

Seanchas Ìle

MACLAGAN MANUSCRIPTS

LEGENDS: Local Legends

From Ronald Johnstone, Conispie, Islay.

V3/537/8

Legends of King James.

King James (Seumas an Rìgh) was going in disguise through the Highlands riding on an old white horse, and on one occasion he met a soldier, and entered into conversation with him. As they were both going in the same direction, they agreed to travel together, and went on until they reached an Tigh-sheante (an inn). Here they resolved to pass the night. A red haired girl brought them some food, and as she went out and in, they noticed she looked very sad. At last, they asked her what was wrong, and she told them that the house they were in was not a Tigh-sheante at all, but a house where a gang of robbers were living. She advised them to go away at once, or they would be sure to be robbed and killed before the morning. They however resolved to stand their ground, and protect themselves and the girl. So about midnight the robbers came to their room door, and demanded an entrance. They refused to allow them in, and the robbers immediately fired a shot. The soldier returned the salute, and they fired on each other through the door, until at length the robbers ceased. When the firing had commenced the King went to bed. In the morning, it was found that all the robbers had been killed, and the house was full of money and everything else. The King took a great deal of the money with him, but the soldier would take none. They took the Caille-ruadh (red haired girl) along with them, and went on until they came near a large house. Here the King left them. The girl and the soldier went on until they came to the door of the house. There they were met by a man who asked them where they had been the night before. The soldier replied, that did not matter, they wanted to get in there to rest. With this their companion of the night before appeared, and asked the soldier if he knew who he was. The soldier said he did not, but knew he was a coward, when he saw him go off to bed when the firing began. At this the king laughed, and took them in for this was Tigh an Rìgh. (the King's palace.) The soldier married the girl, and the King gave him all the money he had taken from the robbers house, and a letter to the regiment in which the soldier served. Taking his wife with him, the soldier returned to the regiment, and found the rest of the soldiers mourning the loss of their Commander. When the King's letter was opened, it contained the appointment of the soldier to the Command, and he and his wife lived happy ever after.

Another time, Seumas an Rìgh was going about in disguise when he came to a stream where two young women were washing clothes. They were sisters. One of them was keeping talk to the stranger for they did not know he was the King, but the other one said nothing, and the King noticed she looked very sad. On asking what was the matter with her, her sister said that she was engaged to be married to a young man in her own station, but that the laird who was very rich, and powerful wished her to marry him: and threatened if she would not, he would kill herself and the young man on the night of their marriage. The King asked them on what day was the marriage to be, and

when they told him, he put it down in his book, and went away.

On the night of the marriage, after the ceremony, the laird came in in a great rage to the girls' father's house, and began to clear the tables to make way for killing the bridegroom. Just at that moment a stranger appeared, and the company began to ask among themselves, who this stranger was, but no body seemed to know him. He went up the laird, and asked what he was doing. The laird answered him gruffly, telling him to mind his own affairs, or he would kill himself. At once the King went out, and blew a whistle, and all his soldiers, who had been hiding about the house, rushed in, seized the laird, bound him, and took him to prison. The marriage feast went on with great merriment, and the King took from the laird a splendid post he had, and gave it to the poor lad, whose wife never regretted having remained true to the one of her choice.

From Mrs McConnell, Grulinn, Islay (anonymous) 6187-6193

The following has been written as nearly as possible in th words of the narrator:

(translated from Gaelic)

You would hear about the woman who went over to Jura from Islay, and that was turned to be a beast. This is how I heard the story. Two women went from Islay to Jura, to make maorach (gather limpets). It came on them to remain for some time in the island, and they took shelter in a little hut that was these. One of them had a baby with her, and this one said to the other, "I am going to try if I can manage to make a little maoraich, and keep your eye on the baby till I return." The other one said that she would do that; and the baby's mother went away. She did not return for some time, and what was when she came back; she found her companion, and she looking very curious, just like a beast.

She asked where was the baby, but the other did not answer a word, but she went out of the hut. After she had gone out, the mother of the baby began to look through the house, to see if she could see the child, and she saw a pot of boiling on the fire, and a strong smell from it and when she looked what was in the pot, what was in it but her own baby! She took fright, and she ran down the way of the shore, the other woman caught here and she dragged her back to the hut where she killed and where she ate her.

After that, this one that had been turned to be a beast, remained about that place for years - a cause of terror to the whole island, and to the strangers that would be coming the way, killing and eating every body she caught.

There were not many people in the island of Jura at that time, and they were the fright of their life (beast) for the beast. She took a while up among the hills, and then she came down to the sea side. It was on her hands and feet she would go, and she was covered with hair like a beast and her nails grew as long as the nails of an eagle. At that time all the letters that would be coming to Islay were coming through the island of Jura and because f the beast that was here, they could not get past with them. At last a man came over to Islay from Craignish and he got a man for the people of this island to go with him to kill the beast. They went away in a boat and they took with them two dogs and two guns.

When they reached the Jura side of the sound, between Feolin and Amhainn na damh, the Islay man was left in the boat with one dog and one gun, and the stranger took with him one dog and one gun, and he went ashore to search for the beast. He went up, above where he thought she would be and when he reached the top of a hill that was there, where there were a lot of

little loose stones, they gave way with his weight, and they made a great noise running down the brae. This noise wakened the beast and she came out and she made to be at the man. The dog jumped on her, and while she and the dog were at the fight, the man ran to the boat, but he did not reach the shore, until the beast was following him, after she had killed the dog. He fired upon her twice, and when that did not despatch her, he drew a blow on her with the stock of the gun and he had her dead on the spot.

She was buried beside Amhainn Mhoir. He grave is clearly to be seen there still.

People were saying that her name was Buie, but I was speaking on the matter to a well informed old man in Jura, and he said to me, that Nic-Il-a-Riadhaich was her name.

From Donald McEachern, Kildalton, Islay (anonymous)

6199 - 6201

(translated from Gaelic)

An old man, a native of Islay, who is well versed in the folklore of his native island, gives the following variant of a tragedy which is said to have taken place at Sanaig long ago:

There was a time the McConnells were over there in Sanaig. They were a coarse people. They were one day down at the shore, putting out seaweed and they were after having stolen a cow the night before that. The housewife was sending their dinner out to them and what had she for the dinner but the liver of the cow that had been stolen. When the servants - one Ferguson - was going away with the food, the woman said to her, she to say to the men, that nothing of what was sent was to come back. And when the poor girl said this to them, it was what they did, they took the horse halter, and they tied the girl to the tail of the horse and they dragged her out to drown her in the sea. It happened that Archibald of Sanaig was at the time on the hill, high above them, looking down upon them, and he cried to them, and this saved the girl or she would have been drowned. But although they allowed the girl to go, they said to the man of Sanaig, if he would not promise them on the spot, that he would never tell a living man what he had seen, they would do such like on him as they were going to do on the girl.

The man gave them a promise for the sake of his life, but with the fright he got, he took [to] his bed when he went home, and it was not long he was alive after it.

From Donald McEachern, Kildalton, Islay (anonymous)

6201/2

(Translated from Gaelic)

The following legend is current in Islay, as to how the money was found for building Foreland Castle. It has been related by an old native of the island: It was Captain Walter that made the money with which Foreland Castle was built. He made it by going abroad, and by stealing gold and silver from the people abroad. One time he stole a golden calf and some of the Coolies came to search the ship, to see if the calf was on board. When the sailors ascertained that they were coming, the cook took the calf and he put it in the broth pot. If the Collies had found the calf in the ship they would have killed every man that was on board. But they did not think of the broth pot, and when they went away Captain Walter came home, taking the calf with him, and he did not need to go abroad any more after that.

From Mr A. MacLachlan, Braico, Islay (anonymous)

6209

Loch Coar is a small loch on the farm of Braico in the parish of Kilchomain, Islay. In the centre of the loch there is a small island, on which there is a large number of loose stones. The reciter says that he used to hear old people saying that they are the ruins of a house that was there long ago, in which a priest lived. At that time there was no loch there, and what is now the island was just a little piece of ground on which the Priests house had been built. It was a little higher than the rest of the ground round about it. The way the loch came to be there was this. The Priest had a well which he kept always locked; but one time when he was from home, his servant forgot to lock the well, and the consequence was that the water sprung up, and poured over, and before the priest had come back, all the land round about his house was covered with water. He was only in time to save his house, and prevent the water from spreading further. He had been later in coming home, the loch would have been bigger than it is. The narrator says that this story was believed by many, and in confirmation of it, it was pointed out that no water comes in, and none goes out, and still the loch remains, just as it was on the day on which it was formed - a warning of what may happen through the carelessness of a servant.

From John Gillespie, Port Charlotte, Islay (anonymous)

6212-6216

(translated from Gaelic)

The King of Spain one time had a son who was brave in strength, and clever in war, but there was one sad thing about him, that was that he had a cat's head and tail on him. The reason that that was on him was, the night he was born there were wizards in the castle, and they made witchcraft to him, and ever from that night a head and tail of a cat was on him. And a thing that was very wonderful, he would not see that himself at all.

He came one time on a visit to his country, and when he saw the Kings' daughter he fell in love with her very much, but she would not suffer to see him. She would run to the holes to leave his way. But when he heard this he went to her father, the king and he said to him that he would destroy his kingdom with the sword., if he would not give him his daughter in marriage. The King requested that he might get a little time till he would think on the matter, and the other man said he would get that. But when the Kings daughter heard how the affair was, she went off without delay where the Finalians were, that were dwelling on Leoid hill in Ireland. She reached the Fingalians on a summer's evening, and she told Fionn how the matter was,

and what had brought her there. Fionn said to her, "Fionn or a woman of Leoid? Come you down and I will save you." And she went in with Fionn and his people. At the rising of the sun the next morning, the son of the King of Spain reached the hill where they were, and he called to the hill where they were and he called to Fionn to send out that woman, or if he would not that he would have to fight (get a fight). Fionn replied that he would give him a fight, but would not give the woman. There was no more about it. Fionn sent out one of his men to fight with him, but the son of the king of Spain was not long killing him. Another was sent out, and another, until there had been thirteen men sent out, one after another, but they were all killed. When Fionn saw this, he went out himself, and they fought for a whole day and night, until Fionn killed him at last, and when he returned in, he found the Kings daughter, and the life after going out of her, with the fright she had got.

An Islayman related the following story

6222-6224

(Translated from Gaelic)

The night that Doctor Crawford married Miss Margaret Ballinaby, when the time came to them to go away, after the marriage - it was riding that all the Islay ladies would be at that time - the bride was put on horseback, and the horse gave itself a kind of shake, and she was thrown on the dung hill. When they were bemoaning her for what had happened to her, her husband said to her, Oh never mind Peggie my girl, there will be plenty of this world about you yet. And that came to be true enough, for they came on well.

But people were saying, in the first out set, when she went home to her husbands' house, and when she saw the poor looking house that was before her, she was not at all pleased. But one day when she was out taking a walk, Shawfield met her, and when he saw the appearance of grief on her, he said to her "What is troubling you girl?" She answered "What is troubling me!" Well, he went away, and there was not a cart he got that day that he did not send with something, until he filled up her house quite full for her.

From a native of Portnahaven, Islay

6305

MacKay of the Rhinns of Islay was fighting with the McLeans of Jura, when he was mortally wounded. When he saw that he was dying, he desired some of his followers to carry his body back to Islay, and to bury him on the island of Orersay. When he died they put his body in a lead coffin and brought it to Orersay, where it was buried according to his wish.

From a native of Portnahaven, Islay

6305

One time a vessel came in to the loch here and we called her the "Bloody Yankee". My own great grandfather was a miller at Octofad there at the time, and it was he that piolated her in to the loch. When she reached the harbour, she set fire to fifty two other vessels that were at anchor, and her crew went ashore, and took away with them every likely man they were able to get their hands on. Some of the people on the island got word sent to government, and when the "Bloody Yankee" went away, after doing all the harm she could, she was met out there, between this and Ireland by the government ships and there was a fight, and many were killed. The vessel drifted in, and was wrecked on the Frenchmans rock there. That is why it is called the Frenchmans' rock.

One time, long, long ago - it was about the time of the potato failure, or before it - the Islay lairds brought a fearful plague on the island. This was how it was. The potatoes failed, and the meal was selling at six shilling the stone - twenty two pounds in the stone, men's wages at the time was only a shilling a day, and when things came to be so bad they would just need to depend on the lairds for what would keep them living. But the lairds did not want that, and so they took a plan to get them all killed. The way they took was this. They got an Irish merchant that was in Portnahaven at the time to bring a lot a biscuits, in which the plague was, to the place. And when the people began to eat the biscuits, the plague soon spread. But that was not all, for the doctors were on the side of the lairds, and were giving the people wrong medicine, so that they might not get better.

The way the plague was kept out of Portcharlotte was this. One day there was a black cloud seen in the sky, and it was going from Portnahaven in the direction of Portcharlotte. The doctors, at the same time went away to Portcharlotte, and the people of Portnahaven, suspecting that the cloud had something to do with the plague, and that the doctors were off to give the wrong medicine, sent a messenger to Portcharlotte to tell the people there of what was coming. Before the doctors arrived, all the strongest men about the village were got together, every man with a good stick, they waited till the doctors came forward, and had gone into the public house. When the village men went in after them, they found them at work, making the wrong medicine and they would have killed them there and then had they not promised to make the right medicine. As it was, they had to flee, and had to run up the way of Bridgend: and so the plague was kept from coming to Portcharlotte. But there was another strange thing took place just about that time. A ship was coming from America full of Indian meal, and she having become leaky, the crew had to run into Portaskaig with her, and there sell all the cargo that was damaged. Some of the cargo they had even to throw overboard, and the natives got that for nothing: and by the time that meal was done, the next years crop was ready, and the people had plenty.

Talking of compliments, the reciter said:

"I got the greatest compliment paid to me the other day there, from a lady, that has ever been given me. It was from Mrs C----- . I was in their house, where I was to remain over the night, and we were singing songs all evening until it came to be pretty late. Then Mrs C----- sang one of Padruig Grants' hymns. It was beautifully sung, and then he rose and left us, to go to his bed. The Mistress and I sat chatting at the fire, and she related a dream to me which she said she had twenty years ago. I interpreted the dream, and being very much pleased with the interpretation, she sat on, and we talked about dreams and one thing and another for a long time. At last she said that she had been trying for the last hour to retire after her husband, but as our conversation had been so interesting, and my manner of telling stories so pleasing, she had not been able to go: "Tha sin cosmhuil ri sùil seargach Diarmaid ars mise" (that is like Diarmaids scroching eye, said I)

Well Diarmaid was the progenitor of the Campbells, and he had what was called a sùil seargach - a withering, or bewitching eye. That meant that every woman that would see him would fall in love with him. The same thing was true also of Prince Charlie. His eye was that way, and every woman that saw him fell in love with him.

But Diarmaid's story is this:

The night of his marriage, after he and his new wife had gone to bed, they saw, by the light of the fire which blazed on the middle of the floor, a great giant coming in to the house where they were: and as woman all love power Diarmaid's wife fell in love with the giant but the question was, how was she to get quit of Diarmaid.

The plan she took was this. She pretended to be sick, and Diarmaid became very anxious about her, and would do anything to cure her. But she said that nothing could be of any use to her except a branch from a tree that was growing on Eilean-loch-a-luain. Diarmaid went away to Eilean-loch-a-luain [Loch an Raoin?], and brought home a branch from the tree, but his wife said it was of no use, and that the tree would require to be pulled up by its roots. So Diarmaid went away again, and when he pulled the tree up by its roots, a wild boar came out of the ground, and fastened on Diarmaid but he soon pulled out its tusks, and killed it. When he came home with the boar, his wife requested him to measure it head to tail. This however did not please her, for she wanted him to measure it by stepping it from its tail to its head. To please her he did this, and when stepping along against the pointed bristles, one of them went into his foot, and poisoned him so badly that he died: and that is his story, and how his wife managed to get quit of him.