did and in terms of the older psychology. Life around them continues to impress them in a primitive way. The aged Uist man, as he gazes far across the Western sea, glimmering in the sunlight, raises his cap reverently from his head as he remarks, "How worthy of honour is the ocean!" (Nach urramach an cuan!) The young Uist men, in similar circumstances, exclaims only, "Not a blade of seaweed will come ashore to-day if the wind remains like this" (Bile feamainn cha tig air tir an diugh fhad 's a bhios a' ghaoth 'san aird' 's a bheil i).

NATURE WORSHIP.

The older man's psychology continues to show an element of Pagan nature-worship, though

he himself is unaware of it. The older race lives on though it has been conquered by Celt and Norseman, and an interesting task is to separate out in our Highland Folk-lore the differences due to different race-origins, and, if possible, make each item of folk-lore tell its own life history. Simple primitive races all the world over have been and are influenced in the same way to a marvellous extent by their natural surroundings. The moaning of the wind at night, the rush of the winter torrent, the surge of the surf on the shore, fleeting shadows, &c., account for many universal beliefs of supernatural type. Cæsar himself repeated charm-spells to avoid misfortune, and Voltaire became quite depressed if he heard a raven croak. But apart from such common beliefs as these the Celts have preserved their own culture areas and living as they have lived, for untold centuries, on the fringe of West European civilisation, they have conserved also in their folk-lore and in their practice a remarkable body of peculiar rites of their own. These show in the various Celtic countries intimate contact at many points such as domestic and field deities, Christmastide customs, fire-festivals and processions, incantations, charms, remedies. The field deities of the ancient British Celts were recognised by the Romans: an altar dedicated to them, with Latin inscription, was discovered in the wall of Antoninus Pius. In the Highlands they have become a traditional memory only, but in one of the Outer Isles a household deity, Ni Chlach Urlar (Old Lady of the Hearth Stone), who personifies domestic strife, is still very much alive, and represented in the short Gaelic plays now in vogue in the island. The Highlander's alleged peculiar indifference to the passage of time is well illustrated by his folk-lore. Three giants lived in a cave by the sea. One day one of the giants said, " I heard a cow low." After a year and a day the second giant said, " What's that you said the other day?" A day and a year thereafter the third giant said, " If you don't cease your loud chatter I'll leave the cave to yourselves." At any rate it

illustrates a Celtic giant's way of looking at things.

DEATH BELIEFS.

Burial customs, or what may be called the cult of the dead, manifest in the Celtic countries remarkable folk-lore affinities. The Breton people especially seem more psychically intimate with the spirits of the dead than the other Celts. The dead retain, as it were, their place in the house, and the cemetery is merely a continuance of the fireside. In Brittany those who have gone are not quite gone; they are still quite close, and have only changed their dwelling. The spirits may be doing temporary penance at the bottom of a well, in a tree, bird, an animal or insect, and after expiation, accelerated by the tender devotional duties of near relatives, finally secures release and enters bliss. The spirits, as in our own Highland lore, often return to the domestic hearth and take a serious and practical interest in household affairs. Death rites and beliefs are a prominent feature of this folk-lore. The dreaded "Ankou," or Death personified, visibly visits abodes in Brittany to claim his victim: we have an analogous belief extant in some of the Western Isles where the spirit of the last person interred keeps watch and ward over the cemetery gateway (Faire chlaidh) until relieved by the spirit of the next person buried. Funeral processions on coming within sight of one another have been known to make all the haste possible to secure the right of first entry to the cemetery. Thus the person first interred would have only a very short spell of sentinel duty. Primitive notions are abundant. A cock crowing at night presages death, and a dog barking at an unusual hour for no apparent reason indicates the presence of phantoms. It is not uncommon still to see a plate with salt placed upon the breast of a corpse, and in a recent instance in one of the Inner Hebrides, in addition to the salt, I noted an open Bible placed face downwards upon the lower half of the face of a very aged man who had just passed away. The Bible was meant to prevent the ingress or approach of any evil

spirit. The windows had been all opened to facilitate the egress of the soul.

EVIL SPIRITS.

To protect the living from evil spirits it was customary in the evenings, as the Gaelic folk-rhyme has it, to

> "Shut the North window,
> Close quickly the South one,
> Shut the window to the West,
> Evil never came from the East."

It was also the custom when one was afraid of evil spirits to bless oneself and draw a circle within which to stand. Nothing evil could come inside the circle. Children not so long ago even on the mainland, habitually, as a game, took a stick, alight at the farther end, and swung it rapidly in a fiery circle while repeating a Gaelic invocation.

A propitiatory fire-procession takes place regularly still on the last day of the old year at Burghead. Similar practices are on record in the other Celtic countries. Excessive grief on the part of the living is regarded as very undesirable: it is understood to cause great worry to those who have gone and to retard seriously their progress to happiness. Primitive superstitions with a psychological element, connected with natural phenomena such as fire-balls or shooting stars, are fairly rife among very old people. While I was conversing in Gaelic recently with a very old woman in one of the Hebrides a star shot across the sky, and on noticing it she exclaimed, "The soul of some stranger passing" The fire-balls in the current folk-lore signalise the imminent deaths of people of consequence. One curious practice still extant in at least one remote locality when a person is "in extremis" from heart trouble is to pour molten lead into a basin of cold water. The piece of lead which assumes the shape most resembling a heart is taken by a relative to the shore and flung far out into the sea. The thrower exclaims in Gaelic: "May this heart illness disappear as you disappear for ever!" The ceremony has to be slowly and carefully performed. The curious

custom of curing scrofula, or king's evil, through the agency of a seventh son is still practised. and, according to current belief, frequently with complete success after ordinary medical skill has failed: toothache and similar ailments are cured by drinking from certain wells. No doubt the remedy is as effective as most of our patent pills.

DIVINATION.

Horoscopes from sheep shoulder blades have passed out of fashion, but divination from pouring white of egg into a glass of water is by no means unknown. Only an expert can do it well. Of all the psychical phenomena of Highland folk-lore, no relic of superstition, if indeed it is correct to so describe it, persists more than that which is commonly called "second-sight." This is a misnomer for the belief. The Gaelic phrase really means 'the two sights," "the two-fold vision," or "vision in two planes"; one material, the other spiritual. Belief in this form of clairvoyance is found in oral and written Celtic folk-lore (Le Braz, Sébillot, Sauvé, Gwerziou Breiz, Campbell, &c.). It is specially prominent in Brittany and the Scottish Highlands. Only a limited number of people possess the gift which is regarded by themselves and their friends as an undesirable affliction more than anything else. Such people may be held in some awe, but the general attitude towards them is one of great sympathy. The central fact of the belief nowadays is that certain people inherit or in some other way acquire the abnormal faculty of perceiving apparitions or phantoms, usually of sinister import, which have immediate connection with untoward events about to take place There are varying degrees of the faculty from the elementary form of sensitiveness which is limited to hearing uncanny sounds or knocks at unusual times or perceiving lights in unexpected places to the fuller form which includes clear visions of spectral human forms, resembling people living or dead.

PHANTOM FUNERALS.

In Brittany these spectral appearances are called in the native Breton, seblanchou (semblant); in French they are "intersignes"; in Gaelic, "samhla" or "taibhs," equivalent roughly to the English "apparition."

It is also significant that the formula used in the Highlands when a person dies, "A Chuid de Phàras dha!" (May he have his share of paradise!) has its counterpart in the Breton formula, "Doué da bardono d'an anaon" (God pardon the dead). One or two instances from the present day Highlands will illustrate the doctrine as well as fifty. The particular instances given are carefully selected at first hand, and not even remotely concerned with people who are neurotic, temperamental, excessively emotional, or in a low grade of mental or physical health; but, on the contrary, with people who seem normal in every way, and, so far as they are aware, without any form of control over the circumstances of their experiences. A highly placed clergyman, graduate, was on his way recently to visit a lad whom he knew to be ill. As he approached the house he noticed a number of people standing on the roadway and about the door. He spoke to several of them but got no answer, which he thought strange. On entering the house he enquired after the lad, and then asked what the people on the road were doing there. The mother, in great excitement, exclaimed, "What people?" and, on looking outside, they found the vision had gone. In a day or two the boy passed away.

Another clergyman in perfect physical health, athletic, holding several University degrees, was sleeping with a friend in a bedroom connected by a passage with a room in which his aunt, under the care of a nurse, was lying seriously ill. In the middle of the night both men were suddenly startled from their slumber by very loud knocks on the door. The clergyman got up, thinking he was summoned by the nurse. On opening the door he found nobody there, and, proceeding along the passage, he found both nurse and patient quietly

sleeping. The following night similar knocks at the same time aroused both men once more, but this time it was really the nurse to intimate that the aunt had just passed away. This was related to me by the clergyman concerned.

THE SAILOR'S VISION.

In one of the islands of the west recently, a middle-aged farmer, in perfect health, was visited by a sailor friend home on furlough. After a chat, both proceeded for a stroll. The sailor suddenly pulled his friend aside to make way, as he said, for a funeral that was about to pass. The farmer could see nothing and thought the sailor had taken leave of his senses, but the latter said quietly that he was subject to spectral visions and that nothing untoward happened on board his ship without his being made aware of it. He named to the farmer the people attending the phantom funeral during the few seconds the vision lasted, but was unable to say who was in the coffin. He became rather unwell after the experience, and had to return and spend the night with the farmer. Three weeks later, long after the sailor had rejoined his ship, at about the same hour, as on the former occasion, the farmer strolling along met an actual procession, made up of the men named by the visionary, proceeding to inter the body of an unknown seaman, which had been found cast up on the shore. This same sailor, on a previous occasion, told his farmer friend, who related all these circumstances to me, that he had been fishing one evening about a mile from the shore in the company of his sister's fiancé. The fiancé sat in the stern of the boat, and suddenly appeared to the sailor to rise up and walk past him, as he sat in the middle of the boat, and disappear over the bows into the sea. On his return home, on one pretext or another, he persuaded his sister to postpone her marriage for a few months. In the interval her fiancé was lost at sea. In the house occupied by the narrator referred to, and as related by him, there is a small kitchen stool which periodically, without rhyme or reason,

and plainly visible to all the occupants of the kitchen, rises uncannily clear into the air. The inmates associate this apparently poltergeist performance with the fact that beer or whisky jars, for use at funerals, are always filled as they rest on this stool. The members of this household are frequently awakened on still nights by the loud rattling of these jars on their shelf. Whatever the explanation of these mysterious illusions or delusions may be, whether it be simple or scientific, there is no gainsaying the trustworthiness of the witnesses. Sneering indifference, complacent contempt, or violent prejudices, will neither explain them, nor explain them away, even if they prove to be destitute of permanent significance. As a folk-belief of psychical type they remain, as for centuries they have remained, firmly entrenched.

A kindred belief in one of the western isles, for which I can find no exact parallel in Celtic Folk-lore elsewhere, concerns the mysterious " sluagh " or " Spirit Air Host," which is said to travel in numerical strength, approaching from any direction but the east, in crescent form, resembling the flight of grey birds. They are said to be able to pick up a person bodily and transport him, willy-nilly, long distances, through the air, and from one island to another. Tales of their doings are told around the evening fire. They can rescue a man from a dangerous rock-cleft, but usually bode no good to mortals, and cattle are said to be injured by them.

With care, the Highland culture-evolution, as set forth in Folk-lore, can be made a fruitful line of research. It is at present virgin ground and no exhausted soil. In addition to possibly making a serious contribution to the soul-history and social organisation of the race, the student of this Folk-lore will find that he has succeeded in increasing not only his own knowledge, but mayhap also knowledge generally.