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Personal Experiences in Witchcraft

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important altar bearing fruit and flowers for the devil to eat during the night, as I was assured he actually would do. I was unfortunately not able to accept a tempting offer to show him at midnight on the following day, in the shape of some fowl or beast. There was also among the performers a picturesque man bedecked with long chaplets, and Hindoo sacred marks on his forehead—only as ornaments, however, it was said, as he was in fact a Buddhist. He appeared to be a sort of manager.

Within the house a sort of shrine had been made by winding a cloth around the legs of a common chair raised upon a table ; flowers, palm leaves, and areca blossoms were scattered within. In the middle was a small white-metal box ; its open lid, overlaid with a shining black composition of suitable ingredients, formed a magic mirror. I was made to look into it, unsuccessfully, however ; then one of the band, plainly dressed, took my place, and after gazing in silence, long and intently, proceeded to tell me of my distant home and of my future, without preliminary insidious questions and with every appearance of sincerity. He described the house, the trees near it, their fruit, the number of inmates, even the name of one he said was ill, and advised me about continuing to live there. He hit the truth in one point only, the number of windows on one side of the house.

These men make devil dancing their sole business. They came from Galle, in the south of the island, and being of the best sort, have plenty of work. After remaining a couple of hours, as there seemed no novelty forthcoming, I went home tired and somewhat revolted.

The rite is intended to partly coax, partly force the possessing demon to leave the body of the sick person. In fact, he has no choice, he must be gone before morning, when the invalid would be quite cured. It is a popular performance, taking place often and without concealment.

J. B. ANDREWS.

Le Pigautier, Menton.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES IN WITCHCRAFT.

My first experience of witchcraft began at a very early age, before I was an hour old, in fact. My maternal grandmother, a

pure-bred Highlander, held me close to the fire, and, taking care that she was unobserved, quietly fastened this witch-brooch beneath the ample skirts of my baby-garments. This form of brooch, fastened in the manner above described, was firmly believed to possess the power of driving the witches, which lay in wait for all newly born children, up the chimney. It protected the wearer from their malevolence, and brought good luck. The rite was practised universally in rural districts throughout the north in my grandmother's time. My mother probably had some germs of scepticism in her mind, but considered that her darling would be safer if the charm were applied in the orthodox manner. Amongst the fishing population this superstition lingered till a much later date. Jewellers in Aberdeen had to give fishermen's brides a witch-brooch, along with the wedding-ring, up to about thirty years ago. It was first worn by the bride to bring good luck to the household.

This larger silver brooch and the rarer mother-of-pearl specimen were worn after birth by two of my mother's sisters. The other specimens, of various forms and patterns, were collected in Aberdeenshire by my late brother.

The two witch-brooches set in brilliants he found in Staffordshire. One was the subject of a paper read before the North Staffordshire Field Naturalists' Club in 1890.¹ It is interesting to note that the second specimen, which he obtained after the paper was read, is identical in every respect with "Shakespeare's brooch," found at Stratford-upon-Avon about seventy years ago.

On one occasion, when about seven years old, I was playing in the woods of Black-hall, eighteen miles up the Dee Valley, when I suddenly became aware that my companions had vanished, and that the awful form of Witch Jeffrey stood only a few feet off. Instead, however, of changing me into a toad or a rabbit, or spiriting me off, she smiled kindly at my terrified countenance and wished me a pleasant good morning. To this day I well remember my feeling of relief at the narrow escape, and the air of superiority with which I told my adventure to my companions. Witch Jeffrey lived in a small thatched cottage near the river, and her fame as a witch extended over the whole country-side. People came to her for charms for their sick children or cattle; youths

¹ *Transactions*, 1891, p. 54.

and maidens consulted her about their future. The winter before my encounter in the wood she bewitched five children who lived at a farm near, because their father drove her off his land when she was gathering firewood. She was, of course, held up as a bogey to terrify the young, who would not pass near her dwelling for love nor money. Our meeting in the wood emboldened me, alone amongst all the children round, to accompany some young women who wished to have their fortunes told. The procedure was, so far as I can recollect, the ordinary one of palmistry, except for the part played by an hour-glass, which was placed on a table and consulted frequently. I have never heard of another instance where this object was used in witchcraft. Perhaps the old lady got the idea from the figure of "Death," which is represented holding the hour-glass and sickle, or from its frequent occurrence on tombstones of last century, and considered it an impressive and awe-inspiring object, particularly suitable to the occult ceremony. This witch died at a very great age, and the hour-glass, which I now exhibit, came into my brother's possession.

During my boyhood many of the country people in Deeside firmly believed in the existence of the "horseman's word." By the use of this symbol horses could be groomed and harness cleaned by witches, and its possessor had, moreover, complete control over his team without the aid of whip or rein. The lucky owners of this charm were rare ; indeed, I only knew one, the first horseman on a farm near Murtle, about two miles from where I spent my summer holiday. He was acknowledged to be the best horseman in lower Deeside, and this was currently ascribed to the fact that he possessed this supernatural gift. I heard of others up and down the country who knew the miraculous symbol. It was imparted only to skilled or journeymen horsemen for a sum of money, and with a certain display of ceremony. When it came to our ears, therefore, that two horsemen were to be initiated into the mystery at Murtle one evening, the opportunity was too good to be lost. Three of us—boys of ten or twelve years old—secreted ourselves amongst the rafters of the bothy where the ceremony was to take place. The horseman began by demanding an oath of secrecy from the neophytes, and then commenced reciting a rhyme in sing-song monotone. He had scarcely begun, however, when a titter from one of us

revealed our presence, and we were forcibly expelled. I have since been told that advice to practice kindness towards their horses and to be methodical in the performance of their work was the sum and substance of the ceremony.

The "miller's word" was a still more rare and valuable possession, as by it a mill could be set to work and corn ground without human assistance. I only heard of two millers who possessed it; one lived near Skene, the other, I think, was the Ardo miller.

Charm-stones of various kinds were treasured by old people as potent agents for the cure of disease. This "adder stone"—a natural flint pebble with a hole through it—for example, was used as a cure for certain diseases of cows and horses. It was placed in a basin of water with some salt and an odd number of pieces of saltpetre, and some mysterious words were repeated over it. The solution had then to be swallowed by the diseased animal. This elongated stone was used for the cure of sore eyes and headache. The other specimens—Druid beads, adder stones, and concretions—are charms found in the same district.

The parish of St. Fergus, on the north-east coast of Aberdeenshire, where I spent many happy days each year during my boyhood, teemed with superstitions. A veritable fairy hollow adjoined my uncle's farm, and a well at the entrance to this hollow required a "witch-water-stone" to prevent these wicked beings from poisoning the water. I exhibit this stone with two others, also from Aberdeenshire. Flint arrow-heads, several of which I also show, were common in the district, and were used as charms for the cure of disease affecting man or beast. My uncle informed me that his father had ploughed up what, judging from the multitude of neolithic flint implements found in the field, I think must have been the remains of a tumulus or stone circle. None of the farm servants dared plough over it, and some people collected on a neighbouring hill expecting to see the earth open and swallow up both horses and ploughman.

Every magpie's egg was believed to contain a drop of the devil's blood.

All the bridges over the streams in the district were frequented by witches and fairies during my uncle's boyhood, but in my time they had lost their evil reputation, except the Bridge of Savock, which was the habitat of witches till early in the seventies. Few

of the peasantry I knew would have gone to the place at night. I only had the honour of the acquaintance of one witch in the district. In addition to the routine paraphernalia of witchcraft, Lizzie Davidson had a spinning-wheel and kept a frog in a milk jug. This odd combination gave her the power of "twining the rape," that is, of charming the cream off her neighbours' milk-pans into her own jug. She was believed to dispose of her butter surreptitiously to different merchants, to divert suspicion which might be aroused on account of the quantity she sold. After her death the spinning-wheel passed into the hands of Bell Adam, who also by repute dealt in the occult science: possibly the spinning-wheel proved a veritable Elijah's mantle. My brother purchased it at a sale of her effects.

My cousin informed me that a crofter named "Auld Sautie," who lived near the above-mentioned Bridge of Savock, enjoyed a widespread reputation for supernatural dealings. Auld Sautie was never to be seen when any one came to consult him, so whilst they waited his wife questioned them about the object of their visit. Auld Sautie, who had been listening unseen, then appeared as if returning from the farm buildings. Without any preliminary greeting he accosted them something like the following: "Aye! you have come about your brindled coo!" "It's been ailin' since Feersday!" &c., &c. Having thus demonstrated his supernatural power, Auld Sautie found a ready market for his charms and simples.

At the beginning of my paper I stated that the belief in witch-brooches lingered to a comparatively recent date amongst the fishing population. These people were of a distinct race from the rest of the inhabitants of Aberdeenshire, towards whom their social relations resembled those of the Jews and the Samaritans. Their customs and superstitions were likewise distinct in most cases. Their most binding oath was, "May my boat be my bonnet next time I go to sea." One instance I recollect when, to the horror and dismay of the judge on circuit, this oath proved more potent in extracting the truth from several witnesses than the one administered in due form by the court official.

Their superstitions were the butt of every Aberdeen schoolboy. They had a dread of having their boats counted when at sea. On several occasions we have been chased off the pier for counting the boats in the bay in a loud voice. It was also commonly sup-

posed that they dreaded being counted individually, an idea which gave rise to the popular couplet shouted by all urchins :

“One, two, three,
What a lot of fishwives I do see.”

They believed that a hare's foot brought bad luck. I, like other boys, have been pursued many a time for throwing a clod of earth or some other missile into their creels and shouting, “There is a bad's fit in your creel !” but I will leave it to my audience to decide whether it was solely from superstition that they resented the outrage.

A third popular idea was that they would not cross a line drawn across the road in front of their path, but would make a detour or climb the wall to avoid stepping over it. I never saw the experiment made, so I cannot vouch for its truth. I know I firmly believed it, but it had to be done right in front of an advancing column of fishwives, and all my experimental researches into their superstitions were conducted in a safer strategical position at the rear.

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NORTH INDIAN NOTES AND QUERIES, VOL. V. 7-9.

Popular Religion.

297. Sun Worship : rites on the first day of the new year. *Red powder* offered. The worshipper *tastes of all the food offered*.
299. Taboos during small-pox.
300. Sacred Pool at *Amritsar*. Legend of a holy man walled up in a chamber beneath the pool. [Dedicatory Sacrifice?]
301. Worship of the Sami tree. It has scarlet thorns. Worshipt by the old Rajputs before war, when they also shot at a dummy foe, and held athletic games.
304. Omens taken from floating lamps regarding the safety of friends absent upon a voyage.
306. Worship of the Asoka tree : it gives offspring.
307. *Saharanpur* : Sacred song of the Sweepers.