

CAILLEACH A[N]¹ STRUTH RU Aidh

Kenneth Jackson

NUAIR a bha 'n Fhín cruinn anna'n Éirinn, bha ao[n] duine goirid na[ch] biodh an àireamh aca. 'Se fear a bha dha'n dìth a'sin, Cialla, agus nuair a chaidh Cialla dha'n Fhín bha 'n àireamh aca; agus 'se 'n t-ainm a thug ád² air, Gille nan Cochall Craiceann. Agus nuair a chaidh Gille nan Cochall Craiceann dha'n Fhín, chiad latha chaidh á² héin agus Fionn mac Cumhaill chaidh ád a dh' iasgach dha'n allt air leitir Beinn' Eudain; agus nuair a bhà 'd greis aig iasgach sheall Gille nan Cochall Craiceann air a chùlaibh agus chunnaig e fiadh bria' bha 'seo [n] taobh thuas dhiùbh, agus dh' fhoighneachd á do dh' Fhionn mac Cumhaill gu dé fiadh a bha siod, agus thuir Fionn ris, "Siod agad," ors esan, "fiadh Cailleach a[n] tSruth Ruaidh." "Gu dé 's coireach," ors esan, orsa Gille nan Cochall Craiceann, "nach eil sibh breith air?" "Cha'n eil," ors esan Fionn, "tha sinne sgìth fiachainn ri breith air; thà air fairleachdainn ri breith air." "An tà," orsa Gille nan Cochall Craiceann, "cha'n eil sin ach glé-mhianach agus na bheil de ghaisgich a'san Fhín." "Cha'n eil á gu deibhir," ors esan Fionn, "tha [n] déis trioblaid go leòr a chuir 'n ar cinn, 's cha'n eil sinn ag iarraidh a chorr dheth." Nuair a chuala Gille nan Cochall Craiceann seo cha duirt á an corr, ach thòisich á ri iasgach mar a bhà e reimheid. Cha dug á guth tuilleadh ma dhéidhinn an fhéidh a' latha sin.

Chaidh ád dhachaidh an oidhche sin, agus là 'r n-a mhàireach thàinig ád a dh' iasgach air ais, 's bha 'd ag iasgach fad a' latha; 's feireadh Gille nan Cochall Craiceann sùil air a chùlaibh an dràs 's arist; agus bha faicinn an fhéidh a[n] taobh thuas dhiùbh, ach cha duirt á guth ri Fionn ma dhéidhinn. Ach lean ád air iasgach gosa[n] dàinig bial na hoidhcheadh, agus nuair a thàinig chaidh ád dhachaidh. Agus a' là 'r n-a mhàireach thàinig ád air ais a dh' ionnsaigh an fhaghaide [*sic*] agus thòisich ád ri iasgach air ais; agus a[n] ceann na greiseadh sheall á air a chùlaibh agus chunnaig á a' fiadh, agus thuir e ri Fionn an tsianar³ b' fhearr a bh' aig' a chuir as deoghaidh an fhéidh. Agus nuair a chunnaig Fionn seo, gu robh Gille nan

THE HAG OF THE RED STREAM

Kenneth Jackson

When the Fenians were assembled in Ireland, they were one man short of their number. Cialla was the man who was missing to them then, and when he came to the Fenians their number was complete; and the name they gave him was "The Lad of the Skin Mantles". And when the Lad of the Skin Mantles came to the Fenians, the first day he himself and Fionn son of Cumhall went out they went fishing to the burn on the slopes of the Hill of Howth; and when they had been fishing for a while the Lad of the Skin Mantles looked behind him and saw a fine deer that was there above them, and he asked Fionn son of Cumhall what deer that was, and Fionn said to him, "There you have," said he, "the deer of the Hag of the Red Stream." "What's the reason," said he, said the Lad of the Skin Mantles, "that you don't catch it?" "We don't," said Fionn, "we are tired of trying to catch it; we have failed to catch it." "Indeed," said the Lad of the Skin Mantles, "that is a very poor performance considering how many champions there are among the Fenians." "No matter," said Fionn, "it has given us plenty of trouble, and we aren't wanting any more of it." When the Lad of the Skin Mantles heard this he said no more, but began to fish as he had been before. He said nothing further about the deer that day.

They went home that night, and the next day they came back fishing, and were fishing all day; and the Lad of the Skin Mantles would cast an eye behind him now and again; and he was seeing the deer above them, but said nothing to Fionn about it. But they continued to fish until nightfall came, and when it came they went home. And the next day they came back to the chase and began to fish again; and after a while he looked behind him and saw the deer, and told Fionn to send the six best men he had after the deer. And when Fionn saw this, that the Lad of the Skin Mantles was wanting to have a try at the deer, he summoned the six best men and sent them after the deer, and off went the deer and off they went after it;

Cochall Craiceann air son fiachainn air an fhiadh, chuir á fios air a[n] tsianar a b' fhearr agus chuir á es deoghaidh an fhéidh ád, agus amach a' fiadh agus amach à-san⁴ as a dheoghaidh; agus thòisich Gille nan Cochall Craiceann air iasgach air n-ais. Agus a[’n] ceann greiseadh as a dheoghaidh sin thuir e ri Fionn, “Cuir anist,” ors esan, “do mhiar fo d’ chead fios,⁵ fiach c’àite bheil ád a[n] dràs.” Roinn Fionn seo, chuir á a mhiar fo chead fios ’s thuir á ri Gille nan Cochall Craiceann, “Thà ’d,” ors esan, “nist air trì beannan ’s trì gleannan ’s trì àiteachan suidhe samhraidh a chuir seachad.” “Seadh,” orsa Gille nan Cochall Craiceann, ’s thòisich á ri iasgach air n-ais.

Agus a[’n] ceann greiseadh móireadh as a dheoghaidh sin thuir á ri Fionn air n-ais, “Cuir do mhiar fo d’ chead fios fiach cà bheil ád a[n] dràs;” ’s roinn Fionn seo. “Thà ’d,” ors esan, “nist air sia beannan ’s sia gleannan ’s sia àiteachan suidhe samhraidh a chuir seachad anist.” “Seadh,” ors esan Gille nan Cochall Craiceann, “thà an t-am agam-sa bhith falbh;” ’s dh’ fhalbh Gille nan Cochall Craiceann es deoghaidh an fhéidh. Agus nuair a nochd á ris a[n] tSruth Ruadh bhà [a’] fiadh sìos uige, agus lig á chas as a dheoghaidh; agus nuair a bha a’ fiadh dol a ghearradh a leum rug á air chas deiridh air agus chaith á air fras-mhullach a ghualainn á, agus cha do lig á es á gos na ràinig á Fionn air leitir Beinn’ Eudain. “Seadh,” ors esan Fionn, “tha thu air tigh’nn.” “Thà,” ors esan Gille nan Cochall Craiceann. “Cha bhi sin,” ors esan Fionn, “gu[n] trioblaid dhu’-sa.” “Cha’n eil á gu deibhir,” orsa Gille nan Cochall Craiceann.

“*Well* anist,” ors esan Fionn, ors esan, “nuair a chì Cailleach a[n] tSruth Ruaidh nach do ràinig a fiadh mar a b’ àbhaist, bidh i anna’ seo gu[n] dàil ’ga iarraidh; agus,” ors esan Fionn, “ma gheibh i greim air sgath ’sa’ bith a bhuineas dhà, bidh a’ fiadh aice mar a bhà á reimheid; ’s fiach,” orsa Fionn, “nach doir sibh dhi sgath a bhuineas dhà.” “Cha dohair,” ors esan Gille nan Cochall Craiceann, ’s chuir á fios air Osgar ’s air Caoilte gu’n cuireadh ád a’ fiadh as a chéile ’s gu[’n] cuireadh ád ’sa’ choire mhóir á. ’S roinn Osgar ’s Caoilte seo, chuir ád a’ fiadh as a chéile ’s chuir ád ’sa’ choire mhóir á. Cha robh á ach air blàthachadh nuair a thàinig Cailleach a[n] tSruth Ruaidh ’s thuir i riutha, “Nach anna’ sin a thà na gaisgich, nuair is ann air an aon fhiadh a bh’ agam-sa a thug ád làmh! Ach,” ors ise, “gad a roinn sibh sin héin,” ors ise, “na[ch] biodh sibh cho math ’s gu[’n] doireadh sibh

and the Lad of the Skin Mantles began fishing again. And at the end of a while after that he said to Fionn, "Now put your finger," said he, "under your Tooth of Knowledge to find out where they are now." Fionn did this, he put his finger under his Tooth of Knowledge and said to the Lad of the Skin Mantles, "They have now," said he, "passed by three peaks and three glens and three summer sitting-places." "So," said the Lad of the Skin Mantles, and he began fishing again.

And at the end of a long while after that he said to Fionn again "Put your finger under your Tooth of Knowledge to see where they are now;" and Fionn did this. "They have now," said he, "passed by six peaks and six glens and six summer sitting-places now." "So," said the Lad of the Skin Mantles, "it is time for me to be off;" and off went the Lad of the Skin Mantles after the deer. And when he came in sight of the Red Stream the deer had gone down to it, and he set off running after it; and when the deer was about to make a leap he caught it by the hind leg and threw it on his shoulder, and did not let go of it until he came to Fionn on the slopes of the Hill of Howth. "Well," said Fionn, "you have come." "I have," said the Lad of the Skin Mantles. "That won't have been without trouble to you," said Fionn. "No matter," said the Lad of the Skin Mantles.

"Well, now," said Fionn, said he, "when the Hag of the Red Stream sees that her deer has not arrived as usual, she will be here without delay seeking it; and," said Fionn, "if she gets hold of any bit of it she will have the deer as it was before; and take care," said Fionn, "that you don't give her a bit of it." "I won't," said the Lad of the Skin Mantles, and he sent for Oscar and Caoilte for them to dismember the deer and put it in the big cauldron. And Oscar and Caoilte did this, they dismembered the deer and put it in the big cauldron. It had only just grown warm when the Hag of the Red Stream arrived, and she said to them, "Aren't those the champions, seeing that they have attacked the one deer that I had! But," said she, "though you did that itself," said she, "wouldn't you be so good as to give me a sup of its broth?" "I won't," said the Lad of the Skin Mantles." "And will you give me a bit of its meat?"

dhomh balgam dha shùgh?” “Cha do bhair,” ors esan Gille nan Cochall Craiceann. “S a[n] doir thu dhomh greim dha fheòil?” “Cha do bhair,” orsa Gille nan Cochall Craiceann. “S a[n] doir thu dhomh làn mo dhuirneadh dha’n ghaorr?” “Cha do bhair,” orsa Gille nan Cochall Craiceann; “cha’n fhaigh thu,” ors esan, “sgath a bhuineas dhà.” “*Well,*” ors ise, “mara[n] do bhair, thà mise dha d’ chuir-sa fo gheasaibh ’s fo chrosaibh ’s fo⁶ naoi buaraichean mnà-sìdh siubhla sìth seachrain, laogh beag ’s miotaiche ’s is mì-threoraiche na thu héin thoirt cùram do chluais, do chinn ’s do chaitheamh-beatha dhìot,⁶ mara[n] doir thu thugam-sa ma ruith bliadhna [n] diugh ceann a’ Mhacain Mhóir a Ruigheachd na Sorch.” “Seadh,” ors esan Gille nan Cochall Craiceann, “tha mise dha d’ chuir-sa fo gheasaibh ’s fo chrosaibh, fo naoi buaraichean mnà-sìdh siubhla sìth seachrain, laogh beag ’s miotaiche ’s is mì-threòraiche na thu héin, thoirt cùram do chluais ’s do chinn ’s do chaitheamh-beatha dhìot, mara[m] bi cas air gach taobh aga’-sa dha [n] tSruth Ruadh gosa[n] till mise, agus ’ach uile boinne as a[n] tSruth Ruadh dol astoigh air a[n] dala ceann agus dol amach air a’ cheann eile.” “Tog dhìom,” ors ise, “agus togaidh mi dhìot.” “Cha tog ’s cha leag ach mar siud.” ’S dh’ fhalbh Cailleach a[n] tSruth Ruaidh. Agus nuair a dh’ fhalbh Cailleach a[n] tSruth Ruaidh, thuirt Fionn ri Gille nan Cochall Craiceann, “Nach duirt mi riut,” ors esan, “nach biodh siud gu[n] trioblaid dhut?” “Cha’n eil a gu deibhir,” orsa Gille nan Cochall Craiceann; “feumaidh mise falbh,” ors esan, “dh’ iarraidh ceann a’ Mhacain Mhóir, go brith [*sic*] gu dé mar a gheibh mi greim air.”

Co dhiùbh, air là ’r n-a mhàireach roinn Gille nan Cochall Craiceann deiseail agus dh’ fhalbh á dh’ fhiach a’ faigheadh á gu ruige Ruigheachd na Sorch, go brith gu dé mar a gheibheadh á ann⁷. Co dhiùbh, bhà falbh, ’s fada goirid gu robh á air a’ rathad ràinig á Ruigheachd na Sorch ’s ràinig á caisteal a’ Mhacain Mhóir; agus dh’ iarr á cath ’s comhrag, air neò ceann a’ Mhacain Mhóir a chuir uige-san. Siod a’ rud a gheobhadh á, cath ’s comhrag, ’s cha b’ e ceann a’ Mhacain Mhóir; ’s chaidh ciad làn-ghaisgeach chuir uige. Thòisich a’ sa[n] dala ceann riù gosa[n] deach á amach air a’ cheann eile dhiùbh; ’s dh’ éibh á cath ’s comhrag aríst, air neò ceann a’ Mhacain Mhóir a chuir uige. Siod a’ rud a gheobhadh á, cath ’s comhrag, ’s cha b’ e ceann a’ Mhacain Mhóir. Chaidh ciad treun-ghaisgeach a chuir uige, ’s thòisich á ’sa[n] dala ceann riù gosa[n] deach á ’mach air a’ cheann eile; ’s dh’ éibh á cath is comhrag air ais,

“I won’t,” said the Lad of the Skin Mantles. “And will you give me my fist full of its offal?” “I won’t,” said the Lad of the Skin Mantles; “you shan’t get a bit of it.” “Well,” said she, “if you won’t, I put you under *geasa* and under crosses⁶ and under the nine spancels of the wandering, peaceful, roving fairy-woman, that the little calf which is weaker and feebler than yourself should take the charge of your ear and your head and your behaviour away from you⁶ unless you bring me the head of the Great Youth from the Kingdom of Light before the end of a year from to-day.” “Well,” said the Lad of the Skin Mantles, “I put *you* under *geasa* and under crosses, under the nine spancels of the wandering, peaceful, roving fairy-woman, that the little calf which is weaker and feebler than yourself should take the charge of your ear and your head and your behaviour away from you unless you keep a foot on either side of the Red Stream till I return, and every drop of the Red Stream going in at one end and coming out at the other end.” “Lift it off me,” said she, “and I will lift it off you.” “I won’t lift it, and I won’t lay it down, but thus [it shall be].” And the Hag of the Red Stream went away. And when the Hag of the Red Stream had gone, Fionn said to the Lad of the Skin Mantles, “Didn’t I tell you,” said he, “that that wouldn’t be without trouble to you?” “No matter,” said the Lad of the Skin Mantles; “I must set off,” said he, “to seek the head of the Great Youth, no matter how I shall get hold of it.”

Anyway, next day the Lad of the Skin Mantles made ready and set off to see whether he could get to the Kingdom of Light, no matter how he would get there. However, he was on his way, and whether he was long on the road or not he reached the Kingdom of Light and came to the castle of the Great Youth; and he asked for battle and fight, or if not, for the head of the Great Youth to be sent him. That is what he would get, battle and fight, and not the head of the Great Youth; and a hundred seasoned champions were sent to him. He began at one end of them until he came out at the other end; and he called for battle and fight again, or if not, for the head of the Great Youth to be sent him. That is what he would get, battle and fight, and not the head of the Great Youth. A hundred mighty champions were sent him, and he began at the one end of them until he came out at the other; and he

air neò ceann a' Mhacain Mhóir a chuir uige. Siod a' rud a gheobhadh á, cath 's comhrag, 's cha b' e ceann a' Mhacain Mhóir. Chaidh ciad lùth-ghaisgeach a chuir uige, 's thòisich á 'sa[n] dala ceann gosa['n] deach á 'mach air a' cheann eile dhiùbh; 's nuair a roinn á sin dh' éibh á cath 's comhrag air ais, air neò, ceann a' Mhacain Mhóir a chuir uige-san.

Bhà Macan Mór coimhead air té dha na h-uinneagan, 's bhà faicinn [an] dìol bh' air a chuid sluaigh, 's thuirt á ris héin, "Nach mise thà gòrach, marbhadh mo chuid sluaigh mar seo, agus gu[n] duin' air an tsaoghal a thilleas mo làmh héin;" 's ghaibh á 'mach 's thòisich á héin 's Gille nan Cochall Craiceann air a chéile, 's bhà air thuar go robh fear cho math ris héin as a choinnimh. Thòisich na gillean air a chéile, 's bhà 'd ag obair air sabaid fad ùine mhóir, 's cha robh tuar gu rachadh aig a[n] dala fear air an fhear eile. Agus smaointich Gille nan Cochall Craiceann gu robh á glé-cheacharra dhà gu rachadh aig a' Mhacan Mhór air, 's thug á [an] togail bheag éibhinn ioghnnach [sic] athaireach ád⁸ air héin 's chuir á fodha [a'] Macan Mór, agus thuirt á ris, "Do bhàs as do chionn, gu dé t' éirig?" "Cha'n eil éirig agam-sa," ors a' Macan Mór, "ach na chì thu ma d' choinnimh." "Well, roghainn 's a bhith dhà, gheall mise do cheann a thoirt go leitheid seo do bhoireannach, Cailleach a[n] tSruth Ruaidh, 's feumaidh mi dhianamh; agus air a' mhionaid seo héin bidh 'n ceann air ghearradh dhìot." 'S dh' fhalbh Gille nan Cochall Craiceann 's tharraing á [an] claidheamh air a' Mhacan Mhór agus chuir á dheth an ceann. 'S nuair a roinn á sin rug á air a' cheann is thug á tarsainn air a ghualainn, 's roinn á air an Fhín, agus nuair a ràinig á an Fhín chuir Fionn fàilt' air.

"Tha thu air tigh'nn," ors esan Fionn, "'s dé mar a chaidh do thurus leat?" "Chaidh," ors esan Gille nan Cochall Craiceann, "glé-mhath." "Seadh," ors esan Fionn, "tha ise air a dhol 'na tòrr chnàmhan air a[n] tSruth Ruadh, agus feuma' tu halbh dh' ionnsaigh a[n] tSruth Ruaidh agus tòiseachadh ri innse dha na cnàmhan aice seo mar a mharbh thu [a'] Macan Mór. Agus," ors esan Fionn, "nuair a thòisicheas tu ri innse dha na cnàmhan mar a mharbh thu [a'] Macan Mór, tòisichidh na cnàmhan ri dhol ri chéile, 's tòisichidh an fheòil air tigh'nn air na cnàmhan. Agus nuair a thig an fheòil air na cnàmhan gearra' tu 'n fheòil dhiùbh leis a' chloidheamh; air neò cìosaichidh ì a' saoghal gu léir."

"Seadh," ors esan Gille nan Cochall Craiceann, "'s fhearr

called for battle and fight again, or, if not, for the head of the Great Youth to be sent him. That is what he would get, battle and fight, and not the head of the Great Youth. A hundred vigorous champions were sent him, and he began at the one end until he came out at the other; and when he had done that he called for battle and fight again, or if not, for the head of the Great Youth to be sent him.

The Great Youth was watching at one of the windows, and seeing the punishing his army got, and he said to himself, "What a fool I am to have my army killed like this, when there isn't a man in the world who can overcome me"; and he went out, and he himself and the Lad of the Skin Mantles began on each other, and it began to appear that he had met his match. The lads began on each other, and they were hard at it fighting for a long time, and there seemed no likelihood that the one man would overcome the other. And the Lad of the Skin Mantles considered that it was very stupid of him that the Great Youth should overcome him, and he gave himself that little pleasant wonderful airy lift⁹ and he threw the Great Youth down under him, and said to him, "Your death is above you; what is your ransom?" "I have no ransom," said the Great Youth, "but all that you see before you." "Well, however that may be, I promised to bring your head to a certain woman, the Hag of the Red Stream, and I must do it; and at this very minute your head will be cut off." And the Lad of the Skin Mantles went and drew his sword on the Great Youth and cut off his head. And when he did that he took hold of the head and put it across his shoulder; and he made for the Fenians, and when he reached the Fenians Fionn welcomed him.

"You have come," said Fionn, "and how did you get on on your mission?" "I got on very well," said the Lad of the Skin Mantles. "Well," said Fionn, "she has become a pile of bones at the Red Stream, and you must go to the Red Stream and begin to tell her bones how you killed the Great Youth. And," said Fionn, "when you begin to tell the bones how you killed the Great Youth the bones will begin to come together, and flesh will begin to grow on the bones. And when the flesh grows on the bones, cut the flesh from them with the sword; otherwise she will overcome the whole world."

"Well," said the Lad of the Skin Mantles, "I had better

dhomh-sa bhith falbh far a' bheil i dh' ionnsaigh a[n] tSruth Ruaidh." 'S dh' fhalbh Gille nan Cochall Craiceann 's ràinig á a' Struth Ruadh, is bha ise ann a' shin 'na tòrr chnàmhan. Thòisich á ri innse ri' mar a mharbh á a' Macan Mór 's thòisich na cnàmhan ri tigh'nn ri chéile, 's thòisich an fheòil ri tigh'nn air na cnàmhan. 'S nuair thàinig an fheòil air na cnàmhan thug á uige a[n] claidheamh, 's thòisich á ri gearradh na feòladh far nan cnàmhan gosa[n] dug á 'n fheòil far nan cnàmhan air fad. 'S bhà an uair sin ulladh a dh' innse dhi mar a mharbh a' Macan Mór 's thuit ise 'na tòrr chnàmhan air n-ais; 's rug á air na cnàmhan 's chaith á 'mach dha[n] tSruth Ruadh ád agus ceann a' Mhacain Mhóir comhla riutha, 's thill á dha'n Fhin mar a bha reimheid. Agus sin mar a chuala mise.

NOTES

The preceding story was taken down in phonetic script in March 1952 from the recitation of Niall Gillies of Garrygall, Castlebay, Barra, who told me that he heard it from Ruairidh Ruairidh Mhóir MacNéill of Castlebay about 40 years ago. Niall was born in Barra and lived there all his life, but his parents were from Mingulay. The tale is a very simplified and altered version of the one better represented in Campbell's "The Fair Gruagach, Son of the King of Eirinn" (*West Highland Tales*, No. 51), also from Barra; compare the version from S. Uist printed by K. C. Craig in *Béaloides*, XVII, 245 ff.

- ¹ These nasals are dropped in speech, but they "eclipse" the following consonant, and hence they are inserted here in square brackets to indicate this. Where they are dropped but do not "eclipse" nothing is inserted even if the vowel of the word is dropped too, e.g. *gu dé fadh*.

be going where she is, to the Red Stream.” And the Lad of the Skin Mantles went and he reached the Red Stream, and there she was, a pile of bones. He began to tell her how he killed the Great Youth, and the bones began to come together, and the flesh began to grow on the bones. And when the flesh came on the bones he took the sword and began to cut the flesh from the bones until he took the flesh entirely from the bones. And at that point he had finished telling her how he killed the Great Youth, and she fell back again, a pile of bones; and he took the bones and threw them out into the Red Stream and the head of the Great Youth along with them, and went back to the Fenians where he was before. And that is how I heard it.

² The pronouns *é* and *iad* in their pronunciations [a] and [at] are spelt here *á* and *ád*, where the acute accent means the clear, non-reduced vowel (*not* length).

³ Sic, not *a' sianar*.

⁴ The vowel is long here, hence written *á*.

⁵ i.e. *deud fios*, “tooth of knowledge”; putting his finger under this “tooth of knowledge” as a means of divination is a variant on Fionn’s well-known practice of biting his “thumb of knowledge”.

⁶⁻⁶ The bespelling-run was so given; the exact meaning of this traditional formula is of course uncertain.

⁷ The narrator said first *gheibh mi*, in the first person and oratio recta, and then changed *mi* to *á*, with oratio obliqua, but did not make the consequent change in tense, which is supplied here.

⁸ i.e. *úd*, pronounced [at].

⁹ A traditional phrase.