

# Witchcraft & Second Sight

in the

## Highlands & Islands of Scotland

*Tales and Traditions collected entirely  
from Oral Sources*

By the late  
**John Gregorson Campbell**  
Author of "Superstitions of the Highlands and  
Islands of Scotland"

Glasgow  
**James MacLehose and Sons**

Publishers to the University

1902

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## Superstitions of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Collected entirely from Oral Sources by the late John Gregorson Campbell, Minister of Tiree

### SOME PRESS OPINIONS

The border line of fairyland once crossed is a bourne from which few antiquaries return. We have had great difficulty in getting back ourselves, led on as we were by the seductive John Gregorson Campbell, assuredly, if ever man was, since Campbell of Islay's day, in the innermost secrets of the Elfin folk. Indeed, Campbell's *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, full to overflowing though they are, do not seem to us to express with anything like the same fullness and body the misty legend and wayward romance and quaint realism of the Celtic supernatural as does this plainer and prosaic notebook of an old parish minister between 1861 and 1891. Folklore whether of Celt or Saxon, henceforward has to reckon with the posthumous notebooks of John Gregorson Campbell for an indispensable section of its apparatus of study.—*ANTIQUARY*.

The importance of the work from the scientific point of view can hardly be exaggerated, as its accuracy is absolutely indisputable. And yet being little more than a collection of stories told in the simplest English, it is as enjoyable as one of Mr. Lang's fairy-books.—*THE SPECTATOR*.

Altogether the volume is in its way singularly interesting, and forms a rich mine for the folklorist. Some of the stories may be met with under other versions, but most of them appear here for the first time and are wonderfully varied. The light they throw upon the Highlander's ways of thinking is remarkable.—*SCOTTISH REVIEW*.

Statements and beliefs are given exactly as they reached the author, nor do I think it would be possible to detect a single instance in which wider knowledge or prepossession of any kind has induced him to alter or distort a fact. This rigid conscientiousness will always secure for Mr. Campbell's work the confidence and regard of true folklorists.... Campbell of Tiree takes his place by the side of Kirk, and of Walter Gregor of Pitsligo, among those recorders of folk-lore to whom the student can always turn with increased confidence and admiration.—MR. ALFRED NUTT in *FOLKLORE*.

Students of tradition will find much to interest them in this new collection of Highland folk-lore, for although a good deal of the information is similar to that contained in previous works of the kind, yet many details are new, and even those which are already familiar have this great recommendation—that they were obtained at first-hand from the peasantry, and not from other books.—*RELIQUARY*.

On the whole there can be few richer fields of ancient folk-belief, especially of the gloomier and sterner sort, than that which was so successfully cultivated by the lamented author of this book.—*ATHENÆUM*.

Mr. Campbell has escaped most of the difficulties by which his predecessors were beset. A very interesting series of stories has been collected, and the volume exercises much fascination over the reader. On the subjects such as divination, spells, the devil, etc., much interesting information is given. While scientifically thorough in treatment, the book is indeed admirably suited for general perusal.—*NOTES AND QUERIES*.

The tales are plucked directly from their native soil in the popular memory; and while few of them are

absolute rarities, there is hardly anyone that does not in some way illustrate the infinite variety and the vivid imaginative colouring, as well as the wealth of Highland superstitions.—*SCOTSMAN*.

This volume is posthumous, and we cannot but regret that the author was not spared to see it safely launched. It is a capital book written in a thoroughly sane and sober spirit. In this it differs from most books that deal with the manners, customs, and usages of the Gaels of Scotland, for in them the wildest theories, based mainly on fanciful ideas, are treated as facts and enunciated as truths. In gathering his material the late Mr. Campbell relied solely on oral communications made to himself so that in every case of doubt he could interrogate his informant.—*SCOTTISH GEOGRAPHICAL MAGAZINE*.

Altogether the book is a notable and valuable addition to the literature of British folk-lore not unworthy to take its place alongside Mr. J. F. Campbell's classic "Popular Tales of the West Highlands."—*GLASGOW HERALD*.

The more collections of this sort we get the better will be the verdict of all who read this interesting book; and those who look at the question more from the scientific point of view will echo the wish.—*MAN*.

The fairies and tales about them, gathered by himself or by correspondents in all parts of the Highlands and Isles, take up the half of the book before us, the remarkable feature of which is that the whole of its contents has been taken down from oral sources. There are many variants and many common stories which are variously localised. Printed accounts of the fairies are religiously ignored.—*THE NORTHERN CHRONICLE*.

Those who are interested in our west Highlands and Islands—and who is not?—will find Mr. Campbell's book a perfect mine of strange, weird stories and legends, the latter entirely characteristic of the people, the former dealing with magic, divination, and the superstitions of fairyland. Indeed it takes a place by itself, and a very important place, in our folk-lore literature.—*THE BAILIE*.

The tales are very diversified. They relate to the "fairies" and the superstitions regarding them. A chapter is devoted to augury, another to premonitions and divination, to dreams and prophecies, to imprecations, spells, and the black art. In short we have a very varied and manifold collection of Highland beliefs told with great freshness and vividness.—*OBAN TIMES*.

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# WITCHCRAFT AND SECOND SIGHT IN THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS OF SCOTLAND

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## **CHAPTER I.**

### **BLACK WITCHCRAFT.**

Witchcraft introduces us to a class of popular superstitions entirely different from those connected with Fairies. Fairies, water-horses, and kindred supernatural beings were distinct from the Evil Spirits that gave to witches their unhallowed powers. They could not be compelled or conjured by mortals to appear when wanted, or enter into contracts of service. The Powers of Darkness, on the other hand, were always at the service of their votaries, and, by means of charms and incantations known to the initiated, were made to lend their aid in any scheme of malevolence.

A belief in magic widely, almost universally, prevails among the tribes of mankind, and the witchcraft of the Christian era, while it undoubtedly gained strength and character from mistaken interpretations of Scripture, owes many characteristics to the delusions of Pagan times.

The Highland witches have of course many points in common with their sisters of the south, but comparatively there is little repulsive or horrible in their character. Tales regarding them make no mention of incubus and succubus, midnight meetings and dances with the devil, dead men's fingers, and more of the horrible and awful, the ravings of poor women driven crazy by persecution and torture. Neither is there mention of their riding through the air on broomsticks, nor, like the witch of Endor, raising the dead. Their art was forbidden, and their powers came from the devil; but it does not appear under what paction, or that there was any paction, under which this power was to be got. It was in the name of the devil, and against the name of the Trinity, they set about their cantrips, but a knowledge of the necessary charms, and the courage to use them, seem to have been all that was requisite. Those having the reputation of being witches were (and are, for a few still survive) usually old women, destitute of friends and means of support, and naturally ready to eke out a miserable livelihood by working on the fears or the simplicity of their more prosperous neighbours.

There are instances in which a farmer has bribed a witch by yearly presents not to do harm to his cattle; and we must remember that in days of scarcity and famine, poverty with icy hand and slow-consuming age will make people resort

to shifts of which they would never dream when food was abundant. In most cases, the reputed witch was merely a superstitious and perhaps ill-favoured old woman, possessing a knowledge of rhymes and charms for the healing of disease in man and beast, and taking pains to *sain* her own cattle, if she had any, from harm. Sometimes she was also dishonest, desirous of being looked upon with awe, and taking advantage of nightfall to steal milk from her neighbours' byres and corn from their stackyards. Her powers of witchcraft satisfactorily accounted to the popular mind for her butter and cheese—even if she had no cows—being abundant when the stores of others failed. In dark uncultured times a claim to influence over the unseen powers of nature, and to intercourse with spirits, had only to be made to be allowed, and the mere pretension too readily invests the claimant with awe to make it safe for any one to denounce the imposture. Many believed in the efficacy of the arts they practised, and in their own possession of the power with which the credulity of mankind was willing to accredit them. Unusual natural events and phenomena can easily be turned into proofs of a witch's claim; imposture readily leads to delusion, and hence among the poor and uneducated it is no wonder to find witchcraft practised and believed in.

The power of witches was always at the disposal of those who were willing to pay for it, and the fact that the rewards of witchcraft did not sometimes exceed a pound of tobacco, alone shows how much the urgencies of want had to do with the pretence to supernatural powers. Unless payment was given the witch could do nothing; her spells were then of no avail. To explain the anomaly that witches possessed such tremendous powers and yet remained always in indigent circumstances, it was said the poor wretches could not benefit themselves; their power, as might be expected, considering the source from which it was derived, was only one of mischief and doing harm to others. Much of the superstition is at variance with this popular explanation, as, for instance, the taking of milk from the neighbours' cows and the substance from their butter and cheese, but contradictions and absurdities never stand in the way of credulity and superstitious fears.

The Gaelic name '*Buidseach*' is identical in meaning with the English '*witch*,' a word it also somewhat resembles in form. The term '*Bao*' is sometimes translated wizard, but is properly only a careless conversational form of *Baobh*, a wild furious woman, a wicked mischievous female, who scolds and storms and curses, caring neither what she says nor what she does, praying the houses may be razed (*làrach lom*) and the property destroyed (*sgrios an codach*) of those who have offended her. This is a word used in proverbs. "A raging woman obtains her imprecation, but her soul obtains no mercy."<sup>[1]</sup> *Baoth*, weak, foolish,

is often confounded with it. M'Intosh<sup>[2]</sup> makes the expression '*maca bao*,' 'a wizard's son' instead of *macan baath*, a weak or little child. "Pity of her who is the mother of a helpless child, when May-day falls on a Thursday," i.e.<sup>[3]</sup> owing to the infant mortality of the season.

A common answer to the question, What could witches do? is What could they not do? The classes of actions, however, ascribed to them are not numerous. They could take the milk from their neighbours' cattle, bring fish to their own coasts, make fishermen successful, go to sea for fish themselves and bring home creelfuls, raise storms, sink ships, drown those who offended them; give strings to sailors with knots on them, the unloosening of which raised the wind; they could go to wine-cellars in London or Ireland, and drink wine till morning; fly through the air with magic quickness, and cross the seas in the most unlikely vessels, sieves, eggshells, or dry cowsherd; produce a wasting disease in an enemy, waylay and endanger the belated traveller, and by their cursed tricks keep a child in its mother's womb past its proper time; suck cows, and assume various shapes. They could benefit, or at least ward away evil from a favourite, but their power of doing so seems to have been much feebler than their powers of mischief.

In carrying out their unhallowed cantrips, witches assumed various shapes. They became gulls, cormorants, ravens, rats, mice, black sheep, swelling waves, whales, and very frequently cats and hares. The shape was not always well chosen for the object to be attained, a hare, for instance, being but ill-formed for sucking cows, or a cat for drinking wine; neither was a sieve or an eggshell a likely vessel to go to sea in, nor a piece of tangle for carrying milk in, nor the chimney crook a probable substitute for the cow's udder. This, however, is of no consequence. It is only part of the witch's diabolical mode of going to work. The truth is, that these harmless animals whose shapes witches were said to assume, being seen in unusual places at unusual times, or conducting themselves in an unusual manner, were converted by the terrified imagination into witches pursuing their unlawful practices. Many tales seem to have their origin in vain attempts to stagger credulity, and in that delight which people of lively imaginations sometimes take in 'cramming' their more stupid fellows.

In addition to change of shape, witches had a machinery of charms, incantations, red, black, and blue threads, magic caps, and particularly a magic staff, called '*an luirgean*' '*an lorg ohn*.'

There were certain nights of the year on which they were unusually busy. These were particularly the last night of every quarter. On Beltane night they

were awake all night. Their object seems to have been to *sain*, i.e. keep evil away from, their own cattle or those of the farmers who employed them for the purpose. Others were no doubt taking advantage of any neglect in this respect to secure to themselves the butter and cheese for the next three months. No one, however, knows what they were after, as a woman who believed in their being awake on Beltane night piously said, "God and themselves know what they are doing."<sup>[4]</sup>

Many tales relating to witchcraft, as has been already remarked, must have had their origin in attempts to ridicule people out of their belief and in an unbridled exercise of imagination. They only furnished a proof that men will believe the incredible.

## WITCHES AND MILK.

To the poor a cow is invaluable, and its ailments are naturally a source of anxiety. Hence the poor man has been most frequently the victim of imposture, and his cow has the most frequently lost its milk through the machinations of witches. The folds of the affluent were seldom attacked, or those byres in which regard was paid to cleanliness and tidiness.

The stories of witches assuming the shape of hares and sucking cows are numberless. A boy who saw one described the hare as sitting on its hind legs, with its fore paws resting on the cow's udder. Some people profess to have come upon the witch through the night while thus engaged, and caught her. The hare then became a woman.

When a witch assumes this shape it is dangerous to fire at her without putting silver, a sixpence or a button of that metal, in the gun. If the hare fired at was, as indeed it often was, a witch in disguise, the gun burst, and the shot came back and killed the party firing, or some mischance followed. Old women used, therefore, to recommend that a sixpence be put in the gun when firing at a hare.

Parties who entered the house of a reputed witch in Cornaig, Tiree, found two churns full of water on the floor and a shallow milk-dish (*measair*) full of butter on the table.

In olden times the master of a ship, dining with the Laird of Coll, was asked if the butter on the table was not very fine. He said it was for pig's butter. The dairymaid was called up and questioned. She confessed that seeing a whale (*muc-mhara*, lit. sea-pig) passing, and hearing its bellow (*geumraich*), she had



taken the substance (*toradh*) of its milk from it. If the laird believed her, he was an honest, unsuspecting man, who never dreamt of any collusion between her and his guest.

A Tiree witch once took all their milk from the Laird of Coll's cows, and was on her way home with it in a *duitheaman*, a black seaweed not unlike a tangle, wrapped round her body. A man met her, cut the black tangle with his knife, and all the milk flowed out on the ground. Witches also carried away milk in needles, dung-forks, etc., and have been detected taking it in a stream from the chimney crook. A sailor, whose ship was on her way through the Kyles of Bute (*na caoil Bhòdach*), hearing a bull roaring on the Cowal coast, took the milk from the herd of which it was lord by cutting the cable with an axe. The milk came streaming from the cable.

It is related of 'Mr. Lachlan,' a former minister of Kintail, that going one day to the house of a reputed witch, without telling who he was, he induced her, as a specimen of her power, to milk the chimney crook.<sup>[5]</sup> The cow from which the milk was to be taken was the minister's own. The witch went to work, till all the milk was extracted, and then asked the minister if he was satisfied. He told her to go on, and she milked the iron till blood came. When the minister went home he found his cow dead.

A witch in Lochaber had a little pet sheep, by milking which she gathered to herself the milk from the flocks of all the neighbouring farmers.

Hairy Donald (Dò'ull Molach), a Morven celebrity of last century, professing great skill in healing or hurting cattle by means of magic charms, was laughed at for his pretensions by the parish minister, and his powers were made game of. Donald, at his own request, was shut up in a room, and a particular cow was named by the minister for him to exercise his talents upon. Before he finished his incantations the cow fell over the rocks.

A man bought at a market from a stranger a mart or winter cow. When killing it, the blows of the axe made no impression. An old man who came the way, when told of this, examined the cow's tail, and found a *red string* tied round it. On this being taken away, the cow fell at the first blow.

## COUNTER-CHARMS.

Of course the spells of witches could be counteracted. It would not be right that such dangerous powers should be unchecked. Some of the counter-charms

were good disinfectants, but in general the efficacy of the remedy was as imaginary as the enemy whose machinations were to be defeated. It was to prevent the taking of milk from cows that nearly all the counter-charms were used. Anything in which people believed would be sufficient, but the antidotes in ordinary use were these.

*Juniper* (*Iubhar-beinne, aiteal*), pulled in a particular manner, was burned before the cattle and put in cows' tails.

A ball of hair (*gaoisid*), called a *Ronag*, was put in the milk-pail on Lammas-day or on the Thursday after, to keep its substance in the milk during the rest of the year. MacSymon (*Mac-Shiomoun*, a sept of MacArthurs), a native of Balemartin, Tiree, was much resorted to in former times for these constitution balls. On Lammas-day (*Lùnasdal*) he gave to all who came to him a little bag of plants, sewn up, to be placed in the cream jug (*croggan uachdair*) for the ensuing year, that the cattle and the milk might retain their virtue or substance (*toradh*).

Stale urine (*maistir*) should be sprinkled on the door-posts and about the byre. It keeps away the evil eye. There was an old woman in Coll who was taken notice of by her neighbours for sprinkling cows and door-posts every night. Her intention no doubt was to make assurance doubly sure.

The mountain ash (*Caorrunn*) was the most powerful charm of any.

“A Rowan-tree and a red thread  
Gars a’ the witches dance to dead.”

Its efficacy was known in England as well as in the Highlands. The peg of the cow-shackle (*Cnag chaorruinn sa bhuaarach*) should be made of it, as well as the handle and cross (*crois na loinid*) of the churn<sup>[6]</sup> staff. In Islay, not twenty years ago, a man had a rowan-tree collar for securing his cow at night, and every time the animal visited the bull he passed this collar thrice through the chimney crook. On Beltane-day annually he dressed all the houses with rowan. It was said of the man in Craignish who gathered potent herbs on St. Swithin’s day and studied magic with one foot in the chimney crook:

“A tuft of rowan twigs  
From the face of Ailsa Craig,  
Put a red thread and a knot on it,  
And place it on the end of the sprinkler,  
And though the Witch of Endor came,  
Allan could manage her.”<sup>[7]</sup>

A *horse-shoe* was of great power for the protection of cattle against witchcraft. As in England, it must be found by accident. It was put above the byre door, and a nail from it driven into the lowest hoop (*cearcail*) of the milk-dish (*mias*) kept its substance in the milk. It preserved horses when put above the stable door, and ships when nailed to the mast. An entire horse could not be touched by evil spirits, and its rider was safe from the attacks of witchcraft. A person in the neighbourhood of Luing, Argyllshire, returning from a funeral, found himself unable to make any progress on his road home, though he did his utmost all night to get on. He was retarded by some unseen influence. He rode an entire horse, and found himself safe at daybreak. His safety lay in the horse he rode. The famed *Red Book of Appin*, according to one version of the tale, was got by one who rode an entire horse to a meeting of witches, and, having got hold of the book, made off with it in despite of the devil and all his servants. In a West Highland tale (ii., 87), the owner of the *Red Book* advises the shoe of an entire horse to be nailed on the byre door, to counteract the witches, who were taking the milk from the cows. The shoes of entire horses probably are the proper kind to use, though others came into use from being found equally efficacious.

*Tar*, put on the door, kept witches away, and put on the cow’s ear, was

believed to prevent *ceathramh gorm*, or quarter ill.

If, notwithstanding all these safeguards, or through neglect of them, a cow lost its milk, or the milk ceased to yield butter or cream, there were several methods by which the witchcraft, which was undoubtedly the cause, might be counteracted. Some of these remedies appear more like the inventions of practical jokers than ceremonies from which any rational meaning can be taken.

When a cow ceases unaccountably to give milk, and witchcraft is suspected, its owner is to take some of the animal's urine (*maistir*), put it in a bottle, and cork it well. The witch who has taken the milk cannot make a drop of water till the milk is allowed to come back. It is a common story that the owner of bewitched cows, under the advice of 'wise' people of his neighbourhood, put a potful of the cows' dung on the fire, and boiled it. He then put in half an ounce of pins and stirred the compost, till at last the witch appeared at the hole which formed the window, and entreated him to stop tormenting her, and all would be well. He stopped, and next morning his cows had milk as usual. It was also said that by putting pins in the cow's milk, and boiling till the dish is dry, the witch is made to appear and confess. A woman once did this in Tiree, and found her own brother was the guilty party. Old people in the east side of Skye remember the bull being put on the top of a suspected witch's house to bring back their milk to a farmer's cows. The more brutal method of *scoring*, or drawing blood from, the witch above her breath—the object of which could only be to make clowns strike poor old women on the face with their fists—was unknown in the Highlands. The plant *mōthan*, pearlwort, put in the milk-pail, was a more gentle but quite as sure a method of restoring its virtue to the milk. If a piece of it was in the bull's hoof at the time of pairing no witch could touch the offspring's milk.

In Tiree a person lost several stirks by the stakes falling and strangling them in the byre. A 'wise' woman, reputed a witch, advised, though her advice was not taken, that the *right hand part of a fore horse-shoe, with three nails in it*, should be put below the threshold (*stairsneach*) of the byre, along with a silver coin, and that the hind quarter of one of the beasts should be taken *west* and buried beyond the limits of the farm. This was to prevent a similar calamity in future.

## GOING TO SEA.

The Lewis witches were accounted the best for raising wind. A large number of them were at one time destroyed in the following manner. A tailor, working in a farmer's house, where there happened at the time to be a scarcity of seasoning

for dinner (*gann-do-dh'annlan*), was told by the farmer's wife, this would not be the case to-morrow, if he could get breakfast past without the goodman saying grace. The tailor managed this, and his curiosity being roused, remained awake the following night, to see what the wife would do. He saw a number of women, among whom he recognised his own wife, assembling in the farm-house and accompanied by the farmer's wife, disappearing up the chimney, each in a wicker creel. In the morning the farmer's wife came back with her creel full of fresh herring. The tailor, when he went home, strongly represented to his wife the propriety of allowing him to accompany the witches in their future fishing expeditions. Two shares of the fish would then fall to them instead of one. The proposal was laid before a meeting of the witches, and in the circumstances they consented. To the number of eighteen the witches went to sea on a line of worsted thread, the tailor's wife being left ashore to hold the ball, or end of the line, in her hand. The tailor persuaded her to go with the rest, and leave him in charge of the line. She went and the tailor paid out more line, till he thought the witches far enough out at sea. He then cut the thread and allowed the whole lot to drown.

Similarly, somewhere in the north (all marvels of this kind are said in the south Highlands to have occurred in the north) a tailor was working in the house of an old woman, who knew the forbidden arts, but at the time was short of *kitchen* for dinner. She took a creel, sat in it, and having muttered some mystic words, disappeared through a hole in the roof that formed the chimney. In a while she came back with the creel full of herring. The tailor kept the spell in remembrance, and the first day he got the old woman out of the way, sat in the creel, and repeated it. He does not seem, however, to have learned the words quite correctly, for the creel, instead of making for the hole in the roof, rose straight up and hit his head violently against the rafters. It then floated along against the roof, as if in search of an outlet. It bumped his head a second time against the rafters and he roared out, "Where, in the curse of God, are you going now?" Instantly at the name of the Deity, the creel fell down, and the tailor dislocated his hips (*chaidh e as a ghobhal*). He never again dabbled in the dark science.

In Skye, one of a party of women, assembled at an old woman's house to full cloth, went by accident into the barn, and found it full of fish suspended from the roof. "There are many herrings here," she said; and there being no way by which the old woman could have got them but by witchcraft, she taxed her with unholy practices. The old woman got very angry at the exposure.

A Barra and a Uist witch one year tried each other's powers in drawing the fish to their respective islands. The Barra witch proved the stronger, and took the fish to Castlebay (*Bàgh Chìosamuill*).

Another year the Uist and Tiree witches had a similar contest. The latter prevailed, and the men of a bygone generation believed that every flounder caught that year on the Tiree shores had a hole in its tail, made by the witches in the struggle.

On the shallows (*oitir*) between Tiree and Coll, the witches of the two islands were often seen fighting for the flounders that abound in the locality. The appearance that suggested the fancy was no doubt the same as is still to be seen on these banks in stormy weather.

A witch, who left home every night, was followed by her husband, who wondered what she could be about. She became a cat, and went in the name of the devil to sea in a sieve, with seven other cats. The husband upset the sieve by naming the Trinity, and the witches were drowned. So the Skye story runs. In the Sound of Mull the witches went on board the sieve, "against the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost"; and the husband upset the concern by putting his foot on board in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. In Tiree the unfortunate women were passing Kennavara hill in eggshells on their way to Ireland, when the husband of one of them, seeing the fleet, wished them God-speed. Instantly the eggshells sank, and the women were drowned.

## **RAISING STORMS AND DROWNING PEOPLE.**

The belief that witches can trouble the sea and raise the wind is widespread, reaching even to the native Africans. It is part of the regular traffic of Finland witches to sell wind to mariners,—as in the case of their Celtic sisters, tied in knots upon a thread. The following story is common to many places.

A boatman from one of the southern islands was long detained in Lewis by adverse winds. He was courting a witch's daughter, and applied to her mother for a favourable wind. He gave her a pound of tobacco, and, assisted by neighbouring witches, after three days' exertion, she produced a string with three knots upon it. The first knot was called 'Come gently' (*Thig gu fòill*), and when he loosened it, as he left the shore, a gentle breeze sprang up. The second knot was called 'Come better' (*Teann na's fhèarr*), and on its being untied the breeze came stiffer. As he neared the harbour, he out of curiosity loosened the last knot,

the name of which was 'Hardship' (*Cruaidh-chàs*). A wind came "to blow the hillocks out of their places" (*séideadh nan cnoc*), and sent the thatch of the houses into the furrows of the plough-land, and the boatman was drowned. In Harris, they say the boat was drawn up on land and secured before the last knot was untied. She was capsized and smashed to pieces.

The following, known as "Big Macmhuirich's Supplication" (*Achanaich Mhic Mhuirich Mhòir*), is another form of the Celtic belief.

'Macpherson of power' (*Mac-Mhuirich nam buadh*), a noted wizard in South Uist, was on a passage by sea on a calm day. The skipper said to him, "Ask for a wind, Mac-Vuirich." He did so, saying:

"An east wind from the calm aether,  
As the Lord of the elements has ordained,  
A wind that needs not rowing nor reefing,  
That will do nought deceitful to us."

"Weak and trifling you have asked it," said the skipper, "when I myself am at the helm." Mac-Vuirich answered:

"A north wind hard as a rod,  
Struggling above our gunwale,  
Like a red roe sore pressed,  
Descending a hillock's narrow hard head."

"It does not attain to praise yet," said the skipper, and Mac-Vuirich went on:

"If there be a wind in cold hell,  
Devil; send it after us,  
In waves and surges;  
And if one go ashore, let it be I,  
And if two, I and my dog."

A sea came, that rolled the boat's stern over her bows, and all were drowned but Mac-Vuirich and his dog.

The power of this wizard over the elements was also shown on another occasion. The MacRanalds were coming to attack the MacNeills of Barra, to whom Mac-Vuirich was favourable. Their boat was seen coming along the wild and rocky coast on the west of Skye, and was sunk by the mighty wizard uttering

the following words:

“A south-west wind toward Eiste point,  
Mist and rain,  
Clan Ranald on a breaking board,  
I reckon it not;  
A narrow unsteady vessel,  
A lofty pointed sail,  
A lading of empty barrels,  
And bilge-water to the thwarts,  
A weak irascible crew  
Having no respect one for another.”

As might be expected, such a boat did not go far before sinking.

The usual way witches took to shipwreck a vessel was to put a small round dish (*cuach*) floating in a milk-pan (*measair*) placed on the floor full of water. They then began their incantations, and when the dish upset, the ship sank.

On one occasion three witches from Harris left home at night after placing the milk-pan thus on the floor, in charge of a servant-maid, who was straitly enjoined not to let anything come near it. The girl's attention was, however, called away for a short time, and a duck came in and took to squattering about in the water on the floor. The witches on their return in the morning, asked if anything had come near the milk-pan. The girl said no, and one of them said, “What a heavy sea we had last night coming round Càbag head!”

A few years ago a boat was lost coming from Raasa to Skye. The witches, who caused the calamity, were seen at work in the Braes of Portree, beside a stream. Three of them were engaged in the evil task, and a man was present along with them. Jobs of the kind require the presence of a man. A cockle-shell (*slige coilleig*) was placed floating in a pool, and a number of black stones were ranged round the edge of the pool. When the incantation was at its height, the black stones barked like dogs, and the cockle-shell disappeared.

A farmer in Mull and his little daughter were walking along an eminence that overlooked the Sound, through which a number of ships were passing at the time. The little girl asked, “What will you give me, father, if I sink all these ships?” Thinking she was in fun, he asked her how she would do it. She stooped down, and looked backwards between her legs at one of the vessels. The ship whirled round and sank. In this expeditious manner all the ships in sight were



sunk, but one. The man asked why this one did not sink. The girl said it was because there was rowan-tree wood on board, and she could not touch it. He then asked who had taught her all this? She said it was her mother. The man, who was a good man, and before ignorant of his wife's dabbling in witchcraft, gathered his neighbours and burned herself and daughter.

A witch was engaged to destroy a boat coming to Tiree. Another witch, however, wished its safety. The former came in shape of a gull, that hovered about the boat, and kept it back (a head wind?). The other came as a cormorant (*sgarbh*), followed in the wake of the boat (*an uisge na stiùirceach*, lit. the waters of the rudder), and saved it. (Favourable tide?)

A former Lord Macdonald (*Mà-Cònuill*) was on his way by boat to Uist, and experienced very unfavourable weather. When near his destination, a towering wave, or, as it is called in Gaelic, 'a drowning sea' (*muir bhàite*), nearly overwhelmed the boat, and two birds, a skua (*croma-ritheachar*) and an ordinary gull, were observed fighting in the air. The one was Yellow Claws, daughter of Donald, son of Cormac (*spòga Buidhe ni' a Dò'uill 'ic Cormaig*), the other Hump-backed Blue-eye from Cràcaig (*Gorm-shùil chrotach a Cràcaig*), both celebrated witches. The former was for sinking the boat, the latter for saving it. Sometime after Blue-eye met Lord Macdonald in Edinburgh, and reminded him of the incident, and her own services on the occasion. He just remarked, "There was indeed such a circumstance."

A ship, sailing from Greenock, was to be destroyed by the Captain's wife and two other witches. An apprentice overheard them planning this, and saying that they would come upon the ship on a certain day as three rolling waves, and the ship would be sunk, unless the waves were cut with a sword. At the time said the apprentice was allowed the command of the vessel, and standing in the bow with a drawn sword, cleft the waves, and defeated the witches.

A boat from Hianish, Tiree, went out fishing on the day before the New Year. The morning was calm, but when the boat was returning the wind rose and the sea became very heavy. The best steersman in the boat took the helm. Another, sitting on the hindmost thwart (*tota shìlidh*), after looking for a while towards the stern, asked the helm from him, and being again and again refused, at last took it by force. When he got the rudder below his arm, he said, "Now, come on!" and the boat reached shore in safety. He then explained that he had been seeing a gull, unseen by the first steersman, following the boat, and had recognised her as a woman of the neighbourhood. This woman had an illegitimate child by the first steersman, and it was thought her object in raising

the storm and following so close in the wake of the boat, was to snatch her seducer with her and drown him.

Ian Garve (stout John), laird of Raasa (*Iain Garbh Mac-ille-Challum Ratharsa*), a man celebrated in Highland song and legend for his great personal strength, was drowned by a witch who had this mysterious power of raising storms. The event occurred on Easter Monday (*Di-luain Càisge*), in the great 'storm of the Borrowing Days,' of which a contemporary historian says "the like of this tempest was not seen in our time, nor the like of it heard in this country in any age preceding," A.D. 1625; yet the traditions of the event are still fresh in popular memory. The witch was Ian Garve's own foster-mother (*muime*), and resided on the islet of Trodda (*Trodaidh*), on the east of Skye. She overheard a friend of hers say he wished Ian Garve, who was known to have gone to the Lewis, was drowned, and took up seriously words spoken only in jest. Others say she was bribed by an enemy to effect the hero's destruction. He left Loch Sealg in Lewis to proceed home on a calm day. The witch was dairymaid (*banachag*) in Trodda, and, seeing the boat coming, put milk in a large dish, and a small empty dish floating in it. A boy was placed standing in the doorway, where he could see both the milk-pan and Ian Garve's boat. She herself stood with her foot in the 'swey' or chimney crook, and began her unholy incantations. Soon the dish in the milk-pail began to be violently agitated. The boy reported it first as going round sunwise (*deiseal*), then as going round against the sun and striking the sides of the basin, and finally as being capsized and floating bottom upwards (*air a bial foidhpe*). The storm had been all this time increasing, till at last it blew a perfect hurricane. That night the heap of shingle on East-side (*Du-sear*), called *Moll-stabhan*, was washed ashore. Ian Garve's boat disappeared simultaneously with the capsizing of the bowl, and all on board perished. Three ravens hovered about the boat as the storm was rising, and it became afterwards known that these three were Yellow Claws (*Spòga Buidhe*) from Màiligeir on East-side, Hump-backed Blue-eye (*Gorm-shùil chrotach*) from Cràcaig near Portree, and Doideag from Mull. When the boat was between Bare Skerries (*Sgeire maola*) and Trodda twenty birds flew about, and some of them assumed the shape of frogs (*muileacha màg*) on the deck. All the witches in Scotland were there, but were unable to sink the boat till Ian Garve said to the frogs, "What the brindled one has brought you here?"<sup>[8]</sup> After that he became distracted from the number of birds and frogs coming upon him. A raven lighted on the gunwale of the boat, and Ian Garve, striking at it with his sword, cleft the boat to the water's edge. The first news of the drowning was heard on Minigeig Hill (*Monadh mhinigeig*) in Badenoch, and the particulars became known by the

telling of other witches. Another account says the hero appeared that night to his wife in her dreams, and said:

“On Monday the wind arose,  
And gathered its fury and rage;  
Tell the mother of my body  
'Twas the evils made the hunt.”<sup>[9]</sup>

The shade came thrice and repeated this. Next day the wife told the dream to her mother-in-law, who exclaimed, “Then my beloved is lost” (*tha mo laogh-sa caillte*).

By far the most celebrated tale of this class is that of the destruction of Captain Forrest’s ship by witches in the Sound of Mull.

Viola (*Bheòla*), daughter of the King of Spain, dreamt of a remarkably handsome man, and made a vow not to rest till she found him. She fitted out a boat, and in the course of her wanderings came to Tobermory Bay. Here she saw MacLean of Dowart, who proved to be the man she was in search of, and, though he was a married man, became too intimate with him. MacLean’s wife in her jealousy caused her servant Smollett, a south countryman, to blow up the ship with all on board. After setting fire to a fuse leading to the magazine, Smollett made his escape, and by the time the explosion took place reached Pennygown, a distance of ten or twelve miles. The cook was blown to Srongarve (*sròn-garbh*, rough nose), near Tobermory, where there is a cleft still bearing the name of the Cook’s Cave (*Uamh Chòcaire*). The Princess herself fell somewhere in the sound, and was buried at *Cill*, the Loch Aline burying-ground in Morven.

<sup>[10]</sup> Upon the news of the dreadful event reaching Spain, Captain Forrest (whose name is not very Spanish) was sent with a ship to take vengeance upon the Mull people by taking off the right breast of every Mull woman. When the ship came the Lady of Dowart sent for *Doideag*, the Mull witch, and by her means, with assistance procured from neighbouring witches, Captain Forrest’s ship was sunk before next morning. Doideag shut herself up in a house alone at Guirman Point (*Rutha Ghuirmein*), near Dowart, and there made her incantations. A rope was put through a hole in a rafter, and all night long the handmill (*brà*) was hoisted up to the beam, lowered, and hoisted again. A native of Tiree reported that, having come that evening to Doideag’s house, he was compelled by her to hoist and lower and hoist the mill-stone all night without rest or refreshment, while the witch herself went away to Tiree and elsewhere for help. On her return she said that when in Tiree she had been detained a little in extinguishing a fire, which

had been caused by a spark falling among the fodder in the stirk-house belonging to the man who was her unwilling assistant. As the quern was raised a gale sprang up, and increased in fury as the operation went on. At the same time gulls (others say hooded-crows, others black cats) appeared on the yard-arms of the devoted ship. Captain Forrest knew the Black Art himself, and went below. As word was brought him that another gull had appeared in the rigging, he said, "I will suffice for this one yet" (*Fòghnaidh mi fhìn dhi so fhathast*). He could keep the ship against some say eight, others nine, witches, but "ere a' the play was play'd" there were sixteen, some say eighteen, on the yards. Their names depend on the fancy of the narrator. All the Mull witches (*na doideagun Muileach*) were there, and the most powerful of the sisterhood from the surrounding districts. *Nic-ill'-Domhnuich* from Tiree is commonly mentioned. [11] All accounts agree that when Big Blue-eye from Mey (*Gorm-shùil Mhòr bha sa Mheigh*), the powerful Lochaber witch, came, the ship sank. Shortly before this Captain Forrest told a sailor to look up and see how many gulls were on the yards (*seall suas co miad faoileann air an t-shlait*). On being told eighteen, he said, "We are lost." In the morning Doideag was told her house had been unroofed in the gale, but she was comforted by being told the dreaded ship had gone down opposite Coire-na-theanchoir Bay. "If you are without a house, Captain Forrest is without a ship" (*ma tha thusa gun tigh, tha Captain Forrest gun long*).

## WITCHES AS SHEEP.

A native of Tiree was on his way home to the west end of the island in the evening with a new gun in his hand. When above the beach called Travay, he observed a black sheep running towards him from across the plain of Reef. Alarmed by the animal's motions, he put a silver sixpence in the gun, and on its coming near enough, took aim. The black sheep instantly became a woman, whom he recognised, with a drugget coat wrapped about her head. The same woman had often persecuted him before, particularly in shape of a cat. She asked him to keep her secret, and he promised to do so, but one day, when drunk in the village to which the woman belonged, he told his adventure and the name of the woman. In less than a fortnight after he was drowned, and the witch (for such the woman was universally reputed to be) was blamed as the cause.

Hector M'Lean, in Coll, according to his own account, was coming in the evening from Arinagour to Breacacha, a distance of four miles along what was then throughout the greater part a mountain track. When halfway, at Airidh-

mhic-mharoich, a black sheep came about his feet, and several times threw him down. At last he took out a clasp-knife (*sgian-lughaidh*), and threatened the sheep, if it came near him again, to stick it with the knife. It, however, again and again came and threw him down. In endeavouring to stab it, the knife closed upon his own hand between the finger and thumb, and cut him severely. On coming to the large open drain or stream below Breacacha Garden, he stood afraid to jump across, in case the black sheep should come about his legs, and make him fall in the drain. He was now, however, within hail of his own house, and whistled loudly for his dog. It came, and was fiercely hounded by him at the sheep. Every time the dog made a rush and came too near, the sheep became an old woman, whom Hector recognised as one of his acquaintances, and jumped in the air. She asked him to call off his dog, and he refused. She asked him again, and promised, if he would do so, to befriend him in right and wrong (*an còir's an eucoir*). At last he did call the dog, but it would not obey. He caught it by the back of the neck, and it tried to turn upon himself. He promised to keep his hold till the woman made her escape. The witch became a hare, and Hector called out to her, as she seemed to have such wonderful power, to "add another leg to her stern, to make her escape the faster." When she was some distance away, he let go the dog, and went home. The dog did not come home till the following afternoon; it followed the hare, compelled it to take refuge on a shelf of rock (*uirigh creige*), and lay below on the watch, till forced by hunger to go home. The woman upbraided Hector, the first time she met him, for letting go the dog. Afterwards, when he went as servant-man to Arileod farm (*airidh-Leòid*) in the neighbourhood, the same woman was often seen by him, in the shape of a hare, sucking the cows. His dog, whenever it caught sight of her, gave chase, and compelled her to resume her proper shape. When he left the farm, she was not seen there for some days. He went in search of her, and accused her to her face of having been the party that troubled the farm. She got into a rage, and said she would punish him for raising such a story about her. He answered that the proprietor of the island had offered a reward for the discovery of the guilty person, and if all the women in Coll were gathered on one hillock his speckled dog (*cu breac*) would pick her out as the offender. To this she made no reply. He asked her to go to Arileod dairy that night, so that people would not have it to say it was for him the evil had arisen. She said this was *Wednesday* night, and it was out of her power to do anything, but the following night she would go, and he would hear of it. On Thursday night she loosened the cows in Arileod byre, let in the calves, and did much mischief.

## **WITCHES AS HARES.**

In addition to the above tales, in which this transformation has been mentioned, the following may be given as further illustrations of the superstition.

A young man, in the island of Lismore, was out shooting. When near Balnagown Loch, he started a hare, and fired at it. The animal gave an unearthly scream, and it then for the first time occurred to the young man that there were no hares in Lismore. He threw away his gun in terror, and fled home. Next day he came back for the gun, and heard that a reputed witch of the neighbourhood was laid up with a broken leg. Ever after the figure of this woman encountered him and gave him severe thrashings. This preyed on his mind, and he never came to any good. He proved brooding, idle, and useless.

A Manxman, who was in Tiree a few years ago, told the following story. A party of sportsmen, engaged in coursing, were at a loss for a hare. An old woman told her grandson to go to them, tell them they would get a hare at a certain spot, and get half-a-crown for himself. The boy went, got his half-crown, and guided the sportsmen to the spot his grandmother had indicated. When the hare started he cried, "Run, granny, run!" The hare made straight for the old woman's house, the dogs lost sight of it at the back of the house, and the old woman was found sitting at the fireside.

In Wigtonshire a hare ran up the chimney, and a suspected witch near hand was found with burnt feet.

## **WITCHES AS CATS.**

The association of witches with cats is of great antiquity. In the legends of Greece and Rome, we are told of a woman, who had been changed into a cat, being chosen as priestess by Hecate, the goddess of sorcery and magic power, and of Hecate herself, when the gods were forced to hide themselves in animals, taking refuge in the shape of a cat. The association probably arose not so much from cats being the frequent, almost invariable, companions of the poor old women accused of witchcraft, as from the savage character of the animal itself. Its noiseless and stealthy motions, its persevering watchfulness, its extraordinary agility and tenacity of life, its diabolical caterwauling, prowling habits, deceitful spring, and the luminous appearance of its eyes in the dark, would alone suffice to procure it the name of unearthly; but when infuriated, glaring, bristling, and spitting, it forms a vivid representation of a perfect demon. In the Highlands, it

was not, as in the witchcraft of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, looked upon as the familiar or attendant imp of the witch, but merely as an animal, whose form witches frequently assumed.

There were other superstitions connected with the animal. Were it not the fear of being swallowed by the ground, a cat would run much faster than it does. When people have a cat along with them in a boat, they cannot, or will not, be drowned by witches. By burying a cat alive, people waiting for a favourable wind get a breeze from the direction in which its head is put; and a witch, that is, a young one, who is courted by a sailor, can detain him with contrary winds as long as she likes by shutting up the cat in the cupboard. A cat scraping is a sign that some beast, horse, cow, pig, or dog will be found dead on the farm before long. A cat washing its face portends rain next day, and turning its back to the fire storm and rain. When removing from one house to another (*imrich*), it is unlucky to take a cat. The animal was disliked by the MacGregors, and the Camerons of Glenevis could not tolerate it at all.

A shepherd in Kintail, living alone in a bothy, far from other houses, after kindling in the evening a bright cheerful fire, threw himself on a heather bed on the opposite side of the house. About twenty cats entered and sat round the fire, holding up their paws and warming themselves. One went to the window, put a black cap on its head, cried "Hurrah for London!" and vanished. The other cats, one by one, did the same. The cap of the last fell off, and the shepherd caught it, put it on his own head, cried "Hurrah for London!" and followed. He reached London in a twinkling, and with his companions went to drink wine in a cellar. He got drunk and fell asleep. In the morning he was caught, taken before a judge, and sentenced to be hanged. At the gallows he entreated to be allowed to wear the cap he had on in the cellar; it was a present from his mother, and he would like to die with it on. When it came the rope was round his neck. He clapped the cap on his head, and cried "Hurrah for Kintail!" He disappeared with the gallows about his neck, and his friends in Kintail, having by this time missed him, and being assembled in the bothy prior to searching the hills, were much surprised at his strange appearance.

This is a fair specimen of the popular tale. It forms the foundation of the Ettrick Shepherd's "Witch of Fife." In Skye, the adventure was claimed by a man nicknamed 'Topsy-turvy' (*But-ar-scionn*) as having occurred to himself. After coming home, he made the gallows into a weaver's loom. The hero in Argyllshire made it the stern and keel of a boat, which may be seen in Lorn to this day. In Harris the hero is a tailor: and the tale has been even found in the

Monach isles, west of Uist.

Captain Burt (1730) tells a story of a similar kind which he had heard from a minister. A laird, whose wine was disappearing mysteriously, suspecting witches one night, when he thought the plunderers were at work, entered the cellar, closed the door, and laid about him with a broadsword. When light was brought, the cats, whose eyes he had seen glaring at him in the dark, disappeared, and only some blood was found on the floor. An old woman in the neighbourhood, suspected of being a witch, was found, on her house being entered, in bed, with her leg cut off and lying below the bed. The same story is told of the witches of Thurso (*Inbher-Eòrsa*).

A tailor, named Macilduinn, was left in a house alone on Hallowe'en night, while the rest of the household went to a neighbour's house to hold the festivities of the evening. As he sat on a bed, working at his trade, a great many cats came in, and attacking a bag of flesh at the end of the bed soon tore it up and devoured it. They then gathered round the tailor. One said, "The back of my paw to Macilduinn!" Another said, "The front of my paw to Macilduinn!"<sup>[12]</sup> These threats were repeated by all the rest, while they held out their horrid claws, some derisively, some menacingly, to the poor tailor. Frightened from his wits, he blew out the light, sprung to the door, and took to his heels. The cats gave chase, and by the time he reached a neighbour's house his back was scratched into shreds and thongs (*na iallun*) by the claws of the infernal cats.

Cameron of Doïni, or Glenevis, was out hunting, and killed a wild-cat. The animal, when expiring, asked him to tell, when he went home, that 'the King of the Cats' (*Rìgh nan Cat*) was dead, or according to others 'the Key of Battle' (*an Iuchair Chath*), or 'the streaked Brindled one' (*a Bhruchail Bhreac*). As he told his story, the little black kitten in the ash-hole (*an toll na luath*) bristled up and swelled, till it was as large as a dog. Cameron said, "You are swelling, cat." The cat answered, "My feathers and my swellings are growing bigger with the heat,"<sup>[13]</sup> and, springing at the chieftain's throat, killed him. The scions of this family (*Teaghlach Dhomhainnidh no Ghlinn-Ibheis*) till quite recent times, would not tolerate a cat in the house, from the memory of this tradition.

The same story is told in the following manner, without any locality being assigned for the incident. A hunter killed a wild-cat, and when he came home told his adventure. He said,

"To-night has well prospered with us,  
The big urchal-erchal has been slain."



A kitten that was listening rose and said, “Has Bald Entrails of the Cats been killed? If it were not the many nights I have got meat and milk in your family, I would have your long brindled weasand in my claws. Tell Streaked Foul-Face, that Bladrum is dead,”<sup>[14]</sup> and saying this the kitten went away, and was never seen afterwards.

Near Vault in Tiree, a man riding home at night, with his son, a young boy, seated behind him, was met by a number of cats. The boy had his hands clasped round his father, and the man, pressing them to his sides, to make surer of the boy’s hold, urged his horse to its speed. The cats sprang, and, fastening on the boy, literally devoured him. When the man reached home, with his horse at full gallop, he had only the boy’s arms left.

A Wexford legend of the same kind (the two stories might have been originally identical), said to be at least as old as 1584, will be found in the *Dublin University Magazine* for September, 1869.

A woman detected a strange cat drinking the milk in her kirk, caught it by the back of the neck, and rapped its nose against the floor. It went about mewling in a melancholy manner, till the woman took pity on it, and called it, saying, “Puss, puss, till you get a drop” (*Puis, puis, gus am faigheadh tu diar*). The cat answered, “It is not a drop I want, but the way my mouth is, Mary” (*Cha-ne diar tha mi’g iarraidh ach mar tha mo bhial a Mhàiri*). It then went away, but came back through the night with two other cats. One said they would take the back of their paws to the woman, but the second said the front of their paws. This resolution was carried by the casting vote of the injured cat, and the woman was torn in shreds.

A man, going in the evening to see a girl he was courting, was met at a lonely part of the road (near the end of Balefetrish Hill in Tiree) by seven cats, and was so terrified that he turned back and thereby lost his sweetheart. She married an old man from the village of Hianish, where a noted witch dwelt. The old man got the blame of bribing the witch to send the cats.

In olden times a cat belonging to the tenant of Heynish in Tiree was much addicted, like the rest of its kind, to stealing cheese. It was caught in the act, and, as a punishment for the past and a lesson for the future, its ears were taken off. The tenant had occasion to go from home, and on his return found the cat lying dead, having been hung for theft in his absence. He took it in his lap, and thus addressed it:

Did I not tell you, little Duncan,

You had needs of being wary;  
When you went where the cheeses were,  
The gallows would teach you how to dance.  
Evil is it, earless cat,  
They you have killed, because of cheese;  
Your neck has paid for that refreshment,  
At this time, after your death.

On hearing these expressions of sympathy, the cat began to revive, and the man went on:

A hundred welcomes wait you, cat,  
Since in my lap you've chanced to be;  
And, though I do not much liberty allow,  
Many have you greatly loved.  
Are you the untamed cat that Fionn had,  
That hunted wild from glen to glen?  
Had Oscar you at the battle of Bla-sguinn,  
And left you heroes wounded there?  
You drank the milk Catherine had,  
For entertaining minstrel and meeting;  
And why should I praise you?  
You ought to be, like any kitten,  
On the hillside seeking mice,  
'Neath greyish grassy stems and bramble bushes.

On hearing this the cat ran away and was never again seen.

A Tíree boat was tacking out of a loch in the north. A man met it at a point of land near which it came, and asked to be taken to the other side. One of the boatmen was willing, but the rest were not, as they would thereby lose time. Next tack back, the man met the boat again, with the same result. "Well, then," he said, "perhaps you will repent it." At the mouth of the loch the boatmen heard a howling as of innumerable cats. A storm arose, and with difficulty they reached shelter at the island of Eigg.

## **WITCHES AS RATS.**

A Tíree boatman, bringing a load of peats from the Ross of Mull, was met at

the Treshinish Isles by two rats sailing along on dry cowsheds. As good luck did not direct him, he threw a piece of peat at the rats, and upset their frail barks. A storm sprang up, and with difficulty he got to land. The rats were witches, and he should not have meddled with them.

### WITCHES AS GULLS.

A witch assumed the shape of a gull, delighting in storms, not only to bring danger or safety to a boat, as already told, but also for payment to bring back news of fishing boats driven away in a storm.

A boat from Tiree, going for a cargo of wood, was caught in a violent gale and driven north past Ardnamurchan Point. With difficulty the boatmen, four in number, secured her in a creek. They remained in a cave for four days, till the storm abated. The suddenness and violence of the gale caused much anxiety to their friends, and two women, one of whom had two sons and a son-in-law in the boat, and the other, a widow, her youngest and only surviving son, consulted a famous witch, *Nic-ill'-Dòmhnuaich*, in Caolas, as to their fate. The witch told them to come next day, and she would tell them. Early next morning the widow went. "Yea," said the witch, "they live, and they had no little amusement last night fighting for the *Fallaide* bannock, and your son had his own share of it." When the young men came home, they were questioned as to their seeing anything the night the witch was sent for news. They said a grey gull was seen by them sitting on the edge of the rocks that overhang their place of shelter and peering down at them. One was for throwing stones at it, but the rest dissuaded him. It was only seen that night and next morning.

### WITCH AS CORMORANT.

A man named Campbell, in the Long Island, as the outer Hebrides are called, had two sweethearts, for one of whom he did not very much care. They were both to be present at a gathering of women for fulling cloth, and he resolved to go and see them. When he arrived he found only the one he least liked. He left shortly, and set off to where the other was. On the way he had to cross a ford on large stepping-stones. As he was doing so a cormorant (*sgarbh*) came, and splashed him fiercely with water. He had a cudgel in his hand, and gave the strange bird a whack on the back. He then passed on, and the distance being considerable did not return till next day. When returning he had to pass the house of the slighted damsel. Her mother met him at the door, and said, she could not

understand what was wrong with her daughter; she had got suddenly ill last night, and was very bad with a sore back. Campbell said he knew the reason, and would have nothing further to say to her daughter. The woman then threatened him, but no evil ever came of her threat.

## WITCHES AS WHALES.

A Skye fisherman gave the following narrative of witchcraft to which he himself was a witness. He and his brother were at the herring fishing in Portree in his native isle, and during that season out of all the herring boats one only was successful. It had only a crew of two, and every night caught from eight to ten crans of fish. The other boats were empty or nearly so. One night when the nets were set, the boat, in which he and his brother were, sprang a leak, and was taken back to the harbour and beached. The rest of the crew went away to the village, but he remained till the boat was left dry by the receding tide. In a while he also left, and as he did so, saw a young girl coming out of a house and tapping at a neighbour's window. Another girl came out of that house, and wondering what the two could be about at that hour of the night, he followed them from the village. On reaching the green, the two girls began to disport themselves (*braise*), then of a sudden became hares, and chased each other round and round. After this they made their way to the shore, and at the edge of the water (*gob na tuinne*), leapt into the sea and became whales. They went out from land spouting the water as high as a ship's mast. Next morning the boats came in empty. The fishermen said they had seen during the night two whales throwing up the sea in a dreadful manner (*smùideadh na fairge gu h-eagallach*), which made them think there was fish in the neighbourhood. The lucky boat was full as usual.

The meaning of this tale seems to be that the man had been listening the night before to tales of witchcraft, had fallen asleep in the boat on the beach, and had a troublous dream.

## DELAYING THE BIRTH OF A CHILD.

This infernal cantrip was played by means of a ball of black worsted thread in a black bag, kept at the foot of the witch's weaving loom, where it might not be detected. If the ball was taken away the plot fell through. In proof of this, there is a story told that a child was once kept twenty-two years in its mother's womb by means of witches, and when born it had hair, beard, and teeth, like a person of that age.

The mother of a celebrated West Highland freebooter, ‘Allan of the Faggots’ (*Ailein nan sop*), was a servant maid who became pregnant by a married man. The man’s wife, when she heard of the scandal, got a *bone* from a witch, which, she was assured, would, as long as it was kept, delay the birth of the child. Allan of the Faggots was thus kept in his mother’s womb for fifteen months beyond the usual time. The husband got word of his wife’s doings, and took a plan to defeat her. He made his Fool one day come home, pretending to be very drunk, staggering about, and smashing the furniture. On being called to task, the Fool said he had been in a house down yonder (that of the servant-maid), where a child had at last been born, and had got a dram, which went into his head. The wife, on hearing this, thought the witch had deceived her, and threw the bone into the fire. It disappeared in blue smoke, and knocked down the chimney! Allan was then born, with large teeth.

In other tales to the same effect, the trick usually is played on a married woman, by the mother of a maid who had been slighted on her account.

### CLAY CORPSE.

The greatest evil that witches can do is to make, for a person whose death they desire, a clay body or image (*corp creadha*), into which pins are stuck, to produce a slow and painful disease, terminating in dissolution. Waxen figures for the same purpose, and melted by exposure to a slow fire, were known to Lowland superstition. In the Highlands wax was not accessible to poor bodies, and they had to make clay serve the turn. It is said that when a person wants a limb he cannot be destroyed by witches in this manner.

MacIain Ghiarr, the Ardnamurchan thief, stole so many cattle from MacLean of Dowart that he made that chief his deadly enemy. On one of his roving expeditions he was passing at midnight the chapel or burying-ground of Pennygown (*caibeal Peighinn-a-ghobhan*), on the Sound of Mull. Seeing a light in the chapel, he entered, and found three witches sticking pins in a clay body (*corp creadha*) intended to represent MacLean of Dowart. As each pin was stuck in, MacLean was seized with a stitch in the corresponding part of his body. Only the last pin remained to be stuck in. It was to be in the heart, and to cause death. MacIain Ghiarr scattered the witches, took with him the clay corpse, and made his way to MacLean, whom he found at death’s door. He took out in his presence the pins one by one, and when the last was taken out MacLean jumped up a hale man, and remained ever after the warm friend of MacIain Ghiarr.

MacGilvray, a former minister of Strathfillan, in Perthshire, was seized with burning pains all over his body, and was slowly wasting away by some malady, of which the nature could not be understood. He lived at Clachan in that strath, and one morning early a woman from the opposite side of the river, on her way to call and ask for him, saw another woman going along before her, who had the reputation of being a witch. Wondering what her neighbour was about at that early hour, she kept well behind and watched. The foremost woman, on coming to a hollow, stooped down, buried something in the ground, and then walked on towards the minister's house. The other came and dug up what had been buried. It proved to be a piece of wood stuck all over with pins. She took it with her to the manse, and produced it, to the confusion of the witch. On the pins being withdrawn the minister was freed from his pains and got quite well again.

Ross-shire witches could not destroy 'Donald of the Ear' (*Do'uill na Cluaise*), of whom they had made a clay figure, from being unable to put on the ear. Donald had lost the ear in battle. Similarly a *corp creadha* made for Lord Macdonald by *Raonaid a Chreagain* failed, because the witches never could put the arm on.

Witches could also produce disease in other ways. Thus, a young man in Perthshire—the tailor Cumming in Drimachastle, Rannoch—fell into a decline. He accounted himself for the loss of health, decay, and sweats at night by witches coming at night when he was in Badenoch (a district at the time celebrated for witchcraft), and converting him into a horse, on which they rode through the air to Edinburgh and other places to spend the night carousing in well-stored cellars. He now saw them often passing in different shapes and in eggshells, etc. The poor young man did not understand the sweats of consumption, and his imagination was disordered by the many tales of witchcraft he had heard.

The same tale, of converting men into horses, is with slight variations common. In Lorn, a woman came night after night and shook a bridle at the son of a neighbouring farmer. He immediately became a horse, on which she rode to London, etc. A younger brother exchanged beds with him, and when the witches were carousing, secured the magic bridle, converted the witch herself into a horse, rode home, and before taking off the bridle took his horse to a smithy, and put on four shoes. Next day an old woman of the neighbourhood was found with her feet and hands horribly mangled.

## SILVER SIXPENCE.

As already said, silver fired from a gun will wound a witch, and force her to assume her proper shape. An English sportsman, according to a Perthshire version of an old story, was sitting surrounded by his dogs, in a mountain bothy at the dead hour of night. A cat came in, but the dogs did not move. It sat with its back to the fire, and swelled till it was as large as a yearling calf. The Englishman took a silver button off his clothes, and putting it in the gun, fired at the cat. The brute scampered out at the door. On going to the strath next day, the sportsman being a doctor, was sent for to see a farmer's wife, who had got suddenly ill. He went, and extracted his own silver button from her right breast.

### **SAVING HORSES.**

In Uist, a band of horses wandered on to a ledge in the face of a steep precipice. It was impossible to take them from their dangerous position to the top of the cliff by ropes, and to force them from the ledge to the sea, which washed the base of the precipice, seemed from the height of the fall, inevitable destruction. An old man, who was reputed to know more than his paternoster, advised, however, they should be driven over, and himself began an incantation, beginning "*Casa Gurra, Casa Gurra*," whatever that may mean. The horses of their own accord went over the ledge, and swam safely to land.

### **TAILOR AND WITCHES.**

A Glen-Quoich tailor, detected among a company of witches, was asked what had brought him into such society? He said it was "for the pleasure of the company" (*mar shodan ris a chuideachd*).

### **CELEBRATED WITCHES.**

The best-known names seem to have been merely nicknames, given perhaps to more than one old woman. 'Blue-eye' (*Gorm-shùil*) is said to originate from the witch having one eye black or brown and the other blue. It is, however, a corruption of *Gormla*, an ancient and pretty Gaelic name, usually rendered Dorothy. *Gormla Mhòr* from Meigh, Lochaber, was stronger than all the witches of Mull, and gave the finishing stroke, as already detailed, to Capt. Forrest's ship. She met her death when astraddle on a mountain stream, to intercept a salmon that had made its way up to spawn. A large fish made a rush, knocked her backwards in the water, and drowned her. There was a Gormshuil in the

village of Hianish, Tiree, a most notorious local witch, and one in Cràcaig in Skye, equally notorious. ‘Brindled-Headless-Stocking Foot’ (*Cas a mhogain riabhaich*) and ‘Rough Foot-gear, the Herdsman’s daughter’ (*Caiseart gharbh ni’n an Aodhair*) were anywhere but where the person who is telling about them comes from himself. Shaw, the Lochnell bard, makes them sisters dwelling in Glenforsa in Mull, when Ossian was a little boy, and contemporaries of Mac-Rùsluin. ‘Sallow Spot’ (*Ball Odhar*) was from Kintra (*Ceann-trà*) in Ardnamurchan; ‘Yellow Claws’ (*Spòga buidhe*) from Maligeir on the east side of Skye; *Doideag-un* is the well-known name of the Mull witches, and is given by children to the falling snowflakes, which they are informed are the Mull witches on their journey through the air. Big Kate MacIntyre in Fort-William was extensively known some forty years ago as a person skilled in divinations and possessing mysterious powers.

## WIZARD RISING AFTER DEATH.

People who practised forbidden arts, as may readily be supposed, did not rest after death. When buried they remained quiet like other people, but till then might be troublesome.

Among the hills of Ross-shire, an old man, who in his time was not ‘canny,’ died in his son’s house, a lonely hut in the hills remote from other houses. He was stretched and adjusted (*air a ruidheadh ’s air a chàradh*) on a board in a closet, and the shepherd, leaving his wife and children in the house, went to the strath for people to come to the wake and funeral. At midnight, one of the children, playing through the house, peeped in at the keyhole of the closet and cried out, “Mother, mother! my grandfather is rising.”<sup>[15]</sup> The door of the closet was fast locked, and the dead man, finding he could not open it, began to scrape and dig the earth below it, to make a passage for himself. The children gathered round their mother, and in extremity of terror all listened to the scraping of the unhallowed corpse. At last the head appeared below the door, the corpse increased its exertions, and the terror of the mother and children became intense. The body was halfway through below the door when the cock crew and it fell powerless in the pit it had dug. That pit could never afterwards be kept filled up to the level of the rest of the floor.

In Tiree, a head-stone, placed at the grave of a man whom report accused of dabbling in the dark science, would not remain in its place till secured by a chain. It fell every now and then out of its position, but after the chain was fastened to it, it remained firm, and is so now without the chain.



## HOW TO DETECT WITCHES.

Early in the morning, on the first Monday of each of the four quarters of the year, the smoke from a witch's house *goes against the wind*. This may be seen by any one who takes the trouble of rising early and going to an eminence, whence the witch's house can be seen.



## CHAPTER II.

### WHITE WITCHCRAFT.

In English, a distinction is recognised between *black* and *white* witches. The former could hurt but not help; their power was only one of mischief. White witches were honest, harmless practitioners of sorcery, “whom our custom and country doth call wise men and wise women.”<sup>[16]</sup> In Gaelic, there are no names corresponding to Black and White Witches, but the distinction indicated is well known. Those to whom the name *Buidseach* (witch) properly applies could only do harm. They raised storms, drowned people, took the milk from cows, etc., etc. There were others who by magic charms cured disease in man and beast, bestowed luck, warded off dangers, real and imaginary, and secured various benefits to those who resorted to them. One or more such wise people were to be found in every district, and any accusation of *witchcraft*, of dabbling in forbidden arts, or of being in league with the devil, would be indignantly resented by them. On the contrary, as in the case of a shepherd in upper Argyllshire, who was much resorted to for the magic cure of cattle, they claimed that their powers were given for a good purpose, and to counteract the Powers of Evil.

The machinery by which they secured these blessings to humanity, consisted of rhymes or incantations, rites and ceremonies, plants and stones of virtue, observance of propitious seasons, etc. The use of these could only lead indirectly to harm by fostering a spirit of credulity, and preventing inquiry into natural causes. Of themselves, the charms were like the Sunday plant, according to a common Gaelic saying, “without benefit or harm.” Any other rhyme or ceremony, plant or stone, would do equally well, if its use commanded the same amount of belief. The words or rhymes were praiseworthy commendations addressed to various saints, and the rites were harmless and merely trifling. This kind of superstition still prevails among the lower ranks of society to an almost incredible extent in the south as well as in the Highlands, and ‘wise people’ are resorted to for the cure of obscure ailments by many of whom such folly might be little suspected. Not above five years ago<sup>[17]</sup> the daughter of a dairy farmer in Cowal came to Ardnamurchan, a distance of above 100 miles, to obtain from a man of reputed skill a charm to turn aside the misfortunes and maladies by which her father’s dairy was afflicted. She went home happy in the possession of

a bottle of water, over which some magic words had been muttered. Occasional newspaper paragraphs show the practice is not extinct in England or the south of Scotland.

In the case of sick beasts, when, *e.g.*, a horse lies down and refuses to rise, or a cow ceases to give milk, or gives only milk mingled with blood, the usual mode of procedure to effect a magic cure is to go to a person of skill (*i.e.* a white witch), get a bottle of water prepared by whispering certain words over it, and sprinkle this on the sick beast, or perhaps put a few drops in its ear. Immediately the beast rises without anything being the matter with it. Other rhymes and ceremonies are ready for other occasions, and it would be possible to fill a book with a collection of incantations in use for various diseases or in different localities.

The general name for trifling superstitious observances of the kind is *Gisreag*, *Eapag*, *Upag*. The different kinds are known as *Eòlas* (Knowledge) for the cure of disease; *Oradh* (Gilding) for securing gifts and graces; *Sìan* or *Seun* for protection from danger, and *Soisgeul* (*Gospel*) for weak minds. The rhymes contain internal evidence of having come from Roman Catholic times. The invocation of the Trinity and the Saints, particularly St. Bride and St. Columba, St. Michael and St. Peter, is common to them all, and whatever be their merit as expressions of piety, they certainly convey no idea of traffic with the Powers of Evil. The utmost that truth can urge against those who use them is, that they are ignorant, facile, and credulous. The opprobrious name of *buidseachas* is in every case sincerely and piously repudiated by themselves, and in reality is unjust.

These charms are not readily accessible. The following have been collected from many different persons, and are of interest, some as illustrative of the antiquities of the Scottish Highlands, and some for their poetical merits. Much of the chosen poetry consists in felicity of expression, and this is a merit next to impossible to infuse into a translation. No attempt is here made to do more than give the exact meaning of the original.

## EOLAS.

The *Eòlas* (Knowledge), called also *Teagasg* (Teaching), was a charm for the cure of sickness in man or beast. It consisted of a rhyme, muttered over the sick person, and over water to be drunk by, or sprinkled over, the sick animal. To render it more impressive, its use was accompanied by trifling little ceremonies, such as making the sign of the cross, yawning, making up mysterious parti-

coloured strings, getting particular kinds of water on particular days, dipping stones of virtue in water, and similar mummeries. Its object was a good one, and this much can be said in its favour, that if it did not cure, it did not kill.

The ills, for which the *Eòlas* was used, are generally transitory in their nature, as toothache, bruises, sprains, etc., and improvement or cure, following soon after its performance, kept alive a belief in the efficacy of the incantation. The rhymes are usually found in the possession of old women of the humblest class, to whom a meal or small present from a more affluent neighbour, for a bottle of water and a harmless rhyme, is a welcome gift. These old women, it may be said in every case, believe in the efficacy of the charm as much as those who resort to them; but, while the whole company and its proceedings afford good grounds for ridicule, indignation or reprobation fairly attach themselves only to those who go to seek such foolish cures for sickness. The excuse of the poor white witch is to be found in the pressure of want, and the relief, which the Gaelic saying truthfully but coarsely embodies, “It is good fun that fills the belly” (*’s math an spōrs a līonas brū*).

Not a word of any kind was to be spoken by the person going for an *Eòlas*, till he came home again, to any one but the ‘wise’ person. This was because Elisha, when he sent his servant before him to the Shunammite woman (2 Kings iv. 29), commanded him not to speak on the way. “If thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again.”

On the way, the messenger must take up his quarters for the night before the sun goes down; and no spinning or reading is allowed. There is more probability of the charm becoming efficacious if he enter no house and take no meat.

## CURE FOR THE EVIL EYE.

(*Eòlas a chronachaidh.*)

An evil eye, according to the Highland belief, is one animated by a discontented and unhappy mind, full of envy (*farmad*), covetousness (*sanntachadh*), and such like mean feelings, and looking repiningly on the good of others, and it may be too earnestly and anxiously on what belongs to oneself. It injures the object on which it falls, and animals or persons struck by it are seized with mysterious ailments, dwindle, and perhaps die.

The believers in the gift assert that the evil eye may exist in man or woman, in friend or foe, and that it is prudent not to give causes for the feelings which give rise to it. Thus, for instance, it is advisable not to allow a cow to go without a full udder. An evil eye may rest upon it, and the animal be lost. The practice is commendable, though the reason assigned may not be the correct one. From a similar fear, a pedlar has been known to go about with his goods only at night. A mother can hurt her own child, and some have been said to hurt their own cattle. The traditions of various localities, in the islands and on the mainland, tell of a man who was not allowed to see his own cattle, from his possession of the unhappy gift. If he did see them, one of the best cows was found dead next day.

When a healthy and thriving child is seized with unaccountable illness, and becomes uneasy and sickly, it is suspected of being struck with the evil eye, and a 'wise' woman of the neighbourhood is sent for. She fills a bowl with clean water, into which she puts a silver sixpence. The bowl is then quickly, and dexterously turned upside down. If the sixpence stick to its bottom, the child is the victim of an evil eye (*air a chronachadh*), and the usual remedy is adopted.

An elder of the church, who was witness to the ceremony some fifty years ago, thus describes it (and he is a person very likely to have been observant even in his boyhood). "When a little boy, I wandered into a neighbour's house, very likely with a piece of seaweed in my hand, and chewing away at it, as the manner of boys is. There was a child in the house very ill, but I did not think or know of this when I entered. I suppose the little thing had not sucked its mother's breast, or taken any nourishment, for some days previously. An old woman, who came to inquire for it, on learning its condition, took a bowl half-full of water from a large tub (*farmail*) that was in the house, and putting it on her knees began to mutter over it. I was too young at the time to be heeded, and was not put out of the house. After muttering for a while, the old woman began

to yawn, and such yawning I have never seen in all my days. She yawned, and yawned, and yawned again, till I thought she was going to die. The cat's paws were dipped in the bowl on her knee, and a red thread, brought by a girl belonging to the house, on being also dipped in the water, was put round the child's neck."

The water used must be that in which the "hunter's feet" have been dipped (*uisge casan an t-sealgair*), and the cat is the hunter most readily available. The muttered words are the charm, which gives the whole ceremony its efficacy, and the yawning commences when the child's illness is being transferred to the person who performs the ceremony.

The Evil Eye is deadly to all animals to which the person having it takes a fancy. In the present day it is said of a man in Tiree, who is accused by common report of having the gift, that when he comes to buy a beast it is better to give it to him at his own price than keep it. If he does not get it, the beast is taken ill and perhaps dies soon after. This is said, but the maligned man never gets better bargains than his neighbours.

When a stranger having an evil eye meets a rider or person leading a horse, and praises the animal's points, the effects of his looks are soon evident. Before he is out of sight the horse is suddenly taken ill and falls down. The rider should immediately return after the evil-eyed stranger, and boldly accuse him of having done the mischief. The more "bitterly and abusively" (*gu searbh salach*) he does so the better. On coming back he will find the horse all right. If on his guard at the first meeting, when the stranger praises the horse, he will praise it a great deal more. When the stranger says, "That is a good animal," the prudent owner will say, "It is better than that," and however high the stranger's praises are, the owner's should be higher. This will lessen, perhaps prevent, the power of the evil eye to do mischief.

In the prose part of a Gaelic poem published in M'Kenzie's *Beauties*, Gilbride Macintyre, from Ruaig, in Tiree, is said to have killed eighty hens with one glance of his evil eye, and to have wrecked a big ship of five cross-trees, notwithstanding her cables and anchors. A man in Rocky Mound (*Cnoc Creagach*), in Coll, killed a mare and foal with it. It is said the wife of a former tenant of Heynish, in Tiree (and the story is localised in several other places), would not allow her husband to look at his own fold of cattle. As sure as he did so, one of his best cows was found dead next day. The fear of this calamity made her put a very pretty cow, to which she herself took a great fancy, in an out-of-the-way place, near which her husband had never been observed to go. On

returning one day from a stroll in the hill, he asked who put the cow where he had seen it. The wife's worst fears were realised. The cow was dead in a few days.

The credulous (of whom there is a large number everywhere) were assured that, when any beast belonging to them was praised, all evil consequences were averted by their saying:

“God bless your eye,  
A drop of wine about your heart,  
The mouse is in the bush,  
And the bush is on fire.”<sup>[18]</sup>

There is a Gaelic saying that “Envy splits the rocks” (*sgoiltidh farmad na creagan*), and in proof of this the following story is told. An industrious, careful man sold more cheese than his neighbours, and was much envied when seen, as he frequently was, on his way to market with a cheese in a bag on his back. One day, instead of a cheese, he put a small mill-stone in the bag. His neighbours, filled with envy, saw him jogging along as usual to market, and stood in their doors looking after him and making remarks. On reaching the market and opening the bag he found the mill-stone broken in two, a certain proof of the power of envy and of the truth embodied in the proverb.

The charm for curing the Evil Eye, like many other similar mummeries, must be made on Thursday or Sunday. The rhyme used varies with different localities. The following, with slight variations on the part of different individuals, is the one used in Tiree. The words within brackets are omitted when the charm is for a sick beast:

“I will put salve on eye,  
The best salve beneath the sun,  
[The Son of God made for an angel of heaven]  
Throughout the world,  
For small eye,  
For big eye,  
For my own eye,  
For the grey man's eye,  
For the eye of the nine slim fairy women,  
Who never ate  
Or digested aught,

In yonder hill,  
Whoever has thee under lock  
Of eye, or malice, or envy,  
On themselves may it fall,  
On their goods, and on their children,  
On their juice, and on their fatness,  
On their long white ground,  
On their choicest herd,  
Their white-backed cows,  
Their sheep and pointed goats,  
Each eye and each envy  
That lies on thee, A. B.  
In the very centre of the east.  
Talkative are folk over thee,  
Christ has taken away their likeness,  
Twelve eyes before every eye,  
Strong is the eye of the Son of God,  
Weak is the eye of the unjust.”

The five last lines probably mean, that the fairies or elves, whom God has rendered invisible, are speaking among themselves over the sick person, and the succour of the twelve apostles and of Christ is more powerful than the injustice of man. Others for these lines substitute the following:

“The eye that went over,  
And came back,  
That reached the bone,  
And reached the marrow,  
I will lift from off thee  
And the King of the Elements will aid me.”

A woman in Islay worked wonderful cures with the following. It is a wretched specimen of superstition, but is given to show how ancient creeds accommodate themselves to modern modes of thought. The ancient charm, instead of being entirely abandoned, became a sort of prayer:

“If eye has blighted,  
Three have blessed,  
Stronger are the Three that blessed,



Than the eye that blighted;  
The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost;  
If aught elfin or worldly has harmed it,  
On earth above,  
Or in hell beneath,  
Do Thou, God of Grace, turn it aside.”

This was to be said thrice.

## **CHARM FOR SPRAINS.**

*(Eòlas an t-sìochaidh.)*

This charm also to be efficacious must be thrice repeated. The variations in the versions met with, have been almost entirely in the omission of lines in some that are found in others:

“A charm in sooth.  
The charm that Colum-Kil applied  
To a young man’s knee  
In the hill  
For pang, for swelling,  
For hurt, for wound,  
For abrasion, for sprain,  
For portions, for divisions,  
For varicose vein, for dislocated bone;  
Christ went out  
At early morn,  
He found the legs of horses,  
Broken by turns;  
When he alighted on the ground,  
He healed a horse’s leg;  
He put marrow to marrow,  
And bone to bone,  
He put blood to blood  
And flesh to flesh,  
Juice to juice, and vein to vein  
As he healed that,  
May he heal this,

Because of Christ and His Powers together.  
One-third to-day,  
Two-thirds to-morrow,  
And the whole the day after.”

Part of the charm consisted of a handful of earth from a grey mound (*làn an dùirn an ùir a cnoc glas*) applied to the foot. The sufferer must go three times *deiseal* (southwardly) round the mound on Sunday. In the extreme west of Tiree there is a hillock called *Cnocan an t-siàchaidh* (the hillock of the sprain), but the practice of using it for cures of this kind has become obsolete.

### **CHARM FOR BRUISES.**

*(Eòlas Bruthaidh.)*

“Patera Mary one, Patera Mary two, etc., down to Patera Mary nine,  
Thou wilt flow like woman,  
Thou wilt flow like man,  
Thou wilt flow like royal fish;  
And the nine veins of thy body,  
In one stream together.”

### **CHARM FOR RHEUMATIC PAINS.**

*Eòlas Galar Tholl* (lit. perforating disease).

“Close God about thee,  
Look people over thee,  
To Christ, or else—  
Lift from us the gallows,  
Away, away,  
Thy poison in the ground,  
And thy pain in the stone.”

Otherwise:

“An arrow thrown with sudden terror,  
Salt to cure the wound,  
Jesus Christ to keep the Elfin arrow quiet,

The charm of God about thee,  
Blind are people over thee,  
Thy covering about Colum-Kil,  
And the covering of Colum-Kil about thee,  
To protect thee and watch over thee  
Against the people of this world  
And of the next.”

## **CHARM FOR CONSUMPTION.**

*(Eòlas na Caitheamh.)*

This was to be said on a Thursday and on two Sundays. As in the case of other charms, some days of the year were more favourable than others, and the top of the ninth wave should be used in sprinkling the patient:

“Let me tread on thee, tightness,  
As the swan treads on the shore,  
Tightness of the back, tightness of the chest,  
Tightness of the throat,  
To strip from thee the foul disease,  
From the top of thy head to thy sole,  
To thy two thighs beyond,  
By the might of God and His powers together.”

## **FOR AFFECTIONS OF THE CHEST.**

*(’Air Son Iomairt Cléibh.)*

“I will trample on thee, tightness,  
As on mountain dust to-night;  
On thyself be thy blackening, dwarfing power,  
Evil and painful is that.  
The charm which Patrick put  
On the mother of the son of the King of Iver,  
To kill the worms  
Round the veins of her heart,  
For the four and twenty afflictions  
In her constitution;

For the water of the running stream of her boundary,  
For the stones of the earth's waves,  
For the weakness of her heart,  
For jaundice and distemper,  
For withering and for asthma."

## **CHARM FOR TOOTHACHE.**

*(Eòlas an Déide.)*

It is not difficult to persuade a man distracted with toothache to try any remedy in reason that offers any hope of relief. It would be curious if a charm were not forthcoming. The writer has recovered only a portion of the Gaelic version. The following English charm was obtained ten years ago in Tiree, and probably came originally from the Isle of Man. It was to be sewn up in the clothes and worn about the person, and was given to those who applied for it for a small consideration. This was to be on Sunday, and payment was not to be asked for. If that had to be done, the charm was useless. The copy is word for word:

"In the name of lord petter sat on a marble stone aweeping Christ came by and said what else you petter petter said o lord my god my dok toockage christ said o lord petter be whole and not thou only but all that carry these lines in my name shall never have the toock Christ cure the toockaig."

## **MADE FOR MERRION MACFADYN.**

In a small tract called Peacock's *Guide to the Isle of Man* (p. 66), the following version is given as in use in that island:

"Peter was ordained a saint  
Standing on a marble stone,  
Jesus came to him alone,  
And said to him, 'Peter!  
What is it that makes thee shake?'  
Peter replied, 'My Lord and Master,  
It is the toothache';  
Jesus said to him,  
'Rise up and be healed!  
Keep these words for my sake,

And thou shalt nevermore be troubled with toothache’.”

The Gaelic is to the same effect:

“The charm Colum-Kil applied  
To Mal-ii’s right knee,  
For gnawing and lancinating pain and toothache,  
Toothache and disease of the head.

...

Then said Peter to James,  
‘I can get no peace or rest with the toothache.’

...

Christ said, ‘Answer the question,  
And the toothache and the verse  
Will never be in the same head together’.”

## **CHARMS FOR CATTLE.**

These were even more numerous than those for the distempers of men. Cattle are nowadays better housed, fed, and attended to, and hence are not so liable to ill-understood ailments that gave persons of ‘skill’ employment.

In the case of any beast being seized with distemper, this short charm might prove of use:

“Whoever has done you this deed of malice,  
A brown man or white woman,  
I send these Three to check them,  
The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.”

A more obstinate case demanded the charm for the Evil Eye, water in which stones of virtue were dipped etc.

When a newly purchased animal is brought home, its return to its former home is prevented, and its allurements to its new haunts is secured by blowing into its ear, and saying:

“A blowing into your right ear,  
For your benefit and not your hurt,  
Love of the land under your foot,

And dislike to the land you left,  
Your fastening in my hand,  
And an iron lock is on thee, etc.”

When a cow loses its milk, as is sometimes the case, whatever be the cause (perhaps the eating of a noxious weed), it is necessary to procure the pearlwort and two other plants known to people of skill, to bring back the milk. The following words are to be said when pulling the plants:

“I will pull the pearlwort,  
The plant that Fionn had;  
The son of the angels came,  
When it was bending above it;  
Bridget came home to thee  
With thy curds and thy butter;  
Smooth Mary that hoarded it  
Under her nine round locks,  
A plant of milk it is, a plant of fat,  
And a plant of pairing;  
A plant of happiness and joy  
Wherever it is.

I will pull the joyful clump,  
Sitting by the top of an eminence,  
I would give it to no man,  
Without more than my blessing.  
I will pull the loving charity,  
'Tis a loving delicacy, (?)  
It is a crowding together, (?)  
It is a good object of travel and journey,  
And God asked it as one  
And pulled it as two;  
It will give happiness and joy  
Wherever it is.

I will pull the milk-producing plant,  
As smooth St. Mary pulled it,  
For produce, for fruit,  
For pairing,

For milking plentifully, for thick cream;  
The benefit of your herd may you have,  
Each for his eye, or malice, or envy,  
May his eye be in the bush of whins  
And the bush be on fire.”

### **CHARM AGAINST DANGER (*Sian*).**

The *seun* or *sian*, Scot. *sain*, was used for the protection of both man and beast from particular dangers, such as being taken away by an enemy, being drowned, or struck by sword, or arrow, or bullet in battle. It consisted of rhymes, or parti-coloured strings, or plants, and in many cases its nature remained a mystery. It was said over cows and sheep when leaving them for the night; it was put round the necks of infants; given by the fairy mistress (*leannan sìth*) to her earthly lover; sewn by the foster-mother (*muime*) in the clothes of a beloved foster-son (*dalta*) about to leave her, etc. After it was once given or said, the two, the giver and the recipient, must not see each other again. If they did the charm lost its power. Usually there was some unforeseen danger of the class which the charm was intended to provide against that proved fatal. Thus, it is said, a young woman gave a *sian* to her soldier lover, who was leaving for foreign wars, telling him the only thing he had to guard against was his own arms. He went scatheless through a protracted war, but after his return scratched his forehead with a pin which he carried in his clothes, and died from the effects.

### **THE OLD WIFE’S CHARM FOR HER COW.**

(*Sian na Caillich mu Bò.*)

“I set the watch to-night  
Against horns of he-goat  
And voice of bull,  
The voice of the dead,  
And each horned, fierce,  
Large-eared, large-buttocked cow;  
The Evil One’s mill-stone  
Be trailing at thy rump  
Till to-morrow morning.”

When a stone was tied to the cow’s tail, and these mystic words were uttered,

the animal was safe to be found in the same spot in the morning. This was believed to be as much owing to the words as to the anchor astern.

## **CHARM FOR A SHEEP IN ITS COT.**

*(Sian na Caora mu'n chrò.)*

“The charm that Mary set  
About a sheep cot,  
Against knives, against dogs,  
And against men;  
Against hound, and wild-dog,  
And thief;  
On the hillock, where they lie down,  
May they safely rise.”

## **AGAINST DROWNING AND IN WAR.**

*(Sian roi' bhàthadh 's an Cogadh.)*

A native of the Island of Coll, who served in the British army from the taking of Copenhagen, throughout the Peninsular and continental wars, and only died this year (1874), a most kind-hearted and powerfully built man, attributed his safe return from the wars in some measure to having learned this charm in his youth:

“The charm Mary put round her Son,  
And Bridget put in her banners,  
And Michael put in his shield,  
And the Son of God before His throne of clouds;  
A charm art thou against arrow,  
A charm art thou against sword,  
A charm against the red-tracked bullet;  
An island art thou in the sea,  
A rock art thou on land;  
And greater be the fear these have  
Of the body, round which the charm goes,  
In presence of Colum-Kil  
With his mantle round thee.”



## CHARM AGAINST DANGERS IN WAR.

The following is taken from the Gaelic periodical, *Cuairtear nam Beann*, for January, 1842. It is said to have been got about the year 1800 from an old man in Glenforsa, in Mull.

“For himself and for his goods,  
The charm Bridget put round Dorgill’s daughter,  
The charm Mary put round her Son,  
Between her soles and her neck,  
Between her breast and her knee,  
Between her eye and her hair;  
The sword of Michael be on thy side,  
The shield of Michael on thy shoulder;  
There is none between sky and earth  
Can overcome the King of grace.  
Edge will not cleave thee,  
Sea will not drown thee,  
Christ’s banners round thee,  
Christ’s shadow over thee;  
From thy crown to thy sole,  
The charm of virtue covers thee.  
You will go in the King’s name,  
And come in your Commander’s name;  
Thou belongest to God and all His powers.  
I will make the charm on Monday,  
In a narrow, sharp, thorny space;  
Go, with the charm about thee,  
And let no fear be on thee!  
Thou wilt ascend the tops of cliffs,  
And not be thrown backwards;  
Thou art the calm Swan’s son in battle,  
Thou wilt stand amid the slaughter;  
Thou wilt run through five hundred,  
And thy oppressor will be caught;  
God’s charm be about thee!  
People go with thee!”

A smith in Torosa, Mull, was said to have got a charm of this kind from his

father. He afterwards enlisted, and was in thirty battles. On coming home without a wound, he said he had often wished he was dead, rather than be bruised as he was by bullets. They struck him, but could not pierce him because of the charm.

Red Hector of the Battles (*Eachunn Ruadh nan Cath*), a celebrated chief of the M'Leans of Dowart, had a *sian*, which made him invulnerable in the many conflicts, from which he derived his designation. It failed him at the battle of Inverkeithing, in 1652, when he fell with 1500 of his clan. Surrounded by overwhelming numbers, and sorely wounded, he maintained a hopeless struggle, his gallant clansmen defending him to the last, "each stepping where his comrade stood the instant that he fell," and calling out, in an expression which has been since proverbial in his native island, "Another for Hector!" (*Fear eile air son Eachuinn*).

The charm, which his fairy mistress gave to Thinman (*Caoilte*), the fastest hero of the Fians, has been already referred to.

When washing new-born babes wise women made use of these words:

"Hale fair washing to thee,  
Hale washing of the Fians be thine;  
Health to thee, health to him,  
But not to thy female enemy."

## CHARM FOR CLOTH.

After being fulled, new cloth was folded and placed on a table. The women, who had been engaged in the fulling, then gathered round it and sang the following charm seven times. During the singing they kept time to the music by raising their hands simultaneously and beating the cloth with the tips of their fingers. After each repetition of the charm the cloth was turned over end:

"Well do I say my verse,  
As I descend the glen,  
One verse, two verses, etc., down to seven and a half verses.  
Let not the wearer of the cloth be wounded,  
And may he never be torn,  
And when he goes to battle or conflict,  
The full succour of the Lord be his.

[The little sea-gull yonder swimming  
And the white wave that she loves,  
She swims pleasantly  
And I swim cheerfully spinning;  
When I sow my flax  
And spin my lint  
I will make linen from the awns  
And get seven marks for the yard.]  
Water-cress pulled through flag-stone,  
And given to wife unawares,  
Deer's shank in the herring's head,  
And in the slender body of the speckled salmon.”

Then, striking the cloth faster, the singers say:

“Let this be second cloth, and not enemy's spoil,  
Nor property of clerk or priest.  
But his own property, and may he enjoy and wear it.”

It is said there is a bone in the herring's head that resembles a deer's foot. Some say the word should not be “deer's shank” (*Lurg an fhéidh*), but “deer's antlers” (*Cuibhn'an fhéidh*). The part of the song within brackets seems to belong to the music more than to the meaning. The final wish is that the cloth when turned, or made into a second suit, may prove as good as new, and not, like cloth found on dead bodies, a perquisite of the priest's. In olden times the seventh yard (*slat*) of chequered cloth (*Clò Breac*) was given to the factor and priest, as well as the seventh lamb from the fold.

### **CHARM FOR GENERAL USE.**

“Thou wilt be the friend of God,  
And God will be thy friend;  
Iron will be your two soles,  
And twelve hands shall clasp thy head;  
Thy afflictions be in tree or holly,  
Or rock at sea,  
Or earth on land;  
A protecting shield be about thee,  
Michael's shield be about thee;

Colum-Kil's close-fitting coat of mail  
Protect thee from Elfin bolts  
And from the enclosures of pain, (?)  
From the trouble of this world  
And the other world.  
The woman, on her knee  
And on her eye,  
On her choicest flesh,  
And on the veins of her heart,  
Till it reach the place whence it came.  
Every jealous envious woman  
That propagates her flesh and blood,  
On herself be her desire, and envy, and malice."

### **"THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST."**

Of the same class was the charm to which this name was given. It consisted of a green string, which was kept in the mouth while the charm was muttered, and then secured to the charmed person's right shoulder. The ceremony must be performed on Thursday or Sunday.

"May God bless your cross  
Before you go to any garden,  
Any disease that is in it  
May He take from it.  
May God bless your crucifying cross,  
On the top of a house, the house of Christ,  
From drowning, from danger, and from fever.  
When the King was stretched on high,  
The King of the Three Hills  
And a brown branch top  
... (unintelligible) ...  
May God bless what is before thee.  
When thou goest at their head  
Success at meeting and in battle;  
The grace of God and courteous look of all men be yours;  
The banners of Christ be over thee  
To protect thee from thy crown to thy sole.  
Fire will not burn thee,

Seas will not drown thee;  
A rock at sea art thou,  
A man on land art thou,  
Fairer than the swan on Loch Lathaich,  
And the sea-gull on the white stream;  
You will rise above them  
As the wave rises,  
On the side of God and His powers.  
Thou art the red rowan tree  
To cause the wrath of men to ebb  
Like a wave from the sea to flood-tide,  
And a wave from flood-tide to ebb.”

## **CHARM FOR CONFERRING GRACES.**

*(Oradh nam Buadh.)*

“I will wash thy palms  
In showers of wine,  
In the juice of rasps  
And in honied milk.  
I will put the nine graces  
In thy white cheeks,  
Grace of form and grace of good fortune,  
Grace at meetings and of manners,  
And of goodly speech.  
Black is yonder house,  
And black are its inmates,  
Thou art the brown swan  
Going in among them;  
Their heart is in thy chest,  
Their tongue under thy foot,  
And they will not say to thee  
Word to despise thee;  
An island at sea art thou  
And a castle on land;  
The Lord’s form is in thy face,  
The loveliest form in the universe,  
In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The best day in the week,  
And the best week in the year,  
Peter came, Paul came,  
Michael came, John came,  
The King of Virtues came as guide,  
To give to thee his regard and love.”

### **CHARM FOR THE FACES OF YOUNG WOMEN.**

“Bounty is in thy countenance,  
The Son of God succour thee  
From the evil men of the world,  
The vigil of loving St. Mary keep thee,  
A smooth modest tongue be in thy head,  
Fair hair in thy two eyebrows,  
Fin, the son of Cuäl, between these;  
Since it be Mary and her Son  
That gave them that charm,  
May the taste of honey be  
On every word you say,  
To commons and to nobles,  
Upon this and each day  
To the end of the year.”

### **LOVE CHARM.**

The knowledge of this rhyme is very widespread. It is ascribed by some to Duncan Ban M’Intyre, the greatest of the Gaelic lyrical poets, and is printed in some editions of his poems as his composition, but others with more probability ascribe it to Blind Allan, the Glengarry bard. Allan eked out a livelihood by the practice of charms of the kind.

“That is not a love-charm  
Which is a charm of wisps and straws,  
But one to draw with warmth  
The love of the man you like.  
Rise early on Wednesday  
And go to a broad level flag-stone,<sup>[19]</sup>

Take with you the people's blessing,  
And the priest's cowl,  
Lift then upon your shoulders  
A wooden shovel,  
Get nine stalks of fern,  
Cut with an axe,  
And three bones of an old man  
Taken from a grave;  
Burn that in a fire of brushwood  
Till you reduce it all to ashes,  
And shake it in your lover's fair bosom  
Against a north-wind,  
And I will go twice security  
That man will not leave you."  
"You have a hold of him now."

### **CHARM TO KEEP AWAY HARM IN A LAWSUIT.**

When a person is pulled up at law for abusive language, let him when entering the court-house spit in his fist, grasp his staff firmly, and say the following words. There is then no danger of being found guilty. The charm was originally got from Big Allan of Woodend (*Ailein Mòr cheannacoille*), in Kingairloch, who had been a soldier at the time of the Irish Rebellion, and had himself learned it in his youth. The names of the saints show the charm to be very ancient.

"I will close my fist,  
Faithful to me is the wood;  
It is to protect my abusive words  
I enter in.  
The three sons of Clooney will save me  
And Manaman MacLeth,  
And St. Columba, gentle cleric,  
And Alexander in heaven."

The name "Manaman MacLeth" is probably a corruption of "Manannan MacLeirr," the Manx magician, who is said to have covered that island with a mist, which was dispelled by St. Patrick. *Ni-Mhanainnein* (i.e. the daughter of Manannain) is mentioned in a Gaelic tale as having remarkably beautiful music in her house, and "the Dairy-maid, the daughter of Manannan" (*Bhanachag ni*

*Mhannainein*) is mentioned in another tale as a midwife, whose residence was somewhere near the moon.

In addition to magic cures by means of rhymes, many were effected, and much security was obtained, by means of beads, stones, and plants. A collection of these formed a considerable part of the armoury of witches, black and white.

## SERPENT STONE.

Of all the means of which superstition laid hold for the cure of disease in man or beast, the foremost place is to be assigned to the Serpent Stone (*Clach Nathrach*), also called the Serpent Bead or Glass (*Glaine Nathair*). It is an undoubted relique of Druidism, and as such worthy of particular attention.

Pliny (29 c. 3) tells us that the Emperor Claudius put to death a knight of the Vocontian Gauls for carrying a serpent-egg (*ovum anguinum*) about him while engaged in a lawsuit. He also gives a description of the manner in which the egg or bead is manufactured by the serpents. In summer innumerable serpents enwrap one another, and generate the egg from the slaver of their jaws and bodies. They then, according to the Druids, cast it up into the air by their hissings, when it must be caught in a garment lest it touch the ground. The person who is bold enough to intercept it must fly away on a horse, for the serpents follow till a river intercepts them. The test of a true egg is, that it swims against the stream, even if bound in gold (*si contra aquas fluitet, vel auro vinctum*). The Druids further say it must be got at a particular season of the moon. The one Pliny saw was about the size of a round apple. It procures victory in lawsuits, and entrance to kings.

The tales told in modern times of the Serpent Stone, its manufacture and wonderful properties, are of a similar class, and leave no doubt that in these beads and the use made of them we have the remains of an imposture, if not instituted, at least practised by the Druids.

The ordinary *Glaine Nathair* (Serpent Glass) is of smaller size than is indicated by Pliny. The one which the writer saw was about the size of a gun bullet, and about 1¼ in. long. There was a hole through from end to end, and depressions on its sides, as if it had once been soft, and had been taken up gently between the finger and thumb. It is of transparent glass, but glass unlike that of the present day. There are extremely brilliant and curious streaks of colour in it. It is now merely a family heir-loom, but in olden times was in great demand for dipping in water to be given to bewitched persons or beasts. The sloughed skin



(*cochull*) of the serpent itself was used for the same purpose. Water in which it was dipped was given to sick beasts. The tale as to the manner in which it was originally got is the same as is told of other beads of the same kind. The serpents are assembled in a coiling mass, with their heads in the air hissing horribly, slavering, and out of their slaver making the serpent stone. The spittle, in course of becoming solid, was known as *meall èochd*. That the story was not implicitly believed is shown by the addition that, when the bead is finished, one of the serpents puts its tail through it. Thus the hole by which it is perforated is made.

In the case of the Bead which the writer saw, the person who came upon the serpents at their work is said to have waited till the reptiles slept. He then worked the bead out of their circle with a straw or twig of heather. As he took it up between his finger and thumb, and made off with it, he observed that the pressure of his fingers marked it, it being still soft, and this made him put a straw through it to carry it home. This story fairly accounts for the shape of the bead and the marks upon it. The marks look as if they were so made when the stone was soft. Another account says that the finder came on a rock above where the serpents were at work, and, rolling his plaid into a ball, threw it down the rock near them. Instantly the serpents made a dash at the plaid, and while they were reducing it to shreds he made off with the Adder Stone. By means of a sharp-pointed stick, prepared for the purpose, and thrust through the soft bead, he raised it to the top of the rock, and, taking it between his finger and thumb, ran home.

Similar legends of the Adder Stone were current in the Lowlands. Scott says the name is applied "to celts and other perforated stones." In the Highlands the name is not applied to stones. In Wales and Ireland the Bead is known as "Druid's Glass." A more than historical interest attaches to it, from the means it gives of tracing, beyond the possibility of mistake, the use of amulets and superstitious charms to the times and teaching of the much-lauded Druids, and raises, if it does not throw light upon, questions as to the early intercourse of nations.

The manufacture of serpent beads is involved in obscurity. There is nothing known to create a probability that they are of Celtic workmanship. The Phœnicians from a very early date knew the art of glass-making, and their commerce extended far and wide, and as far as the shores of the British Isles, then the remotest part of the known world. It is, therefore, possible these beads came from Phœnician sources. They are, it is said, found on the coasts of the Baltic and Mediterranean, in England and France, as well as in Ireland and

Scotland, and it is possible enough their diffusion was owing to traders from Phœnicia and her colonies in Gaul and at Massilia. Similarly, idols are exported, at the present day from England to India. Fully as much, however, can be urged in behalf of a supposition that the beads are of Egyptian origin, and were obtained by the Celtic priests from the ancient Egyptian enchanter. The Egyptians from the earliest times used glass extensively, and could cut, grind, and engrave it, inlay it with gold, imitate precious stones in it, and colour it with great brilliancy. A bead found at Thebes is ascribed to B.C. 1500, and relics of a similar class are not unfrequently found in the Egyptian catacombs. If they could be said to be of exactly the same manufacture with the Celtic beads, the question is nearly set at rest. Meyer gives it as his view that the first westward stream of Celtic immigration passed through Egypt, along the north coast of Africa, and entered Europe by the Straits of Gibraltar. Ancient Irish history, if there be any truth in its fables, points to a similar conclusion. The subject is one of which nothing certain is known, and its decision is of value in showing whether the Celtic priests got their aids to superstition from their Egyptian brethren.

### **SNAIL BEADS (*Cnaipein Seilcheig*).**

Snails also are said to form themselves into a mass and manufacture a stone of great virtue as a charm (*Clach shianaidh*). It protects its lucky possessor against all danger. Its name is “a snail bead” (*Cnaipein seilcheig*), or “a snail stone” (*Clach na seilcheig*). Four or five snails are engaged in the manufacture of each stone. Water in which it is dipped is good for sore eyes and for mouths broken out with tetter.

### **FROG STONE.**

The King Frog has in its head a stone of immense value. “The Frog Stone” (*Clach nan gilleadha cràigein*) is said by Pennant to be merely a kind of fossil tooth, known as bufonite. It has been made the best known of this class of physical charms, from Shakespeare’s comparison of adversity to the toad, which, though “ugly and venomous,” yet “wears a precious jewel in its head.”

The swamp at Achagaval in Morvern was tenanted by a King Frog or Toad, the reputation of which was widespread. It was called *Seid*, a word of which the usual meaning is “a truss of hay or straw.” One, who stayed in the neighbourhood of the fen, said, he heard, not once but scores of times, the cry of the animal from as great a distance as the top of a neighbouring hill, *Beinn nam*

*Bearrach*, and he could compare it to nothing so much as the yelping of “a soft mastiff whelp” (*bog chuilein tòdhlair*). The part of the fen which the King Frog most frequented was called *Lòn na Seid*, and in winter, when it was frozen over, a tame otter was let down through a hole in the ice in the hope of driving the frog to the opening. Otters must come occasionally to the surface to breathe, and the one in question having come for that purpose, its owner, in his eagerness to secure the jewel, mistook it for the King Frog, and gave it a rap on the head that killed it on the spot.

## STONES.

In addition to jewels found in animals, superstition made use of stones of various forms, spherical and pointed, plain and ornamented, of unknown origin, but bearing evidence of having been reduced to form by human art. These were carefully preserved in families as heirlooms, and are found in tumuli, graves, and road-cuttings, dredged from rivers, and turned up by the plough. They are undoubted relics of a remote past, and have been referred by antiquaries to a prehistoric age and savages who lived before iron was invented. The ingenuity of those who advocate this view of their origin is sufficiently tested in finding a practical use for the stones as weapons of war or the chase, as employed in games of chance, or as articles of domestic use, corn-crushers, hatchets, or personal ornaments. No doubt many of them were originally intended for such purposes; but the uselessness of others and the absence of fitness for any known or conceivable purpose of utility, indicate a different origin. It is not easy, for instance, to assign any ordinary use to such a stone-ball as that pictured in Wilson’s *Prehistoric Annals of Scotland*, i., 195, and to many others of still more curious appearance and with more elaborate ornaments. The incised ornaments forbid the idea of their being of ordinary service, and the prevalence of witchcraft, with its armoury of curiously-shaped stones and mysterious natural productions, among all savage tribes, makes it highly probable they were the implements of the prehistoric conjurer’s craft, and were from the first associated with strange virtues. As a lethal weapon the first stone picked up from the ground was as serviceable. They have been associated with the popular superstitions of very modern times. It is not unlikely that from the beginning they were so associated.

## FAIRY ARROW.

The most common of these primitive relics was the Fairy Arrow or Elf-bolt (*saighead shith*, pron. *saìt hee*), which was believed to be thrown by the Fairies at cattle and men. It was said in the Highlands the elves could not throw it themselves, but compelled some mortal, who was at that time being carried in their company, to do so. When friendly, he missed his aim, and so disappointed his instigators. A person struck instantaneously lost the power of his limbs, and was taken to the Fairy dwelling. Only his semblance remained. He appeared to die, or an old Elf was substituted for him, to animate the powerless frame and receive the kindness bestowed by mortals on what they thought was their afflicted friend. Similarly elf-struck cattle devoured all the food and gave all the trouble of healthy cattle, but yielded no return; they neither gave milk nor grew fat.

The Elf-bolt is a flint flake reduced with patient ingenuity to the form of an arrow-head, and is in length from one to six inches. Archæologists say these flints formed the arrow and the lance heads of a primitive stone race, but their unsuitableness for being firmly secured to a proper shaft alone makes this supposition not always likely. An arrow with a flint for a head must have been too weighty at one end, and the Allophylian (if there was such a person) must have been very destitute of ingenuity if he could not make a more serviceable arrow-head from bone splinters or hardened wood. When men believed in Fairies these flint heads made their appearance as readily as images do under a system of idolatry.

Whoever had one of these arrows in his possession was safe from Fairy attacks, and water in which it was dipped restored to health man or beast struck with sudden illness.

Similar virtues were ascribed to the Fairy Spade (*Caibe sìth*), a smooth, slippery, black stone (*mìn sleamhuinn du*), supposed to resemble a spade. It was also put in water to be given to sick people and cattle.

## CRUBAN STONE.

The Cruban Stone (*Clach a Chrùbain*) cured diseases in the joints. It is said by Pennant to have been that species of fossil-shell called gryphite. Its name is from *crùban*, a sitting, or squatting, or crouching attitude in man or beast, the result of a disease in the feet that makes them unable to stand. A stone of this kind in Breadalbane was lent only under a pledge of two cows (*an geall càraid cruìdh*). If the stone was not returned the cows were to be forfeited.

## VARIOUS.

A round stone, exactly resembling the one above referred to, as pictured by Wilson, with six regularly arranged circles carved upon it, was long in the possession of a family in Knapdale, and is now in Tiree. It was used for the relief of colic pains and other internal gripings, and was believed to cast a skin (*tilg rusg*) when put in the water to be used. It was called *Clach a Ghreimich*, the Gripe Stone. There was a companion stone of the same size for the cure of the Evil-Eye. Mary Macintyre, the noted Fort-William witch, a native of Barra, had a stone called *Clach na Léig*, the pebble of healing virtues, with a hole in it, through which she thrust her tongue previous to making divinations. It was of a blue colour, and by means of it Mary could give young women accounts of their sweethearts, secure for seamen and others who came to Fort-William with flesh and other commodities a sale for their goods, etc.

There is a stone in Caolas, Tiree, called *Clach na stoirm*, the Storm Stone, almost entirely buried in the ground. If taken out of the ground, cleaned, and set upright, it will cause a storm to arise.

The Ardvoirlich Stone (in Perthshire) was used for the cure of murrain in cattle. A person going for it must not speak, or sit, or enter a house, or be found outside a house after sunset. He must take up his quarters for the night before the sun sets.

## *Soisgeul*, GOSPEL.

A “Gospel” consisted of a verse of Scripture, or a hymn, or some good words, usually got from the priest, and sewn in the clothes to keep the wearer from weakness of mind, and as a protection from spite (*air son inntinn lag ’s droch rùn*). When going for it, a person must not speak to anyone on the way, and must take up his lodgings for the night before the sun goes down.

## MISCELLANEOUS CURES.

Besides all these magic cures, there were others practised by boys and resorted to by the superstitious, without much thought as to there being magic in them or not. The cure in many cases was supposed to be effected or the desired gift conferred by natural means.

## **WARTS (*Foineachun*).**

These were cured by putting in a bag as many knots or joints of straw or grass (*glùinean shop*) as there were warts to be banished, and leaving them on the public road. The first person who lifted the bag was to have the warts in future. Another equally efficacious plan was to take a grain of barley (*spilgein eòrna*) for every wart and bury it in some retired spot, where it was never to be disturbed. Should both these simple cures fail, pig's blood was applied to the warts and rubbed off with a clout. This cloth was made up into a parcel and left on the road. The warts were removed to the hands of the first person who opened it.

## **STYE (*Neònagan*).**

A sty on the eye (pron. *sleònachan*) was cured by putting one end of a stick in the fire, pointing the burning end towards the sore eye, and whirling it round rapidly in a circle, saying, "A sty one, a sty two, a sty three," etc., down to "a sty nine," and then adding, "take yourself off, sty." The charm was also performed by repeating, while the stick was being whirled, "Go back, go back, go back, sty" (*air ais, air ais*, etc.). Others placed great faith in rubbing the eye with gold.

## **TETTER (*Teine-dé*, HERPES LABIALIS).**

Boys troubled with eruptions on the mouth were infuriated by a rhyme:

“A tetter on your mouth,  
Your step-mother laid an egg,  
And you hatched the brood.”<sup>[20]</sup>

The first part of the name is *teine*, a fire, and a curious question arises as to what *dé* is. It occurs also in *dearbadan dé*, a butterfly. It looks like the genitive of *dia*, god.

### **HICCUP (*an aileag*)**

was cured by accusing the person who had it of theft. This stands somewhat to reason in the case of children. If they be ingenuous, such an accusation skilfully made rouses their nature to such an extent that the hiccup disappears.

### **HOOPING-COUGH (*an trigh, an trîugh*).**

It was a saying: “Whoever drinks mare’s milk with an aspen spoon will have hooping-cough but slightly” (*Fear sam bi dh’ òlas bainne capuill le spàin chrithionn, cha ghabh e’n trigh ach aotrom*).

### **STIFF NECK,**

such as may be got from sleeping with too high a pillow or the head awry, was cured by squeezing the neck between the legs of the tongs.

### **TOOTHACHE (*Déide*).**

This excruciating disease was supposed to be capable of cure by putting a dead man’s finger or a coffin nail in the mouth, and people have been known in their agony to try both expedients. The person resorting to this cure must go for the nail or dead man’s finger to the graveyard (*roluig*), though very likely this part of the experiment was rarely tried. As in the case of those who go to have a tooth pulled, the pain disappeared on the way.

### **FALLING SICKNESS (*an tuiteamas*).**

When a new-born child is being washed, a straw rope (*sioman*) twined round

it, and then cut in pieces, is a safeguard during life against epilepsy, falling sickness (*tinneas tuiteamas*), or as it was euphemistically called, “the out sickness” (*an tinneas a-muigh*). In Sutherlandshire, a second attack was supposed to be prevented by burying a cock alive when the first occurred.

## MADNESS.

In the Highlands, as elsewhere, rough usage (often amounting to brutality) was believed to be the most suitable treatment for those suffering under this the greatest of human misfortunes, mental aberration.

On a Thursday (it should be no other day), a person was to take the lunatic behind him on a *grey* horse, and gallop at the horse’s utmost speed three times round a boundary mark (*comharra criche*), and then to an immovable stone. On making the madman speak to this stone the cure was complete.

A plan (of which there are traditions in the Hebrides) was to put a rope round the madman’s waist and drag him after a boat till he was nearly dead.

In Strathfillan (*Srath Fhaolain*), of which the common name is “the straths” (*sraithibh*), in Perthshire, is a pool in the river, which winds through the strath, and the ruins of a chapel at Clachan, about half a mile distant, which at one time enjoyed a wide reputation for the cure of this affliction. One who was alive a few years ago and used to assist at the ceremonies to be observed in the chapel, remembered as many as twelve madmen being left tied there at a time. Tradition says St. Fillan had in his possession a stone of marvellous virtue. Some people were taking it from him by violence when he threw it in a deep pool in the river, and from this the pool derived its miraculous virtue. Mad people were made to go three times *deiseal* (*i.e.* keeping the pool on their right hand) round the linn, and then were plunged headlong in. On being taken out, three stones were lifted from the pool and placed in a cairn, which may still be seen. A stone bowl was filled with water to be consecrated and poured on the patient’s head. The madman was taken to the chapel and placed on his back on the ground, stretched between two sticks, and laced round with ropes in a very simple manner. If he succeeded in extricating himself before morning good hopes were entertained of his recovery. The ropes were so arranged that he could do so easily. He had only to push them from him towards his feet, but if he was outrageous he was hopelessly entangled. The pool lost its virtue in consequence of a mad bull having been thrown into it. It is now known as “the bull’s pool” (*linne ’n tairbh*).



## **Màm, AXILLARY SWELLING.**

A swelling of the axillary glands (*fàireagun na h-achlais*) is an ailment that soon subsides or breaks into an ulcer. The 'skilful' professed to cure it in the following manner, and no doubt when the swelling subsided, as in most cases it did, the whole credit was given to their magic ceremony. On Friday (on which day alone the ceremony was efficacious) certain magic words were muttered to the blade of a knife or axe (the more steel the better), which was held for the purpose close to the mouth, and then, the blade being applied to the sore place, the swelling was crossed and parted into nine, or other odd numbers or imaginary divisions. After each crossing, the axe was pointed towards a hill, the name of which commences not with *ben*, a lofty hill, but *mam*, a round mountain. For instance, in Mull and neighbourhood, the malady was transferred (*do chuids' air, tha sid air, do roinn-sa air*, etc.) to *Màm Lìrein*, *Màm an t-snòid*, *Màm Doire Dhubhaig*, *Màm Chlachraig*, *Màm Bhrathadail*, etc., all hills in that island. When the swelling was 'counted' (*air àireamh*) the axe was pointed to the ground, saying, "the pain be in the ground and the affliction in the earth" (*a ghoimh san làr, 's a chrádh san talamh*).

## **LUMBAGO (*Leum droma*).**

When the back is strained and its nerves are affected so that motion is painful, the afflicted person is to lie down on his face, and one who was born feet foremost is to step thrice across him, each time laying his full weight on the foot that treads on the patient's back. There is no cure unless the person stepping across has been born feet foremost.

## **CONSUMPTION (*Caitheamh*).**

On the farm of Crossapol in Coll there is a stone called *Clach Thuill*, i.e. the Hole Stone, through which persons suffering from consumption were made to pass three times in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. They took meat with them each time, and left some on the stone. The bird that took the food away had the consumption laid upon it. Similar stones, under which the patient can creep, were made use of in other islands.

## **LEPROSY (*Mùr*).**

The waterfall at Scorrybreck, near Portree in Skye, called *Easa suc Con*, forms in the rock a natural trough or basin about the length and breadth of a man. A daughter of Lochlin, suffering from an incurable skin disease (*mùr*, leprosy?), in the course of her journeys in search of a cure (there being a prophecy that her cure was to be found in a northern island), came to this waterfall. The trough was emptied, and she was placed lying in it. She lay there till it again filled, and her cure was effected.

### ***Loch Ma Nàr,***

in Sutherlandshire, if entered on the first Monday of August, was believed to cure any and every disease or sickness.

### **WELLS.**

Throughout the Highlands there are wells to which wonderful powers in the healing of disease were ascribed in olden times. They were generally, but not always, called after some saint, and their waters were drunk on certain days or at a particular hour of the day and with certain ceremonies and offerings. The importance of these wells and the pilgrimages to them disappeared with the Roman Catholic religion, and hardly a trace now remains of their former honours beyond the name.

“The well of the Fian flag-stone” (*Tobar Leac nam Fiann*) in Jura cured every disease. When the sick person went to it he had to leave in it a pin, a needle, a button, or other article, and if this was afterwards taken away there was no cure.

In a cave beyond Sanna in Ardnamurchan, and near the village of *Plòcaig*, there was about thirty years ago a hole, holding about a bowlful, made in the floor of the cave by water dripping from the roof. The waters of this receptacle were decreed of great efficacy in making those who drank it gay and strong. It was in request by young men of a lively disposition, women rising from childbed, etc. When entering, a copper coin, a metal button, or a nail, was placed somewhere near the door, and unless this was done it was not safe to enter. At the time mentioned the shelves of the cave were full of these offerings.

In North Uist, between Loch Maddy and Dìusa in Merivale, there is a well that cures the toothache. In the islet of St. Cormick, on the east of Cantyre, there was a well that cured the jaundice till an old wife from Breadalbane asked the saint in rude or uncivil terms to cure her distemper (*vide* Old Statistical

Account).

In Coll, near the *tung* or family burying-ground of the M'Leans of Coll, there is a well called "the well of stones" (*tobar nan clach*), and not far from it a sunken rock in the sea called *Cairgein*. It was a saying that as long as a person got water from the one and dulse from the other he need never die of want.

At the back of Hough Hill, in Tiree, there is a well called "the well of the nine living" (*Tobar na naoi bèò*), which in a season of great scarcity supported a widow and her eight children without any nourishment but itself and shellfish. Hence its name.

## **PLANTS AND TREES. MOUNTAIN ASH.**

The efficacy of the wicken tree against witches, already described, was a widespread belief, found in England as well as in the Highlands, where it was also said to make the best rod for a fisherman. If he takes with him

"Ragged tackle,  
A stolen hook,  
And a crooked wicken rod,"<sup>[21]</sup>

he is most likely to be in luck. The reason is that no evil or envious eye will rest upon himself or his equipments (*cha laidh sùil orra*).

## **PEARLWORT (*Mòthan*).**

The Trailing Pearlwort (*Sagina procumbens*), which grows in very dry places and on old walls, was one of the most efficacious plants against the powers of darkness. This efficacy was attributed to its being the first plant trodden on by Christ when He came on earth. Placed on the lintel of the door (*san àrd dorus*), it kept the spirits of the dead, if they returned, from entering the house. If in the bull's hoof, at the time of being with the cow, the offspring's milk could not be taken away by witches. When placed below the right knee of a woman in labour, it defeated the machinations of the fairy women. It must be pulled with certain words:

"I will pull the pearlwort,  
The plant that Christ ordained,  
No fear has it of fire-burning

Or wars of Fairy women.”<sup>[22]</sup>

### **ST. JOHN’S WORT (*Achlasan Challum Chille*).**

The Gaelic name of the Upright St. John’s Wort (*hypericum pulchrum*) means literally St. Columba’s axillary one. Why so called does not appear. To be of use it must be found when neither sought for nor wanted. If sought for, it has no efficacy more than another plant, but if accidentally fallen in with, and preserved, it wards off fever and keeps its owner from being taken away in his sleep by the Fairies. One version of the rhyme to be said in pulling it is in these words:

“The axillary plant of Colum-Cill,  
Unsought for, unwanted,  
They will not take you from your sleep  
Nor will you take fever.  
I will pull the brown-leaved one,  
A plant found beside a cleft,  
No man will have it from me,  
Without more than my blessing.”<sup>[23]</sup>

Another version runs:

“I will pull the axillary one,  
'Tis the plant of fair women,  
'Tis the graceful feast  
And the luxurious court;  
A male plant, a female plant,  
A plant the birds of the streams had,  
A plant the Good Being had in his need,  
And Christ had among strangers,  
So better be its reward to the right hand  
That holds it.”<sup>[24]</sup>

### **JUNIPER (*Iubhar-beinne*, lit. Mountain Yew).**

This plant is a protection by sea and land, and no house in which it is will take fire. It must be pulled by the roots, with its branches made into four bunches, and taken between the five fingers, saying:

“I will pull the bounteous yew  
Through the five bent ribs of Christ,  
In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,  
Against drowning, danger, and confusion.”<sup>[25]</sup>

The plant is also called *aiteal* in Gaelic.

### **YARROW (*Chathair làir*).**

This plant of power was also pulled with mystic words, of which but four lines have been recovered.

“I will pull the yarrow,  
As Mary pulled it with her two hands,  
I will pull it with my strength,  
I will pull it with the hollow of my hand,”<sup>[26]</sup> etc.

In many parts of the Highlands the yarrow is called *Cathair-thalanda*, which means the same as *c. làir*, lit. the ground chair.

### **“THE ENTICING PLANT” (*Lus an tàlaidh*).**

This plant grows in soft places among heather, and has a purple flower. From the descriptions given of it, it seems to be the purple orchis or wild hyacinth. It has two roots, one larger than the other, and it is in these its magic power consists. The largest represents the man, the lesser a woman, whose affections are to be gained. The plant is to be pulled by the roots before sunrise, with the face directed to the south. Whichever root is used is to be immediately placed in spring water, taking care that no part of the sun’s surface is above the horizon. If it sinks, the person whose love is sought will prove the future husband or wife. If the charm is made for no one in particular, the root reduced to powder and put below the pillow causes dreams of the person to be married.

### **THE DAUGHTER OF THE KING OF ENCHANTMENTS**

(*Neghinn Rìgh Sionnach*).

The daughter of *Rìgh Sionnach* was found in the hunting hill by a party of

hunters, as the writer heard the story, and they took her home with them. The Chief married her, and she lived with his mother in the same house, and had three children before she was heard to utter a word. Afterwards, on the occasion of a feast being prepared, they gave her a candle to hold when she said:

“On thine account candle  
Put in my hand to hold  
Standing in the smoke  
That was not my customary wont  
In my mother and father’s house.”

Her mother-in-law answered:

“At your leisure, my good woman,  
Well I knew the company,  
One cow with three teats,  
And nine people.”

She replied:

“That was not the custom  
In my father and mother’s house  
There was not one cow three teated  
Nor a company of nine in number  
But nine chains of pure gold  
Hung in the house of the King of Enchantments.”<sup>[27]</sup>

By her words it was found out whose daughter she was, and whence she had come.

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## CHAPTER III.

### DEATH WARNINGS.

Death has always been deemed the greatest evil that afflicts humanity, and the terrors and awe which its advent inspires have given superstition its amplest scope. The “King of Terrors” no doubt throws its shadows before it, but that foreshadowing belongs to medical diagnosis. The superstition connected with it consists in making unusual appearances and natural phenomena, having no relation to it beyond an accidental proximity in time, forerunners of its dread approach. The mind loves to dwell on the circumstances connected with the death of a departed and dear friend, and amid a sparse population, death is not an event of that frequency and daily occurrence which make it to the townsman little heeded, till it affects himself and his friends. Besides, doubt and scepticism are not spontaneous in the human mind, and whenever any one states positively that he saw supernatural indications connected with the death or spirit of one departed, he naturally and readily finds credence. By being frequently told the tale becomes more and more certain, and traditions, once they have attained the rank of beliefs, are very slow in dying out. That the excitable and imaginative mind of the Celt should, therefore, have a firm belief in supernatural fore-warnings of death is not at all surprising.

Certain families and septs had death-warnings peculiar to themselves, and whenever any of them was on his death-bed, particularly when the death of a chief was at hand, some one about the house was sure to see or hear the warning. Before the death of any of the Breadalbane family, the descendants of Black Duncan of the Cowl (*Donncha du a churraichd*), a bull was heard at night roaring up the hillside. The bellowing grew fainter as it ascended the mountain, and died away as it reached the top. The origin of this superstition probably is, that Black Duncan is accused of having once had a bull’s head brought in at a feast as a signal for the massacre of a number of the M’Gregors, whom he had invited in a friendly manner to the castle. The clan Maclachlan were warned of death by the appearance of a little bird; a sept of the M’Gregors, known as the children or descendants of Black Duncan (*Clann Dhonncha dhui*), by a whistle; another family of the same clan, “the children of little Duncan” (*Clann Dhonncha bhig*), by a light like that of a candle. Other signals were shouting (*sgairt*), cries of distress, screaming (*sgriachail*), sounds of weeping, etc. When

any of them foreboded death, it was heard where no human being could be, and there was an unearthly tone about it that struck a chill into the hearer's heart.

Before the death of a duine wassal (*duin uasal*, a gentleman), a light or meteor called *Dreag* or rather *Driug*, was seen in the sky proceeding from the house to the grave in the direction in which the funeral procession was to go. It was only for 'big men,' people of station and affluence, that these lights appeared, and an irreverent tailor once expressed a wish that the whole sky were full of them.

### **HUGH OF THE LITTLE HEAD (*Eoghan a chinn bhig*).**

This was the best known and most dreadful spectre in the West Highlands, the phantom of a headless horseman, which made its appearance whenever any of the Maclaines of Lochbuy, in Mull, were near their dissolution. The spectral horseman is mounted on a small black steed, having a white spot on its forehead, and the marks of the hoofs of which are not like those of other horses, but round indentations as if it had wooden legs. Whenever any of the sept which he follows are on their death-bed Hugh is heard riding past the house, and sometimes even shows himself at the door. He does not sit straight on his horse's back, but somewhat to one side, and the appearance of the almost headless body is that of a water-stoup tied on the horse's back. The history of the man who is thus doomed to attend at the death of any of his clan is curious. Tradition is not always uniform on the subject, but the following statement reconciles most of the accounts and substantially agrees with them all.

Hugh was the only son of Hector the Stubborn (*Eachunn Reuganach*), first chief of Lochbuy, in the fourteenth century, and brother of Lachlan the Wily (*Lachunn Lùbanach*), first chief of Dowart. He got the name of "Hugh of the Little Head" in his lifetime, and from the actions ascribed to him fully bears his own testimony to the truth of the adage, "A big head on a wise man and a hen's head on a fool" (*Ceann mōr air duine glic 's ceann circ avi amadan*). Sayings of his, which tradition has preserved, illustrate the curious shrewdness sometimes found in connection with limited intellect. Thus, when his mother was being carried for burial, he thought the pall-bearers were carrying the body too high, and he told them not to raise her so high, "in case she should seek to make a habit of it" (*mu 'm bi i 'g iarraidh a chleachdaidh*), and the phrase has since continued, "to seek to make a habit of anything, like Hugh of the Little Head's mother." He was married to a daughter of the house of Macdougall of Lorn; and she proved but a very indifferent wife. Tradition ascribes to her several nicknames, all of them extremely opprobrious, "The Black-bottomed Heron"



(*Chorra thòn du*), “Stingy, the Bad Black Heron” (*Gortag, an droch chorra dhu*), “The Macdougall Heron” (*Curra Dhùghaill*), and *Dubhag tòn ri teallaich*. He was a fearless soldier, and altogether a very likely person to have been made a wandering spectre of after his death.

Lochbuy first belonged to the Macfadyens. MacIaine (so the family spell the name) having obtained a grant of the place from the Lord of the Isles, deceitfully asked Macfadyen for a site for a sheep-fold (*crò chaoraich*), and, having obtained a hillock for the purpose, proceeded to build a castle. When the place was sufficiently fortified he shot an arrow from it at Macfadyen, who sat at some distance picking bones (*spioladh chnàmh*) at his dinner. In the end Macfadyen had to leave his own land and go to Garmony (*Gar'moin'an fhraoich*), where he supported himself by coining gold, gathered in *Beinn an Aoinidh*, Mull, whence his descendants became known as “the Seed of the Goldsmith's” (*Siòlachadh nan òr-cheard*). After this Lochbuy and Dowart quarrelled. The properties of the two brothers adjoined, and between them lay a piece of ground, the ownership of which they disputed. A ploughman belonging to Lochbuy was ploughing on the debateable ground, when a friend of Dowart, who was out hunting, shot him. Sometime after this Dowart's two boys were on a visit to Lochbuy, whose wife, being a relative of the murdered ploughman, went a piece of the way home with the children, and at a well, since called “The Well of the Heads” (*Tobar nan ceann*), took off their heads and threw them into the well, leaving the bodies on the bank. For this foul deed a deadly feud sprang up between the two houses, and Hugh's wife, being a foster-sister (*co-dhalta*) of Dowart's wife, did not care though her husband and the house of Lochbuy should be worsted.

This feud, joined to the other grievances of the “Crane,” led to there being so little peace at Lochbuy that the old chief gave Hugh a separate establishment, and allotted to him the lands of Morinish. Hugh built himself a castle on an islet in *Loch Sguabain*, a small lake between Lochbuy and Dowart. His wife urged him to go and get the rights (*còiricheaa*), i.e. the title deeds, of the lands of Lochbuy, or perhaps to go and get more, from his father, and at last he went. It was explained to him that on his father's death he would have a right to the whole property, and he went away pacified. His wife, however, urged that it would be a small thing for Lachlan the Wily, his father's brother, to come and take from him everything he had. He went again, an altercation ensued, and he struck his aged father a violent blow on the side of the head. This came to the ears of the old man's brother, the chief of Dowart. Glad of an excuse to cut off the heir presumptive and make himself master of Lochbuy, and gratify his desire for revenge, Dowart collected his men and marched to take Hugh to some place

of confinement or kill him. Hugh collected his own men and prepared to give battle.

Early on the morning of the fight, others say the evening before, Hugh was out walking, and at the boundary stream (*allt crìche*) saw an Elfin woman rinsing clothes, and singing the “Song of the M’Leans.”<sup>[28]</sup> Her long breasts, after the manner of her kind (according to the Mull belief regarding these weird women), hung down and interfered with her washing, and she now and then flung them over her shoulders to keep them out of the way. Hugh crept up silently behind her, and catching one of the breasts, as is recommended in such cases, put the nipple in his mouth, saying, “Yourself and I be witness you are my first nursing mother.” She answered, “The hand of your father and grandfather be upon you! You had need that it is so.” He then asked her what she was doing. She said, “Washing the shirts of your mortally-wounded men” (*Nigheadh leintean nam fir ghointe agad-sa*), or (as others say) “the clothes of those who will mount the horses to-morrow and will not return” (*aodach nam fear theid air na h-eich a màireach ’s nach till*). He asked her, “Will I win the fight?” She answered that if he and his men got “butter without asking” (*Im gun iarraidh*) to their breakfast, he would win; if not, he would lose. He asked if he himself would return alive from the battle (*an d’thig mise as beò?*), and she either answered ambiguously or not at all; and when going away left him as her parting gift (*fāgail*) that he should go about to give warning of approaching death to all his race. The same morning he put on a new suit, and a servant woman coming in just as he had donned it, praised it, and said, “May you enjoy and wear it” (*Meal is caith e*). It was deemed unlucky that a woman should be the first to say this, and Hugh replied to the evil omen by saying, “May you not enjoy your health” (*Na na meal thusa do shlàinte*).

For breakfast, “Stingy, the Black Heron,” sent in curds and milk in broad dishes. She did not even give spoons, but told Hugh and his men to put on hen’s bills (*gobun cheare*) and take their food. Hugh waited long to see if any butter would come, rubbing his shoes together impatiently, saying now and then it was time to go, and giving every hint he could that the butter might be sent in. At last he threw his shoe down the house, exclaiming, “Neither shoes nor speech will move a bad housewife” (*Cha ghluais bròg no bruidhinn droch bhean tighe*), and demanding the butter. “Send down the butter, and you may eat it yourself to-morrow” (*cuir anuas an t-ìm, ’s feudaidh tu fhein itheadh a màireach*). She retorted, “The kicker of old shoes will not leave skin upon palm” (*Cha’n fhàg breabadair na seana-bhròig craicionn air dearnaidh*). When the butter came, Hugh said he did not want her curds or cheese to be coming in white masses

through his men's sides (*tighinn na staoigean geala roi' chliathach nam fear aige*), kicked open the milk-house door and let in the dogs, and went away, leaving the breakfast untouched. The fight took place at *Onoc nan Sgolb*, at the back of Innsri (*cùl na h-Innsribh*), near *Ceann a Chnocain*, and not far from Torness in Glenmore. As might be expected of fasting men, Hugh and his followers lost the fight. The sweep of a broadsword took off the upper part of his head (*copan a chinn*). Instead of falling dead, he jumped on the top of his horse, a small black steed with a white spot on its forehead, and ever since is "dreeing his weird" by going about to give warning when any of his race are about to die. [29]

The ghostly rider of the black horse (*marcaich an eich dhuì*), crosses the seas in discharging his task. When coming to Tìree (where there are now but two or three persons claiming to be of the sept of the Lochbuy MacLaines), he takes his passage from *Port-nan-amhn'* near *Ru-an-t-sléibh*, in Treshinish, Mull. About fifty years ago a Mull woman, living there, insisted that she had often, when a young woman, heard him galloping past the house in the evening and had seen the sparks from his horse's hoofs as he rode down to the shore on his way to Tìree.

It is told of an old man of the Lochbuy Macleans in Tìree, that on his death-bed the noise of a horse clanking a chain after it, was heard coming to the house. Thinking it was Hugh of the Little Head, he said, "The rider of the Black Horse is clanking on his own errand" (*straoilich air ceann a ghnothuich fhein*). On looking out the awe-struck company found the noise was caused by a farm-horse dragging a chain tether (*langasaid*) after it.

On the high road between Calachyle and Salen in Mull, a strong man of the name of Maclean was met at night by Hugh. The horseman spake never a word, but caught Maclean to take him away. Maclean resisted, and in the struggle caught hold of a birch sapling and succeeded in holding it till the cock crew. The birch tree was twisted in the struggle, and one after another of its roots gave way. As the last was yielding the cock crew. The twisted tree may still be seen. The same story is told of a twisted tree near Tobermory, and a similar one is localised between Lochaber and Badenoch. [30]

Other premonitions of death were the howling of dogs, the appearance of lights, loud outcries and sounds of weeping, apparitions of the doomed person's "fetch," or coffin, or funeral procession, etc. These sounds and appearances were more apt to precede an accidental and premature death, such as drowning, and to understand them properly it will be necessary to enter into an examination of the

doctrine of the Second Sight.



## CHAPTER IV.

### SECOND SIGHT (*an da shealladh*).

Freed from a good deal of mystery in which an imperfect understanding of its character has involved it, the gift of second sight may be briefly explained to be the same as being “spectre-haunted,” or liable to “spectre illusions,” when that condition occurs, as it often does, in persons of sound mind. The phenomena in both cases are the same; the difference is in the explanation given of them. In the one case the vision is looked on as unreal and imaginary, arising from some bodily or mental derangement, and having no foundation in fact, while the other proceeds on a belief that the object seen is really there and has an existence independent of the seer, is a revelation, in fact, to certain gifted individuals of a world different from, and beyond, the world of sense. Science has accepted the former as the true and rational explanation, and traces spectral illusions to an abnormal state of the nervous system, exhaustion of mind or body, strong emotions, temperament, and others of the countless, and at times obscure, causes that lead to hallucination and delusion. But before optical and nervous delusions were recognised by science, while the spectres were believed to be external realities having an existence of their own, the visions were necessarily invested with an awe approaching to terror, and the gift or faculty of seeing them could not but be referred to some such explanation as the doctrine of the second sight offers.

“The shepherds of the Hebridean Isles” are usually credited with the largest possession of the gift, but the doctrine was well known over the whole Highlands, and as firmly believed in Ross-shire and the highlands of Perthshire as in the remotest Hebrides. Waldron describes it as existing in his time in the Isle of Man. It is a Celtic belief, and the suggestion that it is the remains of the magic of the Druids is not unreasonable. In every age there are individuals who are spectre-haunted, and it is probable enough that the sage Celtic priests, assuming the spectres to be external, reduced the gift of seeing them to a system, a belief in which formed part of their teaching. This accounts for the circumstance that the second sight has flourished more among the Celts than any other race.

The Gaelic name *da-shealladh* does not literally mean “the second sight,” but “the two sights.” The vision of the world of sense is *one* sight, ordinarily

possessed by all, but the world of spirits is visible only to certain persons, and the possession of this additional vision gives them “the two sights,” or what comes to the same thing, “a second sight.” Through this faculty they see the ghosts of the dead revisiting the earth, and the fetches, doubles, or apparitions of the living.

The world to which apparitions belong is called by writers on the second sight “the world of spirits,” but the expression does not convey correctly the idea attached to visions of the kind. The object seen, usually that of a friend or acquaintance, the phantasm, phantom, apparition, or whatever else we choose to call it, was recognised to be as independent of the person whose semblance it bore as it was of the person seeing it. He knew nothing of the phantom’s appearance, it was not his spirit, and played its part without his knowledge or his wish. The seer, again, could not, or did not, trace it to anything in himself; it did not arise from any suggestion of his hopes or fears, and was not a reproduction of any former state of his mind or thought. As to its owing its origin to anything abnormal in himself, he was (as far as he could judge) as healthy in mind and body as other people. As long, therefore, as men believed the phantasm to be an external reality, they were compelled to believe in doubles, or semblances, that move in a world which is neither that of sense nor that of spirits. The actions and appearances of these doubles have no counterpart in any past or present event, and naturally are referred to the future and the distant.

The object seen, or phantasm, is called *taibhs* (pron. *taish*), the person seeing it *taibhsear* (pron. *taisher*), and the gift of vision, in addition to its name of second sight, is known as *taibhsearachd*. It is noticeable that many words referring to spirits and ghosts begin with this syllable *ta*. The following are worth noticing:

*Tannas*, or *tannasg*, a spectre, generally of the dead, and in the idea attached to it more shadowy, unsubstantial, and spiritual than a *Bòchdan*.

*Tamhasg* (pron. *taüs*g), the shade or double of a living person, is the common name for apparitions by which men are haunted, and with which, according to the doctrine of the second sight, they have to hold assignations.

*Tàchar*, a rare and almost obsolete word, but the derivatives of which, *tacharan* and *tachradh*, are still in common use. The only instances known to the writer of its occurrence are in the names of places. *Sròn an tàchair*, the Ghost-haunted Nose, is a rock between Kinloch Rannoch and Druim-a-chastail, in Perthshire, where faint mysterious noises were heard, and on passing which the

wayfarer was left by the mysterious sprite which joined him in the hollow below. *Imire tàchair*, in the island of Iona, is a ridge leading from near the ecclesiastical buildings to the hill, and, till the moor through which it runs was drained in recent years, formed an elevation above a sheet of water,—a very likely place to have been haunted by goblins. The natives of the island have no tradition or explanation of the name. The derivatives *tachradh* and *tacharan* are applied to a weak and helpless person: when the first syllable is long, in pity; when short, contemptuously, as, *e.g.*, *an tächradh grànda*, “the ugly wretch.”

*Tàslaich*, a supernatural premonition, felt or heard, but not seen. Also applied to the ghosts of the living. For instance, a native of Skye being asked the reason why dogs were barking at night near a churchyard, said it was because they saw *tàslaich nan daoine beò*, the ghosts of the living, the premonition of a funeral.

*Tàradh*, noises (*straightlich*) heard at night through the house, indicating a change of tenants, a premonition by mysterious sounds of a coming event.

*Taran*, the ghost of an unbaptised child (Dr. Macpherson, p. 307), not now a common word.

*Tàsg*, perhaps a contraction of *tamhasg*, used commonly in the expression *eigheach tàisg*, the cry or wail of a fetch. Cf. *taghairm*, the spirit-call.

The whole doctrine of these apparitions of the living, or, as they are called in Cumberland, *swarths*, and premonitions of coming events, proceeds on the supposition that people have a counterpart or other self, an *alter ego*, which goes about unknown to themselves, with their voices, features, form, and dress, even to their shoes, and is visible to those who have the unhappy gift of the second sight. This phantasm, or other self, is not the life or the spirit of the person whom it represents. He has nothing to do with it; he may, at the time it is seen, be sunk in unconscious sleep, or his attention and wishes may be otherwise taken up, and death may not be at all in his thoughts. At the same time, it is not without some connection with him. Strongly wishing is apt to make one's *tàradh* be heard at the place where he wishes to be, and if the person whose spectre is seen be spoken to the apparition disappears; but in general the *taibhs* is independent of all thought, or action, or emotion of the person whom it represents. The doctrine does not assert that all men have got such a double, much less that those who are most largely gifted with the second sight see it always, or even frequently. The spectres are visible to the seer only under exceptional circumstances, in certain situations, and at certain times. The most usual of these are after dusk and across a fire, when a sudden or violent death has occurred, or is to occur, when a friend

is ill, when strangers are to come, or any event is impending calculated to make a deep impression on the mind.

Spectres are often seen with as much distinctness as external objects, and it would be a great injustice to the poor man, who claims to have visions of things that are not there at all, to say he is telling an untruth. To him the vision is really there, and it is but natural for him to think it has an existence separate from himself, instead of referring it to an abnormal state of his mind and nervous system. Some spectres “move with the moving eye,” being what the poet calls “hard mechanic ghosts”; others have their own proper motion, and probably arise in the brain. The former are the most common, and it was a test among *taishers*, whether the figure seen was a wraith or not, to stoop down and raise themselves up again suddenly. If the figure did the same, it was an apparition, a *tamhasg*.

The gift of second sight was not in any case looked upon as enviable or desirable. Seers frequently expressed a wish that they had no such gift. In some instances it ran in the family; in others, but rarer cases, the seer was the only one of his kindred who “saw sights” (*chì sealladh*). Some had it early in life, upon others it did not come till they were advanced in life. These characteristics alone show it to be in its origin the same as spectral illusions. It arose from hereditary disease, malformation, or weakness of the visual organs, and derangements of mind or bodily health. It was not *voluntary*; the visions went and came without the option of the seer, and his being visited by them was deemed by himself and others a misfortune rather than a gift. A difference was also recognised in the kinds of apparitions visible to different individuals.

When the figure of an acquaintance was seen, the manner in which the *taibhs* was clothed afforded an indication to the skilful seer of the fate then befalling, or about to befall, the person whose *taibhs* it was. If the apparition was dressed in the dead-clothes, the person was to die soon; but if in every-day clothes, his death would not occur for some time. If the clothes covered the entire face, his death would be very soon; if the face was uncovered, or partly covered, death was proportionately more remote. Others saw the dead-clothes first about the head, and lower down at each succeeding vision. When the feet were covered death was imminent. There were, however, grave-clothes of good fortune (*lion-aodach àigh*) as well as grave-clothes indicative of death (*lion-aodach bàis*), and it was considered extremely difficult for the most skilful seer to distinguish between them. He required, he said, a close view of the spectre to tell which it had on.



The time of day at which the vision was seen was also an indication. The later in the day, the sooner the death. If as late as 5 p.m., soon; but if as early as 2 a.m., the man might live for years.

If the person seen was to be drowned at sea, phosphorescent gleams (*teine-sionnachain*), such as are common in the Hebridean seas on summer nights, appeared round the figure, or its clothes seemed to drip, or there was water in its shoes.

The *swarths*, or doubles, were believed to go through all the actions and occupy the places which the originals would afterwards perform or occupy. This was particularly the case with regard to funerals. They went for the glasses to be used on the occasion, for the coffin, and even for the wood to make it, and marched in melancholy procession to the churchyard. When the funeral procession was seen, the seer was unable to say, except by inference, whose funeral it was. For anything he could directly tell, it might be, as it sometimes was, his own. He could only tell the dress, position in the procession, and appearance of those performing the sad duty. It is dangerous to walk in the middle of the road at night, in case of meeting one of these processions, and being thrown down or forced to become one of the coffin-bearers to the graveyard. Persons in the latter predicament have experienced great difficulty in keeping on the road, the whole weight of the coffin seeming to be laid upon them, and pushing them off the path. If the seer goes among the *swarths* he will likely be knocked down, but in some districts, as Moidart, he is said to have one of the staves or bearers (*lunn*) of the coffin thrust into his hand, and to be compelled to take his part in the procession till relieved in due time. In Durness, in Sutherlandshire, the cry of "Relief!" there used at every change of coffin-bearers, has been heard at night by persons whose houses were near the high-road called out by the phantasms in their ghostly procession. Persons have been caught hold of by those reputed to have the second sight, and pulled to a side to allow a spectral funeral to pass; and it was universally believed that when the seer saw a procession of the kind, or, indeed, any of his supernatural visions, he could make others see the same sight by putting his foot on theirs and a hand on their shoulder. He should, therefore, never walk in the middle of the road at night. *Taishers* never did so. At any moment the traveller may fall in with a spectral funeral, and be thrown down or seized with the oppression of an unearthly weight.

The visions of the seer did not always relate to melancholy events, impending death, funerals, and misfortunes. At times he had visions of pleasant events, and

saw his future wife, before he ever thought of her (at least so he said), sitting by the fireside in the seat she was afterwards to occupy. He could tell whether an absent friend was on his way home, and whether he was to have anything in his hands when coming. He could not tell what the thing was to be, but merely the general appearance of the absent man when returning, and whether he was to come full or empty handed.

It has been said that the phantasm (*taibhs* or *tamhasg*) was independent of all thought and volition on the part of those whom it represented, as well as on the part of the seer himself. At the same time, it was part of the creed that if the person whose double was seen was spoken to and told to cease his persecutions, the annoyance came to an end. The person spoken to, being utterly unconscious that his phantasm was wandering about and annoying any one, got very angry, but somehow the spectre ceased to appear. Before taking a final leave, however, it gave the person whom it had haunted (as an informant described it) “one thundering lashing.” After that it was no more seen.

When a double is first met, if it be taken to be the man himself whose semblance it bears, and be spoken to, it acquires the power of compelling the person who has accosted it to hold nightly assignations with it in future. The man, in fact, from that hour becomes “spectre-haunted.” Hence it was a tenet of the second sight never to be the first to speak, on meeting an acquaintance at night, till satisfied that the figure seen was of this world. The seer did not like, indeed did not dare, to tell to others whose figure it was that haunted him. If he did so, the anger of the spectre was roused, and on the following evening it gave him a dreadful thrashing. When he resisted, he grasped but a shadow, was thrown down repeatedly in the struggle, and bruised severely. This form of the disease was well known in the Western Islands. The haunted person, as in the case of those who had Fairy sweethearts, had to leave home at a certain hour in the evening to meet the spectre, and if he dared for one night to neglect the assignation he received in due course a sound thrashing. Sometimes at these meetings the spectre spoke and gave items of information about the death of the seer and others. Ordinarily, however, it had merely an indistinct murmuring kind of speech (*tormanaich bruidhinn*).

People noted for the second sight have been observed to have a peculiar look about the eyes. One of them, for instance, in Harris was described as “always looking up and never looking you straight in the face.” Those who are of a brooding, melancholy disposition are most liable to spectral illusions, and it is only to be expected that the gloom of their character should appear in their

looks, and that many of their visions should relate to deaths and funerals.

Among a superstitious and credulous people the second sight, or a pretence to it, must have furnished a powerful weapon of annoyance, and there is reason to believe that, in addition to cases of nervous delusion and of men being duped by their own fancies, there were many instances of imposture and design. So much, indeed, was this the case, that a person of undoubted good character, born and brought up among believers in the second sight, and himself not incredulous on the subject, said: "I never knew a truthful, trustworthy man (*duine firinneach creideasach*) who was a taïsher." While being spectre-haunted was honoured by the name of a Second Sight, and was invested with mystery and awe, no doubt many laid claim to it for the sake of the awe with which it invested them to annoy those whom they disliked, or to make capital out of it with those anxious about the future or the absent.

### **SPECTRES OF THE LIVING (*Tamhasg*).**

Some thirty years ago a man in Tiree, nicknamed the Poult (*am Big-ein*), was haunted for several months by the spectre of the person with whom he was at the time at service. The phantom came regularly every evening for him, and if its call was disregarded it gave him next evening a severe thrashing. According to the man's own account, the spectre sometimes spoke, and, when he understood what it said, gave good advice. Its speech was generally indistinct and unintelligible. The person whose spectre it was, on being spoken to on the subject, got very angry, but the visits of the spectre ceased.

Only a few years ago a young man, also in Tiree, was on his way home about midnight from the parish mill, where he had been kiln-drying corn. He had to go against a strong gale of north-west wind, and, having his head bent down and not looking well before him, ran up against a figure, which he took to be that of a young man of his acquaintance. He spoke to it, and the figure answered in broken, inarticulate speech (*tormanaich bruidhinn*). Every evening afterwards during that half-year he had to leave the house in which he was at service to meet, he himself said, the spectre that had thus met him. A person who doubted this followed one evening, and saw him, immediately on leaving the house, squaring out in boxing style to some invisible opponent, and falling at every round. The haunted youth said the apparition gave him much information. It said the person whose semblance it itself bore was to die of fever, that the coffin was to be taken out of the house by certain individuals, whom it named, and was to be placed on two creels outside the door. On speaking to the lad whose

apparition haunted him, the persecution ceased. The common opinion was that this was a case of imposture and design.

Near Salen, in Mull, a workman, when going home from his employment in the evening, forgot to take his coat with him. He returned for it, and the apparition (*tamhasg*) of a woman met him, and gave him a squeezing (*plùchadh*) that made him keep his bed for several days.

In the same island a man was said to have been knocked off his horse by an apparition.

A crofter (or tenant of a small piece of land of which he has no lease) in Caolas, Tiree, went out at night to see that his neighbour's horses were not trespassing on some clover he had in his croft. He was a man who had confessedly the second sight. He observed on this occasion a man going in a parallel direction to himself, and but a short distance off. At first he thought it was only a neighbour, Black Allan, trying to frighten him, but, struck by the motion and silence of the figure, he stooped down, and then raised himself suddenly. The figure did the same, proof of its being a *tamhasg* or phantasm. The seer reached home, pale and ready to faint, but nothing further came of his vision.

Three years ago a man, who claims to have the second sight, was on his way home at night to Barrapol, in the west end of Tiree, from the mill (which is in the centre of the island) with a sack of meal on his back. He laid down the sack, and rested by the wayside. When swinging the burden again on his shoulder he observed a figure standing beside him, and then springing on the top of the sack on his back. It remained there, rendering the sack very oppressive, till he reached home, some miles further on.

The son of a seer in Coll was away in the south country. The seer when delving saw his son several times lending assistance, and on two occasions when coming home with a creelful of peats, after taking a rest by the way, saw him helping to lift the creel again on his back. Before long word came of his son's death.

Alexander Sinclair, from Erray, in Mull, was grieve at Funery in Morven. Two, if not three, of the servant women fell in love with him. He had to cross one night a bridge in the neighbourhood, between Savory and Salachan, and was met by the apparitions of two women, whom he recognised as his fellow-servants. One, he said, was the figure of a dark little woman, and lifted him over the parapet. The other was that of the dairymaid, in the house in which he was,

and it rescued him. The adventure ended by his marrying the dairymaid.

A man, going home at night to Ledmore (*Leudmòr*), near Loch Frisa, in Mull, saw the kitchen-maid of the house in which he was at service waiting for him on the other side of a ford that lay in his way. Suspecting the appearance, he went further up the stream to avoid it, but it was waiting for him at every ford. At last he crossed, and held on his way, the apparition accompanying him. At the top of the first incline, the apparition threw him down. He rose, but was again thrown. He struggled, but the figure, he said, had no weight, and he grasped nothing but wind. On the highest part of the ascent, called *Guala Spinne*, the apparition left him. After going home, the man spoke to the woman whose spectre had met him. "The next time," he said, "you meet me, I will stab you." This made the woman cry, but he was never again troubled by her apparition.

A native of Glenbeg in Ardnamurchan, Henderson by name, was at service in Kilfinichen in Mull. One of the servant maids there made him a present of a pair of worsted gloves. After returning home from service, he had, one evening towards dusk (*am bial an anmuich*, lit. in the mouth of lateness) to go from Glenbeg to Kilchoan, by a path across a steep incline on the side of the lofty Ben-shianta, towards the projection known as "The Nose of the Macleans" (*Sròin Chloinn Illeathain*). Steep mountain paths of this kind are called *Catha*, and this particular catha is called *Catha na Muice* (the pig's pass). Near the top of the ascent (*aonaich*), and where the difficult path ceases (*bràighe na Catha*), there is a narrow step (*aisre*), which only one person at a time can cross, leading towards another ascent (*aonaich*). When going up the first ascent, or cadha, Henderson was joined by the apparition of the woman who had made him the gloves in Kilfinichen. She was on the up side of him, and he saw, when he came to the *aisre*, if she chose to give him a push, he would be precipitated into the black shore (*du-chladach*), which the rocks there overhang, and become a shapeless bundle (*seirgein cuagach*). He blessed himself, and taking courage crossed in safety. When he got on more level ground, over towards Correi-Vulin, he took the gloves she had given him, and threw them at her, saying "that is all the business you have with me." He stayed that night in *Laga Fliuch*, and next day went to Kilchoan. On his return he looked for the gloves, and saw them where he had thrown them. He had no return of the vision.

## APPARITIONS OF THE DEAD.

A taisher in Tiree came upon a dead body washed ashore by the sea. The corpse had nothing on in the way of clothing but a pair of sea-boots. Old people

considered it a duty, when they fell in with a drowned body, to turn it over or move it in some way. In this case, the seer was so horrified that, instead of doing this, he ran away. Other people, however, came, and the body was duly buried. Afterwards the dead man haunted the seer, and now and then appeared and terrified him exceedingly. One night on his way home he saw the corpse before him, wherever he turned, and on reaching the house it stood between him and the door. He walked on till close to the house, and then called to his wife to take the broomstick and sprinkle the door-posts with urine. When this was done, he boldly walked forward. The spectre, on his approach, leapt from the ground, and stood above the door with a foot resting on each side on the double walls. The seer entered between its legs, and never saw the horrible apparition again.

A taïsher in Coll had no second sight till some time after his marriage. Working one day with a companion near the shore, he left for a short time, but stayed away so long that, on his return, he was asked what kept him? He said he had been looking at the body of a drowned man, which the waves were swaying backwards and forwards near the rocks. Others, however, were of opinion he had found the body on the shore, ransacked its clothes, and then thrown it again into the sea, and that the second sight was a curse sent upon him for the deed. Certain it is that from that day he had the second sight. His friends at first doubted him, when he said he saw visions, till he one day told his sister a certain rope in the house would be sent for before morning, to be used about a body lying on the "straight-board." This proved to be the case, and his reputation as a taïsher was established.

A noted seer, named *Mac Dhòmhnuill Oig*, in Kilmoluag, Tiree, was sitting one day at home, when his brother entered, and opening a chest in the room, took out some money. In reply to the seer's inquiries, the brother said he was going to pay such and such a shoemaker for a pair of shoes recently got from him. The brother died soon after, and the shoemaker claimed the price of the shoes. The seer warmly resisted the claim, as he himself had seen his brother taking the money expressly to pay them. That same night, however, he saw the shade of his deceased brother crossing the room, and, as it were, fumbling in a particular place on the top of the inner wall of the house. Next day the seer himself searched in the same spot, and found there the money that had been taken out of the chest to pay the shoes. He could only think it had been placed there by his brother when alive, and had been forgotten.

A taïsher, whose house was at Crossapol, where the burying-ground of the island of Coll is, on his way home from the harbour of Arnagour, about six miles

away, experienced many mischances (*driod-fhortain*), such as falling, etc. He arrived at home to find his only child, a boy about twelve years of age, dead in the burying-ground, where he had gone to play and fallen asleep. Its entrails (*màthair a mhionaich*) were protruding. The seer, in his distraction, belaboured the surrounding graves with his stick, accusing their tenants, in his outcries, of indifference to him and his, and saying he had many of his kindred among them, though they had allowed this evil to befall his child. That night a voice came to him in his sleep, saying, he should not be angry with them (shades of the dead), seeing they were away that day in Islay keeping “strange blood” from the grave of Lachlan Mor (*cumail na fuil choimhich a uaigh Lachuinn Mhòir*), and were not present to have rescued the child. This Lachlan Mor was a man of great stature and bodily strength, chief of the Macleans of Dowart, and therefore related to the Macleans of Coll, who had been killed at the bloody clan battle of Gruinard Beach, in Islay, and was buried at Kilchoman Churchyard. On hearing of the seer’s vision the Laird of Coll dispatched a boat to Islay, and it was found that on the day the child was murdered an attempt had been made to lift the chief’s gravestone for the burial of a sailor, whose body had been cast ashore on a neighbouring beach. The attempt had failed, and the stone was left partly on its edge (*air a leth-bhile*). The shades had laid their weight upon it, so that it could not be moved further.

This story the writer has heard more than once adduced as positive proof of the reality of the second sight (*tabhsearachd*), that is, of the capacity of some men to see and hear spirits, or whatever else the spectres are. The power of the dead to lay a heavy weight upon persons as well as things, and even to punish the living, is shown by the following stories.

In the same island of Coll the wife of Donald the Fair-haired (*Dòmhnall Bàn*) was lying ill. She had strange feelings of oppression and sickness (*tinneas ’us slachdadh*). Donald’s father was a taisher, and came to see her. After sitting and watching for some time he told her she had herself to blame for her sickness, that she must have done some act of unkindness or wrong to her mother, and that her feelings of oppression were caused by the spirit of her dead father coming and lying its weight upon her. The seer professed to see the spirit of the dead leaning its weight upon the sick person.

A woman (the tale, which comes from Perthshire, does not say where), being ill-treated by her husband, wished, too strongly and unduly, her brother, who had some time previously died in Edinburgh, were with her to take her part. Soon after, when she was alone, her brother’s shade appeared, and in a tone of

displeasure asked her what was wrong, and what she wanted him for. She told. Her husband was at the time ploughing in a field in front of the house. The woman saw the shade going towards him, and when it reached, her husband fell dead.

## **STRONG AND UNDUE WISHES.**

It is in fact part of the creed in the Second Sight that a person should never indulge in strong wishes, lest he overstep proper bounds, and wish what Providence has not designed to be. Such wishes affect others, especially if these others have anything of the Second Sight.

A woman in the island of Harris, known as *Fionnaghal a Mhoir*, was celebrated for her gift of Second Sight. A young man related to her went to Appin, in Argyleshire, with a boat. One day, when taking a smoke, he expressed a wish that *Fionnaghal a Mhoir* had a draw of his pipe. Next day, and long before it could be known in Harris the youth had expressed such a wish, Flora, daughter of the Big Man (for that is the meaning of her name), told her friends that a pipe was being offered her all night by the young man, and that she was anxious enough to have a smoke from it, but could not.

A young girl in Kennovay, Tiree, holding a bowl of milk in her hands, expressed a wish a certain woman (naming one, who was a *taibhsear*) had the bowl to drink. Next day the woman indicated in the wish told the girl she had a sore time of it all night keeping the bowl away from her lips.

In very recent times, not above four years ago, as the driver of the mail-gig was going through the Wood of Nant (*Coill an Eannd*), between Bonawe and Loch Awe, at night, he was met by the figure of his sweetheart, and received from it such a severe thrashing that he had to turn back. On telling this to herself, afterwards, she acknowledged, that on the night referred to she was very anxious about him, and wished she could intercept him in case, at his journey's end, he should go to a house where fever had broken out.

A woman in Lismore, making a bowl of gruel (*brochan blàth*) in the evening, expressed a wish her husband, who was then away at the fishing at Corpach, near the entrance to the Caledonian Canal, had the drink she was making. When her husband came home, he said to her, "I tell you what it is, you are not to come again with porridge to me at Corpach." He said he had seen her all night at his bedside offering him his gruel.



The power ascribed to strong wishes, or rather the evil consequences by which they may be followed, is still more forcibly illustrated by the following tale.

A young woman at Barr, Morvern, beautiful and much esteemed in her own neighbourhood, was about to be married. Other maidens were in the house with her, sewing the dresses for the marriage. As they sat at work, she sighed and said, she wished her intended was come. At that moment, he was on his way coming over the shoulder of Ben Iadain, a lofty mountain near hand, of weird appearance and having the reputation of being much frequented by the Fairies. He observed his sweetheart walking beside him, and as the shadowy presence threw him down, he struck at it repeatedly with his dirk. The bride got unwell, and, before the bridegroom reached the house, died. The 'fetch' left him shortly before his arrival, and her death was simultaneous with its disappearance.

It has been said that the appearance of the spectre was considered entirely independent of the thoughts or volition of the person whose image it bears. Yet the tales of the Second Sight indicate some mysterious connection between men and their doubles. Strongly wishing, as in the above instances, causes at times a person's likeness to be seen or heard at the place where he wishes to be, and the original (so to call him) may be affected through his double.

A man in Islay encountered a ghost, and threw his open penknife at it. The weapon struck the phantom in the eye, and at that moment, a woman, whose likeness it bore, though several miles away, was struck blind of an eye.

A young woman, residing in Skye, had a lover, a sailor, who was away in the East Indies. On Hallowe'en night she went, as is customary in country frolics, to pull a kail plant, that she might know, from its being crooked or straight or laden with earth, what the character or appearance or wealth of her future husband might be. As she grasped a stock to pull it, a knife dropped from the sky and stuck in the plant. When her lover came home, she learned from him, that on that very night and about the same hour, he was standing near the ship's bulwark, looking over the side, with a knife in his hand. He was thinking of her, and in his reverie the knife fell out of his hand and over the side. The young woman produced the knife she found in the kail-stock, and it proved to be the very knife her sailor lover had lost.

## TÀRADH.

When a person strongly wishes to be anywhere, as for instance when a person on a journey at night wishes to be at home, his footsteps coming to the house, or the sounds of his lifting the door latch are heard, or a glimpse of his appearance is seen, at the time of his conceiving or expressing the wish, and even without any wish being present to the absent person's mind, sights or sounds indicative of his coming may be seen or heard. This previous intimation is called his *tàradh*, and his double or shade, which is the cause of it, his *tàslach*. These mysterious intelligences are also called *manadh nan daoine bèò*, "the omens of living men." The family, sitting round the evening fire, hear a footstep approaching the house, and even a tapping at the door. The sounds are so life-like that some one goes to open the door, but there is no one there. The sound is only the *tàradh* of an absent friend, storm-tossed or wayworn, and wishing he were at home.

The *tàradh* may be that of a complete stranger, who is not thinking of, and perhaps does not even know the place to which his *tàradh* has come. When there is to be a change of tenants the advent of the stranger is heralded, it may be years beforehand, by his double. It is said "*thàinig a thàradh*," i.e. his wraith or forewarning has come. When a shepherd, for instance, from another part of the country, is to come to a place, his likeness, phantom, or *tàradh*, is seen perhaps years beforehand on the hills he is afterwards so frequently to traverse. It is not every kind of men who have this phantom or double, neither does it appear wherein those who have it differ from other men. At all events if all men have it, it is not always to be seen.

A feeling of oppression at night, and the sound of footsteps through the house and the noise of furniture being moved about, is the omen of a change of tenants, and the *tàradh* of the incoming tenant.

In the island of Coll, the chiefs of which in former times were among the most celebrated in the West Highlands, and where the return of the former lairds is talked about, and believed in, and prayed for among the few of the native population left, the figure of the Laird who is to come is said to have been seen by the castle servants, sitting in an empty chair, with a long beard flowing down to his breast.

A young man, sleeping alone in a house, in which a shop was kept by his father at Scarinish, Tiree, one night felt such an oppression on his chest that he

could not sleep, and heard noises as if there were people in the house. He got up and made a thorough search, but found no one. Before long there was a change in the occupancy of the house.

On the uninhabited and lonely islet of *Fladdachuain*, to the east of Skye, some storm-stayed fishermen were boiling potatoes in a deserted bothy, and heard the noise of voices outside. On going out they could find no one. This occurred thrice. Some days after, and before the fishermen got away, a boat passing to the outer Hebrides was forced by stress of weather to take refuge in the same islet. The voices of its crew were exactly those previously heard. Nothing further occurred in connection with the sounds.

The spirit, thus coming in a visible or audible form about a treasure, by which the thoughts are too much occupied, or where a person wishes too much to be, is also denominated "*falbh air fàrsaing*," i.e. going uncontrolled (?)

## **MARRIAGE.**

Those gifted with the second sight were sometimes able to tell the appearance of a person's future wife. They saw her taish, or appearance, sitting beside her husband, and this long before the event occurred, or was spoken of. For instance, a seer has been known to remark to a young man, who did not dream of marrying at the time, "I think your wife must belong to a big house, for she has a white apron on," etc.

The event has proved the vision to be real. The woman was housemaid in a gentleman's house. Seers also said they saw their own future wives sitting opposite to them at the fireside.

A native of Coll, Hugh, son of Donald the Red (*Eoghan MacDhòmhnuill Ruaidh*), while serving with his regiment in Africa, said he saw, almost every evening, for a period of five years, glimpses of the woman whom he afterwards married, and whom he never saw in reality till his return from the wars. Wherever he sat, after the day's march, the figure of a woman came beside him, and sometimes seemed to him to touch him lightly on the shoulders. On each occasion he merely caught a glimpse of her. When he left the army, and was on his way home, he came to the village at Dervaig, in Mull, from the neighbourhood of which the ferry across to Coll lay. He entered by chance a house in the village, and his attention was unexpectedly attracted by the sound of a weaver's loom at work in the house. On looking up he saw sitting at the loom the identical woman whose figure had for five years haunted him in Africa. He

married her.

## COMING MISFORTUNE.

A taïsher in Caolas, Tiree, was observed to have great objections to going home to take his meals. Being questioned on the subject, he said that at home he saw a horrible-looking black woman, with her head “as black as a pot,” and if he chanced to catch a glimpse of her at meal-times, her hideous appearance made him rise from his food. He said he did not recognise the woman, and was unable to say who or what she was. This was continued for three months, when the place was visited with smallpox, and the seer’s own sister took the disease very badly. Her head became hideous, and literally “as black as a pot,” and the people understood the meaning of the vision.

A celebrated seer in the same village, Donald Black (*Domhnall Mac an dui*), was married for the fourth time. In his day lucifer matches were unknown, and when corn was kiln-dried a person had to sit up all night to keep the fire alive. As Donald sat at this work in a solitary hut—such as small kilns are still kept in—the figure of his first wife appeared, and told him to beware, for “the terror” (*an t-eagal*) was coming, it was at the Horse-shoe (*crudh an eich*), a spot on the public road leading to Caolis, about a mile and a half distant, deriving its name from the plain likeness of a horse-shoe indented in the rock. He, however, was dozing over into sleep again when his second wife, in more distressed tones, warned him the “terror” was nearer hand—at the Gateway of the Fuel enclosure (*Cachlaidh na Cuil Connaidh*). He neglected this warning also, and was dozing again when his third wife warned him the “terror” was at the upper village (*Bail’ uachdrach*). He immediately went home, and had hardly got into bed when a sound like the rushing of a violent blast of wind passed, and the whole house was shaken, so that the walls were like to fall. If this was not “the terror” of which he had been so strangely warned, Donald could give no other explanation.

## EVENTS AT A DISTANCE.

Some sixty years ago a seer in Ruaig, Tiree, the neighbouring village to the preceding, was one day employed in the harvest-field, tying sheaves after the reapers, a work assigned to old people. One of his sons was away in the Ross of Mull for a cargo of peats. All of a sudden the old man cried out “Alas! alas! my loss!” (*och! och! mo chreach!*) His children gathered round him in great anxiety as to the cause of his distress. He told them to wait a minute and in a short time

said it was all right, his son was safe. It turned out that at the very time of his exclamation, the boat in which his son was on its way from the Ross of Mull, was run into by another boat at the Dutchman's Cap (*Am Bac Mòr*), a peculiarly shaped island on the way, and his son was thrown overboard, but was rescued in time. The view of this incident which his mystic gift gave the seer was the cause of his exclamation.

## DEATH.

Visionary delusions are so frequently to be traced to a brooding, gloomy disposition, that it is no wonder sorrowful sights were those usually seen by persons having the Second Sight, or that death was an event of which taishers had particular cognisance. The doctrine is, that the whole ceremony connected with a funeral is gone through in rehearsal by spectres which are the shades, phantoms, appearances, taishs, doubles, swarths, or whatever else we choose to call them, of living men, not merely by the shade of the person who is to die, but by the shades of all who are to be concerned in the ceremony. The phantoms go for the wood that is to make the coffin, the nails, the dead clothes, and whatever else may be required on the occasion; the sounds of the coffin being made are heard, of presses being opened, of glasses rattling; and the melancholy procession has been met in the dead of night wending its way to the churchyard. These weird sights and sounds have been seen and heard by others as well as taishers. The only difference is, that he who has the Second Sight is more apt to see them.

## COFFIN.

The shades that go for a coffin are called *tathaich air ciste*, i.e. frequenters for a chest. They are heard at night long after the joiner has ceased his day's labour. The workshop is closed, and the wright has retired to rest, when the sound of a hammer, a shuffling for nails, and the working of a plane, are heard as if someone were at work. If anyone has the courage to enter the workshop, nothing is to be seen, and no answer is given though he speak.

Some fifty years ago there was a wright in Kinloch Rannoch, in Perthshire, who complained of having the Second Sight, and who, in emigrating to Australia, assigned as his chief reason for leaving his native land, the frequency with which he saw or heard people coming beforehand for coffins. The tools of his trade, plane, hammers, saw, etc., were heard by him at work as distinctly as

though he himself were working, and the frequency of the omen preyed so much on his mind that he left the country in the hope of relief. The shades were not those of the people whose death was imminent, but those of their friends and acquaintances, who afterwards proved actually to be the parties who came for the coffin.

A few years ago a medical student, in the west of Inverness-shire, sat up late on a summer night “grinding” for his examination. A joiner’s workshop adjoined the house in which he was. About two o’clock in the morning he heard the sound of hammers, plane, etc., as though some one were at work in the shop. The sounds continued till about three. The evening was calm. Next day when he told what he had heard his friends laughed at him. Next night again, however, the noises were resumed and continued till he fell asleep. They were this night heard also by the other inmates; and as they were repeated every night for a week, every person in the house, including the joiner himself, who was brought in for the purpose, heard them. Shortly after a woman in the neighbourhood died in childbed, and the joiner, in whose workshop the noises were heard, made her coffin. The mysterious hammering only discontinued when the coffin was finished. The person who heard the noises were neither taishers nor sons of taishers.

A Tiree man assured the writer that he and a brother of his heard most distinctly (*ga farumach*) the sound of a hammer all night till morning on a chest in an empty room, near which they slept. A woman next door died suddenly on the following day, and it was on that chest another brother of his made her coffin. The truthfulness of the persons who told this can be assured, whatever be the explanation given of the noise.

A very intelligent informant says that the only thing of the kind he himself was personally witness to occurred above fifty years ago, when he was a young lad. An old woman of the neighbourhood lay on her death-bed, and while the rest of the household, of which he was a member, sat up, he was on account of his youth packed off to bed. Through the night he heard what he took to be the trampling of dogs on a loft above his sleeping place, and this he heard so distinctly that he asked his father next day what made him put the dogs there. He also heard a plank sliding down from the loft and striking on end in the passage between the doors. The following night the old woman died, and the lad himself was sent up to the loft to bring down planks to make her coffin. A plank slipped from his hands, and, falling on end in the passage, made exactly the same noise as he had before heard.

Some forty or fifty years ago the trampling of horses and the rattling of a conveyance (*stararaich agus gliongarsaich*) were heard after dark, coming to the farm-house of Liaran in Rannoch. Every person in the house thought a conveyance was really there. The horses were distinctly heard turning round in the courtyard. On looking out nothing was to be seen or heard. In four or five days after, a hearse (a kind of conveyance till then unknown in the country) came from Appin of Menzies (*Apuinn na Meinearach*) with the remains of a cousin of the family, who had been suddenly killed by a kick from a horse.

As late as 1867 a coach was seen proceeding silently through the streets of a village in Ayrshire to the burying-ground, and was believed by the common people to be that of a rich lady in the neighbourhood, known as Brimstone Betty, who died shortly after, not in the odour of sanctity.

### **NOISE OF GLASSES TO BE USED AT FUNERALS.**

Some thirty years ago in Appin, Argyleshire, noises were heard in a cupboard upstairs, above a room which formed part of a neighbour's house, as if some one were fumbling among bottles. The noises were heard by the inmates of both houses for several nights previous to a somewhat sudden death occurring in the house below. It turned out that bottles from that cupboard were used at the funeral.

It was also a belief in Tiree that glasses, to be used before long for refreshments at a funeral, were heard rattling, as if being moved. Not many years ago there was an instance of this in the village of Kilmoluag. Skilful women professed to be able to tell by the baking board and the "griddle" whether the bread of that baking would be used at a funeral.

### **FUNERAL PROCESSION.**

A boy in Rannoch was playing with his companions in sight of the public road, when all of a sudden he exclaimed, "Lord! will you not look at my grandmother's funeral?" (*Dhia! nach fhaic sibh tòrradh mo sheanamhair.*) His grandmother was ill at the time, but was not thought near her dissolution. In a few days after her funeral took place, as the boy described it, with a red-haired character of the neighbourhood dancing at its head.

The following incident is told by a person whose truthfulness is beyond question. He is a person of talents and education, and a clergyman of the Church

of Scotland.

“A young lad, herd-boy in the village in the Western Islands to which I belong, was one day with me on the moors (*sliabh*), above the cultivated land, when he said he saw two men carrying a coffin between them from a wright’s workshop then in sight to the door of a house, which he mentioned. He called my attention to the vision, but I could see nothing of the kind. He described the dress the two men had on, particularly grey trousers, such as seafaring people of the place then wore. In about ten days after an event exactly corresponding occurred.”

A Tíree taísher told how he had seen a funeral procession leave a certain house, and persons whom he named acting as coffin-bearers when leaving the house. This was at Beltane, the first day of summer. Next Christmas a death occurred in that house, and one of those to whom the seer had told his vision, took a good look at the funeral, to see if matters would prove as the seer had said. They did so exactly.

“On one occasion,” said a native of Harris, “I was out fishing till twelve or one o’clock in the morning, with several others, of whom one, a man about 35, was reputed to have the Second Sight. As we were coming home, I kept the middle of the road, thinking it was the safest place, and that no evil could come near me there. Suddenly the man, who had the Second Sight, caught me by the shoulder and pulled me to the side of the road. As he laid his hand on my shoulder I saw a funeral procession—a coffin and men carrying it. I was afterwards at that funeral myself, and at the place where I met the taish, the men were in the same order in which I had seen them.”

A young man going home at night, along the south side of Loch Rannoch, was joined by a funeral procession. One of the poles of the bier was thrust into his hands, and he had to march in the procession above a mile. He was on the lochside of the coffin, and had great difficulty in keeping on the road. The other bearers of the ghostly coffin were laying the weight to push him off the road.

A woman, near Loch Scavaig (*Scathabhaig*), in Skye, saw a funeral procession, with the coffins, passing along a hillside, where no road lay, and no one was ever observed to pass. After the woman’s death, and two years after her vision, a boat was lost in Loch Scavaig, and the bodies of three persons lost in her were buried near the shepherd’s house at the loch side. They were afterwards raised and carried along in the direction the woman had pointed out as that taken by her vision.



One of these mystic processions was seen in Strathaird, in the same neighbourhood, carrying something in a grey plaid. A man was drowned in a river there, and his body was not recovered for a week. It was then carried in a grey plaid in the same direction the spectral procession had taken.

A man in Skye met at night a funeral procession, and some occult influence made him walk along with it till he came to Portree churchyard. He then for the first time asked whose funeral it was. He received for answer, "Your own."

A man living in the Braes of Portree went daily to Portree, four miles away, to work. A neighbour, whose house was a little further away, was engaged in the same work, and was in the habit of calling him as he passed in the morning. The two then walked together to the scene of their labour. One clear moonlight night he was awakened by what he took to be his companion's call. He hastily threw on his clothes and followed. Every now and then he heard a call before him on the road telling him to make haste. He followed, without thought, till he came to Portree churchyard. It did not strike him till then that the call was from no earthly voice.

### **WRAITHS SEEN BEFORE DEATH.**

When a person was about to die, especially if his death was to be by violence or drowning, his wraith or phantom was seen by those who had the Second Sight, or it might be by those who had no such gift.

In the island of Lismore, in the beginning of the nineteenth century, the minister was said to have seen the fetch of the man at whose funeral the custom was introduced of having the refreshments (*cosdas*) after the funeral. In former times it was the practice in the Highlands to have the refreshments before starting, and consequently the funeral party were sometimes far advanced in drink before starting on their melancholy journey. There are even stories of their having forgot the coffin.

On the farm of Kirkapol, in Tiree, where the burying-place of the east end of the island is, the figure of a man in a dress not belonging to the island—light trousers and blue jacket with white buttons—was seen about forty years ago by several people in the evenings going in the direction of the kirkyard. A celebrated seer in the neighbouring village saw it, and said it was not the taish of any man or any man's son in Tiree. Some time after a ship was wrecked in the east end of Tiree, and one of the sailors, whose dress when his body was found corresponded to that of the taish, was taken and buried in Kirkapol. After that the

apparition was no more seen.

The body of a young man drowned in the same neighbourhood, before being coffined, was laid first on a rock and then on the green sward. A person who came to the scene after the body was laid on the grass asked if the body had been laid on the rock mentioned. He was told it had, and was asked why he enquired. He said his uncle had told him that his grandfather, who was a taïsher, had said a dead body would yet be laid on that rock. This shows that the fulfilment of the seer's vision does not necessarily take place soon after, or even within a number of years.

The taïsher in Caolas, Tiree, already mentioned as having seen the fetch of his sister in the smallpox, on a New-Year night accompanied his brother-in-law, who had spent the evening with him (and from whom the story has been got), a piece of the way home. When his brother-in-law urged him to return, as he had come far enough, he asked to be allowed, as this was the last New Year he would be with his friends. He was asked what made him think so gloomily of the future. He said the matter was to be so, and there was no chance of its being otherwise, for he had seen his own phantom three or four times. In March following the man was drowned.

A Tiree taïsher was going out to Tobermory, and taking his passage along with him was a neighbour going to consult the doctor. There was no medical officer in those days resident in Tiree. The seer said to one of the boatmen, he wished he had not the sight he had, for he saw his fellow-passenger with the dead clothes up to his eyes. "You may," he said, "take off my ear if the man's death is not near hand." The event proved the correctness of his vision, and the right to take off his ear did not arise.

## **DROWNING.**

It is a common story that a taïsher saw the figure of an acquaintance passing with dripping clothes and water in its shoes (*aodach fliuch agus bogan na bhròig*). Soon after word was received of the drowning of the person, whose resemblance it was, at the time the figure was seen.

The seeing of spectres about boats in which people are to be drowned, is also common. When the superstition was in full force, a sure way of making a boat useless was to say that voices had been heard about it when it was drawn upon the beach, or that figures had been seen, which disappeared mysteriously, "whether the earth swallowed them, or the sky lifted them." After that no one

having a regard for his own life would put his foot in that boat.

A person from Tiree went for wood to Loch Creran, and at Tobermory forgot the parcel in which he had a change of clothes. One day he got wet, soaked through to the skin, and had to sit all evening in his wet clothes. On his return home to Tiree a woman, who was reputed to have the gift of second sight, asked him if, on a certain day of the week (mentioning the one on which this accident occurred), he had got himself wetted, that she had seen him, and thought he had been drowned. The man himself tells the story, and says he cannot conceive of any ordinary channel of information by which the woman could have become aware of his condition.

A man named Conn was drowned at Sorisdal, in Coll. A seer, who had been at daily work with him, had long seen his boots full of water (*bogan uisge*), when there was no water in them in reality; and for twelve months after the event, was haunted wherever he went by the vision of Conn's drowning.

A seer in Skye saw, when in reality there was no such object, a woman sitting in the stern of a boat, which afterwards drowned people in Portree Bay.

A fishing boat or skiff belonging to the people of Gortendonald, in the west end of Tiree, was sold, because "things" were said to have been seen about it, till no one belonging to the village would venture to sea in it. It was bought by some persons in Scarinish, in the east end of the island, who professed not to believe in *taibhsearachd*, or second sight. They gave the loan of it to people in Vaul, on the north side of the island. Here sights began again to be seen about it, and it was even said that at a time when it was hauled up on dry land, six men were seen rowing in it and one steering. At last no one at all would venture to sea in the boat, and it was sent back to Scarinish. So strong was the feeling that the Vaul men would not venture with it through the Black Water (*am Bun dubh*), as the sound between Coll and Tiree is called, but drew it across the land to Gott Loch, whence the Scarinish people took it home. After this, its odour in the east end of Tiree became so bad that it was sold again to villagers in the west end, at some distance from the place it originally came from. Here it terminated its career in Tiree by drowning six men.

Sights were similarly seen about a boat in Iona, and it had to be sold. It went to Islay, and the visions were believed to have received their fulfilment from the boat being employed to convey dead bodies from a ship wrecked on the Rhinns of Islay (*an Roinn Ileach*, lit. the sharp edge of Islay).

Not many years ago, a man told about a boat on the south side of Tiree, that he

had heard voices about it, like those of people talking, but on going near found no person there. He did not know, he said, whether the air had lifted the people whom he thought were there, or the earth had swallowed them, but he had heard voices, and no person was there. The boat became worthless, it would drown some one some day, and no one would go out to fish in it. The owner, therefore, summoned the seer before the Sheriff and got him fined.

## HORSES AND DOGS.

These animals were deemed to have the gift of seeing spectres in a larger measure than the best seers. They are observed to be frightened, or to have their fury raised, without any visible or intelligible cause; they show signs of terror and distress when human eyes can see no cause, and it is part of the Celtic belief in the second sight that this excitement is caused by seeing the *taish*, or shades of the living, in those circumstances, and engaged in those services in which the persons, whose similitude they are, will afterwards be. Dogs bark at night, and when this occurs on clear moonlight nights, they are said in English to “bay the moon.” The Celtic belief does not deny that they often bark at the moon, but it asserts further their clamour arises, as the event afterwards proves, from their seeing the forms of that world, in which fetches and doubles move, the omens of an impending death. Horses are better spectre-seers than even dogs. At places where a violent or sudden death is to occur, they take fright, and no effort of the rider can get them to pass the spot, till at last he has to dismount and lead them past. This is caused by their seeing the “fetch” of the subsequent event, but ordinary people pass it over merely as an “unaccountable fright.”

“I have heard,” said a Skyeman, “scores of times the dogs howling before a funeral was to take place in Kilmuir churchyard. It was because they saw the wraiths of the living” (*tàslaich nan daoine beò*). It is a universal Highland belief that certain dogs cry at night when any one in the house is to die.

In Lorn, a woman, going with leather to a neighbouring shoemaker, had on her way to cross a wooden bridge thrown over a mountain stream. She was accompanied by a young child, whom she left, while she herself crossed the bridge to leave the parcel of leather on the other side. As she was crossing a second time, leading the child, the stream came down in flood, as mountain streams do, and carried away the bridge. The woman and child were drowned, and their bodies were found further down the stream, at a place where, for fourteen days previously, a grey tailless bitch (*galla chutach ghlas*), belonging to a neighbour, used to go and howl piteously.

The fierce growling of a dog at night, when nothing is known to be in the house to excite its fury, is also supposed to arise from its seeing spirits, or the spectres, it is not known which, of the living or of the dead. Stories of this class usually run in the same groove. A shepherd or servant-man has a very good dog, which is in the habit of sleeping in the same room with himself. One night it suddenly gets up growling, and is heard making its way to the other end of the room. It returns howling faintly, springs into bed, and, lying with its forepaws resting on its master, snarls fiercely at something invisible. The occupant of the bed, not seeing anything to account for the dog's fury, puts his head below the bedclothes and quakes with fear till daylight.

A horse in Vaul, Tiree, ordinarily a quiet beast used, when carting, to be most unaccountably startled especially when passing a certain boat, drawn up on the beach. This same boat has been mentioned already as having, in consequence of being spectre-haunted, been sold by people in the west end of Tiree to some villagers in the east end, who gave the loan of it to Vaul people. Lights began also to be seen about it, and it was ultimately sent back to the lenders, who again sold it to people in the west end. Here a melancholy loss of life occurred in it. A gale off the land suddenly sprang up, when the boat, with its six of a crew, was within a few hundred yards of the shore. The men were seen rowing hard to bring the boat to land, but they had at last to give up the attempt. Some days after, the boat came ashore in Coll, with only one of the crew in it. He was reclining on one of the thwarts dead. It was the horse and cart mentioned that took home his body. After that day the horse was never known to be unaccountably startled or frightened. Its former fits entirely forsook it.

### **CRYING HEARD BEFORE DEATH.**

A wailing or unusual cry heard at night, where no one is known to be, or can be, is an indication that at that place some one will break into lamentation for the death of a friend, of which he will there first receive intimation, or will have otherwise cause to cry. The voice heard is not that of the “fetch” of the man, who is to be killed or drowned, but that of some mourner—a wife, or sister, or near relation. In these cries before a sudden death, the voices of women are the most frequently recognised.

A cry or scream, indicative of death, and believed to be uttered by a wraith, was called *tàsg*, and *éigheach tàisg* or *éigheach tàsg*, i.e. the cry of a wraith.

In the case of a man accidentally drowned on Trabay Beach in Tiree, a cry

described as “a healthy cry” (*glaodh fallain*) was heard at night in the west end of the island several days previous to the disaster, and four miles from the scene of the accident, at the spot where the man’s brother first received the melancholy intelligence. The cry consisted of “òh” said thrice, and each time at the full length of a man’s breath (*fad analach*).

At the old quay in Port Appin, Argyleshire, the wailing of a woman was heard at night. Some days after, the mother of a young man who had been accidentally killed in Glasgow, there met the remains, which came by steamer, and she broke into loud lamentation.

At the Big Bridge (*an Drochaid Mhor*) above Portree Manse, on the road to Braes, in the Isle of Skye, strange sounds are heard by people passing there at night, such as the moaning of a dying person, sounds of throttling, etc. Mysterious objects, dogs, and indistinct moving objects are also seen at the haunted spot. These are supposed to denote that a murder will some time be committed here.

Weeping and crying were heard at midnight near the mill-dam in Tiree, on a dark and rainy night, by a young man going for a midwife for his brother’s wife. He heard the same sounds on his return. The woman died in that childbed, and it was observed that at the very spot where the young man said he heard the sounds of lamentation, her two sisters first met after her death, and burst into tears and outcries. The person to whom this incident occurred is now past forty years of age, is intelligent, and to be relied on as a person who would not tell a lie. There can be no doubt he heard the lamentation, whatever may have been the cause of his impression. Strange noises, of which the natural cause is not known, are readily associated with the first incident that offers any explanation.

In the island of Mull, lamentation (*tuireadh*) was recollected to have been heard where a young man was accidentally killed ten years after.

Thirty years ago horrible screaming and shouting (*sgiamhail oillteil agus glaodhaich*) were heard about eight o’clock on a summer evening across Loch Corry in Kingairloch. In a line with the shouting lay a ship at anchor, and the burying-ground on the other side of the loch. The cry was like that of a goat or buck being killed, a bleating which bears a horrible resemblance to the human voice. Next night the master of the ship was drowned, no one knew how. The man on the watch said that when sitting in the stern of the ship he saw the skipper go below, and then a clanking as if the chain were being paid out. He heard and saw nothing further. The night was fine.

In July, 1870, a ship struck on a sunken rock in the passages between the Skerryvore lighthouse and Tiree, and sprang a leak. The shore was made for at once, but when within 150 yards of it the ship sank. The crew betook themselves to the rigging, and were ultimately rescued; but the skipper, in trying to swim ashore, was caught by the current that sweeps round Kennavara Hill, and drowned. The crying heard in Kennavara Hill four years previous was deemed to have portended this event.

Crying was heard several times on the reefs to the east end of Coll, and to the best of the hearer's belief, it was in English. In the same year (1870), a boat or skiff with two East Coast fishermen, following their calling in that neighbourhood, went amissing, and was never heard of. Many were of opinion it must have been lost on the reefs, where the cries had long previously been heard.

## LIGHTS.

It was deemed a good sign when lights were seen previous to a person's death. The *dreag* was a light seen in the sky, leaving a tail (*dreallsach*) behind it, and, according to some, stopping above the house where the death was to occur; according to others, proceeding from above the house to the churchyard, along the line the funeral was to take. The *dreag* was seen only when a person of consequence was near his dissolution. Hence an irreverent tailor in East-side, Skye, said he wished the sky was full of dreags.

It was also a belief that the death-light went along the road a funeral was to take.

An old man in Druim-a-chaoin, in Lower Rannoch, being sceptical on this point, was one night called to the door to believe his own eyes. His house overlooked the public road, and stepping boldly down he stood in the middle of the road awaiting the approach of the death-light. When it reached him, it also stood, right before him. The old man gazed fixedly at the unearthly light, and at last an indistinct and shadowy form became visible in the middle of it. The form slowly placed the palms of its two hands together, and extended them towards him. With a startling suddenness it said "Whish!" and passed over his head. That old man never afterwards said a word against death-lights.

In another instance of the death-light proceeding along the highway in the same district, a hare-brained young man went to meet it, and stood waiting it behind his dirk, which he stuck in the middle of the road. When the light came to the dirk it stopped, and the young man gazing at it, at last saw a child's face in its

feeble glare. He then stooped down and drew his dirk from the ground. As he did so the light passed over his head.

Lights were also seen where a violent or accidental death was to occur, and might be seen by the person whose death they fore-tokened. Thus, at Brae-Glen (*Bràighe Ghlinne*) in Glen-Iuchar, where a river falls into Loch Sgamadail, in Lorn, lights were seen two years previous to the drowning of a man of the name of Maclachlan, in the stream when drunk. Maclachlan had seen these lights himself.

Lights, to which these mysterious meanings are attached, are generally mere *ignes fatui*. They have of late years become prevalent in the Hebrides, and various explanations are given of them. In Tiree they are called “Fairy light” (*Teine sìth*), and are said to be produced by a bird. In Skye and the northern islands they are called the “Uist light” (*Solus Uithist*), and the following extraordinary account is given of their origin:

A young girl one Sunday night insisted, in spite of her mother’s remonstrances, on starting with a hook and creel to gather plants in the field for some species of dye before the Sabbath was expired. Finding her counsels of no avail, the mother in a rage told her to go then and never return: the young girl never returned, but her hook and creel were found in the fields, and marks of fighting at the spot. When encountered, the light jumps three times, and its appearance is that of human ribs with a light inside of them. It is only an odd number that can see this light. Two will not see it, but three can. Like other supernatural appearances it could only speak when spoken to. A young lad once had the courage to speak to it. The light answered that it was the young girl whom the above fate befell: that she had done wrong in disobeying her mother, and breaking the Sabbath day; that it was her mother’s prayer that was the cause of her unrest; and that she was now doomed to wander about in the shape of this light till the end of the world.

## **SPIRITS SEEN BEFORE DEATH.**

Shortly before death greenish bright lights were seen moving from one place to another, when no other light was in the room. These were said to be spirits awaiting the soul of the dying person. When the body lay stretched out, previous to being coffined, these lights were seen hovering near, and perhaps seven or eight butterflies (*dealan-dé*) fluttered through the room. They moved about the chest, in which were the bannocks to be used at the funeral, or the winding-sheet



(*blà-lìn*), and about the cupboard in which the glasses were. The belief in these appearances was not commonly entertained.

A belief in the occurrence of something supernatural at the moment of death seems to have been not altogether uncommon. On an occasion already mentioned of a sudden death at Port Appin, Argyleshire, which was preceded by the noise of bottles rattling, a girl opened the door of a side room at the moment of the sick man's dissolution. She returned in a state bordering on hysteria, cursing and swearing, that she would not take the world and go in. She said every article in the room seemed to meet her at the door.

## RETURN OF THE DEAD.

The plant *mòthan* (*sagina procumbens*), or Trailing Pearlwort, was placed by old women in Tìree above the door, on the lintel (*san àrd-dorus*), to prevent the spirits of the dead, when they revisited their former haunts, from entering the house, and it was customary in many places to place a drink of water beside the corpse previous to the funeral, in case the dead should return.

There is a sept of Macdonalds called MacCannel, of whom it is said in Tìree, that when one dies and the body is laid out to be waked, all the dead of the race enter the room, go round the body, upon which each lays his hand, and then in solemn procession march out again. This is the case at every death of one of the sept, but only those who have the second sight can see the shades. A man married to one of the MacCannels, whose father had been long dead, enraged her beyond measure, on the occasion of the death of one of the sept, by asking her why she had not gone to Ballevullen (where the death had occurred), last night to see her father.

The spirits of the dead came back to reveal secrets and give good advice. Those who hid iron during their lifetime, and died without telling where, could not rest till they had told their secret. Notoriously bad men, misers, oppressors of the poor, and all whose affections were set too much on the things of this world, were believed after death to wander about their former haunts. They seek to be where they left their treasure. They do not speak till they are spoken to, and it requires great courage in a living person to address the spirits of the dead. The last buried had to watch the churchyard till the next funeral; and if the strings of the winding-sheet were not untied, it was also a belief that the spirit could not rest.

It is very imprudent to enter into a compact with another, that whoever dies

first will come back to tell his fate to the survivor. The agreement is unholy, and will entail sorrow, whether the dead man's position is in weal or woe.

Two herdsmen at the summer pastures for the cattle (*bothan àiridh*) in "the wilds of far Kintail" entered into a compact of this kind. One of them died, and a substitute came in his place. The newcomer observed that his companion was anxious not to be alone for any time, however short, but one day he had to go to the strath for yeast (*deasgainn*), the two being engaged in brewing spirits, and did not return till far on in the night. The survivor of the two who had made the paction, being thus left alone, when night came on took to mending his shoes and singing at his work to keep his courage up. His thoughts constantly reverted to his dead companion, and the bargain made with him, and the more he thought the more uneasy he became. At midnight a scraping noise began on the top of the house, as if some one were trying to make an entrance. The scraping became louder and louder, and the shoemaker, in the agony of terror, but pretending to think the noise was made by his comrade who had gone to the strath, called out, "I know it is you trying to frighten me" (*cuir eagal orm*). As soon as he spoke, a man, whom he recognised as his dead companion, entered the hut, wrapped in the grave clothes, but after saying it was a good thing for him where he (the dead man) had gone, went away and left him unharmed.

In another case of a similar agreement between two youths in the same district, the survivor forgot all about the paction, till one night he was met on the public road by the figure of his departed friend, which told him to meet it alone at a certain place (which it named) at a certain hour, otherwise it would be worse for himself. The man, terrified beyond measure, consulted the parish minister as to what he ought to do, but the minister merely advised him to pray that no evil would come of his rash and unguarded compact. He consulted an old man, who told him to go to the place appointed and take a ball of iron in his hand, and hold it out to the ghost when shaking hands. The man went, the ghost crushed the ball of iron and the man escaped, otherwise the spirit, which could only have come from a bad place, would have crushed his hand into atoms.

A woman in Flodigarry, in Skye, whose husband had been killed by witchcraft (*buidseachd*), saw him after his death sitting by the fireside. On being spoken to, the ghost asked, why they had not shaved him before putting his body in a coffin?<sup>[31]</sup>

## **BONES OF THE DEAD AND PLACE OF BURIAL.**

It was part of the lesson impressed on the young Highlander, to treat that which belonged to the dead with reverence. The unnecessary or contemptuous disturbing of graves, bones, or other relics of humanity was reprobated, and sometimes warmly resented. This praiseworthy feeling towards the dead was strengthened by the pride of race and ancestry, which formed so prominent a feature of the Highland character, and by sundry tales of wide circulation.

The story has been already told of the tailor who irreverently gave a kick to a skull, and was ever after haunted by the man to whom it had belonged. It is told of one who disturbed a grave at night, that, on his taking up a skull in his hand, a feeble voice, that of the disturbed spirit, said, "That's mine." He dropped that skull and took up another, when a like voice said, "That's mine." The man cried out, "Had you two skulls?"

Tradition says the island of Islay derives its name from Ile, a Scandinavian princess, who went to bathe in a loch there, and sticking in the soft mud, was drowned. The head and footstones of her grave are some distance from each other, and of three persons, who successively attempted to open the grave to see what the bones were like, each died mad! Very likely this was the fate awaiting them at any rate. Their action in opening a grave, to satisfy an idle curiosity, was in keeping with a morbid character, and they only died as they lived.

Stones from a disused burying-ground, called "The Burial-place of the Big Women," on the farm of Heynish, in Tiree, were used for building one of the farm out-houses. In this house, a servant man from Mull was sent to sleep. Through the night he was disturbed by his dog jumping into bed, between him and the wall, and with its fore feet resting upon his body, snarling fiercely at something he could not see. He heard feeble voices through the house, saying, "This is the stone that was at my head." Nothing more came of this visit of the spirits, than that the Mull man (who was likely the victim of a hoax) positively refused to sleep in that house again.

The manner in which shades haunt the places where their bodies are, is very clearly shown in the following tale.

The body of a woman was cast ashore by the sea on the North Beach, called the Beach of Fell (*Tràigh Feall*), in the island of Coll, and was buried in the neighbouring sandbanks. After this, the semblance of a woman was seen in the evenings on the beach, close to the tide. Maclean, the then tenant of Caolas, a farm near hand, ridiculed the belief. One evening, however, when going home across the North Beach, at the White Stream (*Sruth Bàn*), he thought of the

numerous stories he had heard of the apparition, and, looking seaward, saw a woman sitting by the tide, rocking herself (*ga turruman fhein*), and apparently in the utmost distress. He went where she was, and asked her what she was doing? “Hand of cleverness” (*làmh thapaidh*), she answered, “I have been long here; I try to go home, but I cannot. I was a poor woman belonging to Uist; I was lost on a rock; my body came ashore here, and I try to go home, but cannot; my body keeps me.” Maclean asked what reward she would give, if he took her body home. She promised to be with him in every quarrel or fight, in which he might be involved. This offer he declined, saying his own hand was strong enough to extricate him in any difficulty of that kind. She then offered him the gift of knowing the thief, if anything should be stolen in Coll. This gift he accepted, and the stones that marked the grave being told him, he sent for the woman’s brothers, the body was taken home, and the spectre was no more seen on the North Beach.

### **SPIRITS APPEARING IN DREAMS.**

A deceased sister’s ghost appeared to a woman in a dream, and told her, their brother had been buried the day before in Ireland. She also told the signs, by which next day the truth of the dream was to be proved. The words of the ghost form in Gaelic a singularly beautiful and plaintive song. Each line is repeated twice in singing, first with one and then another of those meaningless choruses to be found in Gaelic melody, and suiting well with the genius of the language.

E ha na hoo-roo  
Loving sister, are you sleeping?  
Ho lo va, hoo-roo,  
E ha na hao-lo-ro hee.  
Loving sister, are you sleeping?  
The brother, whom we had in Erin,  
Went yesterday away on bearers.  
I was there, but no one saw me.  
A while on foot, a while on horseback,  
Another while my hands wringing.  
I will give proofs of thy vision,  
The big byre, where the kine are,  
Will be wrapped in flames to-morrow,  
And the infant in your bosom,  
You'll find dead on your bedside.

It is told of a widower, who was unkind to his children, that the ghost of his deceased wife in a similar manner appeared to him, and said:

“Man, who hast shut the door upon me,  
And left me lying here!  
Before the Christmas comes  
A greater loss will befall you.  
Man, who hast the children,  
Rearing them unpeaceably,  
If oft your hand be raised,  
I will not be long at peace with you.”

## **TO GET RID OF THE SECOND SIGHT.**

It was a belief in the island of Coll that a person afflicted with the second sight might get rid of his unhappy gift, and, as it were, bind it away (*nasg*) from himself, by giving alms (*déirc*) and praying the gift may depart. A seer living near Arinagour in that island had two sons in the army, then engaged in foreign wars, and in his visions saw what was happening to them. The visions preyed so much on his mind that, to rid himself of them, he gave half-a-crown to an old woman, and prayed his second sight might be taken away. After this he saw nothing of his sons, and, anxious to know their fate, he went to Tiree for a

celebrated taïsher, and brought him to Coll with him. He placed him beside the fire, which was on the middle of the floor. It was held by the best seers that visions are best seen through the fire (*roi' n teine*). Before long the Tíree seer began to sweat, and the other, who knew that this was caused by a painful vision, begged him to tell what he saw, and hide nothing. He told that both the sons were killed—the one by a bullet through the head, the other shot through the heart and through the neck. Soon after a letter came to the Laird of Coll corroborating the seer's vision.



## CHAPTER V. HOBGOBLINS.

The term *Bòchdan* (pron. Baucan) is a general name for terrifying objects seen at night, and taken to be supernatural, bugbears, ghosts, apparitions, goblins, etc., in all their variety. The word conveys as much the idea of fright in the observer as of anything hurtful or violent in the object itself. It is derived from *bòchd*, to come in a swelling and resistless flood, not an unapt description of the manner in which fear takes possession of its victims. Any object, indistinctly seen, may prove a hobgoblin of this kind. It may be merely a neighbour playing pranks by going about in a white sheet, a stray dog, a bush waving and sighing in the night wind, or even a peat-stack looming large in the imperfect light. There is a story of a man on Loch Rannoch-side who fought a bush, in mistake for a ghost, in a hollow, which had an evil name for being haunted. The conflict continued till dawn, when he was found exhausted, scratched, and bleeding.

Sometimes the Baucan, or terrifying object, causes fright by its mere appearance, sometimes by the noises it makes, and sometimes by its silence. In appearance it is commonly a man or woman moving silently past, and not speaking till spoken to, if even then; but it has also been encountered as a black dog, that accompanies the traveller part of his way, as a headless body (a particularly dangerous form of ghost), as a he-goat, or simply a dark moving object. At other times it is terrific from having a chain clanking after it, from its whistling with unearthly loudness, by horrible and blood-freezing cries and sounds of throttling, and sometimes it makes its presence known only by faint and hardly audible sounds. In fact, the number and variety of things by which superstitious terror may be awakened at night are countless.

In most cases the Baucan is deemed the precursor of a sudden or violent death to occur at the place where it is seen or heard. It is remembered after the event that an unaccountable light was seen there at night, or a horse had become uneasy and could not be induced by its rider to pass, or something extraordinary had been observed, which the popular imagination connects with the subsequent event. At other times the Baucan is the spirit of the dead revisiting the earth, that it may be spoken to, and unburden itself of some secret that disturbs its rest. Sometimes it is an evil spirit on some message of darkness and sometimes merely a sound or indistinct object by which the wayfarer is frightened, but of

which he is unable to give any lucid description. Fright is destructive of curiosity, and a person ready to faint with terror cannot be expected to be critical in his observations, nor afterwards coherent in his statements. Besides, vagueness or indistinctness as to the cause—an element to which the obscurity of night lends a ready aid—tends to render fear more frantic. If the observer had a distinct view of the object of his alarm, and knew exactly what it was, even though it were a spirit of darkness, his terror would be less. *Omne ignotum pro magnifico* is an axiom that holds especially true in such cases, and it is ignorance of its own cause that gives terror its wildest forms. A ghost or apparition seen in the day time, if that were possible, would not be at all so dreadful.

It may be said, that every Highland village has near it a locality where a ghost or *baucan* is, or was, to be seen. A favourite haunt for these unearthly visitants is by the fords of rivers (*beul àth na h-aimhne*), where generally bridges have been built in modern times, near churchyards, on dark moors, and in hollows, or rather at the top of the ascent from hollows, traversed by the public road. Not unfrequently there is a projecting rock (*sròin creige*) near the spot, and this may have its own share in producing that sense of loneliness and awe, which makes the belated peasant prone to convert stray animals and unusual appearances into ghosts and spirits. It is a noticeable feature in ghost stories, that it is principally to those travelling alone, and not accustomed to walk the night, that ghosts are visible. They have been seen in houses, and even in towns, but ordinarily they affect lonely places, where naturally men are more apt to be timorous.

The “Black Shore” (*du-chladach*) as it is called, *i.e.* the shore below the line or roll of seaweed thrown up by the tide (*ròlag ròid*), is, according to Highland belief, an asylum from all kinds of supernatural beings that haunt the night, fairies, ghosts, or evil spirits. No being “at all, at all” of the kind (*seòrsa sam bith, sam bith*) can go below the tide mark. The confidence of the timorous in this place of refuge is confirmed by the assurance that they are not exposed to a similar danger from the sea. It is a saying, “Evil comes not from the sea” (*Cha d’tig olc sam bith o’n fhairge*).

Ghosts and evil spirits cannot cross a running stream, a belief which had its origin before the days of bridges. The shock given to the nerves by the cold water, when it was of any depth, served to dispel the optical delusion caused by unfounded terror.

When about to encounter a *Baucan* the dirk should be partly drawn from its sheath, otherwise it will prove impossible during the encounter to draw the weapon. In the event of the evil spirit asking its name it should not be called by



its proper name, “a dirk” (*biodag*), but “my father’s sister” (*piuthar m’athar*), “my grandmother’s sister” (*piuthar mo sheanamhair*) or by some similar title. This prevents enchantments being laid upon it to render it useless. The effect of these is, that instead of giving the ghost its *quietus*, the weapon merely makes a tinkling noise (*gliong*) against it. Evil spirits cannot bear the touch of cold steel. Iron, or preferably steel, in any form is a protection, though it is not obvious how or why, against the fairies,—an iron ring on the point of a staff is as good as a sword, but evil spirits are subdued by it only when made into a lethal weapon.

In the struggle the ghost is in the hands of its opponent, soft as a bag of wool or impalpable as air. At every tussle, therefore, the unfortunate man is thrown down and injured.

In the presence of an evil spirit, a dog defends its master, or crouches in terror about his feet, but a bitch jumps at his throat, and if it can will tear him. It is, however, rendered harmless, by taking blood from its ear, or tying a collar (*conghal* i.e. *ceangal*), usually its master’s garter, about its neck. Similarly an entire horse was said to defend its master, but a mare attacked him. It was also a belief, that an entire horse could not be injured by witches or evil spirits.

The best protection is a circle drawn round one’s self on the ground with the point of a sapling or dirk, saying “The Cross of Christ be upon us” (*Crois Chriosd oirnn!*) All the spirits that infest the night may dash in fury against this circle, but they can no more pass it, than the most threatening waves of the sea the rocks that form their appointed bounds. As already suggested, this circle is the superstitious representative of a person’s own integrity, within which he is safe from the attacks and wiles of the devil. It is known also in Ireland, as the following story told in Arisaig, Inverness-shire, by an Irish packman, shows.

A priest’s brother having died, a young man, who had been a bosom friend of his, expressed an ardent wish some weeks after to see him again. That same evening he was met by the shade of his dead companion, and the two had a long talk together. They spoke of the pleasure, they had in each other’s society, and the dead man got the other to promise to meet him at the same spot the following evening. It added, “To make you sure it is indeed I, you will tell my brother the priest of such and such an occurrence [describing it], which nobody knows but he and I.” On his way home, the young man called upon the priest, and told what he had seen. “It is not my brother’s ghost at all,” said the priest, “but the devil, who is trying to decoy you into his power; I will go with you to-morrow night to meet him.” The two went together to the place of appointment, the priest taking with him a dirk, with which he traced a circle round them, and an iron hoop,

inside of which also they stood. A figure in face and form like the priest's brother, "most like, yet not the same," came, but on finding itself outwitted, and a Bible being opened before it, went away in a flame of fire.

### **THE *Bodach*, OR CARLE.**

The *bodach* (lit. a carle, an old man) is perhaps the commonest form of Baucan, so common that in some districts, *e.g.* the Lord Reay country (*Dùthaich Mhic Aoi*), as the seven parishes nearest to Cape Wrath are called, they have no other name for apparitions or terrifying objects seen at night. It is the figure of a man, who is no "living wight," seen at night, and as may readily be imagined, this kind of apparition is frequently seen when children are obstreperous, querulous, or crying without cause, as their manner is. The Beckoning Old Man (*Bodach an Sméididh*) appears about the corners of houses, making signs with his hand for people to come to him. The *Corra-lòigein*, whatever his name may mean, stands in places which it is desirable to keep children from wandering to after dark, and will ill-treat any of whom it gets a hold. The principal of these *Lemures* is "The Son of Platter-pool," whose full title is, "The Son of Platter-pool from grey spike, silken spike, great caterpillar."<sup>[32]</sup> This, as his name indicates, is really a frightful bugbear; he looks in at windows, flattens his face against the panes, sharpens his teeth with much noise, and takes away children in a twinkling, unless they keep quiet. Neither he, however, nor any of his brother bugbears, enter a house unless called in. The threat of doing so is generally quite sufficient to silence the most ill-grained child.

### **FUATH.**

This word means literally aversion, hatred, but in Ross-shire is a common word to denote an apparition, ghost, spectre. In this latter sense, it is rare in Argyleshire. In the poem of the *Muireartach* or *Muileartach*, which may be translated, "Western Sea," foster-mother of Manus, King of Lochlin, describing her attack upon Fin MacCoul and his men, it is said:

"The name of the daring spectre (fuath)  
Was the bold, red, white-maned Westlin Sea;  
Her face was dusky, of the hue of coal,  
The teeth of her jaws crooked red;  
In her head there glared a single eye,

That swifter moved than bait-pursuing mackerel;  
And on her head there bristled dark-grey hair,  
Like brushwood covered with hoar-frost.”<sup>[33]</sup>

The attributes of the *Fuath* are different in different tales, and Mr. Campbell (*Tales of the West Highlands*, ii. 191) has fallen into the error of conjoining attributes ascribed in several stories, and representing the *Fuath* as a water spirit, having web-feet, tail, mane, etc. The name of a desolate moor near Ullapool, in Ross-shire, “The Flat-stoned Declivity of Fuaths” (*Leathad leacanta nam Fuath*), is alone convincing it was not deemed particularly a water spirit.

The following tales will illustrate the character of Highland hobgoblins and such-like objects of terror better than a lengthened disquisition.

### **CACHLAIDH NA FEUSAIG, ISLAY.**

At the bottom of a dell, or hollow, through which the public road lies, in the island of Islay, there was a gate across the road, bearing the above name, which means “The Beard gateway.” At this place things unearthly were encountered after dark. One night a man saw an indistinct object coming towards him. He could give no account of it, but that its mouth was wide open, as if to devour him, and that from the width of its gape he could see its lungs (*sgamhan*) down its throat. He was accompanied, fortunately, by a large Newfoundland dog, which rushed between his legs at the “thing,” and a terrific fight ensued. He ran away home, leaving them at it. In the morning the dog came without any hair on its body, and shortly after its return expired.

About the middle of February, a party was coming home from the market held on the Level Ridge (*Imire Còmhnard*) at Ballygrant (Ugly Town). Before parting they entered a roadside inn. One of them, Ewen M’Corkindale, had, after leaving, to pass through the Beard gateway and the haunted dell. His companions made fun of him, and asked him if he was not afraid of the *Bodach*, the carle, or old man, who haunted the dell. Out of fool-hardiness, Ewen proposed “the health of the *bodach*, the old man, and let the *cailleach*, the old wife, go to the dogs.” When he reached the haunted spot two apparitions, an old man and an old woman, met him. The old woman endeavoured to attack him, but the old man kept her off, and ever after, at every opportunity, the same scene was rehearsed, the old wife attacked him and the old man defended him. The latter also told him to go to a smithy in Ireland, others say to two brothers in Cantyre, and get a dirk made, and as long as he kept this on his person the old

woman would not venture to attack him. The dirk bent three times in the making, and from its possession Ewen acquired the title of “Ewen of the Dirk” (*Eoghan na biodaig*). As he was working one evening by moonlight in the harvest field, he left the dirk on a stook of corn, along with his vest. The carlin wife got between him and the dirk, and gave him such a squeeze that he put out three mouthfuls of blood. The *bodach* came, but too late, to his rescue. It however, told him, that if he survived till cock-crowing, five years would be added to his life. Ewen woke up now and then to ask if the cock crew yet, but when it did it was too late. Very likely the poor man died of some rupture or heart disease. The dirk was preserved by his son.

### **THE HEADLESS BODY (*Colann gun cheann*).**

At the shore and forming part of the boundary between North and South Morar,<sup>[34]</sup> on the west coast of Inverness-shire, there is a large rocky mound (*cnoc mòr creige*), which was long the cause of terror in the district. At the base of the mound a road can be taken along the shore when the tide is out. No one, however, taking it alone after nightfall, lived to tell the tale. His remains were found next day among the large boulder stones (*eòmach mòr chlach*), of which the shore is full, mangled, and bearing traces of a ghastly and unnatural death. Persons who had the second sight looking over the rocks that overhang the shore said they saw a phantom or “something” haunting the place, having the shape of a headless human figure. Macdonall or MacCuil, as he is styled, of South Morar (*Mac Dhughaill mhòrair*), whose house was not far from the scene of the Headless Body’s violence, unexpectedly became the means of expelling it from its haunt. He was one winter evening unexpectedly visited by a friend. He had no one to send to Bracara across the river, to invite some more friends to come and join in the entertainment of his guest but his son and heir, then about 18 years of age. He strictly enjoined the youth not to return that night unless men came with him, for fear of the Headless Body. The young man did not find the friends he was sent for at home, and with the temerity natural to his years came back alone. The Body met him and killed him, and in the morning were found traces of a fearful struggle, large stones displaced and clots of blood, as if the youth had put out his heart’s blood. MacCuil made a solemn vow neither to eat nor drink till he avenged his son’s death. All that evening his friends tried to persuade him to remain at home, but to no purpose. The Headless Body never appeared but to those who passed its way alone, and the chief’s friends had to return while he went on unaccompanied to the haunted rocks. The Body came out and said,

“You have come to take your son’s ransom (*éiric*); take counsel, and go home.” To this the chief replied by clasping his arms round the hated apparition. A furious struggle commenced, and to this day the stones may be seen which were rolled out of their way in the dread encounter. At last the strong and fearless chief got the Headless Body under, and drew his dirk to stab it. The Body cried, “Hold your hand, MacCuil, touch me not with the iron, and while there is one within the twentieth degree related to you (*air an fhicheadamh miar*) in Morar, I will not again be seen.”

When this story was heard some years ago there were only two alive within this relationship to the ancient chief, one a harmless idiot, the other a poor woman in Fort William. One or other of them must be still alive, for the Headless Ghost has not yet made its reappearance. The person from whom it was heard, was a firm believer in its truth, and in his youth, half a century ago, was well acquainted with the district in which the events were said to have occurred. He had learned and practised the tailoring trade there.

Another, and somewhat different, version of the tale will be found in Campbell’s *West Highland Tales*, ii. 89. In it the subduing of the ghost is ascribed to Stout John, Laird of Raasay, a proof of the manner in which floating popular tales attach themselves to known characters. The words ascribed to the Body as it went away, were composed in the East Indies by a piper of the name of Bruce from East-side, Skye. *Beinn Heidera* and *Bealach a Bhorbhain* are both in East-side, Skye. The words are an adaptation of an old tune, “*Thogainn fonn air gille an t-sealgair*.”

The tale quoted by Scott (*Lay of the Last Minstrel* note Q) from Henry the Minstrel, of Sir William Wallace’s encounter with the Headless Body is also known in the Hebrides, and has been told to the writer by a native of the extreme west of Tiree. According to this version, Macfadyen’s head was cut off by Wallace to avoid his falling alive into the hands of the English. Macfadyen was an old man and not able to keep up with the rest of the retreating company. When Wallace himself went to open the door, the Headless Body stood holding the head by the hair in its hand, and threw it at Wallace. Wallace picked it up and flung it out at the door as far as he could. The Headless Body went in search of it and Wallace made his escape by a window on the opposite side of the castle.

There is a rhyme with which probably some legend was formerly connected:

“When Fionn went to the hill  
He met Headless Body.”<sup>[35]</sup>

It was deemed very foolhardy in a boy to go out after dark alone and say,

“Headless Body

Come and take me away.”<sup>[36]</sup>

### **THE GREY PAW (*Spòg liath*).**

In the big church of Beauly (*Eaglais mhor na manachain*, i.e. of the Monastery) mysterious and unearthly sights and sounds were seen and heard at night, and none who went to watch the churchyard or burial-places within the church ever came back alive. A courageous tailor made light of the matter and laid a wager that he would go any night, and sew a pair of hose in the haunted church. He went and began his task. The light of the full moon streamed in through the windows, and at first all was silent and natural. At the dead hour of midnight, however, a big ghastly head emerged from a tomb and said, “Look at the old grey cow that is without food, tailor.”<sup>[37]</sup> The tailor answered, “I see that and I sew this,” and soon found that while he spoke the ghost was stationary, but when he drew breath it rose higher. The neck emerged and said, “A long grizzled weasand that is without food, tailor.”<sup>[38]</sup> The tailor went on with his work in fear, but answered, “I see it, my son, I see it, my son, I see that and I sew this just now.”<sup>[39]</sup> This he said drawling out his words to their utmost length. At last his voice failed and he inhaled a long breath. The ghost rose higher and said, “A long grey arm that is without flesh or food, tailor.”<sup>[40]</sup> The trembling tailor went on with his work and answered, “I see it, my son, I see it, my son; I see that and I sew this just now.” Next breath the thigh came up and the ghastly apparition said, “A long, crooked shank that is without meat, tailor.” “I see it, my son, I see it, my son; I see that and I sew this just now.” The long foodless and fleshless arm was now stretched in the direction of the tailor. “A long grey paw without blood or flesh, or muscles, or meat, tailor.”<sup>[41]</sup> The tailor was near done with his work and answered, “I see it, my son, I see it, my son; I see that and I sew this just now,” while with a trembling heart he proceeded with his work. At last he had to draw breath, and the ghost, spreading out its long and bony fingers and clutching the air in front of him, said, “A big grey claw that is without meat, tailor.”<sup>[42]</sup> At that moment the last stitch was put in the hose, and the tailor gave one spring of horror to the door. The claw struck at him and the point of the fingers caught him by the bottom against the door-post and took away the piece. The mark of the hand remains on the door to this day. The tailor’s flesh shook and quivered with terror, and he could cut grass with his haunches as he flew

home.

This is perhaps the most widely known and most popular story in the Highlands. Its incidents can be reproduced on a winter evening with frightful distinctness by means of a shadow on the wall. This gives it a wonderful attraction for children, and if fear can under any circumstances be called into healthy action (and dread, like any other power or capacity of the mind must have a proper and healthy action), it is in listening to this or similar stories. Their baneful effects, if such there be, soon disappear. There is hardly an old church in the Highlands, where the event has not been said to have occurred. A writer in the last statistical account (Argyleshire, p. 682 note) claims it for the old church of Glassary. In Skye it is placed in the *Eaglais Uamhalta* in Conasta near Duntulm. The old church of Beaulay has the most popular claim, though to a youthful audience the truth of the story is much confirmed by putting the scene in some place that they know.

In the cathedral of Iona, there is a small nook pointed out, called “the tailor’s hole” (*Toll an taillear*), where it is said the monks kept the tailor who made their clothes. They kept him too long, and too busy at his work, and at last “things” began to trouble him at night. The worst of these was a fleshless hand that used to show itself on the wall, and say, “a great grey paw that is without meat, tailor.”

Another form of the tale is that the tailor was at the *aire chlainn*, i.e. watching the graveyard, of a friend, in a chapel (*caibeal*) when the foodless figure began to emerge from a tomb. The tailor did not run away till the figure had got up as far as the knees, and said: “*Sliasaid liath reamhar*,” etc.

## EWEN AND THE CARLIN WIFE.

One of the commonest of Gaelic sayings is, “Whether he would or not, as the old wife came upon Ewen,” to which is frequently added, “a wife as big as his mother” (*a dheòin no dh’aindeoin, mar thainig a chailleach air Eoghan, bean cho mòr ri mhathair*). There are various versions of the origin of this tale, but none of them common.

The celebrated Ewen Cameron of Locheil (who is characterised by Macaulay, in his *History of England*, as the Ulysses of the Highlands, a gracious master, a trusty ally, and a terrible enemy), was on a journey, as the story goes, from Aberdeen to Inverness. He was at the time a young man, and on entering the inn, in which he stayed at Aberdeen, the evening before starting, he found sitting



before him an old woman he had never seen before. On seeing Ewen she wrinkled up her nose, tossed her head, and said “hĩh.” Ewen, being of a witty humour, replied by wrinkling up his own nose, tossing his head, and saying “hõh.” Next morning when starting, he found the hag waiting for him at the door. She said, “Step it out, Ewen” (*Ceum ann, Eoghain!*) He said nothing, but went on his way. All day the old woman walked alongside, and, whenever his steps flagged, repeated her challenge to him to step it out. Ashamed to be beat by an old woman, and agile as a wild cat, Ewen held on at a headlong pace, and before nightfall the pair were in Inverness, 108 miles away. Ewen was sadly fatigued, as may well be supposed from the distance and the pace. That night he consulted an old man, who advised him to answer the old wife’s challenge also in words, and no evil would result from his walk. Next day the hag, as before, was waiting for him at the door, and said, “Step it out, Ewen” (*Ceum ann, Eoghain!*) He answered: “A step for your step, and a step additional, old woman!” (*Ceum air do cheum, agus ceum a bharrachd, a chailleach!*) This day they walked to Patrickson Sound (*Caolas ’ic Phadruig*), as the ferry across Loch Leven at Balachulish is called, a distance of 75 miles. Ewen got into the ferry boat first, and pushed off from the shore. When the hag saw herself about to lose him, she called out, “My sincere wishes are yours, Ewen” (*Mo dhùrachd dhut fhéin, Eoghain!*) He replied: “Your sincere wishes be upon your own sides, and on yonder grey stone, old wife!” (*Rùn do chridh’ air do chliathaich ’s air a chloich ghlais ud thall, a chailleach*). The old wife looked at the grey stone, and it split in two, as may still be seen by any one passing that way.

Another version of the parting of Ewen and the Old Wife is, that the pair came to Ewen’s foster-mother’s house. That night his foster-mother put him to sleep on a hard deal board, and placed a crock of butter<sup>[43]</sup> to his feet, while she put the old wife in a soft and luxurious bed. In the morning Ewen was as fresh as a lark, his feet had soaked in the whole of the butter during the night, but the Carlin wife was dead!

Another, and probably older, tale of the origin of the saying, is of a wilder cast. Ewen was a jolly young fellow (*óganach grinn*) who went to a wedding. He had a switch in his hand, with which, when the ceremony was being performed in the church, he tapped a skull in the church window, saying to it every word the minister said to the couple marrying. That night on going to bed he was seized by a shivering cold, and an old woman (*cailleach*) came and claimed him as her husband. She said, they were married as surely as the couple in church that day. She came night after night, and Ewen, whose thoughtless fun had turned to such terrible earnestness, could not get rid of her, do what he could. An



old man, whom he consulted, said, there was a bad chance of her going away while he lived, but that he ought to consult Michael Scott. Michael said, "I will separate you from her, but perhaps you will not live after. Here is a book, which you are to take to bed with you, and when she goes away, open the book, and follow her wherever she goes. While the book is open, she cannot leave you by walking. Before you come back, you will see the bed prepared for me, and will be able to tell me what it is like." The hag went to hell, and Ewen followed.<sup>[44]</sup> Several subordinate demons came first to the door, but Ewen demanded an interview with their chief. He then requested, that the old wife should be bound with chains, to keep her always in her infernal abode. This was done, but when he offered to go away, she followed. She was then put below a caldron (*fo bhial coire*) on the bed of brimstone prepared for Michael Scott, and she is probably there still. Ewen came back to tell Michael, that his bed was ready, and did not live long after his terrible adventure.

## THE BLACK WALKER OF THE FORD.

Rather more than a century ago,<sup>[45]</sup> there lived at Amhulaich, in Rannoch, a miller, much addicted to the use of tobacco, and when unable to get it, was like most smokers very short and quick in the temper. On one occasion, he ran out of tobacco, and sent for a supply by some Lochaber men, who were passing through Rannoch on their way to Perth. The mill-stream ran close to his house, and he had to cross it on stepping stones in going to and from the mill. As he was returning home one evening in the dusk, and was about to enter the house, he heard the sound of footsteps coming to the ford. He called out, who is there? but received no answer. Being crusty for want of tobacco, and thinking it might be the Lochaber men returning, he called out a second time, very peremptorily and impatiently. He still received no answer. He called out a third time, turning down to the ford, and saying aloud, that, whether it was man or devil, he would make it answer. The thing then spoke, and said it (or he) was the Black Walker of the Ford (*Coisiche du beul an àth*). What further passed between the two never transpired, but every evening after that, for a year or more, the miller left home at dusk, crossed the stream, and went to a small clump of trees about half a mile away, whence loud cries and yells were heard during the night. Before daybreak he came home, with his knife or dirk covered with blood. When examined by the light, the blood proved to be merely earth. An attempt was made on one occasion by some young men to follow him to the rendezvous, but he became aware in some mysterious way of the attempt, and turning back

warned them not to follow. It was enough, he said, for himself to go, without their perilling their souls. On the last night of his going to meet the Black Walker, such terrific outcries were heard from the clump of trees, that the people of the neighbouring villages, Amhulaich and Cragganöir, came to the doors to listen. It was a winter night, and next morning marks of a foot or knee were found in the snow, along with the miller's own footsteps, as if something had been engaged in a struggle with him. Some years after this, a man, who had been away in America, entered Amhulaich Mill. The miller at the time was dressing the mill-stone, and whenever he observed the American, threw at him the pick he had in his hand, and nearly killed another, who was standing near. He told him never to appear in his presence again, that he had had enough of him. Many surmised it was this man, who had troubled him before, but whether it was or not never appeared.

### **STROWAN, ATHOLE.**

Within the present century, a native of Glen Erochty (*Gleann Eireachdaidh*), the valley that leads from Athole to Rannoch, was similarly afflicted. Every evening he went to meet the evil spirit, at a small circle of trees, on the top of the hill above the clachan of Strowan. The last occasion of his doing so, was after the shinty playing on New-Year's day. He took with him a large stick, which had been cut that same day in the wood, and had served one of the players for a shinty stick. Next day this stick was found at the scene of the nightly meetings, twisted like a withe, while all round within a circle the snow was trampled, as if there had been a struggle. There were marks of a man's foot and of a knee.

### **THE UNEARTHLY WHISTLE.**

About seventy years ago, a young man, a native of the village of Cornaig, in Tiree, went in the evening to another village, *Cruaidh-ghortain*, about two miles distant. When he reached it, he reclined on a bed, and being tired fell fast asleep. He awoke with a start, and thinking from the clearness of the night (it was full moon) daylight had come, hurried off home. His way lay across a desolate moor, called the Yellow Ridge (*Druim Buidhe*), and when halfway he heard a loud whistle behind him, but in a different direction from that in which he had come, at a distance, as he thought, of above a mile. The whistle was so unearthly loud, he thought every person in the island must have heard it. He hurried on, and when opposite the Sharp-pointed Rock (*An Carragh biorach*) he heard the

whistle again, as if at the place where he himself had been when he heard it first. The whistle was so clear and loud, that it sent a shiver through his very marrow. With a beating heart he quickened his pace, and when at the gateway adjoining the village he belonged to, he heard the whistle at the Pointed Rock. He here made off the road, and managed to reach home before being overtaken. He rushed into the barn, where he usually slept, and, after one look towards the door at his pursuer, buried himself below a pile of corn. His brother was in a bed in the same barn asleep. His father was in the house, and three times, with an interval between each call, heard a voice at the door saying, "Are you asleep? Will you not go to look at your son? He is in danger of his life, and in risk of all he is worth" (*an geall na's fhiach e*). Each call became more importunate, and at last the old man rose and went to the barn. After a search he found his son below a pile of sheaves, and nearly dead. The only account the young man could give was, that when he stood at the door, he could see the sky between the legs of his pursuer, who came to the door and said it was fortunate for him he had reached shelter; and that he (the pursuer) was such a one who had been killed in the Field of Birds (*Blàr nam Big-ein*) in the Moas, a part of Tìree near hand.

In its main outline, this tale may be correct enough. A hideous nightmare or terror had made the fatigued young man hide himself under the corn, and things as strange have happened, in the history of nervous delusions, as that he should have gone himself to the door of the dwelling house to call his father.

## **THE BATTLE OF GAURA.**

This was the battle in which Cairbre and Oscar, the son of Ossian, were killed. It was fought in Ireland about the fifth century, and from the poem or ballad, in which Ossian describes the battle and the circumstances of his son's death, and which is still extant in popular tradition, has always been the most celebrated of Celtic battles. Macpherson has worked up the popular accounts in the first Book of Temora, but not very successfully.

One night a little man, of the name of Campbell, was going home from the smithy, with the ploughshare and coulter on his shoulder, and in a narrow glen encountered a gigantic figure, that stood with a foot resting on each side of the valley. This figure asked him, "What is your name?" He answered boldly (as became one of the clan), "Campbell." It then asked, "Were you at the Battle of Gaura?" He answered "Yes." "Show me your hand, then, that I may know if you were at the Battle of Gaura." Instead of his hand, Campbell held out the ploughshare and coulter, and the figure grasped them so tightly, that they were

welded together and had to be taken back to the smithy, to be separated. “I see,” said the apparition, “that you were at the Battle of Gaura, for your hand is pretty hard.”

Two men were during the night on their way, it is said, to steal sheep. One beguiled the way by telling the other about the Battle of Gaura. Two figures of immense size appeared, one on the top of each of two high hills in the neighbourhood. The gigantic apparitions spoke to each other, and one said, “Do you hear these men down there? I was the second best hero (*ursainn chath*, lit. door-post of battle) at the Battle of Gaura, and that man down there knows all about it better than I do myself.”

## **THE BEAST OF ODAL PASS.**

From Kyle-rhea (*Caol-Redhinn*), the narrowest part of the Sound of Skye, the Pass of Odal stretches westward and forms one of the most striking Pass views in the Highlands. It was through it, that the first public road was made in Skye, about sixty years ago. At the time it was being made, the Pass was haunted by “something” awful—the more awful that its character was not distinctly known,—that enjoyed an evil reputation far and wide as “The Beast of Odal Pass” (*Biasd Bealach Odail*). This thing, whatever it was, did not always appear in the same shape. Sometimes it bore the form of a man, sometimes of a man with only one leg; at other times it appeared like a greyhound, or beast prowling about; and sometimes it was heard uttering frightful shrieks and outcries, which made the workmen leave their bothies in horror. It was only during the night it was seen or heard. Travellers through the Pass at night were often thrown down and hurt by it, and with difficulty made their way to a place of safety. It ceased when a man was found dead at the roadside, pierced with two wounds one on his side and one on his leg, with a hand pressed on each wound. It was considered impossible these wounds could have been inflicted by human agency.

## ***Luideag*, “THE RAG.”**

At a small loch between Broadford and Sleat, in Skye, called “The Lakelet of Black Trout” (*Lochan nan dubh bhreac*), thirty or forty years ago, the figure of a young woman with a coat about her head was commonly to be seen at night in the neighbourhood of and on the public road that passes that way. She went by the name *Luideag*, i.e. the Rag, or slovenly female. She did not answer when spoken to, and disappeared as silently and mysteriously as she made her

appearance. The place is lonely and far from houses, and there was no conceivable reason why any one, much less a female, should nightly frequent it. An excise-man passing the way once spoke to *Luideag*, first in English and then in Gaelic, but she answered not a word. A man was found lying dead on the road at the place, and she never appeared afterwards.

### ***Lochan Doimeig.***

On the skirts of Schiehallion, the steepest and one of the highest hills in the kingdom, there is a small loch or tarn, near Crossmount, in Lower Rannoch, the vicinity of which about 50 years ago was the scene of strange terrors at night. The road leading over the shoulder of the hill to Weem lay along the shores of this lake, and, where it was crossed by a small stream that falls into the loch, those who passed the way after dark were scared by strange sights. After crossing the ford the traveller was accompanied for about twenty yards by a dog, a he-goat, a dark moving mass, or some other object, which, from the unaccountable manner of its appearance and disappearance, could not be deemed earthly. A native of Kilchonan, in Rannoch, who had been for some time in the south as a gardener, came on a visit to his friends, and had to pass in the neighbourhood of the loch. It was ascertained that at Cashieville (*Cois-a-bhile*), where he left the strath of the Tay to cross the skirts of Schiehallion, he had taken a drink of porter. It was fourteen days after before it was ascertained he never reached Kilchonan. A search was instituted; men gathered from Appin and Athole and Rannoch, and the whole country round about, and continued the search for three or four days, even as far as Glenlyon, but without success. One of the exploring parties when above Crossmount was met by a woman, who advised them to search round *Lochan Doimeig*, for she had dreamt last night she was cutting rushes there. Soon after a man met them, who gave them the same advice, and said he had had the same dream. On going round the loch they found the dead gardener lying on a green mound on the brink of the stream, already mentioned as crossing the road, in the attitude in which he had stretched himself to take a drink.

### **RETURN OF THE DEAD.**

A former minister of East-side, Skye, was in his lifetime addicted to visiting his cattle fold. His whole heart was given to his herds, and after his death his ghost was to be seen revisiting his former haunts. An old man undertook to meet

and lay the ghost. The two met and saluted each other in the usual manner. When shaking hands, however, the man, instead of his hand, offered the ploughshare. After that the ghost never came back.

In the same neighbourhood, about thirty years ago, a man died suddenly. His wife watched the cows in harvest soon after this, lest they should leave the fank or enclosure, in which they were put at nights to keep them from wandering into the crops. She had occasion one night to leave her charge and go to a shop two miles away. On her return she went to close a gap (*beàrn*) in the fold (*buaile*). She found there her late husband, who told her not to be anxious, as he was watching in her stead. Every night after this he was visible to anyone who chose to go and look for him. He even came to the house to *ceilidh*, *i.e.* to while away the time, a favourite recreation in the Highlands (λέσχη of the ancient Greeks) of spending the evening, by gathering in a neighbour's house to listen to gossip and tales and idle talk. The dead man's attentions at last made the wife resolve to sell all she had and go to America. On the day of the sale the cattle could not be gathered; they seemed to be taken possession of by an undefinable terror, and the sale and projected emigration had to be abandoned. A little bird hovering about was evidently the cause of the wildness of the cattle. After this day the visits of the dead man ceased.

### **DONALD GORM'S GHOST.**

In 1616 a batch of West Highland and Island chiefs were brought before the Privy Council in Edinburgh, and bound over in restrictions as to the quantity of wine they were respectively to use in their houses. The narrative upon which the Privy Council proceeded is quoted by Gregory (*History of the Western Highlands*, p. 395): "The great and extraordinary excesse in drinking of wyne, commonlie usit among the commonis and tenantis of the Yllis is not only ane occasioun of the beastlie and barbarous cruelties and inhumanities that fallis oute amongis thame, to the offens and displeasour of God, and contempt of law and justice; but that it drawis numberis of thame to miserable necessitie and povartie, sua they are constrainit, quhen they want from their awne, to take from their nichtbours."<sup>[46]</sup> Among these lawless and reckless chiefs was Donald Gorm Mor (Big Blue Donald), of Sleat, in Skye, the then Lord Macdonald of the Isles. He was prevented from attending the Council by sickness, but ratified all their proceedings. "He named Duntulm, a castle of his family in Trouterness (in Skye), as his residence; and six household gentlemen and an annual consumption of four tun of wine was allowed him." He died that same year, and was

succeeded by his nephew, Donald Gorm Og (Young Blue Donald). So far history; the following tradition is well known in Skye:

Some family document went amissing, and its loss was likely to be of serious consequence to young Donald Gorm. At the same time the figures of Donald Gorm Mor and two companions were repeatedly seen on the road leading to Duntulm Castle. Efforts were made to accost them, but the three figures passed those who met them in some mysterious manner without being noticed, and without giving any opportunity of being accosted. They were then seen to enter the castle. An old man of the neighbourhood advised that seven staves of pine (*gathannan caol giuthais*), according to others seven spindles of oak (*seachd dealgun daraich*), with fire at their points, should be taken, and entry be made into the room in which the ghosts each day took up their quarters. This was done, and the phantoms, Donald Gorm Mor and his two companions, were found drinking. To give confidence to the intruders, that they might hear his tale, Donald said:

“I was in Edinburgh last night,  
I am in my own mansion to-night,  
And worth a mote in the sunbeam  
I have not in me of strength.”<sup>[47]</sup>

He then told where the lost document was to be found, and disappeared, saying:

“If it were not the slender lances of pine,  
This would be to thy hurt, Young Donald Gorm.”<sup>[48]</sup>

## **TAIBHSE CHOIMHLIG.**

Peter Brown, at Dun Crosg, in Glen Lochy, hid a ploughshare (*coltair*), and died without telling where. In consequence his ghost long haunted a waterfall in the neighbourhood (*Eas Choimhlig*), but no one had the courage to speak to it and ascertain the cause of its unrest. In every settled community, the ploughshare is of greater value, though less glory is attached to it than the sword or any other weapon, and in the Highlands, the same terrors were attached to the hiding of so useful an instrument, which afterwards, and in a more commercial state of society, were believed to follow the secreting of gold. The unhappy man who hid it, and died without revealing his secret, could not rest in his grave. Peter Brown’s ghost was commonly seen as a roebuck (*boc-earba*), that followed people passing the ravine of Coilig after dark, but also as a horse, dog, man, etc., and disappeared only about forty years ago. A weaver had the courage to meet it, and had a long talk with it. He was told what would happen to his family, and that his daughter, whose marriage was then spoken of, would never marry. When he returned home he took to his bed and never rose. There is now a bridge where the ford was formerly, and it was at the top of the bank above the ford the ghost was seen. It once fought a strong man, and the marks of the conflict long remained on the ground and trees.

## **KINGAIRLOCH, ARGYLESHIRE.**

A skiff was upset at Maodlach, the most rugged part of the coast of this rugged district. Of the two men who formed its crew, one was saved by clinging to the boat, but the other, a powerful swimmer, in trying to swim ashore, was drowned close to land. He omitted to put off his shoes and got entangled in the seaweed. Some time after his brother was coming from the smithy late at night



along the shore, carrying an iron bolt on his shoulder. When opposite the place where his brother's body had been found, this man was joined by a figure which, it was said, resembled a he-goat. He had at the time two dogs along with him, one of which cowered about his feet, but the other, a bitch, leapt up at his throat, and he had again and again to strike it down with the bolt he carried on his shoulder. The figure spoke, but it never clearly transpired what it said. It gave messages to deliver to former associates, especially to one thoughtless individual, warning him to amend in time. When the brother reached a house and came to the light, he fainted away.

### FLADDA-CHUAIN.

In this islet, which lies on the east coast of Skye, there lived at one time a native of Mull and his wife. In the place there is a burying-ground called "The Monks' burial-ground" (*Cladh a Mhanaich*), the existence of which adds much to the feelings of awe natural to so lonely a place—a solitary islet several miles from land in a stormy sea. A dead body came on the shore, and was buried, after being stripped of its clothes. After this the dead man came to the hut in which the Mull man stayed regularly at midnight, and sat warming himself at the fire which was left burning all night on the floor. As he bent over the fire, and held his feet and his hands to it, he said, "I will softly warm myself, I will softly warm myself" (*Ni mi mo theóghadh 's mo theóghadh*), and then add,

"Wife, who took my trousers off,  
And my nice black shoes from me,  
And the shirt my sister gave me,—  
To it, to it, cold feet of mine,  
Many a sea you've traversed."<sup>[49]</sup>

After the Mull man left the place, a party of fishermen, being in the neighbourhood, sent one of their number ashore, Red-headed Donald (*Dòmhnall Ruadh*) to prepare dinner for them in the bothy. As Donald was bending down to kindle a fire, something struck him violently on the skull and knocked him flat. Every time he attempted to lift his head the thing knocked him on the skull again. He felt sure it must be the ghost which warmed itself at the Mull-man's fire, the *Teóghan* of which his companions had warned him. Finding it would not allow him to rise, he lay on his back as he had been knocked down, and, not daring to look at his assaulter, wriggled himself along the floor till he got hold of a post, up which he clambered, to hide himself among the rafters. When his

companions arrived the ghost was found to be a pet ram, addicted, like its kind, to butting.

## HAUNTED HOUSES.

Some half a century ago or more a native of Rannoch resided at Bonskeid (*Bonn-sgaod*) in the neighbouring parish of Blair Athole. He was married to a Badenoch woman, who had brought servants with her from her own country. In fact the only servants about the house were from Badenoch. In obedience to the law, which ascribes that which is mysterious to that which is remote, Badenoch was at that time esteemed a great place for witchcraft and things “uncanny.” A series of unaccountable noises and appearances began about the house in Bonskeid. Turnips and peats, thrown by unseen hands, flew about the house, lights were blown out, furniture was mysteriously moved, bedclothes were pulled off, and no one could be sure that an article would be found by him where he had left it. In all this there was no appearance of mortal agency, and the whole business was at once assumed to be the work of evil spirits. A friend from Rannoch, who had been on a visit to the house, declared solemnly (and he was a God-fearing, trustworthy man) that he himself heard the spinning-wheel coming down stairs, and saw it falling in pieces on the floor of the room in which he and the family were sitting, without any visible agency, and without any part of it being broken or injured. He put it together again, and with his own hands carried it upstairs and left it in its original place. He had not sat long after coming down when the wheel again came in the same mysterious manner, and fell in pieces on the floor. On another occasion, as he stood in the byre, a turnip came and knocked the candle out of his hand. To his certain knowledge there was no one in the byre who could have thrown it. These flying turnips came sometimes as if they had been hurled through the wall. The unhappy man, in whose house this occurred, endured the persecution for more than a year, and was sadly broken in health and spirits by the trouble. One day as he stood on the hearth-stone, warming the back of his feet to the fire, the hearth-stone began to move. A Badenoch dark hussy (*Caileag dhubh*) was at the time standing by, with her elbow rested on the kitchen ‘dresser,’ and her chin on her hand. He observed her smiling, and it struck him she was at the bottom of all this bedevilment. He turned her and all the rest of the Badenoch servants away, and no further disturbance took place.

About twenty years ago, a house in Kilmoluag, Tiree, was the scene of similar disturbances. With one or two exceptions, all the people of the island believed

them to be produced by some supernatural evil agency, and all the superstition that with the spread of education had been quietly dying out was revived in renewed vigour. No one could deny the agency of spirits when the evidence was so clear. The annoyance began by the trickling of dirty water, mixed with sand, from the roof. The burning peats were found among the bedclothes, and pebbles in bowls of milk, where no peats or pebbles ought to be; linen was lifted mysteriously from the washing, and found in another room; articles of furniture were moved without being touched by visible hands, and stones flew about the house. The disturbances did not occur during the day, nor when a large company assembled at the house. Several went to lay the ghost, and a good deal of powder and shot was wasted by persons of undoubted courage in firing in the air about the house. The annoyance became so bad, and the advice of “wise people” so positive, that the family removed to another house, in the hope the evil would not follow. The removal, however, had no effect, and it is privately rumoured, the disturbances ceased only when some money that had gone amissing was restored. The cause was never clearly ascertained, but there is reason to suspect it was caused, as all similar disturbances are, by some one suborned for the purpose and shielded from suspicion by a pretended simplicity and terror.

Numerous similar cases, which have occurred in the Highlands, might be instanced. Instances occurring in England, from that of Woodstock downwards, and in the south of Scotland, differ only as the circumstances of the countries do. They all seem to have the same characteristic, the tricks are such as it is perfectly possible for human agency to perform, but it is believed there is no human being about the place who does them. Stones come flying through the windows, as if they were thrown from the sky, and are found lying on the floor; the leg of a wheelbarrow startles two persons engaged within the house in earnest conversation, by coming flying between them through the window, and striking the opposite wall with violence; a peat strikes the incredulous stranger between the shoulders, and he goes home a believer, etc. These cantrips are exaggerated by fear and rumour, till at last the devil is believed to be unusually busy in the locality. Once this belief becomes popular, the delusion is easily carried on.

### ***Bòcain, GOBLINS.***

The number of these, resembling *Luideag*, seen about fords or bridges, and near the public road in lonely places, as has been already said, are numberless. Every unusual sight and sound, in the locality which has the name of being haunted, becomes a goblin to the timorous, and one of the most tiresome forms

of ghost stories is, how the narrator was nearly frightened out of his wits (the quantity of which is not mentioned) by a horse standing with outstretched neck, and its head towards him, which he mistook for a gigantic human figure, by a white he-goat in the face of a rock, the plaintive cries of an owl, etc., etc. Most ghosts, however, are dependent not so much on the imagination of the individual spectator as on accumulated rumours, and their explanation is to be sought in men's love of the marvellous and tendency to exaggeration. On the high road leading from the wood of Nant (*Coill' an Eannd*) to Kilchrenan on Lochaweside, two or three summers ago, the traveller was met by a dark shadow, which passed him without his knowing how. On looking after him, he again saw the shadow, but this time moving away, and a little man in its centre, growing less as the shadow moved off. The little man was known as "*Bodach beag Chill-a-Chreunain*."

About the same time a ghost haunted the neighbourhood of Inveraray, and caused great annoyance to the post and others travelling late. A man had a tussle with a ghost at *Uchdan a Bhiorain dui* in Appin, and said it felt in his arms like a bag of wool. Phantom men were to be seen at *Uchdan na Dubhaig* above Balachulish; at *Ath-flèodair*, a ford near Loch Maddy in Uist, 'things' are perpetually seen, and it takes a very courageous man to go from Portree home to Braes, in Skye, after dark. A mile above the manse, where the road is most lonely, and near the top of a gradual ascent, sounds of throttling are heard and dark moving objects are seen.

In the island of Coll, the top of the ascent above Grisipol had at one time an evil reputation as a haunted spot. At the summit of the pass, there is a white round rock called *Cnoc Stoirr*. One night a man, on his way to the west end of Coll, reached the place about midnight, and was joined by a man on horseback. The rider said not a word, and accompanied him for near three miles to the "Round House," as a house, built for the accommodation of the farm-servants of Breacacha Castle was called. Whenever he attempted to enter any of the houses on the way, the silent horseman came between him and the house and prevented him. When they came to the Round House, the cock crew, and the horseman disappeared over the gate in a flame of fire. The man was lifted into the house, pouring with sweat, and going off in fainting fits.

In Glen Lyon, in Perthshire, there is a village called *Caisle*, and near it a ford (now a bridge) and ravine called *Eas a Chaisle*. In the early part of the present century, clods and stones were thrown by unseen hands at parties crossing this ford at night. At last, no one would venture to cross. A harum-scarum gentleman

of the neighbourhood, popularly looked upon as an unbeliever and a man without fear of God or man, crossed one night, and the clods as usual began to fly about him. He cried out, "In the name of God I defy all from the pit"; and on his saying this a mysterious sound passed away up the ravine, and clod-throwing at the place was never afterwards heard of.

The district, now forming the parishes of Kilmartin and Kilmichael, at the west end of the Crinan Canal, is known in the neighbourhood as Argyle (*Earraghaidheal*), probably from a Celtic colony from Ireland having settled there first. The people, for instance, of Loch Awe side say of a person going down past Ford, that he is going down to Argyle. In course of time the name has been extended to the county. The public road leading through the district was once infested by a ghost, which caused considerable terror to the inhabitants. A person was got to lay it. He met the ghost and exorcised it in the name of Peter and Paul and John and all the most powerful saints, but it never moved. At last he called out peremptorily, "In the name of the Duke of Argyle, I tell you to get out of there immediately." The ghost disappeared at once, and was never seen again.

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## CHAPTER VI. THE CELTIC YEAR.

*Bliadhna*, a year, has been derived by writers on Celtic antiquities from *Bel-ain*, “the ring or circle of Baal,” but the derivation is at variance with etymological analogies, as well as inadmissible from there being no satisfactory evidence that Baalim worship ever extended to the Celtic tribes. It can only be regarded as part of that punning affectation with which Gaelic scholarship is disfigured. The initial *bl* occurs in many words which have in common the idea of *separation*, and *bliadhna* is likely connected with such words as *bloigh*, a fragment; *ball*, a spot, a limb, and denotes merely a division, or separate portion, of time.

The notations of the Celtic year belong to the Christian period, old style. If there are any traces of Pagan times they are only such as are to be gathered from a few names and ceremonies.

The four seasons are known as *earrach*, spring, *samhradh*, summer, *fogharadh*, harvest, and *geamhradh*, winter. The final syllable in each of these names is *ràidh*, a quarter or season of the year, a space of three months; and the student of Gaelic will note that the long and heavy vowel, of which it consists, is, contrary to the common rule affecting long vowels, shortened and made an apparently indifferent terminal syllable. It is still deemed, in many parts of the Highlands, unlucky to be proclaimed in one quarter of the year and married in the next, and the circumstance is called being “astride on the seasons” (*gobhlach mu’n ràidh*). It is an old saying, that the appearance of a season comes a month before its actual arrival; *mìos roi gach ràidh choltas*, i.e. a month before each season, is seen its appearance. The character of the seasons is described in an old riddle,

“Four came over,  
Without boat or ship,  
One yellow and white,  
One brown, abounding in twigs,  
One to handle the flail  
And one to strip the trees.”<sup>[50]</sup>

There can be no doubt the origin of the names given to them belongs to a period anterior to Christianity.

*Earrach*, spring, is derived from *ear*, the head, the front, the east. In naming the four quarters of the heavens, the face, as in the case of the Hebrew names, is supposed to be toward the east. The right hand (*deas*) is the name given to the south, and the adjective *tuaitheal*, from *tuath*, the north, means “wrong, to the left, against the sun.” Hence also, *toirt fo’n ear*, lit. to take a thing from the east, means to observe; *earalas*, foresight, *i.e.* the having a thing in view; *earar*, the day after to-morrow, *i.e.* the day in front of it. The Latin *bos*, and the Greek ἔας or ἦς would indicate that the ancient Celtic name of the season was *fearrach*, and if so it may be connected with *fear*, vir, a man, the first *par excellence*, *for*, before, *furasda*, easy, etc. *Eàrr* means the tail, and the long syllable shows it to be only another form of *iar*, west, behind, after, the opposite of *ear*. Frequently these names for east and west are known as *sear* and *siar*, as *e.g. cha-n fhearr an gille shiar na’n gille shear*, “the lad from the west is no better than the lad from the east,” that is, it is but six of the one and half a dozen of the other.

*Samhradh*, summer, according to old glossaries, is from obs. *samh*, the sun, and means the sun season or quarter. This corresponds with the English name, which is evidently a softened form of *sun-mer*. *Samh* is now used to denote “the suffocating smell produced by excessive heat.”<sup>[51]</sup> In Tiree, it is the name given to the hazy heavy appearance of the Western ocean, and few expressions are more common than *samh chuain t-siar*, the oppressive feeling of which the uneasy sea on the west side of the island is productive. In the North Hebrides *samh* means the ocean itself. A common description over the whole Highlands of an intolerable stench is *mharbhadh e na samhanaich*, *i.e.* it would kill the savage people living in caves near the ocean, as giants were fabled to do.

*Fogharadh*, autumn, is likely connected with *fogh*, said to mean ease, hospitality, and *foghainn*, to suffice, with the same root idea of *abundance*.

*Geamhradh*, winter; Lat. *hiems*, Gr. χεῖμα. No doubt *geamh* is of the same origin as the Greek and Latin words, but it does not find its explanation in the Greek χεω, to pour. From its being found in *gèamhlag*, a crow-bar, *gèimheal*, a chain, *geamhtach*, short, stiff, and thick, there seems to have been a Gaelic root implying to bind, to be stiff, which gives a suitable derivation for the name of the season of frost and ice.

*Mios*, a month, is supposed to be connected with *mias*, a round platter, from the moon’s round orb completing its circle within the month. Greek μῆν, Eol.

μεις, a month; Lat. *mensis*; Sanscr. *mâsas*, a month, *mâs*, the moon. These show that undoubtedly the origin of the word is connected with the moon. The names in the Greek, Latin, and Teutonic languages show that there was originally an *n* in the word, and the Gaelic, as well as Sanscrit, bears testimony to the same fact, by the long vowel. It is a common thing in Hebrew for *n* at the end of a syllable and in the middle of a word to be assimilated to an immediately succeeding consonant, and it is more likely it so disappeared in some languages than that it was assumed by others. Another Gaelic name for the moon, *ré*, is also used to denote a portion of time; *ri mo ré*, during my lifetime.

Computation of time, however, by months and days of the month, as at present, was entirely unknown to the Highlander of former days; and even yet, the native population do not say “on such a day of such a month,” but so many days before or after the beginning of summer or other season, or before and after certain well-known term days and festivals, as St Bride’s day, St Patrick’s day, Whitsunday (*caingis*), Hallowtide (*Samhuinn*), etc. The time is always reckoned by the old style, and this difference of notation is at first confusing to a stranger. For instance, when told that the ling fishing on the West Coast lasts from the middle of spring till five weeks of summer, it will take a little thought on his part to realise that this means from the beginning of April to about the 18th of June. Names for the months are to be found in dictionaries, but they are obviously manufactured from the Latin names, and confined to modern printed Gaelic.

A connected account of the festivals and days by which the year was marked, must begin with the festivities by which its advent was celebrated.

## NOLLAIG.

The seven days from Christmas to the New Year were called *Nollaig*, and in the good easy-going olden times no work was done during them, but men gave themselves up to friendly festivities and expressions of goodwill. Hence the sayings, “The man whom Christmas does not make cheerful, Easter will leave sad and tearful,”<sup>[52]</sup> and “There is no Christmas without flesh.”<sup>[53]</sup> Christmas day was called “the day of big Nollaig” (*Latha Nollaig mhór*), and the night before it “the night of Cakes” (*oidhche nam bannagan*); while New-Year day was known as “the day of little Nollaig” (*Latha Nollaig bhig*), and the night before it “the night of blows” (*oidhche nan Calluinnean*).

The name *Nollaig* is from the Latin *natalis*, as is made certain by the Welsh word being *Nadolig*; and therefore corresponds to the English Christmas.



Various explanations are given of the name of the night before it. Some say *bannag* means “a feast of women,” from *bean*, a wife, a feast of rejoicing, such as is customary when a child is born, being prepared by women this evening in memory of the birth of Christ. Others say the *bannag* is the cake presented by them to every one who entered the house that night. If the word means a cake, it is only applied to Christmas cakes or those used on this day. When there was a person of means, he took every one he met that week, especially the poor, to his house, and gave him his *bannag*, a large round cake (*bonnach mòr cruinn*).

New-Year’s night, or Hogmanay, was variously known as “the night of the candle” (*oidhche Choinnle*) and “the night of the blows or pelting” (*oidhche nan Calluinn*, a *Challuinn*). The former name may have been derived from some religious ceremonies being performed by candle-light, as is suggested to be the origin of the English name Candlemas (2nd February), or from a candle being kept lighted till the New Year came in. The other name is said to be from the showers of rattling blows given to a dry cow’s hide used in the ceremonies of the evening, *colluinn* being also used to denote a thundering blow, or what is called in the Lowlands “a lounding lick” (*stràic mhòr*). Thus, *thug e aon cholluinn air* (he gave him one resounding blow); *bi tu air do dheagh cholluinneachadh* (you will be severely beaten). The word, however, as was long ago pointed out by Lhuyd (*Archæologia Britannica*, 1707) is from *Calendæ*, the first day of every month, this being the beginning of the whole year, and the night being in the Highlands reckoned as preceding the day.

## CALLUINN.

Towards evening men began to gather and boys ran about shouting and laughing, playing shinty, and rolling “pigs of snow” (*mucan sneachda*), *i.e.* large snowballs. The hide of the mart or winter cow (*seiche a mhairt gheamhraidh*) was wrapped round the head of one of the men, and he made off, followed by the rest, belabouring the hide, which made a noise like a drum, with switches. The disorderly procession went three times *deiseal*, according to the course of the sun (*i.e.* keeping the house on the right hand) round each house in the village, striking the walls and shouting on coming to a door:

“The *calluinn* of the yellow bag of hide,  
Strike the skin (upon the wall)  
An old wife in the graveyard,  
An old wife in the corner,

Another old wife beside the fire,  
A pointed stick in her two eyes,  
A pointed stick in her stomach,  
Let me in, open this.”<sup>[54]</sup>

Before this request was complied with, each of the revellers had to repeat a rhyme, called *Rann Calluinn* (i.e. a Christmas rhyme), though, as might be expected when the door opened for one, several pushed their way in, till it was ultimately left open for all. On entering each of the party was offered refreshments, oatmeal bread, cheese, flesh, and a dram of whisky. Their leader gave to the goodman of the house that indispensable adjunct of the evening's mummeries, the *Caisein-uchd*, the breast-stripe of a sheep wrapped round the point of a shinty stick. This was then singed in the fire (*teallach*), put three times with the right-hand turn (*deiseal*) round the family, and held to the noses of all. Not a drop of drink was given till this ceremony was performed. The *Caisein-uchd* was also made of the breast-stripe or tail of a deer, sheep, or goat, and as many as choose had one with them.

The house was hung with holly to keep out the fairies, and a boy, whipped with a branch of it, may be assured he will live a year for every drop of blood he loses. This scratching and assurance were bestowed by boys on one another, and was considered a good joke.

Cheese was an important part of the refreshments, and was known as the Christmas cheese (*Càise Calluinn*). A slice, cut off at this feast, or a piece of the rind (*cùl na mulchaig*), if preserved and with a hole made through it, has strange virtues. It was called *laomachan*, and a person losing his way during the ensuing year, in a mist or otherwise, has only to look through the hole and he will see his way clearly. By scrambling to the top of the house, and looking through it down the *fàr-lus* (the hole in the roof that served in olden times for chimney and window), a person can ascertain the name of his or her future husband or wife. It will prove to be the same as that of the first person seen, or heard named. A piece of *laomachan* is also valuable for putting under one's pillow to sleep over.

In this style the villagers, men and boys, went from house to house, preceded in many cases by a piper, and drowning the animosities of the past year in hilarity and merriment.

### **CHRISTMAS RHYMES (*Rann Calluinn*).**

In general the rhymes used, when seeking admittance, varied but little in different districts. Sometimes an ingenious person made a rhyme suitable to the place and people, and containing allusions to incidents and character that increased the prevailing fun. The following is one of the most common of the class:

“I have come here first  
To renew the Hogmanay;  
I need not tell about it,  
It was kept in my grandfather’s time.  
The Calluinn Breast-stripe is in my pocket,  
A goodly mist comes from it;  
The goodman will get it first,  
And shove its nose into the fire upon the hearth.  
It will go sunwise round the children,  
And particularly the wife will get it;  
’Tis his own wife best deserves it,  
Hand to distribute the Christmas cakes.  
Rise down, young wife,  
And young wife who hast earned praise;  
Rise (and come) down, as you were wont,  
And bring down our *Calluinn* to us.  
The cheese, that has the smooth face,  
And butter eye has not blinked;  
But if you have not that beside you,  
Bread and flesh will suffice.  
There is water in my shoes,  
And my fingers are cut,  
There is in beside the fire,  
What will cure my complaint,  
And if you have room to move,  
Rise and bring down the glass.”

The following New-Year’s rhyme must have tried the breath of the speaker and the patience of his listeners considerably. It consists probably of several separate rhymes tagged together, and the allusions it contains to the “big clerk of the street,” etc., make it highly probable the ceremonies of the evening were remains of the Festival of Fools, and had their origin in the streets of Rome. The rhyme is given as it came to hand.

“Bless this cheerful dwelling,  
With a musical voice,  
That it be like a royal palace,  
Without being wasteful.  
Bless each man  
Who surrounds this gathering,  
From the one grown grey with seniority  
To the one of infant’s age.  
Bless our gentle men,  
And our young children,  
All who chance at this time  
To come to Donald’s.  
Men! this begins my tale  
And I must tell it.  
Ho! each black, black generous one!  
Hò-go! each generous one!  
Divide this portion  
My servant harrowed!  
More produce!  
Then it was that Margaret said,  
‘O dear! more produce!’  
Then said Mary,  
‘My dearest dear!  
Martin is behind the door,  
Listening to us!’  
‘That is his excuse,’ said she.  
Hu fudar! hei fedar!  
Up with you, you cajoler!  
Fierce icinesses rose  
On Donald,  
He levelled at Margaret  
Fair abuse!  
He gave a tap to the harp,  
And the strings sounded.  
He quickly drew a *crambat*  
And tried to tune it.  
‘You have done a mischief,’ said the clerk,  
‘That I don’t regret!  
Utter ruin has come upon you,

With your broken stick!’  
‘You have a healing vessel,’  
Said the harper.  
‘When you are tried with it a second time,  
’Twill make the stick whole;  
So your share be yours of the healing cup.  
O dearest sir!  
May that stick of many virtues  
Be full of produce!’  
I went on candle night to hold New Year revel,  
In the house of fat puddings,  
I asked admittance at the door,  
Coaxingly with fair words;  
The big clerk of the street spoke  
A senseless word,  
‘If my gold crook were in my hand,  
I would not let your head whole from the door.’  
I took the north turn to the door,  
That was a north turn of mischief to me;  
I struck the big toe of my foot  
In the face of a stone,  
The pin fell, the pan fell,  
The harrows in the door fell,  
They made a cling clang clattering!  
Rise down, young wife,  
And honest dame, that hast carried praise,  
Be womanly as thou wert wont,  
And bring our Christmas gifts to us.  
The smoothed-faced cheese,  
And entrails prepared with juice;  
But if these are not convenient,  
Bread and cheese will suffice.  
It was not greed with open mouth  
That brought me to the town,  
But a hamper  
On my servant’s back!  
A white servant catch me,  
Fatness burns me!  
Open and let me in!

‘True for him,’ said the goodman, ‘let him in.’”

The following rhyme was appointed for all who had nothing else to say:

“I do not dislike cheese,  
And have no aversion to butter;  
But a little drop from the cask  
My throttle is in quest of.”

## NEW-YEAR NIGHT.

It was a practice not to be neglected to keep the fire alive in the house all night. No one was to come near it but a friend, and, as an additional security against its going out, candles were kept burning. Hence, the other name given to the night, *Oidhche Choinnle*, i.e. candle night. There was a rhyme (which the writer has not been able to recover) to be said when feeding the fire. By this means evil was kept away from the house for the subsequent year. If the fire went out no kindling could be got next day from any of the neighbours. The first day of the year was a quarter-day, on which it was unlucky to give fire out of the house. It gave the means to witches and evilly-disposed people to do irreparable mischief to the cattle and their produce. The dying out of the fire was, therefore, a serious inconvenience in days when lucifer matches were unknown. The women made use of the occasion to bake bread for next day.

Old men, provident of the future, watched with interest the wind the old year left (*ghaoth dh’fhàgas a Choluinn*). That would prove the prevailing wind during the ensuing year, and indicated its chief characteristics, as the rhyme says:

“South wind—heat and produce,  
North wind—cold and tempest,  
West wind—fish and milk,  
East wind—fruit on trees.”<sup>[55]</sup>

## NEW-YEAR’S DAY

(*Latha na Bliadhn’ ùr*); also called the Day of Little Christmas (*Latha nollaige bige*).

On getting up in the morning the head of the family treated all the household to a dram. After that a spoonful of half-boiled sowens (*cabhruich leth-bhruich*),

the poorest food imaginable, was given for luck. Sometimes the sowens were whole boiled, and in some places the well-to-do farmer's wife left a little over night at the house of every poor man on the farm. The custom of having this dish of sowens was known in the central Highlands, and in Lorn, but does not seem to have extended to Mull, Morven, or the Western Islands. The salutations of the season were duly given by the household to one another, and to every person they met: "A good New Year to you" (*Bliadhna mhath ùr dhuit*), "The same to you, and many of them" (*Mar sin duit fhein is mòran diu*). The boys rushed away out, to play at their everlasting game of shinty, and a more sumptuous breakfast than ordinary was prepared.

Nothing was allowed to be put out of the house this day, neither the ashes of the fire nor the sweepings of the house, nor dirty water, nor anything else, however useless, or however much in the way. It was a very serious matter to give fire out of the house to a neighbour whose hearth had become cold, as the doing so, as already said, gave power to the evil-minded to take away the produce from the cattle. Indeed it was ominous that death would occur in the household within the year. Hospinian tells that at Rome, on New-Year's Day, no one would allow a neighbour to take fire out of his house, or anything composed of iron (Ellis's *Brand's Antiquities*, i. 13).

It was unlucky for a woman to be the first to enter the house, or if the person were empty-handed. A young man entering with an armful of corn was an excellent sign of the year's prosperity; but a decrepit old woman asking kindling for her fire was a most deplorable omen. The same belief that some people are lucky as first-foots led to the "curious custom" in the Isle of Man known as the *Quaaltagh* (Ellis's *Brand*, i. 538). That word differs only in spelling from the Gaelic *còmhalach*, or *còmhaltaich*, a person, the meeting of whom is ominous of good or bad fortune. To ensure a good omen, a party of young men went in every parish in Man from house to house on New-Year's Day singing luck to the inmates. It was deemed an omen of good to see the sun this day.

Towards mid-day the men gathered in some suitable place, the largest and most level field in the neighbourhood, for the great Shinty Match (*Iomain mhòr*). A match was formed between adjoining districts and villages, or, if the village itself was populous, by two leaders, appointed for the purpose, choosing one alternately from those present till the whole gathering was gone through. It was decided who was to choose first by the one leader holding his shinty stick (*caman*) vertically, or up and down, and throwing it to the other, who caught somewhere about the middle. The two then grasped the stick alternately, the

hand of the one being close above that of the other, and the one who grasped the end, so that he could swing the stick three times round his head, had the first choice. Sometimes, to decide the point quickly, one asked the other which he would have, “foot or palm” (*chas no bhas*), meaning which end of the shinty stick he made choice of, the “foot” being that by which the stick is held, the “palm,” that with which the ball is struck. On a choice being made the club was thrown into the air, and the matter was decided by the point of it that pointed southwardly more summarily than by the “heads and tails” of a copper coin.

In the game a wooden ball (*ball*) was used in the daytime, when men could guard themselves against being struck by it; but when the game was played at night, in the dusk or by moonlight, a ball of hair or thread called *crìod* was used. The object of the game was to drive this ball “hail” (*thaghal*), that is between and beyond certain marks at the two ends of the field. Of course the two parties had opposite “hails.” The play commenced by setting the ball in a suitable place, and giving the first blow, called *Buille Bhàraich*, to the chief, proprietor, priest, minister or other principal person present. A player stood opposite to him, and if the ball was missed at the first blow, as sometimes happened from excessive deliberation, want of skill and practice, etc., whipped it away in the other direction, and, without further ceremony, every person ran after it as he chose, and hit it as he got opportunity. Two or three of the best players on each side were kept behind their party, “behind hail” (*air chùl taghail*), as in the game of football, to act as a guard when their adversaries too nearly sent the ball “home.” Sometimes the company was so fairly matched that nightfall put an end to the sport without either party winning “a hail.” Every player got as much exercise as he felt inclined for. Some did little more than walk about the field, others could hardly drag themselves home at night with fatigue. Much can be said in behalf of the game as the best of out-door sports, combining healthy, and, when the player chooses, strong exercise with freedom from horse-play.

A piper played before and after the game. The women, dressed in their best, stood looking on. At the end the chief, or laird, gave a dinner, or, failing him, a number were entertained in the house of a mutual friend. In the evening a ball was given, open to all.

New-Year’s Day, like the first of every quarter of the year (*h-uile latha ceann ràidhe*), was a great *saining* day, i.e. a day for taking precautions for keeping away evil from the cattle and houses. Certain ceremonies were carefully observed by the superstitious; juniper was burnt in the byre, the animals were marked with tar, the houses were decked with mountain ash, and the door-posts



and walls, and even the cattle, were sprinkled with wine.

By New-Year's Day the nights have begun to shorten considerably. It is a Gaelic saying that there is "an hour of greater length to the day of little Christmas" (*uair ri latha Nollaige bige*), and this is explained to be "the hour of the fuel lad" (*uair a ghille chonnaidh*). The word *uair* means "a time" as well as an hour; and the meaning perhaps is, that owing to the lengthening of the day the person bringing in firewood has to go one trip less frequently for fuel to make a light.

Christmas Day (*La Nollaige mòire*) was said to lengthen *fad coisichean coilich*, a cock's stride or walk, and the expression was explained to mean that the bird had time to walk to a neighbour's dunghill, crow three times, and come back again.

The same sayings are current in the Highlands as in the south. "A green Yule makes a fat kirkyard" has its literal counterpart in '*S i Nollaig uaine ni an cladh miagh* (i.e. *reamhar*) and in '*S blianach Nollaig gun sneachda* (i.e. *Lean is Yule without snow*).

There is no reason to suppose that any Pagan rites connected with the period of the winter solstice were incorporated with the Yule or *Nollaig* ceremonies. The various names connected with the season are of Christian origin; the superstitions, as that of refusing fire and allowing nothing out of the house, can be traced to Rome; the custom of a man dressing himself in a cow's hide, as suggested by Brand (i. 8), with every probability, is a vestige of the Festival of Fools, long held in Paris on New-Year's Day, and of which it was part that men clothed themselves in cow-hide (*vestiuntur pellibus pecudum*). The holding of a singed piece of skin to the noses of the wassailers is more likely to have originated in the frolics of the same festival than in any Pagan observance. The meaning of the custom is obscure, but its character is too whimsical to be associated with any Pagan rite.

## THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS.

(*Da latha dheug na Nollaig.*)

These were the twelve days commencing from the Nativity or Big *Nollaig*, and were deemed to represent, in respect of weather, the twelve months of the year. Some say the days should be calculated from New-Year's Day. "Whatever weather there is on the twelve days beginning with the last of December, the

same will agree with the weather in the corresponding month” (Pennant). In Ireland the twelve days were held to stand for the twelve Apostles, and “on Twelve Eve in Christmas they used to set up as high as they can a sieve of oats, and in it a dozen of candles all round, and in the centre one larger, all lighted. This in memory of our Saviour and his Apostles, lights of the world” (Brand, i. 25). The same, no doubt, was the origin of the Highland notation. They are also looked upon as the twelve days between old and new style. There is evidence in the saying, that “an hour and a half is added to Candle Day” (*uair gu leth ri Latha Coinnle*), that some such custom was known of old in Scotland as in Ireland; and though Candle Night (*Oidhche Choinnle*) is now a name given to Christmas night, there is a probability it originally denoted Twelve Eve, or the Feast of the Epiphany.

## WINTER SEASON.

The period during which the above festivities occurred, and sometime before and after *Nollaig*, was popularly known as “The Black cuttings of Christmas” (*Gearra dubha na Nollaig*), from its liability to tempestuous weather. The sky is then lowering and dark, the “level” sun gives little warmth, and high winds prevail.

The *Dùlachd* of winter extended over the six weeks preceding the middle of spring (*gu meadhon an Earraich*). Some (e.g. *Highland Society’s Dict.*, *sub voce*) call it *Dùhlachd*, and translate it simply “wintry weather.” Others call it *Dùdlachd*, and denote by it “the depth of winter.” The word is a contraction of *duaithealachd*, from *duaitheil*, extremely coarse and rough, an epithet applied to stormy weather. Thus, *nach duaitheil an t-sid?* is it not desperately coarse weather? *Ceann reamhar an duaithealais*, “the thick end of coarseness,” denotes extremely rough usage.

Handsel Monday (*Di-luain an t-sainnseil*) was the first Monday after New-Year’s Day, and was the principal day in the whole year for *deachainn*, i.e. for making trials and forecasts of the future. It derives its name from *sainnseal*, Scot. handsel, a present or gift in his hand given this day to every visitor to a house. *Sainnseal sona* is “a happy or fortunate present.” In some districts cock-fighting was practised in the schools, and children brought a gratuity (in money) to the schoolmaster. In other districts this was not the case till Shrovetide (*Di-màirt Inid*).

In Skye the day is called *Di-luain Traosda*; and it is from it the 12 days,

corresponding in weather to the 12 months of the year, are computed.

## **FEBRUARY (*Faoilleach*).**

The name *Faoilleach* is said to mean “Wolf-month,” from *faol*, wild, whence also *faol-chu*, a wolf, lit. a wild dog. It embraces the last 14 days of winter and the first 14 days of spring, the former being called the winter *Faoilleach* (*am Faoilleach geamhraidh*), the latter the spring (*am Faoilleach Earraich*). It is also known as “the Dead Month” (*a’ marbh mhiòs*). Winter is still ruling the inverted year, and all nature seems to be dead. The trees have long lost their foliage, the grass gives no sign as yet of returning growth, and fields and fallows are bare. When over all there is a coating of snow the name of “Dead Month” appears peculiarly appropriate. The time, being reckoned by old style, corresponds almost exactly to the present month of February, and the saying that “every month in the year curses a fair February.” is amply corroborated by the Gaelic sayings regarding it. Old men liked it to commence with a heavy storm and end with a calm, or (to use their own words) “to come in with the head of a serpent and go out with a peacock’s tail” (*tighinn a stigh le ceann na nathrach, ’s dol amach le earball peucaig*). There are to be three days of calm during it, according to the saying, “Three days of August in February, and three days of February in August” (*trì la Faoilleach san Iuchar, ’s trì la Iuchar san Fhaoilleach*). Both the February calm and the August storm, however, have become proverbial for their uncertainty and short duration. “February calm and August wind” (*Fia’ Faoilleach is gaath Iuchar*) are the most fickle things in the world. In the north it was said mist in February means snow next day (*Ceò san Fhaoilleach, sneachda maireach*). Old people said, “Better the land be plundered than a calm morning in February.”<sup>[56]</sup> The most unreasonable of expectations is to expect black “brambles in February” (*smeuran dubha san Fhaoilleach*).

It is unfortunate if the heat of this season is such, as old men say they have seen it, that the cattle run with the heat; but it is a healthy sign of the season if men go about with their hands wrinkled with the cold till they resemble an animal’s hoof, and kept in their pockets (anciently belts) for warmth.

“Wild month, wild month, hoof in belt  
Much rejoicing should be held;  
Cows and sheep running in heat,  
Weeping and wailing then are meet.”<sup>[57]</sup>

It was said to be as unnatural to hear thunder at this time as to hear a calf lowing in its mother’s womb (*laogh a geumraich am broinn a mhàthiar*).

### ***Earrach beag nam Faochag.***

“The little Spring of Whelks” is the period from Christmas (*Nollaig*) to St Bride’s day, or beginning of February. That species of shellfish is then at its best, and the soup made from it, called *siabh* or *brochan fhaochag*, was deemed as good as flesh.

### **ST. BRIDE’S DAY.**

St. Bridget’s, or St. Bride’s day (*Feill Brìde, Brithid*) is the first day of spring, consequently the middle of the *Faoilleach*, the 1st of February, O.S., but the 13th New Style. It is frequently confounded with Candlemas, but that day is the 2nd February, whereas St. Bride’s Day is the 1st—this mistake is made by Martin (*West. Isl.*, 1716, p. 119). He says that on the 2nd of February “the mistress and servants of each family take a sheaf of oats, and dress it up in woman’s apparel, put it in a large basket, and lay a wooden club by it, and this they call Briid’s Bed; and then the mistress and servants cry three times, Briid is come, Briid is welcome” (Brand, i. 56). The custom is long extinct in the parts of the Highlands with which the writer is acquainted and the only particulars connected with it he has heard are, that on St. Bride’s Day a bed of birch twigs (*leaba bharraich*) was made by the women, and that they then cried at the door, “Bride, Bride, come in, your bed is ready” (*Brìde, Brìde, thig astigh, tha do leaba dean-te*).

As in the case of many Gaelic festivals, ceremonies, and other antiquities, the origin of St. Bride’s Day is to be traced directly to Ireland. St. Bridget, we are told, was the first nun in Ireland, and founded her first cell where the city of Kildare now stands, in 585. She was a native of Ulster, and, after building monasteries and performing miracles, became Patroness of Ireland. In 1185 her body was found in the same vault with those of St. Patrick and St. Columba. A well near her church in Fleet Street, London, gave its name, Bridewell, to a

palace given by Edward VI. to the city, for a workhouse and a house of correction. The honoured name of St. Bride, who during many ages was celebrated for her sanctity and piety, has thus by accident become associated with the criminal population.

It is a sign of the approaching spring that on this day the raven begins to build, and larks sing with a clearer voice. It has been explained in another part of this work, that there was a belief, the serpent had to come out of its hole seven days previous. The rhyme regarding the raven ran:

“A nest on St. Bridget’s day,  
An egg at Shrovetide,  
And a bird at Easter;  
If the raven have not these,  
Then it dies.”<sup>[58]</sup>

The corrections of the observations which it embodies is confirmed by White (*Nat. Hist. of Selborne*), who gives Feb. 14-17 as the period at which the raven builds.

In Tiree this was the day on which cock-fighting was practised, and gratuities were given to the schoolmaster. In the evening it was customary to have a ball.

The period from *Nollaig* to *Feill Brìde*, was reckoned at one month and three days.

## SPRING.

The *Faoilleach* introduces a series of names, peculiarly Celtic, and (so far as the writer is aware), having no equivalents in any other language. The divisions of time denoted by them extend to the beginning of summer, each name, in accordance with the genius of the Gaelic language, as shown in names of places, nicknames, etc., is descriptive. Almanacs have long superseded the ancient notations, and it is not now an easy matter to arrange them in their proper order, or to reconcile the accounts retained by tradition with Almanac notation. The length of time ascribed to each seems to have varied in different districts.

### *Feadag*, THE WHISTLE,

succeeds immediately to the Wolf-month (*Faoilleach*), though some place it

before *Cailleach*, and about St. Patrick's day. In M'Leod and Dewar's Dictionary it is said to be the third week in February, which reckoned by O.S. is from 1st to 8th March, N.S. It is thus made to succeed the *Faoilleach*, and the same seems the opinion of Hugh M'Lachlan, of Aberdeen, a most learned and accomplished man. In a poem on spring, he says:

“Season in which comes the flaying Wolf-month,  
Cold hail-stones, a storm of bullets,  
*Feadag*, *Sguabag*, the *Gearran*'s gloom  
And shrivelling *Cailleach*, sharp bristled.”

It extends to three days, and its boisterous character is shewn in the rhyme:

“*Feadag*, *Feadag*, mother of the cold *Faoilleach*,  
It kills sheep and lambs,  
It kills the big kine one by one,  
And horses at the same time.”<sup>[59]</sup>

### ***Gobag*, THE SHARP-BILLED ONE,**

lasts for a week, others say three, four, and nine days.

### ***Sguabag*, THE SWEEPER,**

seems the same as the three days called “The Eddy winds of the Storm Month” (*Ioma-sguaba na Faoilleach*). The appearance of spring is now to be seen, but the bad weather is not yet past. The worst weather comes back occasionally, and there are fewer gusts of wind, uncertain in their coming and duration, that well deserve the name of “Eddy winds from February.”

### ***Gearran*, A GELDING, OR PERHAPS *Gearan*, COMPLAINT.**

It is quite possible the latter may have been the original name, as there is always associated with it a period called *Caoile*, Leanness. It extends over a month, and in Skye is made to succeed to the *Faoilleach*. There was a rule known to old men, that “the first Tuesday of March (O.S.) is the last Tuesday of *Gearran*” (*a chiad Di-mairt de'n mhàrt an Di-mairt mu dheire de 'n Ghearran*). In Tiree, from which the lofty hills of Rum form a conspicuous sight, and to the green appearance of which in frosty weather, their snow-covered summits form a

striking contrast, it is said, that at the season “the big mare of Rum turns three times to her colt,” *i.e.* from cold and hunger. The expression refers to times when a little hardy breed of horses was found in the Western Islands, like Shetland ponies, and left to shift for themselves during winter. It was also said:

“Then said Gearran to Faoilleach,  
Where left you the poor stirk?  
I left it with Him who made the elements,  
Staring at a stack of fodder.  
If I catch it, said the May month,  
With the breath in the points of his ears,  
I will send it racing to the hill  
With its tail upon its shoulders.”<sup>[60]</sup>

The beast will pull through if it can “lift its ear higher than its horn,” which at that age (one year), it ought to do.

The high winds coming at this time, and well known in the south as the winds of March, were said in their violence to “send seven bolls of driving snow through one augur hole” (*Chuireadh an Gearran seachd bola catha, stigh air aon toll tora, leis co gailbheach’s a bha ’n t-sìd*).

The Gearran is deemed the best time for sowing seeds. The high winds dry the ground, and all agricultural seeds are the better of being put in “a dry bed” (*leaba thioram do’ n t-sìol*). It is a disputed point what precise date.

The Perthshire rhyme also testifies to the still stormy character of the weather. The calling the Gearran short supports the opinion of many, that it was properly only seven days:

“Then, said the short Gearran,  
I will play you a trick that is no better,  
I will put the big cow in the mud,  
Till the wave comes over its head.”<sup>[61]</sup>

Some say the Gearran is the month before St. Patrick’s day O.S., others fourteen days before it and fourteen days after, *i.e.* before and after 29th March.

### ***A Chailleach, the old wife.***

This old wife is the same as the hag of whom people were afraid in harvest,

the last done with the shearing had to feed her till next harvest, and to whom boys bid defiance in their New-Year day rhyme, viz.: “The Famine, or Scarcity of the Farm.” In spring she was engaged with a hammer in keeping the grass under.

“She strikes here, she strikes there,  
She strikes between her legs,”

but the grass grows too fast for her, and in despair she throws the hammer from her, and where it lighted no grass grows.

“She threw it beneath the hard, holly tree,  
Where grass or hair has never grown.”<sup>[62]</sup>

### ***Trì làithean nan òisgean, THREE HOG DAYS.***

In the rural lore of the south of Scotland, the three hog days are held to be the last three days of March, and to have been borrowed by that month from April (Brand, ii. 42). Dr. Jamieson (*Etym. Dict. of Scot. Lang.*) says, “Some of the vulgar imagine, that these days receive their designation from the conduct of the Israelites in borrowing the property of the Egyptians.”

There is a Highland explanation also connecting them with the departure from Egypt. They were days borrowed by the Israelites for the killing of the Paschal lamb. “Some went on this side of the hillock, some on that” (*Chàidh cuid an taobh so ’n Chnoc*, etc.).

They are perhaps the days called in Tìree “*trì latha na bo ruaidhe*” i.e. “the red cow’s three days.”

### ***Mhàrt, SEED-TIME.***

This name is doubtlessly derived from the Latin *Mars*, in which case it ought to correspond to the month of March, O.S. It does not commence till the 24th of that month. The word has come to signify a busy time of the year, whether seed-time or harvest, usually, however, the former. *Saothair a Mhàrt* is the “busiest time of spring”; *a ghaoth luath luimeineach Mhàrt* means “the bare swift March wind,” frequently mentioned in *Winter Evening Tales* to denote great speed, and *a Mhàrt tioram blath* means “dry genial March.” It is a favourable sign of the season when the ground is saturated with wet at its beginning. Old men wished,



“The full pool awaiting March,  
And house-thatch in the furrows of the plough land;”<sup>[63]</sup>

and deemed it a good sign if the violence of the wind stripped three layers of thatch (*trì breathan de thugha*) from the houses. The advice for sowing seed now is:

“Let past the first March (*i.e.* Tuesday),  
And second March if need be,  
But be the weather good or bad,  
Sow thy seed in the true March.”<sup>[64]</sup>

Others say, “though you cannot send a pebble against the north wind” (*ged nach cuireadh tu dòirneag an aghaidh na gaoth tuath*) you are to sow.

“A night in March is swifter than two in harvest” (*Is luaithe oidhche sa Mhàrt na dhà san fhogharadh*).

### ***Inid*, SHROVETIDE.**

The Gaelic name is from Lat. *Initium*, this being the beginning of Lent. It was always reckoned as “The first Tuesday of the Spring Light” (*chiad Di-màirt de’n t-solus Earraich*), *i.e.* of the new moon in spring. It is a moveable feast, and this is a simple way of calculating it. The plan adopted by the English Church is more complicated—Shrovetide is always the seventh Tuesday before Easter, and Easter is “the first Sunday after the first full moon, which happens on or after the 21st March; but if the full moon is on a Sunday, Easter day is the Sunday following.”

Shrovetide was called “*an Inid bheadaidh*” (shameless Shrovetide), because the day of the festival was held to precede the night, while, in the case of all the other festivals, the night or vigil was held to precede the day. A good reason for this will be found in a natural aversion to begin the austerities of Lent.

It has been already told<sup>[65]</sup> (art. Diabolus) how Michael Scott, or, according to Skye tradition, Parson Sir Andro of Rigg, near Storr in that island, went to Rome, riding on the devil, and first ascertained from the Pope the rule for calculating the day.

In schools it was the day for cock-fighting, and giving gratuities to the schoolmaster. The latter custom was observed with more correctness on the first

Monday of the year, being the day allotted for presents. The practice of cock-fighting is extinct in the Highlands, but presents to the schoolmaster are universally practised. The boy and girl who give the largest donation (and it seldom exceeds a shilling) are declared King and Queen of the school, and have the privilege of asking “a play” (*i.e.* a holiday) for the school.

The names connected with cock-fighting, still to be found in the Highlands, being Latin, shew the practice is not of native growth. Each boy came to the school with a dunghill cock under his arm. The head of the bird was covered and its tail taken out, to make it more ready to fight, and fight better when let loose opposite another bird.

Runaway cocks were called *fuge*, and the name is still given to boys who shirk fighting. Shouts followed the defeated bird of “run, run, cock with one eye” (*fuge, fuge, coileach cam*), and its owner had to pay a penalty of some pence.

Shrovetide was one of the great days for *saining* cattle, juniper being burned before them, and other superstitious precautions were taken to keep them free from harm.

Those curious or anxious about their future husbands or wives made a cake of soot (*Bonnach sùith, B. Inid*), of which they partook, putting the rest below their pillows to dream over.

It was believed that if there was fair weather at *Inid* it would be foul weather at Easter, and *vice versâ*, as the rhyme has it:

“Shrovetide said to Easter,  
Where will I get a place to play myself?  
Give to me a winter palace,  
And I will build a summer house for you.”<sup>[66]</sup>

### ***Carghas, LENT,***

is the period from Shrovetide to Easter. It extends to 40 days, and refers to the miraculous fasts of Moses, Elias, and our Lord. The Gaelic mode of calculation was, “Seven short weeks from Shrovetide till Easter” (*seachd seachdainean gearr goirid Eadar Inid is Càisg*). The name *Carghas* is a corruption *Quadragesima*, Ital. *Quaresimo*, 40, just as *Inid* is from *Initium*. *Inid a charghuis* is just “the beginning of the forty days.”<sup>[67]</sup>

## ST. KESSOCK'S DAY (*Féill mo Cheasaig*)

was March 10/22. It is said, "On the Feast of St. Kessock every eel is pregnant" (*Latha Feill mo Cheasaig bithidh gach easgann torrach*).

The Saint was Bishop in Scotland in 560, and has given a name to Kessock Ferry (*Port a Cheasaig*), near Inverness, and to a market held at Callander, Perthshire, for hiring, on the 22nd March, or 10th old style. The fair is known as "Tenth-day," but among the Gaelic-speaking population as "*Féill mo Cheasaig*." A rock at the west end of the village is known as "*Tom a Cheasaig*."

## ST. PATRICK'S DAY (*Feill Pàruig*)

is the middle day of spring and that on which the night and day are of equal length, March 17/29. A certain sign of the day is held in the Hebrides to be a south wind in the morning and a north wind at night.

The saint comes from Ireland to see his parishioners in Barra and other places on the west of Scotland, and has a favourable wind coming and returning. He is in Highland lore described as "Patrick who blessed Ireland" (*Pàdruig a bheannaich Eirinn*), and is said to have been married to the daughter of Ossian, bard, and last, of the *Feinne*. He was born A.D. 373, but it is disputed whether his native place was Scotland, or Wales, or England, or France. There can be no question that in Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland the more lively and kindly recollections of him have been retained. Numerous places called after him are found scattered over Scotland, Wales, and Ireland.

After this day (*seach gun leum an Fhéill Pàruig*) (lit. once Patrick's Festival has jumped) the limpet is better than the whelk, and is said in consequence to treat it with great indignity.

*Latha Feill Pàruig*  
*Muinidh bhairneach air an fhaochaig.*

Another piece of shore information connected with this season is that with the advance of spring "as horses grow lean, crabs grow fat" (*mar is caoile 'n t-each, 's ann is reamhrad am partan*). Others have it, "When the horse is lean, the whelk is fat" (*Nuair bhios an t-each caol bi 'n fhaochag reamhar*.)

The reviving influences of the spring are now making themselves visible, according to the saying, "There is not an herb in the ground, but the length of a

mouse's ear of it is out on St. Patrick's Day" (*Chaneil luibh san talamh, nach' eil fad cluas luch dhi mach, latha Féil Pàruig*).

Old men liked the days immediately preceding it to be stormy, and to see, as they said, "the furrows full of snow, of rain, and the thatch of houses" (*a chlaisich làn sneachda, làn uisge, 's tughan nan tighean*).

There are particularly high tides on St. Patrick's Day, and the annunciation of the Virgin Mary, according to the saying,

"The spring tides of Lady Day  
And the mad tides of St. Patrick's Day."<sup>[68]</sup>

*Marbhladh na Feill Pàruig*, the deadening of St. Patrick's Day, means the quiet calm waters that sometimes occur at this season; others say *Bogmharbhlaonn*, and say it means the swelling (*tòcadh*) observable at the time in the sea (from the increasing heat).

### **LADY DAY (*Féill Moire*).**

This was known as *Féill Moire an t-sanais* (St. Mary's Vigil of annunciation) to distinguish it from *Féill Moire Mòr* (the Big St. Mary's-day), the assumption of the Virgin, which was the middle day of autumn. It is March 25/April 6.

### **SHORE OR MAUNDY-THURSDAY.**

This was the Thursday before Easter, and was known in the Hebrides as "*La Brochain Mhòir*," the Day of the Big Porridge. It was now getting late in the spring, and if the winter had failed to cast a sufficient supply of seaweed on the shores, it was time to resort to extraordinary measures to secure the necessary manure for the land. A large pot of porridge was prepared, with butter and other good ingredients, and taken to the headlands near creeks where seaweed rested. A quantity was poured into the sea from each headland, with certain incantations or rhymes, and in consequence, it was believed, the harbours were full of seaweed. The ceremony should only be performed in stormy weather. Its object no doubt was, by throwing the produce of the land into the sea, to make the sea throw its produce on the land.

### **GOOD FRIDAY (*Di-haoine na Ceusa*).**

The Gaelic name means literally Crucifixion Friday. The day was the Friday before Easter, and was observed in memory of our Lord's Passion. There was hardly any belief that had a stronger hold on the Highlander's mind than that on no account whatever should iron be put in the ground on this day. So great was the aversion to doing so that the more superstitious extended the prohibition to every Friday. As a matter of course no ploughing was done, and if a burial was to take place, the grave was opened on the previous day, and the earth was settled over the coffin with a wooden shovel. The origin of the observance perhaps was that our Saviour's sepulchre had been previously prepared, being a new tomb hewn out in the rock.

It was said that if the day be cold, it is colder than any other, in fact the coldest day of the whole year.

### **EASTER (*Càsg*).**

The proper day for keeping this festival, the anniversary of our Lord's resurrection, was at one time the cause of bitter controversies in the Christian world. It was first a subject of keen dispute between the Eastern and Western Churches, and again between the Church of Rome and the Irish and British Churches. The feast is moveable, and depends on the time of the first full moon after the vernal equinox. Owing to rectifications of the calendar introduced at Rome, but unknown to the British Churches, two different days had come to be observed, and by the seventh century the discussion as to which day was the correct one had become so warm and the difference so scandalous that the civil powers interfered and the question was settled in favour of the Church of Rome by Oswy, King of Northumbria, at Whitby in 664. The Celtic clergy were accused of being Quartodecimans (a very good word in a controversy), that is, of keeping the festival, according to the Jewish mode of calculation, on the fourteenth day of the month Nisan, whether that day fell on a Sunday or not. The accusation is now universally acknowledged to be ill-founded, but it is likely they followed the Alexandrian rule on the point, by which the Easter festival could not begin till the eighth of March, a rule which had been at one time observed by the Church of Rome itself. Neither the cycle followed during the controversy by the Celtic Church, nor that followed by the Romish Church, is that now prevailing, so that if one day was of more value than another for the festival, both parties were in the wrong.

The rule now observed in the Highlands is "seven short weeks from Shrovetide to Easter," Shrovetide being "the first Tuesday of the New Moon in

Spring,” or, Easter is “the first Sunday of the second wane of the moon in spring” (*chiad Di-dòmhnaich de ’n dara earra-dhubh san Earrach*).

The name “Càisg” is but the Gaelic form of the Hebrew *Pascha*. The change of P into C, K, or Q is well known in philology, and the most noticeable difference between the Welsh and Gaelic branches of the Celtic tongue is, that the latter has an aversion which the former has not to *p* as an initial consonant, preferring *c* instead. Lhuyd (*Arch. Brit.*, p. 20) says, “It is very remarkable that there are scarce any words in the Irish (besides what are borrowed from the Latin or some other language) that begin with P, insomuch that in an ancient alphabetical vocabulary I have by me, that letter is omitted; and no less observable that a considerable number of those words whose initial letter it is in the British begin in that language with a K or (as they constantly write) C.” He then quotes as illustrations, W. *Pask*, Easter, Ir. *Kasg*; Corn. *Peneas*, Whitsuntide, Ir. *Kinkis*; W. *pen*, a head, Ir. *keann*, etc. He quotes from Vassius instances of a similar change in the interrogatives and relatives of the Greek Ionic dialect. A readily recognised instance is the change of the Greek ἵππος into the Latin *equus*.

On Càisg Sunday, the sun was believed in the Highlands of Scotland, as in Ireland, to dance soon after rising, and many respectable people are to be found who say they saw the phenomenon. The alternate glancing and darkening of the sun on a fitful spring morning was no doubt often so construed by those who stared too long at a brilliant object.

A liability to north wind has made “*Gaoth tuath na Càisg*” (the north wind of Easter) a proverbial expression. The most trying part of the spring is still to come, and it is an expression employed to moderate excessive joy, and to put people in mind that the cares of life are not all past yet, that there is “a long spring after Easter” (*Earrach fada ’n déigh Càisg*).

Another expression, reminding men that it is not too late to acquit themselves of their duties or hold rejoicings, is “a Feast can be kept after Easter” (*Gleidhear cuirm an déigh Càisg*).

Easter was a particular holiday with the young, and preparations were made for it long beforehand. Every egg that a boy could steal or lay his hands on unobserved, was hid by him in the thatch of an out-house, or in a hole in the ground, under a turf, or wherever else he thought his treasure would remain undiscovered. When the great day came, he and his companions, each with his collection of eggs, went away to some retired spot, at a distance from the houses,

and beyond the probability of being disturbed by their seniors. Here they had a grand feast of pancakes, and enjoyed themselves uncontrolled. The eggs were deemed of no use unless they had been secreted or stolen, and this originated, perhaps, in a feeling that with honestly or openly got eggs the feast was not so entirely independent of the older people.

The reason why eggs were used at all is supposed to be from an egg being emblematic of the resurrection.

Two Sundays were held as Càisg. The second was distinguished only by a better feast than usual in the houses. The first Sunday was called “Big Easter” (*Càisg mhòr*), and the Sunday after it “Old Men’s Easter” (*Càisg nam bodach*), corresponding to the English Low Sunday.

## **ALL-FOOLS’ DAY**

is variously known in the Highlands as “The Day of going on Fools’ errands” (*Latha na Gogaireachd*), “Cuckoo Day” (*Latha na Cuthaig*), and “The Day of Tricks” (*Latha nan Car*). Its observance is on the first of April, N.S., and this argues its very recent introduction into the Highlands. The tricks and practices of the day are the same as elsewhere, the sending of acquaintances on sleeveless errands. Sometimes, but only rarely, there is some ingenuity displayed in taking advantage of local and passing events to throw the most suspicious off their guard, and send them on fools’ messages. It is not difficult to impose on men with a serious face and a plausible story, when it entails but little trouble to see if so likely a story or so pressing a message is real.

## ***Bailc na Bealltainn.***

The fourteen days preceding May-day were known as *Bailc na Bealltainn*, “the balk or ridge of Beltane.” The sea is then as it were awakening, and is more obedient to the winds. *Balc* means a ridge, also swelling, strength, *onfhadh*, *foghail*. The weather threatens frequently without breaking.

“If warm May day be swollen [threatening],  
And it be dry the third day,  
And it be an east wind after that,  
There certainly will be fruit on trees.”<sup>[69]</sup>

## ***Bealltainn, MAY-DAY.***

The advent of summer is everywhere hailed with joy, and the day recognised as the first of the season is naturally one of the most important days in the calendar. Another day of equal importance in the Celtic year was the first of winter, and the names of the two days, *Bealltainn* and *Samhainn*, cannot be traced, like so many other notations of the year, to ecclesiastical sources. Like the names *Faoilleach* (the Storm month), and *Iuchar* (the Hot month), they are best referred to Pagan times.

*Bealltainn* is commonly derived from *Bel teine*, the fire of Baal or Belus, and is considered as sure evidence of the Phoenician origin of the sacred institutions of the Celts. It is a derivation, however, that wants all the elements of probability. There is a want of evidence that the Phoenician Baal, or any deity resembling him, was ever worshipped by the Celts, or that the fires kindled and observances practised on this day had any connection with the attributes ascribed to him; while the analogies of the Gaelic language prevent the supposition that “the fire of Baal” could be rendered “Beall-tein’.” Besides, the word is not *Beall-teine*, but *Bealltainn*, a difference in the final syllable sufficiently noticeable to a Gaelic ear. It is the difference between the single and double sound of *n*. Baal and Ashtoreth were the supreme male and female divinities of the Phoenician and Canaanitish nations, and are supposed to be personifications of the generative and receptive powers of nature, and to be identical with the sun and moon. In Hebrew and kindred languages, *Baal* is a mere title of honour, signifying “Lord or Possessor of,” and in Gaelic the Sun and Moon are both feminine nouns, merely descriptive of the appearance of these planets. There is nothing that indicates their ever having been looked on as divinities, or ascribing to them any attribute such as belonged to Baal. In Gaelic the noun limited or possessed always precedes the qualifying noun, and it would require strong evidence to show that “Baal’s fire” could be “Beltane” *i.e.* Baal-fire, and not “Tane-Bel” (*Teine-Bhàil*), *i.e.* fire of Baal. The contrast between English and Gaelic in this respect is often very striking, and a safe rule in etymology!

The final syllable is the same as in *Samhainn*, the end of summer, which is thought by Lhuyd, to be from *fuinn* (connected with the Latin *finis*), an end. In this case *t* is simply accresive. *L* has an attraction for *t* after it, as *m* has for *b*, and *n* for *d*. *Beall* is likely connected with the other words that have *bl* in their initial syllable, with a root idea of separating, parting, opening; and claims kindred with *blàth*, a blossom, *bial*, the mouth, *bealach*, a pass, more than with the title of a Semitic deity. It is the opening day of the year, when the rigours of winter



are parted with, and the seasons, as it were, separate. Behind lay winter, cold, and unfruitfulness of the earth, but before was warmth and fertility and beauty. The final syllable has no more to do with fire than it has in *gamhainn*, a stirk, *calltainn*, a hazel tree.

It was said, with truth, that whatever day New Year day fell upon, Beltane fell on the day following. “New Year’s day to-day, Beltane to-morrow” (*Nollaig an diugh, Bealltainn a màireach*).

There is sometimes very cold weather at this time, and this was denoted by the expression “The mournful linnet of Beltane” (*Glaisein cumhach na Bealltainn*). Snow at the time was known as “Snow about the mouth of May-day” (*Sneachda mu bhial na Bealltainn*).

On the night preceding it, *i.e.* Beltane eve, witches were awake, and went about as hares, to take their produce (*toradh*), milk, butter, and cheese, from the cows. People who believed in their existence were as earnest to counteract their machinations. Tar was put behind the ears of the cattle, and at the root of the tail; the animals were sprinkled with urine to keep them from fighting; the house was hung with rowan-tree, etc., etc. By having a churning past and a cheese made (*muidhe ’s mulchag*) before sunrise, the Fairies were kept away from the farm for the rest of the year. If any came to ask for rennet (*deasgainn*), it should not on any account be given to them. It would be used for taking the substance out of the giver’s own dairy produce.

When the day arrived, it was necessary, whatever the state of the weather, though people sank ankle deep in snow, or (as the Gaelic idiom has it), though snow came over the shoes, to get the cattle away to the summer pastures among the hills (*àiridh*).

No fire on this, or any other first day of a quarter of the year (*latha ceann raidhe*), was given out of the house. It gave the borrower the power of taking the milk from the lender’s cows.

People had a feast in their houses with better food than ordinary. The arrival of the cuckoo was looked for, and boys shouted “Cuckoo! cried the ‘gowk’ on yellow Beltane day” (*Gug-ùg ars’ a Chuthag latha buidhe Bealltainn*).

In the Statistical Account of Scotland, 1794, XI. 620, there is a custom described, as existing at Callander in Perthshire, of boys going on this day to the moors, and kneading a cake of oatmeal, one part of which was daubed black. The bread was then put in a bonnet, from which each drew a piece. The boy, to whose share the black piece falls, is obliged to leap three times through the

flames, at which the repast was prepared. The minister of Logierait (V. 84), says the festivities of the day were chiefly observed by herdsmen, and Pennant (*Tour*, p. 90), describes a similar feast of herdsmen, in which pieces of the cake were offered to the fox, hoodie-crow, eagle, etc., with a request that they would avoid the cattle during the year. In the south of Ireland, we are told (*vide* Brand on May-day customs), cows were made to leap over lighted straw. All this has been referred to Baal and human sacrifices, and the going through the fire and other observances, have been assumed to be the remains of Syrian rites. They seem to be nothing but parts of the numerous superstitious observances for the *saining* of cattle.

A *Sop seilbhe*, or “Possession Wisp,” was burned on land, of which possession was to be taken at Whitsunday. The wisp was of fodder or heather. The burning of it on the land, as already explained, insured possession (*bha e ceangailte aige tuille*).

### ***Céitein*, MONTH OF MAY.**

This is the month of which Beltane day, O.S., forms the centre, and consists of the last fourteen days of spring, and the first fourteen days of summer. Its derivation is from *ceud*, first, it being the beginning of the summer season. It is identical with the present month of May. “Better is snow in May, than to be without rain” (*’S fhearr sneachda sa Céitein na bhi gun uisge*).

The month preceding Beltane was called *Céitein na h-òinsich*, “the May-days of the silly one,” the word *òinseach* denoting both a silly woman and a cuckoo. The habits of the bird, which has no nest of its own, and goes about all day aimlessly uttering its peculiar note, has earned for it the reputation of being silly, as is witnessed also by the Scotch word *gowk*, and premature glimpses of fine weather are supposed to mislead it as to the advent of May.

### **WHISTLING WEEK.**

*Seachdain na feadaireachd*, the whistling week, is the first week of summer, and the name is in allusion to the loud, whistling winds, that are apt to occur at the time. It is unlucky during it to proceed with field operations.

### ***Màigh*, MAY.**

The name *Màigh*, for the first month of summer, is quite common in the Highlands, and is to be found in songs and proverbs. This is mentioned as shewing incontestably that Roman (or rather ecclesiastical) notations of time were adopted into the ancient Celtic calendar.

## **THE AVOIDING DAY OF THE YEAR.**

*(Latha seachnach na Bliadhna.)*

This is the third day of summer, and its name is almost the only part of the beliefs concerning it, that now survives. The writer searched far and wide for an explanation of the name, and only once heard one that was satisfactory. It was on this day that the fallen angels were expelled from Paradise, and on it people should avoid doing any kind of evil. If caught in the act, they will be similarly expelled from the regions of forgiveness, and be visited with “judgement without mercy.” If it falls on a Friday, it is unlucky to go on a journey.

Pennant says about it, “The fourteenth May is unlucky, and the day on which it falls.”

## ***Caingis*, WHITSUNTIDE, PENTECOST.**

This and Martinmas are the two principal term days in Scotland, at which half-yearly servants enter on their duties, and at which removals take place. At Whitsunday term (old style) especially, the 25th of May, the towns of Scotland present an animated appearance from the number of removals, or changes of residences. The streets are crowded with household goods being removed from one house to another. Tenants at will are removed and leases expire at this term.

In Lorn, and the districts to the south of it, along by Lochfyneside, the term is called *Feill Breunain*. St. Brendan the Elder, from whom the name is derived, was abbot of Clonfest in Ireland A.D. 578. His day is May 16-28. Kilbrandon parish (in Gaelic *Sgìreachd a Chuain*, the parish of the ocean) in the west of Argyllshire, derives its name from him, and there is a farm in the island of Mull of the same name. History records that the saint with 14 companions once made a voyage in search of Paradise, and in stormy weather, when the sea is rough and the sky inclement, and the earth is hid with driving showers [it excites a smile], that he came north in the hope of finding it. There are days indeed in summer in the Hebrides, when a glory covers the sea and sky and the hills “that encircle the sea,” when he might think that he was on the way.<sup>[70]</sup>

In Sutherlandshire, people reckon by the *Feill Chelzie*, a market held on Tuesday of the term, deriving its name from a wool manufactory, now discontinued, called *New Kelso*, near Loch Carron.

The names *Caingis*, Whitsuntide, and Pentecost, are modifications of one and the same word. Pentecost became *pencas* in Cornish, in Gaelic (which represents *p* of the Welsh dialects by *c*) *caingis* (Kinkis), as *pascha* became W. *pâsk*, Gael. *Càisg* (Kasg). The Gaelic *c* or *k* sound is represented in the Saxon tongue by *wh*. Thus we have *cuibhle* (cuile), wheel; *cuip*, whip; *ciod*, what?; *cuilein*, whelp; *co*, who?; *cuist*, wheesht! be quiet!; *caoin*, whine; etc. So *cencas* has become *Whitsun*. The feast has no name in the languages of Western Europe, but such as are derivations of the Greek word. The English name has been thought to be an exception, and to be, therefore, of modern origin. From the light thrown upon it by the Celtic languages, we infer that it is of the same origin as the rest.

*Caingis* is reckoned to be “at the end of a fortnight of summer.”

### ***Feill-Sheathain*, ST. JOHN’S OR MID-SUMMER’S EVE, 24TH JUNE-6TH JULY.**

On this day, the cuckoo was said to enter its winter house (*theid a chuthag na tigh geamhraidh*). It is not natural for its song to be heard after this. The bird may be seen, but it is not heard. It is, like the landrail, stonechat, or other birds that disappear in winter, one of the seven sleepers, who were believed to pass the winter underground.

*Seathan*, Swithin, is the old form of the name John, the common form being *Iain*, *Eòin*, and in Islay *Eathin*. It still survives in the name of the Clan Maclean, Mac-ill’-sheathain, also written MacGhilleòin. A former minister of Kilmore in Mull is still remembered as *Maighsthir Seathain*, and an exceedingly plaintive song, composed to her husband, who had been betrayed and executed for piracy, by his widow, begins “Swithin is to-night a dead one.”

“Tha Seathan nochd na mharbhan,”

the names being those now denoted by John.

### ***Mios crochadh nan Con, DOG-DAYS.***

(Lit. month for hanging dogs.)

This is but a boyish and sportive name given to the month preceding *Lùnasdal*, or first of August, the time of greatest scarcity with the poor. The stores of last harvest are exhausted, and the new supplies are not yet come in. If there is a scarcity of food for the dogs, it is recommended as the best thing that can be done, to hang them. Besides, the excessive heat makes it advisable to get rid of all superfluous dogs.

### ***Latha Martainn Builg, TRANSLATION OF MARTIN.***

(Lit. Martin of the Bag's Day.)

July 4-16 received its title of the Translation of Martin from being the day on which the remains of St. Martin, Bishop of Tours, 397, “the apostle of the Gauls” (who also gives his name to the Martinmas term) were transferred to the Cathedral of Tours. In Scotland the day is called St. Martin of Bullions Day, and it was a proverb that if the deer rise dry and lie down dry on it, that is if the morning and evening be dry, it will be a dry season till harvest; and it was a general belief over Europe that rain on this day betokened wet weather for the next twenty days.

The Day of St. Martin of the Bag is commonly translated St. Swithin's day, which is the 15th. St. Swithin was Bishop of Winchester, and no name of an English Bishop is found in the Gaelic calendar.

### ***Lùnasdal, LAMMAS, AUGUST 1-12TH.***

This, being a quarter day, formed a great day with old women for saining cattle, and performing those ceremonies by which evil was to be kept away from them for the next three months. Tar was put on their tails and ears, charms (*òradh*) were said at their udders, red and blue threads were put on their tails, and various observances were gone through with balls of hair (*rolag*), plants, fire

about the earthenware pipkins (*crogain*) in which milk or butter was to be put, etc. Curds and butter were specially prepared for a great feast held this day, at which it was highly important that everyone got as much as he cared for.

On Lammas day, the gad-fly “loses one of its eyes” (*Latha Lùnasdal caillidh chreithleag an leth shùil*). The creature is not so vicious after this date.

*Lùnasdal* is not a word of Gaelic origin, at least no satisfactory Gaelic etymology can be given for it. It is perhaps a contraction of the Latin, *luna augustalis*, the August moon. The Roman month was lunar, and was reckoned from the first appearance of the moon’s slender crescent in the sky. The moon in the harvest months is of more consequence to the husbandman than at any other season, and has always been taken notice of for its splendour. The temperature of the night air has much to do with this. The Gaelic bears its own testimony to it, in giving distinctive names to the autumn moon.

The corresponding English name, Lammas, had very likely the same origin, and it is a contraction of *Lunamas*. The derivation of it from Lamb-mas is an “affectation of punning,” and that suggested by Gen. Vallancey from La-ith-mas, “a day of eating fruit,” is extremely fanciful. The omission of *n* in the middle of a word, for the sake of brevity or from inadvertence, frequently occurs. So *g* has been elided in *Lùnasdal*. Augustus, which was adopted as the name of the sixth month B.C. 6, became *east* in Cornish and *eost* in Armoric.

### ***Iuchar*, THE HOT MONTH (*i.e.* AUGUST).**

The *Iuchar* consists of 14 days of summer and 14 days of autumn, and Lammas Day, O.S., being the first of autumn, corresponds to the present month of August. It is regarded, in point of weather, as the opposite of *Faoilleach*, the “storm month” of February.

The name is derived from an obsolete verb *fiuchadh* to be hot. Lhuyd (*Archæolog. Brit.*) renders *fiuchaeh*, boiling, and *fiuchadh*, a spring, *scatebra*. In another place he gives *fiuchadh* as an equivalent of the Latin *æstus*. In some districts of the north, the name of the season is still called *Fiuchar*. Linlithgow, celebrated for its wells, is known in the Highlands as *Gleann Iuch*, and the Linlithgow measures are called *tomhaís Ghlinn Iuch*. The dropping of *f* initial, as in the case of the Greek digamma, is too common to need illustration.

### ***Fèill Moire*, ASSUMPTION DAY.**

This is the middle day of autumn (*latha meadhon an fhogharaidh*), August 15-27. It was counted a greater day than St. Mary's Day (*Féill Moire*) in spring, and was called "the Big St. Mary's Day." Harvest operations were now vigorously pushed forward, and hence the saying, "Big St Mary's Feast in harvest, sheaf and binding and men with their coats off" (*an Fhéill Mhoire mòr a's t-fhogharadh sguab 'us ceangal 's daoine as an léintean*).

### ***Féill Ròid*, ROODMAS, SEPTEMBER 14-26.**

This day is the first of the rutting season among deer, and it was held that if the night before it (*oidhche na Féill Ròid*), be wet, or (as it was expressed), "if the deer took his head wet into the rutting season" (*ma bheir e cheann fliuch san dàmhair*), there will be a month after it of dry weather, and the farmer need be under no apprehension as to securing his crops. The belling of red deer among the hills on this night is magnificent.

The night succeeding Roodmas was called "the night of the nut," "the night of the Holy Nut" (*oidhche na cnò, na cnò Naomh*), a name, the reason of which is doubtful. Some say it arises from this night dividing harvest in unequal halves, as the kernel is divided in the nut. Brand (i. 353) mentions a custom of going a nutting upon Rood Day, and it seems to have been a popular belief that on this day the devil goes a nutting. This does not explain why the nut is called the Holy Nut.

The Holy Rood is the same as the Cross.

### **MICHAELMAS (*Feill Mìcheil*)**

is also known in the Roman Catholic districts of the Highlands, as "the Riding Day" (*latha na marcachd*). On the level green of Borg (*machaire Bhorg*), in Barra, a great race is held, the women bringing the horses, and sitting behind the men on horseback. In the scamper that ensues, it is a lucky sign if the woman tumbles off. All the expenses of the festivity are borne by the women, each of whom takes with her to the racecourse a large thick bannock of oatmeal, made with treacle, butter, etc.

### ***Samhain*, HALLOWMAS,**

is the first day of winter, and is also known as All-Saints' Day (*Latha nan uile*

*Naomh*), Nov. 1-13. It was a sign of a bad winter if it fell upon a Wednesday, according to the saying: "When Hallowmas is on Wednesday, it is afflictive after it" (*Nuair is Di-ciadaìn an t-samhainn is iargaineach na déigh*).

The coming of winter was hailed with more fun and merriment than any other season of the year. The cold was now fairly set in, the fruits of the summer, down to the very nuts, were gathered, and the young became desirous of learning their fate with regard to that subject of anxiety in every age, their future husbands and wives. This natural welcoming of winter explains the ceremonies of the day, and the games of the evening. Hardly any of them have reference to the practices or deities of the nations of antiquity or to Scripture, and this explanation must be sought for in Pagan times.

On the last day of autumn children gathered ferns, tar-barrels, the long thin stalks called *gàinisg*, and everything suitable for a bonfire. These were placed in a heap on some eminence near the house, and in the evening set fire to. The fires were called *Samhnagan*. There was one for each house, and it was an object of ambition who should have the biggest. Whole districts were brilliant with bonfires, and their glare across a Highland loch, and from many eminences, formed an exceedingly picturesque scene. Some find in them traces of the worship of the invariable Baal, but there is no reason to look upon them otherwise than as the natural and defiant welcome of the season, in which fires are most required, when the heat of the year is departed, and cold and frost and rushing winds cover all things with gloom. Bonfires are kindled on all occasions of public rejoicing, or excitement, and Hallowmas fires are a natural expression of the change of season. It is possible a deity was originally associated with the practice, but there is now no trace of him in name or practices of this day.

As the evening wore on, the young people gathered to one house, and an almost endless variety of games (*cleasan*) were resorted to, with the object in every case of divining the future lot of the company. Were they to marry or not, was it to be that year or never, who was to be married first, what like the future husband or wife was to be, their names, trade, colour of hair, size, property, etc.? were questions of great importance, and their answer was a source of never-failing entertainment. The modes of divination are of interest, from the light they throw on the character of the people among whom they prevailed, and from an antiquarian point of view, as remains of Pagan times.

A shoe caught by the tip and thrown over the house, fore-indicates the future by its position on the ground on the other side. In whatever direction the toe points, the thrower will go before long, and it is very unlucky if the shoe be



found with the sole uppermost, misfortune is “making for” him. A thin, fine shoe, used in this manner, led the man, fished up from the Green Island, to remark, after some years of silence:

“A thin shoe, little valued,  
It is hard to say who will wear it.”<sup>[71]</sup>

He might well say so, for the owner of the shoe died in a few days.

The white of eggs, dropped in a glass of pure water, indicates by certain marks how many children a person is to have. The impatience and clamour of the children often made the housewife perform this ceremony for them by daylight, and the kindly mother, standing with her face to the window, dropping the white of an egg into a crystal glass of clean water, and surrounded by a group of children, eagerly watching her proceedings, formed a pretty picture.

When the fun of the evening had fairly commenced, the names of eligible, or likely as possible matches, were written on the chimney place, and the young man, who wished to essay his fortune, was blindfolded and led up to the list. Whatever name he put his finger on would prove to be that of his future wife.

Two nuts were put on the fire beside each other, representing two individuals, whose names were made known to the company. As they burned together, or flared up alone, or leaped away from each other, the future marriage of the pair, or haughty rejection of each other, was inferred.

A dish of milk and meal (*fuaraq*, Scot. crowdie), or of beat potatoes, was made, and a ring was concealed in it. Spoons were given to the company, and a vigorous attack was made on the dish. Whoever got the ring would prove to be the first married. This was an excellent way of making the taking of food part of the evening’s merriment.

Apples and a silver sixpence were put in a tub of water. The apples floated on the top, but the coin lay close to the bottom. Whoever was able to lift either in his mouth, and without using his teeth, was counted very lucky, and got the prize to himself.

By taking an apple and going to a room alone, dividing it there into nine pieces against the name of the Father and the Son, eating eight pieces with the back to a looking glass and the face looking over the left shoulder, and then throwing the ninth piece over the same shoulder, the future husband or wife was seen in the glass coming and taking the piece of apple away.

A person, going in the devil's name to winnow in a barn alone, will see his future partner entering the door.

An unmarried woman, taking a ball of thread and crossing a wall on her way, went to a kiln or other out-house. Here, holding one end of the thread, she threw the ball in the dark into the eye of the kiln (*sùil àth*), or over one of the rafters or a partition wall, in the name of a sweetheart whom she had before fixed on in her mind, and calling out "who is down there at the end of my little rope?" (*co so shìos air ceann mo ròpain?*), at the same time she gave the thread a gentle pull. In reply, some one or something pulled the thread at the other end, and a voice called out the name of her future husband. There is a story of a tailor having hid himself in anticipation of this mode of divination being resorted to, and when the ball was thrown he caught it and gave the thread a tug. In answer to the question "who is this at the end of my little rope?" he said, "I am the devil" (*Tha mise, 'n deamhan*), and the woman to whom this frightful answer was given never tried divination again.

Young women sowed hemp seed (*fras lìn*) over nine ridges of plough land, saying "I sow hemp seed, and he who is to be my husband, let him come and harrow it" (*Tha mi cur fras lìn, 's am fear bhios na fhear 'dhomh, thigeadh e 's cliathadh e*). On looking back they saw the figure of their future husband. Hallowe'en being the night preceding the first day of a lunar month was always dark, and this ceremony was rendered more awful by a story that a woman once saw herself coming after her, and never recovered from the effects of the vision.

By dipping his shirt sleeve in a well to the south (*tobar mu dheas*), and then pulling off the shirt and placing it to dry before the fire, the anxious youth, if he does not oversleep himself, will see his sweetheart entering through the night and turning the shirt.

On putting an odd number of keys in a sieve, going to a barn alone, and there riddling them well "with the wrong hand turn" (*car tuaitheal*), the destined one will come and put the odd key right.

By holding a mouthful of water in the mouth, and going to listen (*farcluais*) at a neighbour's window, the first name overheard will prove to be that of one's intended.

The same knowledge was obtained by biting a piece of the last cart that sent in the corn, and with it in the mouth going, without speaking, to listen (*farcluais*) under a neighbour's window.

A common practice was to go and steal kail stocks. Unless the plants are

pulled surreptitiously, without the knowledge or consent of their owner, they are of no use for the purpose of divination. A number of young people go together, and having cautiously and with difficulty made their way into a kailyard, pull each one the first stock that comes to hand after bending down. It must be the first that the hand meets. The plant is then taken home and examined by the light, and according to its height, straightness, colour, etc., will be the future husband or wife. A quantity of soil adhering to it signifies money and property. When put for the night above the lintel of the door, it affords indications by the first person entering below it in the morning; and, put below the pillow, it is excellent to dream over.

A straw, drawn at random from a stack, indicates by the number of grains upon it what family a person is to have.

Three ears of corn similarly pulled and placed below the pillow for the night, will cause dreams of the future husband reaping them.

A plate of clean water, one of dirty water, and one empty being placed on the floor, and a napkin thrown over the eyes, the dish in which the person blindfolded puts his forefinger, indicated a maid, or widow, or none at all.

A piece of flesh being buried this night, if any living creature was found in it in the morning, the person burying it would be married; but if not, he never would.

If water, in which the feet had been washed, were kept in the house this night, <sup>[72]</sup> (and the Fairies were apt to enter the house when that was the case), a person putting a burning peat in it will see the colour of his sweetheart's hair in it.

If a mouthful of the top sod of the house wall (*fòid fàil na h-anainn*), or a mouthful from the clod above the lintel of the door (*àrd-dorus*) be taken into the house in one's teeth and any hair be found in it, it is of the same colour as that of the future wife of the person who performs the rite.

One of the chief performances of the evening was for young women to go to a Boundary Stream (*allt crìche*), (if between two neighbouring proprietors so much the better,) and with closed eyes to lift from it three stones between the middle finger and thumb, saying these words:

“I will lift the stone  
As Mary lifted it for her Son,  
For substance, virtue, and strength;  
May this stone be in my hand

Till I reach my journey's end.”<sup>[73]</sup>

The stones were for putting below the head when going to sleep.

Many other modes of divination were practised too tedious to mention, by slices from the plough, different metals, eating a stolen raw salt herring, sprinkling corn in front of the bed, etc., etc. These observances can hardly be characterised as superstitions; they proceeded from a spirit of fun more than from any belief in their efficacy. There are in every community many weak and simple people who are easily imposed on, and made to believe almost anything; but the divinations of Hallowe'en left an abiding impression on few minds.

### ***Feill Fionnain.***

St. Finan's Eve is the longest night in the year, and hence it is said of a very stupid person, “he is as dark as the night of St. Finan, and that night is pretty dark” (*Tha e co dorch ri oidhche Feill Fionnain, 's tha 'n oidhche sin glè dhorch*). The shortest day is called, in the Mackay country, the extreme north of Sutherlandshire, “The Day of the Three Suppers” (*Latha nan trì suipeirean*).

On this night it was said “the rain is wine and the stones are cheese” (*Tha 'n t-uisge na fhion 's na clachan nan càise*), and it was considered a joke to persuade boys to go out and see. “I remember,” says one who is a shrewd intelligent man, “about fifty years ago, when I was a little boy, sitting quite contentedly on the Eve of St. Finan's Day sipping with a spoon from a big tub of water, in the full hope that the next spoonful would prove to be wine.”

The name is derived from St. Finan, confessor, Bp. of Clonard, in Ireland, in the sixth century. This day is now fixed as the 12th December, but in the Highlands it is the shortest in the year, whatever day of the calendar that may fall upon. In olden times it was much esteemed, as the rhyme shows:

“St. Finnan's night of festivities,  
And Christmas night of great cheer.”<sup>[74]</sup>

Besides giving a name to the days of the calendar the saints were employed to designate local markets, St. Kessock's Day (*Fèill mo Cheasaig*) at Callander has been already mentioned. St. Connan's Day (*Feill Connain*) is the autumn market in Glenorchy; *Feill Fhaolain* is held at Killin; *Feill Ceit* at Kenmore; and in other places we have *Feill Peadair*, *F. Aindreis*, etc. Old men spoke of *Feill an*

*Diomhanais*, the festival of St. Idleness, a holiday frequently observed by a great many people. *Latha na Sluasaid*, Shovel Day, means the day of one's burial. *Bliadhna na Braoisge*, Grinning Year, and *La Luain*, Moon-day (*i.e.* Monday come-never), mean the same thing, the Greek Kalends. *Bliadhna nam Brisgeinean*, the Year of Silverweed roots, was shortly after Culloden, and is remembered in Tiree as a year of great scarcity. The land had been neglected in previous years from the disturbed state of the country, and in spring the furrows were white with roots (*brisgeinean*), and people made meal of them.

## DAYS OF THE WEEK.

These play a more important part in Highland superstition than even the seasons of the year. The names by which they are known are not Celtic; two, Wednesday and Thursday, are of Scandinavian or Teutonic origin, and the rest are from the Latin. The superstitions, as might be expected, can in most cases be traced directly to incidents in Scripture history. The division of time into weeks was introduced with the Christian religion from Ireland, and the Irish must be held responsible for the names adopted. Neither in the names nor in the superstitions is there any trace of an age anterior to Christianity.

*Dì*, which is prefixed to each name, in the sense of *day*, is kindred with the Latin *dies*, and occurs in slightly modified forms in all the Celtic dialects. It is curious that in Gaelic it occurs in no other form or combination in the sense of "day," and a suspicion is thereby created that it is merely an adaptation of the Latin word, an easier adaptation, because there are words of similar sound and kindred meaning in Gaelic.

### *Di-dòmhnach*, SUNDAY (*dies Domini*).

The name *Dòmhnach* for our Lord is not common. It is evidently derived from the Latin *Dominus*. It occurs in the proper name *Maol-Dòmhnach* Ludovic, lit. the bald one (*i.e.* the shaven priest) of our Lord, a name still to be found in Skye, and formed like *Maol-Mhoire*, Miles (lit. the priest of St. Mary), *Maol-Ciaran*, *Maol-Ruainidh*, etc. There is a streamlet near Strowan, in Blair Athole, called *allt Dòmhnach*, the streamlet of our Lord; and a *Tobar an Dòmhnach*, the well of our Lord, in Balmeanach, in the west of Tiree. In a charm for fulling cloth the expression occurs, "if he (the wearer of the cloth) enter field or fight, the full succour of our Lord be his" (*Slàn chomraich an Dòmhnach da*).

The day is also known as "*an Dòmhnach*" without the prefix of *di*. Other

names are those occurring in Scripture, Sabbath, etc.

The plant pulled on Sunday is, according to a proverbial expression, without good or harm (*luibh an Dòmhnach gun mhath gun chron*).

### ***Di-luain*, MONDAY.**

*Luain* is said in dictionaries to be a Gaelic name for the moon, agreeing in origin with the Latin *luna*. It is used only in the name of this day, and in the expression *la luain*, a poetic phrase for Monday come-never, *i.e.* “never more.” The adjective *luaineach*, restless, is supposed to be derived from it, but is a word never applied to the moon. It applies to whatever moves restlessly by fits and starts, from place to place, without staying long in one place, and never to anything on account of change of shape or form. Its derivation from *la uaine*, green day, is absurd, and there are grounds for suspicion, that *luain* is a word manufactured by ancient Gaelic grammarians from the Latin.

It was deemed unlucky to commence ploughing (stretching the team, as it was called, *sìneadh na seisrich*), or any kind of work on Monday. It will be proceeded with too quickly or too slowly, according to the adage,

“Work commenced on Monday,  
Will be (too) quick or will be (too) slow.”<sup>[75]</sup>

It was deemed, however, a good day for removing or “flitting” upon, just as Saturday was the reverse.

“Saturday removal is to the north,  
Monday removal to the south,  
Though I had but a lamb  
On Monday I would it remove.”<sup>[76]</sup>

Old men called it “the key of the week” (*iuchair na seachdain*).

### ***Di-màirt*, TUESDAY.**

The name is obviously enough from *dies martis*, the Latin name.

This was a good day to begin ploughing upon, and it was ominous of good luck if any of the harness broke and the ploughing was stopped for the day. Such

a belief could exist only in the easy-going olden days.

### ***Di-Ciadain*, WEDNESDAY.**

Much ingenuity has been spent on the etymology of this word by those who delight in recondite meanings, and believe that every word in Gaelic must be traced to a Gaelic origin. What Lhuyd says of radicals and primitives is equally applicable to other words. It is a very common error in etymology to endeavour to derive all the radical words of our Western European languages from the Latin or Greek; or indeed to *derive the Primitives of any one language from any particular tongue*. When we do this we seem to forget that all have been subject to alterations, and that the greater and more polite any nation is, the more subject they are (partly from improvement, and partly out of a luxurious wantonness) to remodel their language. Nearly all words connected with ecclesiastical affairs both in English and Gaelic have been imported from the Latin and Greek, undergoing only such changes as the difference of language requires. When or why the name of a Scandinavian deity, and not a Roman name, was adopted by the British and Irish churches to designate this or any other day is a different question. We must seek (and this is a rule lamentably neglected by Gaelic etymologists), the true explanation of words in any language that offers one that is probable and rational; otherwise we make “a useful art ridiculous,” and the etymologist degenerates into “a trifling conjecturer.”

The Latin name of this day is *dies mercurii*, which name was adopted in the Welsh, Cornish, and Armoric, but the Teutonic names are derived from the Scandinavian deity *Odin* or *Woden*, who was supposed to correspond to Mercury. This was the designation adopted in Gaelic, both Irish and Scottish. Like the French the Gaelic has no *w*, and represents that sound by *g* or *c*. Thus, *gad*, withe; *gul*, wail; *cosd*, waste; *clòimh*, wool; *cnuimh*, worm; *curaidh*, warrior, etc. Sometimes, as pointed out under Whitsuntide (*caingis*), the corresponding English sound is *wh*. So *Woden's-day*, Wednesday, became *Di-ceden*.

The derivation *ciad aoin'*, first fast, is open to the objection that there was no fast on Wednesday in the Celtic or any other church, that the use of the word *aoin'*, to denote a fast, is secondary, and derived from Friday (*di-haoine*), the true fast day, and that the final syllable, being the essential one, would with such a derivation, be heavily accented, instead of falling away into a mere terminal syllable. The grave *ia* in *Di-ciadain* is accounted for by the *o* in *Woden* being long.

There was a malediction used to young women, “The disease of the woman be upon you, who put the first Wednesday comb in her head” (*Galar na tè chuir a chiad chùr Chiadna na ceann*). The disease was that she died childless.

Many would not begin sowing seed in spring, but on this day or Thursday. It was also counted a lucky day to begin ploughing upon.

A witch, in the island of Coll, being asked by a person, who had detected her in her unhallowed pranks, to visit a farm-house in shape of a hare, said, that as the day was Wednesday she could do nothing. Why her power was limited on this day does not appear.

### ***Di’rdaoin*, THURSDAY.**

The Latin name, *dies Iovis*, has been similarly followed, with slight alteration, by the Cymric branch of the Celts; while the Gaelic names are taken from *Thor*, *Tor*, and in some dialects *Thordan*, the Scandinavian deity, son of Odin.

This is a lucky day for a calf or lamb to be born upon, for beginning the weaving of cloth, and on which the hair should be cut, as the rhymes testify:

(1) “Thursday the day of benign Colum-cill  
A day to take possession of sheep,  
To put cloth in warp, and settle cow on calf.”

(2) “Cut your hair and beard on Thursday,  
And blunt the nail on Saturday.”<sup>[77]</sup>

It is unlucky if Beltane day, the first of summer, falls upon a Thursday, according to the saying, “Many a woman will be without an infant son, when Beltane falls on Thursday” (*Is iomadh té bhios gun mhac an baobh dar is ann air Di’rdaoin bhios a Bhealltainn*). M’Intosh (*Gael. Prov.*, 146) has it, “Woe to the mother of a wizard’s son, when Beltane falls on a Thursday.” A similar prejudice existed against Halloween (*Samhain*), the first of winter, falling on a Wednesday.

### ***Di-haoine*, FRIDAY, DIES VENORIS.**

Here the Gaelic names revert to the Latin. Venus is etymologically connected with the Gael, *bean*, a wife, as *Friga* is with the German *frau*. In Armorican the



name of the day is *dar guener*, and says Lhuyd (p. 9) "'Tis observable that the initial *gu* is common to the Britons, with the French, Spaniards, and Italians; and that the Romans frequently begin such words with an V consonant." The Gaelic word would be pronounced in the same manner, though spelled *di-Fhaoine*, which probably is the more correct form. *Aoine* is said in dictionaries to mean a fast, but in that sense never came into popular use, and is not found in song or proverb.

The number of superstitions attached to the day were very numerous, and this origin is to be traced to Friday, being the day of the Crucifixion. On Good Friday (*Di-haoine na Ceusa*), the anniversary of our Lord's Passion, the various beliefs had twofold force. So much was it a belief that the powers of evil have more power on this day than on any other, that it was a common saying, "Friday is against the week" (*Tha Di-haoine an aghaidh na seachdain*).

On Friday and on Sunday it was not deemed proper to go and see a sick person. Most took such a visit in anything but good part, and many would as soon see death coming to the house as a sympathising friend. In their opinion there was little difference.

The more superstitious would not allow iron to be put in the ground, and consequently no graves were dug and no ploughing was proceeded with. Commonly, however, ploughing was abstained from only on Good Friday.

It was not lucky (*sealbhach*) on Friday to cut one's hair or nails, to sharpen knives, commence work, count animals, or go near the fire. In Argyllshire and the Highlands generally it is deemed unlucky for marriages, but in the south it is a favourite day, and in Appin, Perthshire, people did not care to be married on any other day. The aversion of seafaring men to leave on this day is well known.

On Fridays the fairies visited men's houses, and people were careful not to say anything to give them offence. Friday was not called by its own name, but "the day of yonder town" (*la bhaile ud thall*), and if any one unfortunately mentioned the proper name, the evil was averted by the bystanders adding "on the cattle of yonder town." Old women in Tiree averted the evil consequences of sharpening knives on Friday by saying "on the farm of Clark," alluding to a big strong man of that name to whom a general dislike was entertained, and who was said to have entered a fairy hillock and compelled the inmate to give him a cure for his sore leg.

The aversion of the elves to iron was a prominent feature in their character, and dislike to putting iron in the ground was perhaps aversion to disturb

(especially with what the elves disliked so much) the earth under the surface of which that easily offended race lives. The “little folk” are quick to take offence, and dislike hearing the name of Friday, seeing iron sharpened, or the earth disturbed with it. When there was any occasion to mention the creatures, all danger of evil consequences is averted by saying, “A blessing on their journeying and travelling, this is Friday and they will not hear us.”

In the western islands it was a bitter curse to wish that “the number of Friday” or “the cross of the number of Friday” might come upon a person (*crois àireamh na h-aoine dh’amas ort*). To count three times cattle, chickens, men, etc., on this day was followed as a certain result by none of them being alive at the end of the year. Many in Tiree remember that in their youth a sure method of putting an old woman in a rage was to begin counting her chickens on a Friday. She seldom allowed them to get beyond three or four. The superstition probably arose from a belief that it was on Friday King David numbered the Children of Israel.

People did not like to kill a cow, a sheep, or other beast, or cut or mark calves or lambs on Friday, and there were many who would not allow their cattle to be shifted from one place to another. They would not alter their fold. If, *e.g.* the day was come for removing cows to the summer hill pastures, the more superstitious would not allow it to be done if the day was Friday.

As work commenced on Monday proceeded too quickly or too slowly, work began on Friday was said to be always hurriedly done, “it will be running” (*bi i na ruith*). “A person born on Friday is always in a hurry” (*Bi neach a rugadh Di-haoine driopail*); hence the malediction, “The running, or hurry, of Friday be upon you” (*Ruith na h-aoine ort*).

“A threatening Friday makes a tearful Saturday” (*’Si ’n Aoine bhagarach ni ’n Sathurna deurach*), and if it came on to rain early on Friday, or (as the saying was) if Friday caught the rain “in its mouth” (*Nan glacadh an t-aoine na bhial e*), it would be wet all day.

### ***Di-sathuirne, SATURDAY (Dies Saturni).***

This, as might be expected, was not deemed a lucky day to begin work upon. It was not deemed of much consequence whether ploughing began or not, but the manufacture of cloth should on no account be begun. “The warp prepared on Saturday will have the delay of the seven Saturdays upon it” (*An rud theid a dheilbh Di-Sathuirne, bi stad nan seachd Sathurn’ air*). No spinning was to be done after sunset, but other work might proceed as usual. All work should stop at

9 p.m. It is still considered a bad thing among the old people in Kintail to work past that hour.

There is a man in Tiree who will not allow a newly-engaged servant to come home to enter on his service on Saturday. On one occasion, when the term-day happened to be Saturday, he persuaded the servant man to come on Friday, though only to stand in the house for a few minutes, that the evil omen might be averted.

New moon on Saturday was deemed a presage of stormy weather. "Saturday light goes seven times mad before it goes out" (*Solus Sathurna gabhaidh e na seachd cuthaich mun d' theid e mach*).

An evil wish is "The end of the seven Saturdays be upon you" (*Deire nan seachd Sathurn' ort*), Macintosh's *Prov.*, p. 78; and in Cowal it is a vicious saying of one woman to another, "Worse than that will come upon you, the disease of the seven Saturdays will come upon you" (*Thig na 's miosa na sin ort, thig galar nan seachd Sathurn' ort*).

The objection to removing on Saturday has been already mentioned under Monday.<sup>[78]</sup> The same objection is entertained in Ireland.

The end of the week is very grateful to the labouring man. "Alas! and alas! is Monday, but my love is Saturday" (*och is och! Di-luain, ach 's e mo luaidh Di-Sathuirne*).

## WEATHER WISDOM, ETC.

Expressions denoting high wind are: "the blowing of hillocks out of their places" (*seideadh nan cnoc*), "a wind to take the tails off horses" (*Bheireadh i na h-earbuill bhar nan each*), and "blow the barn over the house" (*chuir an t-sabhuill thar an tighe*); heavy rain takes "pieces out of the ground" (*mìrean as an talamh*), and gives "milk to the whales" (*bainne do na muca mara*), it being supposed that in heavy rain whales lie on the surface to cool themselves; heavy snow "confines the infirm to their cots" (*chròdhadh e na giùigirean*), strong robust men can go about their business. A dead calm is called "the calm of birds" (*fia' nan ian*); on days when not a hair is moved by the wind, and the sea is unruffled, the young fry of fish come to the surface, and sea-birds, themselves also conspicuous in such weather, can look about them for their prey.

The first breath of wind after a calm comes from the south, hence "When the wind is lost look for it in the south" (*Nuair a bhios gaoth air chall iarr a deas i*).

After a heavy fall of rain the wind comes west, as is told in the saying, “West wind after fat rain” (*Gaoth ’n iar ’n déigh uisge reamhar*). If frost comes on, when rivers and pools are swollen, and the ground is very wet, it does not last long; “the freezing of the full pool does not rest long” (*reodhadh an lodain làin, cha mhair e fada*). The heaviest rain comes from the north (or rather north-east), and the longest drought from the south; “there is no rain but from the north, or lasting dry weather but from the south” (*Cha-n uisge ach o’n tuath, ’s cha turadh buan ach o’n deas*). The frequency with which the violence of the wind moderates after a shower of rain has given rise to the proverb “after wind comes rain” (*an déigh gaoth mhor thig uisge*), to denote that after loud merriment and laughter come sorrow and the cares brought by reflection. “It is north wind that dissipates mist” (*’s i gaoth tuath sgaoileas ceò*); “the first day of south wind, and the third day of north wind” (*chiad latha de ’n ghaoth deas ’s an treas latha de ’n ghaoth tuath*), i.e. they are moderate then, and are best for crossing ferries on. “A speckled chequered summer makes a white, sunny harvest” (*ni samhradh breac riabhach fogharadh geal grianach*). The south-west, being the direction from which rain commonly comes, is known in the Hebrides as “*Cachlaidh na Buigeuisg*,” the gateway of soft weather.

## THE MOON.

Both the sun (*a Ghrian*) and moon (*a Ghealach*) are feminine in Gaelic, and the names are simply descriptive of their appearance. There is no trace of a Sun-God or Moon-Goddess. The root *gr* in *Grian* denotes horrent or bristling, and alludes to the sun’s rays. It is said by some writers, that the name is connected with Apollo Grannua, but the connection is a mere accidental similarity in the initial letters. The root *gr*, denoting what is streaming or bristling, occurs in *gruag*, a wig, flowing hair; *greann*, a surly look, a bristling of the hair as on an enraged dog; *grāin*, aversion, from the turning up of nose and stomach and bristling appearance of one much disgusted, so abhorrence, etc. *Gealach*, the moon, is from *geal*, white. The names *luan*, *easga*, or *easgann* are given in dictionaries, but have disappeared from common use. With the former is supposed to be connected *luaineach*, restless, and *luaisg*, to move. *R’* denotes any planet.

The moment the moon begins to increase is called *gob soillse* (lit. the bill or beak of the light). The height of the tide, which follows his changes, is *bolg reothairt* (lit. the swollen womb of spring tide). The moon’s increase is *fās*, and when waning she is *san earra-dhubh* (lit. in her black boundaries).<sup>[79]</sup>

At the instant the moon begins to increase, (*air gob na gealaiche*) the horns of cows are loose on their pith (*slabhagan*), and may be pulled off and stuck on again. It is told that a dispute having arisen on one occasion as to the correctness of an almanac, about the moon's change, the old man who raised the question proved himself to be in the right by turning round and drawing the horn from one of his cows, as a sheath is taken from a knife, and sticking it on again. The story is told of a man who lived in Sconser, Isle of Skye, of more than one person in Tiree, and was doubtless told of people in various places.

It was said that there is never any north wind at *gob gealaich*.

The first time an unmarried person sees the new moon, he should stoop down and lift whatever meets his hand. If, on taking it to the light, any hair be found among it, its colour will prove to be that of the future husband or wife. It is unlucky to see the new moon for the first time when washing one's hands, or with the hand on the face.

In olden times great regard was paid to the increase and wane of the moon. Garden seeds, as onions, kail, etc., if sown in the increase, ran to seed, but if sown in the wane, grew as pot-herbs. Withies or slender twigs (*Caol*) intended for creels and baskets were cut only in the wane. Twigs cut in the increase proved brittle. Trees cut in the increase were believed to bud again, but not those cut in the wane. Eggs laid during the wane were preserved for hatching, rather than those laid during the increase. Hens came from the former; cocks from the latter. Birds hatched in the increase were deemed difficult to rear, and it was doubtful if any of them would ultimately survive. Hence *Eòin an fhàs*, birds of the increase, is a name given to weakly pining children. They are worthless for hatching.

Many would not cut (*i.e.* castrate) an animal, calf, or foal, or pig, during the increase of the moon, and it was a belief that cows seek the bull only in the first and third quarters of the moon, and never at neap tides. A man in Islay pretended to tell, from the time the cow paid her visit to the bull, whether her offspring would prove a bull-calf or a cow-calf. If in the first quarter, the former; if in the wane, the latter.

The second moon in autumn, the harvest moon, or first after the autumnal equinox, was variously known as *Gealach an abachaidh*, "the ripening moon," from a belief that crops ripen as much by it as they do during the day; *Gealach bhuidhe nam broc*, "the badger's yellow moon," these wary animals being engaged, it was said, in taking home their winter supplies; *Gealach an t-*

*sealgair*, “the hunter’s moon”; and the last moon in harvest, extending for a month before Hallowmas (*Samhain*). The first of winter was known as *Gealach a ruadhain*, “the reddening moon,” during which vegetation grew as much by night as in the day.

It was said there was no north wind at the exact period of the appearance of new moon (*gob gealaich*).



## FOOTNOTES

[1] Gheibh baoth 'guidhe ach cha-n fhaigh a h-anam tròcair.

[2] *Prov.*, p. 143.

[3] Is mairg is màthair do mhacan baoth, dar is ann air Di'rdoin bhios a Bhealltainn.

[4] In Germany it was a common belief that witches met on the night before first May (*i.e.* Beltane night) on the mountain called the Blockberg, to dance and feast with devils.

[5] The crook or pot-hanger seems to have been an important article of the witch's paraphernalia. A shepherd in Mull, coming in late from the hill, with his feet wet, placed his stockings to dry on the pot-hanger. An old woman present pulled the stockings down again, saying to the shepherd, "Don't do that; remember you are a person that travels the hill night and day." (Cuimhnich gur duin' thus' tha siubhal a mhonaidh latha 's a dh'oidhche.) He never could ascertain what she meant.

[6] The ancient churn was broader at one end than the other, and its narrow end, or mouth, was secured with a prepared sheepskin covering, called *fùileach* in Mull, *iomaideil* in Morven and on the mainland generally. The cross or hoop, that secured this covering in its place, should also be of mountain ash. The churn was worked by the small end being lifted up and let down repeatedly.

[7]

Badan de ni 'chaorruinn  
Thig o aodunn Ealasaid,  
Cuir snaithn' dearg 'us sreang as  
Cuir sid an ceann a chrathadair;  
'S ged thigeadh buidseach Endor  
Gun ceannsaicheadh Ailein i.

The rhyme was composed by the bard Ailein Dall.

[8] De'n riabhach thug a' so sibh?

[9]

Di-luain a dh'éirich a ghaoth,  
'S thog i orra fraoch us fearg,  
Us innis do mhathair mo chuirp,  
Gur h-e na h-uilc a rinn an t-sealg.

[10] The tale has this much truth in it, that one of the ill-fated Spanish Armada was blown up in Tobermory Harbour, A.D. 1589. The wonder would be, in those days when public news travelled slowly or not at all, if the history or object of the Spanish fleet should be known in the Highlands, or that it should be known to the Mull people that there was any ship in the fleet but the one that came to their own coasts.

[11] A family of this name has had down to the present day a reputation for witchcraft. The last of them was known to the writer as a poor woman of much shrewdness and inoffensive character. She professed great skill in healing cattle by means of charms and such-like *white* witchcraft.

[12] *Cùl a's aghaidh mo spòige ri Macillduinn.*

[13] Tha m'iteagun's m'atagun ag atadh ris na h-eibhleagun.

[14]

“Sann a nochd a thorchanaich leinn  
Mharbhadh an urchuill earchaill mhòr.”

“An do mharbhadh Maol Meanachan nan cat? Mar bhi na h-uile oidhche fhuair mi biadh 'us bainne na d'theaglach, bhiodh do sgòrnan fada riabhach ann am ìnein. Innis do Bhruc Riabhach gun d'eug Bladrum.”

[15] Mhami, mhami! tha mo sheanair ag éiridh.

[16] Cotta, *Short Discovery of Unobserved Dangers*, 1612. Quoted by Beand, iii. 3.

[17] The author wrote this chapter in 1874.—Ed.

[18]

Dia bheannachadh do shùil  
Deur muin mu d' chridhe,  
An luchaidh san tom  
'S an otm ri theine.

[19] Al. Early on Sunday, to a level stone on the shore.

[20]

Teine dé air do bhus,  
Rug do mhàthair chéil ubh,  
'S thug thu fhéin mach an gur.

[21]

Beairt ribeach  
Dubhan bradach  
Slat cham chaoruinn.

[22]

Buainidh mise a mòthan  
An luibh a dh'òrduich Criosd  
Chaneil eagal losga—teine dhuit  
No cogadh nam ban shith.

[23]

Achlusan Challum Chille,  
Gun sireadh gun iarraidh,  
Cha d'thoir iad as do chadal thu,  
Is cha ghabh thu fiabhrus.



Buainidh mis' an donn duilleach,  
Luibh a fhuaradh an taobh bearraidh,  
Cha tugainn e do dhuine  
Gun tuilleadh air mo bheannachd.

[24]

Buainidh mis' an t-achlasan,  
'S e luibh nam ban fionn e,  
'S e chuirm eireachdail e  
'S a chuir shòghail.  
Luibh fhirionn e, luibh bhoirionn e,  
Luibh bh'aig eòin an allt e,  
Luibh bh'aig Ni Math na eiginn  
'S aig Chrisd air aineol,  
'S b'fhearr a dhuais do'n laimh dheas,  
Am bitheadh e.

[25]

Buainidh mis' an t-iubhar àigh  
Roimh chòig aisneam croma Chrìosd  
An ainm an athar, a Mhic, 's an Spioraid Naoimh  
Air bhàthadh, air ghàbhadh, 's air ghriobhadh.

[26]

Buainidh mis' a chathair làir  
Mar bhuain Moire le da làimh,  
Buainidh mi le m' neart i,  
'S buainidh mi le m' ghlaic i, etc.

[27]

*"A'v a chuis a choinneal  
Thuair mi an'am laimh ga cumail  
Um sheasamh a's an deathaich  
'S cha be sin m' abhaist  
Un tigh mo mhathar 's m' athar."*

*"A'r a shocair a bhuinneag  
'S math a b'aithne dhomhsa chuideachd  
Aona mhart air thri sinnean  
'S naoinear do mhuinntir."*

*"Cha be sin an gnathas  
Bha 'n tigh m' athur no momhathar  
Cha robh aona mhart air thré sinnean  
Na naoinear 'a mhuinntir  
Ach naoi slabhrinnean òir  
An crocha 'n tigh Rìgh Sionnach."*

[28] Others say his servant man saw her first, a tradition which finds a ready explanation for the whole account, in an attempt to discourage Hugh by means of a

prevailing superstition.

[29] After his victory Dowart made prisoner of his brother, Lochbuy, and sent him to Kerneburg, a stronghold of which the Dowarts became heritable keepers, on one of the Treshinish Islands, near Staffa, west of Mull. He sent “Black Sarah Macphie” (*Mòr dhu nic a Phì*), from *Suidhe*, in the Ross of Mull, the most ungainly woman he could get, so ugly that she was nicknamed “The Pack-saddle” (*an t-srathair*), to take care of him. Black Sarah, however, became the mother of *Murcha Gearr*, who ultimately made himself master of his paternal acres.

[30] Campbell of Islay’s *West Highland Tales*, ii. 83.

[31] An old man in Aharacle, in the north of Argyleshire, was shaved, his face was washed, his hair combed, and his personal appearance attended to in anticipation of his speedy dissolution. When an attempt was made to cut his nails, he told his friends to let them alone: “They are, he exclaimed, but slight weapons for myself, seeing I don’t know where I am going to.” (*’S beag an t-armachd dhomh fhìn iad, ’s gun fhios ’am cean’ tha mi dol.*)

[32] MacGlumag na mias, o liath tarrang shìoda, burrach mòr.

[33]

’S gum b’ainm do’n fhuath nach robh tiòm  
A mhuireartach maol, ruadh, muing-fhionn;  
Bha-aodunn du-ghlas, air dhreach guail;  
Bha-deud a carbaid claon-ruadh;  
Bha aon sùil ghlogach na ceann,  
’S gum bu luaith i na rionnach maghair;  
Bha greann glas-dhu air a ceann  
Mar choille chrionaich roi chrith-reothadh.

M. S.

[34] North Morar is known as *Mòrair mhic shimidh* and South Morar as *Mòrair mhic Dhùghaill*.

[35]

Dar chaidh Fionn don Bheinn  
Thachair ris Colann gun cheann.

[36]

Colann gun cheann,  
Thig a nall ’s thoir leat mi.

[37] Fhaic thu ’n t-sean bho liath, ’s i gun bhiadh, a thàillear.

[38] Sgòrnan fada riabhach, ’se gun bhiadh, a thàillear.

[39] Chì-sa, mhic, chì-sa, mhic, chì-sa sid ’s fuaigheam so an dràsda.

[40] Gairdean fada riabhach ’s e gun fheòil gun bhiadh, a thàillear.

[41] Spòg mhòr liath gun fhuil, gun fheòil, gun fhéithean, ’s i gun bhiadh, a thàillear.

[42] Spòg mhòr liath, ’s i gun bhiadh, a thàillear.

[43] In connection perhaps with this is the saying, “Ask everything of a Cameron, but ask no butter from a Cameron” (*Iarr gach ni air Camsrhron ach, ach na iarr ìm air Camsrhronach*). The clan are also called “The soft Camerons of the butter” (*Camsrhronaich bhog an ime*).

[44] This is the origin, at least an illustration, of the saying, “Take a wife from hell, and she will take you to her own house” (*Thoir bean a ifrinn, ’s bheir i gu tigh fhein thu*).

[45] It was in the house of this man, tradition says, that Allan Breac, the true murderer of Colin Campbell of Glenure, when making his escape, stayed the night after the murder. James Stewart of Ardsheal was hung in chains for the murder in 1752.

[46] The excessive use of wine by the West Highland chiefs is borne witness to by the distich:

“Neil, son of Rory, fast travelling,  
Who gave wine to his horses,  
That they might avoid the meadow waters.”

[Nial Mac Ruairidh ’n astair  
Bheireadh fiòn da chuid eachaibh  
Air son bùrn an lòn a sheachnadh.]

[47]

Bha mi’n Dun-Eideann an raoir,  
Tha mi’m thalla féin a nochd;  
’S fiach an, dadum ud ’sa ghréin  
Chaneil annam féin do neart.

[48]

Mar bhi na gathannan caol giuthais  
Bhiodh so gu d’phuthar-sa, Dhò’uill Ghuirm Oig.

[49]

Bhean, thug mo thriubhas dhiom  
’S mo bhrògan grinne dubha bhuam,  
’S an léine thug mo phiuthar dhomh,—  
Thuige, thuige, chasan fuara,  
’S ioma cuan a shiubhail sibh.

[50]

Thàinig ceathrar a nall,  
Gun bhàta, gun long,  
Fear buidhe, fionn,  
Fear slatagach, donn,  
Fear a bhualadh na sùisde,  
’S fear a rùsgadh nan crann.

*Toimhseagan.*

[51] Highland Society's Dictionary, *sub voce*.

[52] *Am fear nach dean a Nollaig sunndach ni e chàisg gu tursach deurach.*

[53] *Chaneil Nollaig gun fheòil.*

[54]

A challuinn a bhuilg bhuidhe bhoicinn  
Buail an craicionn (air an tota)  
Cailleach sa chill,  
Cailleach sa chùil,  
Cailleach eile 'n cùl an teine  
Bior na da shùil  
Bior na goile  
A challuinn so,  
Leig astigh mi.

[55]

Gaoth deas, teas is toradh  
Gaoth tuath, fuachd is gaillionn,  
Gaoth 'n iar, iasg is bainne,  
Gaoth 'n ear, meas air chrannaibh.

[56]

B' fhearr leam a chreach thigh'nn do'n tìr  
Na mhaduinn chiùin 'san Fhaoilleach fhuar.

[57]

Faoilleach Faoilleach, cruth an crios  
Faoilte mhòr bu chòir bhi ris;  
Crodh us caoraich ruith air theas,  
Gul us caoidh bu chòir bhi ris.

[58]

“Nead air Brithid, ubh air Inid,  
'S eun air Càisg,  
'S mar bi sin aig an fhitheach  
Bithidh am bàs.”

[59]

“Feadag, Feadag, màthair Faoilleach fuar,  
Marbhaidh i caoraich us uain,  
Marbhaidh i 'n cro mòr mu seach,  
'S an t-each ris an aon uair.”

[60]

“Thuirt an Gearran ris an Fhaoilleach,  
C'ait an d' fhàg thu 'n gamhuinn bochd!  
Dh' fhàg mi e aig an Fhear rinn na dùilean,

'S dhà shùil air an t-sop.  
Ma bheireas mis', thuirt a mios Màigh,  
Air an anail am barraibh a chluas,  
Cuiridh mi ruideis air an tràigh e,  
'S fheaman air a ghualainn."

[61]

"Sin thuirt an Gearran gearr,  
Ni mi farran ort nach fhearr,  
Cuiridh mi bhò mhòr sa pholl,  
Gus an d' thig an tonn far a ceann."

[62]

"Buailidh i thall, buailidh i bhos,  
Buailidh i eadar a da chois;  
...  
Thilg i e fo 'n chraoibh chruaidh chuilinn,  
Air nach do chinn gas feur no fionnadh riamh."

[63]

An linge làn air chionn a Mhàrt,  
'S tugha nan tighean an claisean nan iomairean.

[64]

Leig seachad a chiad Mhàrt  
S an dàrna Mhàrt màs fheudar e,  
Ach olc air mhath gan d' thig an t-sìd,  
Cuir do shìol san fhìor Mhàrt.

[65] Campbell's *Superstitions of the Scottish Highlands*, p. 296.

[66]

Thuirt an Inid ris a Chàisg,  
C'ait am faigh mi àite cluich?  
Thoir thusa dhomhsa pàillion geamhraidh  
'S togaidh mi tigh samhraidh dhuit.

[67] This derivation has been derived from, and others have been confirmed by Lhuyd (*Archæologia Britannica*, publ. at Oxford, 1707). The work is folio size, and contains many curious and sensible philological observations. Its principal defect is, that what is valuable is buried in pages of uninteresting glossaries.

[68]

Reothairt na Feill Moire  
'S boilich na Feill Pàruig.

[69]

Mas a bailc Bhealltainn bhlàth,

Mas a turadh an treas là,  
'S mas a gaoth an ear a rithis,  
'S cinnteach gum bi meas air chrannaibh.

[70] In the Hebrides, the name St. Brendan's Eve for the Whitsunday term is entirely unknown. It is told of a Tíree man of the last generation, that he was promised a croft, or piece of land, by the then chamberlain of the island, who was a native of the mainland, and said, "Your name will be put on the rent-roll on St. Brendan's Day." The Tíree man went home and consulted his godfather (*goistidh*) as to what day the factor meant. "I really don't know," said his godfather, "unless it be the day of judgment."

[71]

Bròg thana, 's i gun mheas,  
Gun fhios co chaitheas i.

[72] Campbell's *Superstitions of the Scottish Highlands*, p. 260.

[73]

Togaidh mise chlach,  
Mar a thog Moire da Mac,  
Air bhrìgh, air bhuaidh, 's air neart;  
Gun robh a chlachsa am dhòrn,  
Gus an ruig mi mo cheann uidhe.

[74]

Feill Fionnain nam fleadh  
S' oidhche Nollaig na mòr bhladh.

[75]

Tinnste (tionnsgnadh?) nitear Di-luain,  
Bithidh e luath no bi e mall.

[76]

Imrich an t-sathurna mu thuath,  
Imrich an Luain mu dheas,  
Ged nach biodh agam ach an t-uan  
'S ann Di-luain a dh' fhalbhainn leis.

[77]

(1) Di'rdoin, latha Challum-chille chaoin  
Latha chuir chaorach air seilbh,  
A dheilbh, 's a chuir bo air laogh.

(2) T' fhalt 's t' fhionna Di'rdoin,  
'S t' ionga mhaol Di-sathuirne.

[78] V. page 293.

[79] When hid in her vacant interlunar cave, *i.e.* when she is waning and late of

rising, the dark period of the night is called *rath dorch* (dark circle). “Son of the moon’s dark circle” (*mhic an rath dorch*) is an expression of mild objurgation.

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