

REFERENCES

- DIACK, FRANCIS C.
 1920-1 "Place-Names of Pictland." *Revue Celtique* 38:109-32. Paris.
- FÖRSTER, MAX
 1923 "Proben eines englischen Eigennamenwörterbuchs." *German-romanische Monatsschrift* 11:86-110. Heidelberg.
- HOGAN, EDMUND
 1910 *Onomasticon Goedelicum*. Dublin.
- JOHNSTON, JAMES B.
 1934 *Place-Names of Scotland*. 3rd edition. London.
- KRAHE, HANS
 1959 "Über einige Gewässernamen mit *st*-Suffix." *Beiträge zu Namensforschung* 10: 1-17. Heidelberg.
- LIVINGSTONE, COLIN
 1888 "Lochaber Place-Names." *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 13 (1886-7):257-69. Inverness.
- MACBAIN, ALEXANDER
 1922 *Place Names Highlands and Islands of Scotland*. Ed. William J. Watson. Stirling.
- NICOLAISEN, WILHELM
 1957 "Die alteuropäischen Gewässernamen der britischen Hauptinsel." *Beiträge zur Namensforschung* 8:209-68. Heidelberg.
- PEDERSEN, HOLGER
 1909 *Vergleichende Grammatik der keltischen Sprachen*. Vol. 1. Göttingen.
- POKORNY, JULIUS
 1950 *Indogermanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Fasc. 4. Bern.
 1954 *Indogermanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Fasc. 8. Bern.
- TAYLOR, Rev. ISAAC
 n.d. *Words and Places*. Ed. A. Smythe Palmer. London.
- WATSON, WILLIAM J.
 1926 *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*. Edinburgh.
W. F. H. NICOLAISEN

B. OTHER NOTES

Book Review

The Silver Bough. Volume I. Scottish Folk-Lore and Folk Belief. By F. Marian McNeill. William Maclellan, Glasgow. 1957.

The title, *The Silver Bough*, was, according to the author, chosen as a reference to Sir James Frazer's "stupendous work", and one may perhaps agree with the author that the choice "may seem pretentious". The idea was that as the Golden Bough was part of the tree of classical mythology so the Silver Bough was of Celtic growth, and the author's hope was that

in this survey of folklore and mythology the reader might discern "the scent of apple blossom". This key-note is more fully developed in the introductory chapter, is further emphasised in the Notes with quotations from every type of book; it pervades, in fact, the whole book, evoking a romantic almost nostalgic feeling in trying to resuscitate a world and a way of living where the "really vital things, wine, music and love, and prayers to those that sit above", are still alive. It is the reflex of a glorious past in Scottish folklore, and "as Scotland is essentially a Celtic country", in the wonderland of Celtic tradition. The appeal of a book of this type depends upon the writer's ability to evoke in his readers the same vague mixture of reverence and regret. To judge the book as an objective study is accordingly difficult, if not unfair, and a competent criticism would besides involve specialist knowledge of a wide field of studies, and a knowledge sufficient to determine the value of the facts and sources referred to, as well as the conclusive solutions offered to many complicated problems. A reviewer is constantly in the position that he has to ask whether the facts referred to are real facts and not only the writer's interpretations, and in addition has to examine the relevance of such facts to the theory proposed.

A full answer, too, would require extensive specialist knowledge of many much-discussed subjects, such as Celtic mythology, and to such knowledge the present reviewer can lay no claims. As a folklorist, i.e. one who is primarily concerned with traditional ideas, customs and belief, he has mainly to keep to points where tradition is involved. But in passing by the Druids, he may still doubt the author's interpretations of the well known passages in ancient writers and, even more, such sweeping statements as that "all pagan religions are a form of nature worship" or "druidism was already groping towards a spiritual interpretation of the universe", while it is also fair to stress the reservation, "of the druids of Scotland and Ireland our knowledge is comparatively scanty". In writing about possible traces of druidism, and following her source "Druidism Exhumed" (1871), she refers to the "druidical fields" that down to present times the peasants are reluctant to till. The same attitude is equally familiar to people in non-Celtic countries; the reason given is that the fields belonged to "the Good People". A recent case—1958— from Mayo, Ireland, shows how persistent such belief is, when the official road builders were forced to make their road

twist round one of these localities. To look for the background of such belief in ancient Celtic religion, of which besides very little is known, seems hazardous, and when such reverence for localities not subject to human power is found in almost every country, the attitude seems to presuppose a far wider background. Here, as in other cases, it seems that what is known and accessible—traditional conceptions still being held—may help us to understand ancient pre-Christian religion, or the elements in it that spring from some human general way of thinking.

The chapter *The New Faith*, is suggestive and interesting, and it may well be right that "the mystical nature-worship of the Druids was much less incompatible with Christianity than with the polytheistic systems of non-Celtic peoples", yet the Celtic Sun-god and Sea-god figure constantly. Why, by the way, did the Norseman, the son of Earl Sigurd, get the strange name Hindius (p. 45)? He was called Hundi—i.e. whelp, but on being baptised he received the name Hlodver.

An extensive chapter with the heading *Magic* covers a wide group of conceptions and customs with different origins, and leaves the reader with the impression of some well planned, orderly garden, where every growth carries the impress of its origin. We are, however, rather faced with a wilderness of interrelated conceptions, where it is extremely difficult to trace the origin of the separate elements, and where the constant interplay of what is national and what international makes it difficult to trace any possible survivals from a national, pagan background. The ideas about "sun-wise" and "anti-sunwise" are held by people far apart, and the musings of D. H. Lawrence: "Conscience is sun-awareness, and our deep instinct not to go against the sun", may be suggestive, but is no explanation (p. 159). The *toradh*, the "virtue" a Norwegian farmer would say, the influence of the moon "in pagan religion second only to the sun-worship" is well attested everywhere. One doubts the statement (p. 59), "The moon-title Ra, or one of its many variants, is found in many languages, and survives in Celtic speech as Ur, Er and Ara." The same signs and omens recur everywhere, and are also in other countries, connected with some special "quarterday", but such connection is not decisive. The important thing is the vital importance of the omen, and omens of death, or of matters of love, appear at any time. A term like "Earth-magic" is extremely vague and the quotations given in the Notes, do

not clarify it. The "Need-fire" is a well-known device everywhere, and was known in the Middle Ages, and one may doubt the assertion that when a wheel was used in producing it, the wheel was "of course the symbol of the revolving sun". Considerably more familiar is a stray reference to an old man from Aberdeen "whose head was full of rituals". He would have felt in sympathy with the old Norwegian farmer, speaking about old people he had met in his youth: "They had so many rituals, indeed they had one for everything that happened to them." Vague also is a term like "Magic objects", where the separate items are familiar. The red thread used when reciting the sprain-charm, is recorded in Germany about the year 900. The salmon or white serpent of wisdom, was sampled by Sigurd the Volsung, as by Fionn Mac Cumhail, Pliny knew about the true virtue of the Orchis, and Thor, the god, was saved by the rowan. The "snake stone" was as eagerly coveted by Norwegian farmers, as hard to get, and as useful to possess. Curiously the "Standing Stones" are placed within this group. The account is interesting, and anyone who has seen, e.g., the Callanish stones, has felt the stupendous impression of size and a definite plan, and cannot fail to wonder why they were raised. One is also grateful for some fine photos of charms and amulets.

The next chapter is devoted to the *Fairies*, a subject far more uniform than that covered by *Magic*. The author is aware that fairy-belief is universal, as also of the fact that the *sidhe*, or by whatever name they were called, differ from the literary fairies of children's books. She touches briefly upon the vexed question of origins, and brings in "the folk-memory of a short-statured though not genuinely pigmy, race of Neolithic and Bronze Age folk", qualifying her words by "some anthropologists maintain", but hinting at the same time of certain "people of dwarfish race" living apart "somewhere in Caithness in the eighteenth century". These again she, with a cautious "probably", equates with the modern Laplanders, who, by the way, are not "merely a stunted branch of the Finnish race", but more likely a Nomad tribe of Siberian origin that at some time in their wanderings strayed towards the west, and on every point, except partly in language, differ from the people of Finland. To illustrate the nature of these Laplanders, the author quotes some passages from the books of R. Crottet, a very able writer, and a true artist. His stories are told as genuine oral tradition, the strange thing is that they

have hardly a single point in common with the extensive collections of folklore recorded from the Laplanders of the same district by Scandinavian and Finnish scholars. Again it is in harmony with the keynote of the book, when such books are quoted; and on the same lines is the free use of descriptions and accounts given in ancient Irish literature, as e.g. from the Voyage of Bran, where the obvious characteristics of an individual poet, and his imagination, both in setting as in atmosphere makes it hazardous to utilise them as sources for mythology and folklore. In many ways the Secret Commonwealth of the Rev. R. Kirk is more close to popular conceptions. The notes upon the popular belief in the fairies are disappointing. The explanation that they are the Fallen Angels, is not exclusively Hebridean, and the distinction between "good and evil fairies", is a later systematisation. In folkbelief there is always a certain risk involved in having dealings with "them", an attitude which is inherent in the function of such belief which was to explain happenings that seemed inexplicable, and to sanction a definite code of behaviour. The utilisation of the vast mass of first-hand evidence collected in Ireland, and also in Western Scotland in recent times, would have added towards an understanding of these conceptions, well described as "the most vital living link with a distant past". The essential point in any discussion of origin is the interplay between international and national elements, and the author, in summing up, wisely declines to accept any single explanation. It seems to me, however, of more importance to stress the essence of this attitude to "the other world" in noting its affinity to a religious attitude, and experience, a survival from an epoch when such experience was familiar to everybody, and not circumscribed by official words and rites, a period where more roads than one led on to "the other world". Something of this kind of interpretation is probably the gist of the author's summing up, who is "content to be illogical", and "to leave it at that".

The subject of the final chapter, *The Witches*, is essentially different, the background being the official teachings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. With some faint reservations the author seems to accept the theories of Miss M. Murray, as "a rationalisation of phenomena", of the survival of a definite "cult of the Horned God". Of interest are the extracts from the trials of witches, and a gruesome picture of a *corp creagh*.

As will be seen this review was written by a reviewer who on many points was in disagreement with the author, but this fact does not detract from his appreciation of an attractive book, and a will to give an understanding, comprehensive review of Celtic mythology and folklore, akin in many ways to what her predecessors have written upon this fascinating subject. She has at all events managed to convey to her readers "the scent of appleblossom"; in how far it is Celtic or not, remains an open question.

REIDAR TH. CHRISTIANSEN

Some Items from an Aberdeenshire Parish

On a recent visit to the parish of Auchterless in Aberdeenshire, a number of items were collected, five of which are noted below. Further information on any of these items would be welcomed.

1. A straw *knitting sheath* from the farm of Brownhill. It was made by George Merson (died 1938), father-in-law of Mr. Hunter, the present farmer, in the following way. A band of straw was pulled out straight, a piece of binder twine tied round it about half-way along its length, and the straws bent back upon themselves over the ring of twine so as to leave a tube-shaped opening in the centre. The loose end of the twine was brought through the bent-back straws, and wound very tightly round the outside of the straw until a cone had been formed, measuring $9\frac{1}{4}$ inches long, and tapering from $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter at the top, to 1 inch in diameter at the foot. The loose straws were then trimmed straight across with a sharp knife. This sheath shows little sign of wear.

Although knitting sheaths were formerly widely distributed throughout the British Isles, they have now become of museum interest. Older ladies may still occasionally be seen using them in the North-East of Scotland, and young and old use them in Orkney and particularly Shetland, where knitting is a flourishing industry, though the use of machines has made knitting by hand on any large scale obsolete. Mary Thomas (1938:22) mentions straw sheaths as being in use in Cornwall and Devon at the time she was writing. They are made of practically any convenient material. A bunch of hay or straw, bound round with string or tape, is a common form (Risom 1893:378; Muirhead 1895:141; Mackinnon 1897:120). An