

XII.—*On the Scottish Formula of Congratulation on New Year's Eve,*

“Hogmanay, Trollalay.”

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[*Read to the Society 23rd February 1831.*]

THERE are few things more important in the history of nations than their festivals, their anniversaries, and days of public rejoicing. Their peculiarities, their true character, are strikingly manifested on such occasions; old traditions and customs are revived; the mind, relaxed from the cares and pursuits of every day, exhibits its predilections without reserve, and in this freer state it delights to recall ancient reminiscences, and to rehearse, as it were, a lesson of the past. By these means solemn festivals form a chain of connection between the present and the very remote past ages.

That which on a common day would appear ludicrous or childish to do or say, we do or say without hesitation or scruple on the day appointed, for our ancestors were wont on that day so to say and do. Nay, the keeping up of the custom we are prone to consider as a religious duty, even though its object may have vanished, or though we may have lost the key to its true meaning and import.

The formula “*Hogmanay, Trollalay*,” offers a case in point for these observations. Its high antiquity is admitted by all inquirers; but no man will pretend to determine when it first was brought into use. The words, as we cannot for a moment doubt that they express some definite meaning, show by the very idiom that they belong to ages far remote; for they are not at present generally understood, and no one has as yet succeeded in explaining their meaning from the dialects now spoken in the British Isles, or elsewhere in Europe.

By referring to Dr Jamieson's Dictionary (*sub voce* Hogmanay), the reader will observe that none of the explanations offered have completely satisfied the mind of that diligent and learned antiquary, although he seems to give a

preference to an opinion expressed in the Caledonian Mercury, February 2, 1792.

The connection between the French formula there mentioned, *AU GUI MENEZ*,” and the Scottish “*Hogmanay*,” I feel no inclination to doubt; but if my explanation shall appear the true one, then it will be almost evident that the PHILOLOGUS of the Caledonian Mercury has mistaken the daughter for the parent;—that the Scottish formula is not derived from the French, but the French from the Scottish;—that the Scottish formula was once quite intelligible in Scotland, and that it perfectly agreed with the idiom and traditions of the country; but that the French formula was never intelligible in that country;—that one half of it gives at best but a forced and constrained meaning in French;—that that meaning is entirely founded on conjecture;—and that the remainder of the formula is left entirely unexplained.

It is stated that, on the *fete des fous*, companies of both sexes used to run about, fantastically dressed, with Christmas boxes, under a chief called *Rollet Follet*, and to enter churches during service crying “*Au gui menez. Rollet Follet. Au gui menez. Tiri liri. Mainte du blanc, et point du bis.*” The syllable *gui*, which happens to mean mistletoe in French, furnishes the only foundation for an explanation, coupled with the circumstance, that it is said the Druids used to cut the mistletoe, crying as they went along, *Au gui menez*; yet the author does not venture to assert that the Druids spoke French!! as they could only have done so by anticipation. The author derives some consolation from the possibility that *gui*, perhaps, may mean mistletoe in some Celtic or Scandinavian dialect: Why, such a thing is easily ascertained. The author could easily have satisfied himself as to the Celtic dialects. Respecting the Scandinavian, we can assure him that in none of them *gui* means the mistletoe, although in all probability the French word *gui* is derived from the Icelandic *vidr* (pron. vithr); but this would be of no service for the explaining of the supposed Druidical *gui*. And what would be gained if the *gui* were found to be Druidical, unless the other words *au* and *menez* were Druidical too, which they cannot be, unless the Druids spoke French by prophecy?

If the explanation which I have to offer shall appear admissible, the French formula *au gui menez* is only a corruption of the Scottish *Hogmanay*, as it would be spelt in the French fashion, and accommodated to French organs of speech; but it is without any sense in the French language whatever.

ROLLET IS NO INVOCATION of old ROLLO THE WALKER (*Gáungu Hrólfr*),

for Rollo was never invoked or honoured with any divine worship by any man or nation, heathen or Christian,—only, on account of his invading Neustria, the monks added this prayer to their litany,

“ A furore Normanorum
Libera nos, Domine ;”

but that was no invocation to Rolf. *Rollet Follet* has accordingly nothing to do with Rolf, as our author supposes, but is only an ill-recollected echo of the Scottish words *Trollalay*, pronounced by a nation who did not understand them. *Tiri liri* is another corruption, and is, like all the rest of the French formula, utter nonsense.

“ *Au guy! l'an neuf,*” which our author, on the authority of Keyser, states to be a cry uttered on the 31st of December in Aquitaine, is another corruption of the old formula, still more modern.

But the French words “ *Mainte du blanc, et point du bis,*” are good sense, and a plain translation of the Scottish words,

“ Gie me some o' your white bread,
I'll ha'e nane o' your grey.”

This part of the Scottish formula is, as the language shows, comparatively modern, and substituted for a part of the old formula when that was no longer understood; for the people abhor the repetition of long formulas without understanding them. The whole of the old verse or formula will be found in a succeeding page; but it is only necessary at present to observe, that “ *Hogmanaye, Trollalay,*” was quite as much as the common people could recollect of words no longer intelligible, and for the latter part they substituted an address in the name of the Elves or Fairies (to whom, as shall presently be shown, the formula applied, and whose connection with it was thus obscurely borne in remembrance), praying for the customary offering which they were wont to receive, and which they still receive, in some parts of Norway at the change of the year, as a reward for the protection they have afforded during the past year, and as a propitiation and further inducement to continue their favour during the next.

After these remarks, I shall now proceed to state the conclusion at which, after mature deliberation, I have arrived, in explaining the words of the formula “ *HOGMANAYE, TROLLALAY,*” as being entirely founded on fairy lore. In doing so, I hope to satisfy the reader that these words, just as the people pronounce them, without now understanding their signification, express a natural

and obvious meaning in the ancient language of the country. According to my view, therefore, the formula

“ Hogman [properly Hogmen] aye,
Troll a lay,”

contains two words in the former line, and three in the latter, signifying

The Elves for ever,
The Trolles (i. e. the evil genii) into the sea,

the whole of the formula being good Anglo-Saxon or even old English words.

This assumption needs both a philological and also an historical illustration. The philological illustration is short. *Hogh* or *Hog* is Anglo-Saxon, meaning a hill, and *Hoghmen*, hillmen; for the Elves were by all northern nations believed to reside in hills.

The Icelandic analogy confirms the supposition here advanced; for the Elves were by the Icelanders called “ *Haugmenn*” and “ *Haugbuar,*” i. e. *Hillmen* and *Hilldwellers*; and indeed the belief that the Elves inhabit hills is well known to every one who is at all acquainted with fairy mythology, and needs not therefore to be proved by any further authority; and *Hoghman*, in plural *Hoghmen*, being pure Anglo-Saxon for *Hillmen*, I think it sufficiently proved in a philological respect, that *Hogmen aye* means the Elves for ever.

I humbly conceive that no philological doubt or difficulty can be urged against this interpretation of *Hogmen aye*. We do not, it is true, find the compound word *Hogmen* in our Anglo-Saxon vocabularies or dictionaries; but we find both *Hog* for hill, and *Men* for men; which, put together, can have no other signification than *Hillmen*,—a most appropriate name for the Elves, and similar to that which we know they received in the Icelandic tongue; no weak argument to those who are aware of the perpetual parallelism in forms and phrases between that language and the Anglo-Saxon.

We shall see that the assumption, that *Hogmen* means *Hillmen*, renders the interpretation of the formula consistent in all its parts, and perfectly reconciles it with popular traditions of this as well as other northern countries.

Still it may be asked, Why did our forefathers cry “ the Elves for ever ?”

¹ Not *Hoga*, as Spelman says; for, to tell the truth, Spelman appears not to have been acquainted with the Anglo-Saxon system of declensions, and therefore he sometimes mistakes some oblique case or other for a different form or variation of the nominative.

² See the *Minstrely of the Scottish Border*, III. 162, 5th edit. for the Scottish belief on this subject.

Whence this address to them on New Year's Eve? This is an historical question which must be solved.

The removing term or Lady-day of the *Hoghmen* or *Elves* was the night preceding New Year. Magnusen, in his *Mythological Dictionary* (*sub voce* *Alfheimr*, p. 279), says, "Nocte quæ novum annum præcedit, Alfi in Islandia nova habitacula petere, et intrare perhibentur." We shall soon see that this popular belief was common to other northern countries, and that it also existed in Scotland. Even Magnusen says, immediately after the passage here quoted, "Similis superstitio de solstitiari hyemis nocte, a vulgo vicinorum boreæ regionum fovetur."

Now although the temper of the *Elves* or *Hoghmen* was little to be depended upon, they still were upon the whole *Good Genii*, and in fact they have on that account been termed in Britain *Good People* and *Good Neighbours*; therefore, their moving away was considered as a calamity, inasmuch as it was a sure forerunner of one. No wish was therefore more appropriate, at the very moment when it was feared that the capricious *Elves* might change their residence, than this, "May they—may the *Good Genii* of your habitation—stay with you for ever."

And, moreover, this was not an empty wish; for the *Elves* heard it, and, like all people who know their great influence, they loved to be held in respect. Thus, then, a wish piously expressed might avert even an intended migration.

But New Year's Eve, or rather the very moment of midnight—for all *Genii* are punctual—was a general removing term for *Genii*, not only for good, but also for evil ones. The latter are in old English called *Trolle*, Icel. *Tróll*. They too heard the address of man, and it was one comfort that they were in many instances (powerful as they were) bound to listen to it, and to obey it. Their removal was very desirable, and therefore an address to them was added immediately after the former one to the *Hoghmen*, or the *Good Genii*, by which the *Trolles* were called upon to change their habitation, or even commanded to do so.

We are not to wonder that such mighty *Genii* would, or even felt themselves compelled to obey the command; for it is a most interesting, and at the same time a most comfortable point in fairy demonology, that the words of the children of men, when uttered in season, are of the most surprising power, and, if all formalities are observed, *Genii* must fulfil them to the letter. I could prove this by many instances from northern as well as Arabic and Persian fairy lore.

But I must here return to philology.

Trolle are Evil *Genii*,—that part of the formula is settled: but what is a *lay*? This, I think, is derived from two Norse words, *á læ*, in Icelandic pronounced *ow lay*, the former word being a preposition meaning *in* or *into*, and the latter the *Sea*. *Læ* in this sense is an old, poetic, Icelandic word: thus, in the *Hófuðlausn* of Egil Skallagrim's son,

Kom gríðar læ,
A gíalpar skæ;—

i. e.

The ocean [or the tide] of the axe
Fell on the Nereid's window.³

The interpretation, therefore, which I have given above (p. 204) of this hitherto mystic formula will, it is hoped, both on philological and on historical grounds, stand the test of the most rigid criticism; seeing that, while it is now shown to have an obvious meaning in the northern languages, it at the same time rests on well authenticated popular traditions, believed and prevalent in all the northern countries, not excepting Scotland.

Magnusen has, in his *Mythological Dictionary* (*sub voce* *Tróll*), shown that in Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Scotland and other parts of Great Britain, the *Genii* were believed to change their residences on New Year's Eve. He has proved this by numerous conclusive instances. And whoever will consult the three copious articles in his *Dictionary*, *Alfar*, *Tróll*, and *Vætr*, will find every part of my historical arguments, although proposed in a very different way, there amply confirmed. I have, however, borrowed nothing from my learned countryman. The results which I have had the honour of laying before the Society, I had arrived at without inspecting his book; and I wrote the first draft of this article off hand, in the presence of a gentleman who did me the honour of consulting me on the meaning of "*Hogmanaye*, *Troll a lay*," and in that draft all these results were contained. It greatly strengthened my confidence in the accuracy of my interpretation, to find, afterwards, that the popular traditions which Magnusen had collected all agreed with my hypothesis.

Feeling convinced that I had in some measure fulfilled the eternal and invariable rules of true interpretation, I entertained no doubt of the correctness of

³ The ocean of the axe is a Norse poetical figure, meaning the blood of the slain; it fell on the Nereid's window, *i. e.* into the sea.

the one here proposed. I found a set of words in an obsolete language (and yet, be it remembered, a language of the country), which I rendered word for word in a modern idiom; and this interpretation gave a natural sense conformable with known tradition: this, I humbly conceive, is all that can be expected, all that can be wished, from an interpreter. The only thing capable of overthrowing my interpretation would be if another set of words were found, either in the same language or in another, expressive of a more natural sense, and equally agreeing with the known sound of the formula. After my opinion was once formed, I had no great fear of such an event; still it behoves every writer to consider that the conviction of others is often weaker than his own. It was therefore a welcome discovery to me when I found, in Percy's Relics, the following lines, which I hope will remove every further doubt from the mind of even a very stubborn sceptic. These lines run as follows:

Trolle on away,
 Synge heave and howe,
 Rombelowe,
 Trolle on away.

These lines, which contain a very ample confirmation of the interpretation of "*Hogman aye, Troll a lay,*" given above, have, as far as I know, never been interpreted before; and yet I find they are good old English, certainly of no more modern date than the 13th or perhaps 14th century, judging merely from the language. It is quite evident that Percy has here copied, from a *viva voce* delivery, a set of words which neither he nor his Rhapsodes understood. In order to demonstrate this more clearly, I shall place side by side his reading and the correct ancient spelling of the same sounds:—

<i>Percy's Reading.</i>	<i>Correct Ancient Spelling.</i>
"Trolle on away,	Trolle on away,
Synge heave and howe,	Synge hive and howe,
Rombelowe,	Rum belowe,
Trolle on away."	Trolle on away.

The word *heave* he gave according to modern English orthography, which for this sound has at least three different spellings, *heave*, *heve*, and *heeve*, and it was a mere chance that he chose the first of these. He did not think of *hive* (although this in old English is the correct spelling of the same sound), for that would, in his as well as in our days, be pronounced *haive*. *Rombelowe* is certainly two words, and not one, and the first must in old English be spelt *Rum*, and not *Rom*; but the difference did not appear in pronunciation. And,

after all, there remains an error in the first line, for both the metre shows that it cannot be "Trolle on away," there being one syllable too much; and the sense, too, as there are two prepositions *on* and *a*, instead of one. This mistake is easily accounted for; it was originally, doubtless, "Troll on way." This was not understood by modern repeaters of the song, and they made it *Trolle on away*, wishing it to contain at least one word intelligible to them; and they were not much in the wrong, only they should then have eliminated the *on*, which became superfluous when the *a* was added to *way*. It is a homage to common sense, that the people have an aversion to repeat what they do not understand; and thus they frequently transform words unintelligible to them into others which they understand. Hence Scottish *Needcessity*, Turkish *Stambul*, &c. "*Troll away*" is still a popular glossa for the original, *Troll on lay* or *Troll on lee*, at one time similarly pronounced. And, finally, the rhyme shows that the first line of the ditty, as Percy has given it, is missing; and the context makes it evident that the missing line is no other than the words "*Hogmen aye*;" and a further evidence of that fact is, that we find in the still subsisting congratulation-formula, *Hogmanay* coupled with *Trollalay*.

Accordingly, the verse, restored to its pristine integrity, runs thus:—

And this is the translation.

Hogmen aye,	Vivant in aeternum Genii boni!
Trolle on lay,	Abeant mali in profundum!
Synge hive and howe,	Cantet famulitium collesque!
Rum-belowe,	Jam erit quies in regionibus infernis,
<i>Chorus,</i> Trolle on lay. ¹	<i>Chorus,</i> Abeant, mali Genii, in profundum.

Why were the servants of a family to *synge* at the departure of the *Trolles*? Because the Evil Genii often marred their work, and took pleasure in subject-

¹ I shall subjoin the glossary to this ditty.

HOGMAN, an Elf, as already explained; in the plural number, HOGMEN, the Elves.

TROLLE, Evil Genius, Giant, Witch, &c. See every northern dictionary, Icelandic, Swedish, or Danish.

LAY, the Sea; Icel. *Læ*, pronounced in the same way, confor. Anglosax. *Lee*, Vasta planities, æquor. See Spelman.

HIVE, Anglosax. Servant, Domestic, pl. Hiues.

HOWE, Anglosax. a Hill. For both these words see Spelman and Lye.

RUM, Anglosax. Room, place of quiet and comfort

BLOWE, old spelling for below.

ing them to a variety of annoyances; as, on the other hand, the kind Elves aided and assisted them, when the servants treated their sacred haunts with due respect. The hills were to sing at the removal of the Evil Genii, because they were the common place of residence for all Genii both good and bad; and as the Trolles were in their temper and character entirely opposed to the Elves, undoing whatever good they did, or throwing obstacles in their way, and in many ways afflicting and vexing both the Elves themselves and those amongst mankind whom they favoured and protected, the latter had great cause to rejoice when the former departed, not only because they were their antagonists, but because after their departure there would be more ROOM BELOW.

A doubt may be started respecting the Icelandic word LAY, *the sea*. For, it will be asked, how was such a foreign word introduced into a Scottish formula or song? The answer is, it is not foreign. The labours of so many eminent philologists have now satisfactorily proved, that although the Norse and the Scottish undoubtedly belonged to two different families (the one being the parent of all Scandinavian Gothic dialects, and the other a branch or daughter of the Teutonic), yet both were derived from the same remoter parent stock; and also the constant intercourse, sometimes hostile and sometimes peaceful, between the Scottish and the Norwegians (who spoke the language now called Icelandic); so assimilated the two idioms in Scotland, that Scottish and Norman understood each other without difficulty: and that the Scottish directly borrowed many words from the Norse has been amply demonstrated by Dr Jamieson. But if any one is not satisfied with this account of the word *lay*, let him spell it *Lee*, and say it is Anglo-Saxon; the meaning of the Anglo-Saxon word is similar to that of the Icelandic; *Lee* means *vasta planities, æquor*. Ergo, still "the Trolles into the sea," or "*into the wide field*;" that is to say, off with them! far away with them! an idiom similar to the German phrase *ins weite*. Thus the whole verse is uniformly explained from the same language.

NOTE BY THE AUTHOR, TO THE FOREGOING COMMUNICATION.—In addition to the remarks made in the preceding Essay, on the attempts at explaining *Hogmanay* made by earlier authors, I shall briefly notice a few more opinions on the subject, partly with the view of satisfying the reader that I have not overlooked these opinions, and partly by way of placing before him, *velut in tabula*, the most current explanations, that

he may with the greater ease compare them, and judge of the admissibility of each respectively, and of the comparative claims of the one submitted in the preceding paper in particular.

I. The basis of one of these explanations is the conjecture that *Hogmanay* is corrupt Greek, and that it means *ἅγια μῆνη*, which, although it literally means *Holy Moon*, has been interpreted HOLY MONTH. By this Greek cry or exclamation it has been surmised that the commencement of the New Year was announced to the public, or even that the *ignobile vulgus* themselves, by these two Greek words, announced the commencement of the year to one another.

My objections to this opinion are as follows:—1st, By no calendar, either old or new, does any holy month commence on the 1st of January. Nay, an HOLY MONTH could never commence, for no such MONTH is recognised by the ritual of any church. 2d, The common people in the north of Europe never showed any predilection for Greek, either in ancient or modern times; and even the clergy were by no means fond of spouting Greek during the middle ages. Who does not recollect their common excuse—"Græca sunt non leguntur." 3d, The words *ἅγια μῆνη* bear but a small resemblance to *Hogmanay*, particularly when the accent is considered, which generally is the most lasting and unchanging part of every word. *Hogmanay* is always accented on the last syllable, and *μῆνη* on the penultime. 4th, In this explanation only one half of the formula is taken into consideration, for no interpreter has said that *Trollalay* was Greek. 5th, It rests entirely on conjecture, and is not supported by any record or tradition.

II. In the very moment I was going to read the above Essay to the Soc. Antiq. I was favoured with a note from an eminent antiquary,⁴ merely containing an interrogatory, "*Whether I were acquainted with that Hogmanay which the Goths were wont to sing before the emperors in Constantinople?*" I had no difficulty in comprehending that this query referred to the *Gothic song*, as the emperor calls it, which Constantinus Porphyrogenitus has inserted in his work on the Cerimonial of the court of Constantinople, b. i. chap. 83. I have long been acquainted with that song, and at one time I paid more attention to it than, according to my present conviction, it deserves. I must say there is no "*Hogmanay*" in that song; but I shall not determine whether the words *ἅγια* and *νῆα* which occur in it have first led etymologists to the theory of *ἅγια μῆνη* above mentioned. The emperor has not only given the song, but accompanied it with two glossaries [perhaps either one or both of these glossaries are inserted by later transcribers]; but I have no longer any doubt that both the song and the glossaries are *utter nonsense*, and such seems to be the mature opinion of the learned commentator, Dr Reiske. Respecting the Gothic song, the historical fact seems to amount to no

⁴ I am inclined to add, one who too much keeps his light under a bushel; I mean the editor of the Scottish Ballads, Mr R. Jameson.

more than this,—that on the ninth day after Christmas, the Goths, and, as it seems, those who formed the Gothic guard called *Βαγγυοι*, were in the habit, or were even appointed to entertain the great emperor with a song and dance in their own way. The language of their song seems to have been a sort of a *lingua franca*. Such, at least, must have been the idea which the emperor, or the author of the above-mentioned glossary, entertained respecting it; for there some words are derived from Hebrew, others from Latin. But, at all events, it does not resemble Ulphilas's Gothic, or any other kind of Gothic, ancient or modern, now known; neither does it appear to resemble Slavonic: some words of it bear a greater resemblance to bad Greek than to anything else; and to a certainty it contains nothing in any way applicable to, or likely to throw the least light on, *Hogmanay*.⁵

III. Other interpreters have said that *Hogmanay* was Latin, and ought to be spelt *Hoc mane*; that these words were the beginning of the matins in the Roman Catholic service, &c. There are many objections to this theory, and among others this, that the matins on New Year's day begin with *no such words as Hoc Mane*. The objections 3, 4, and 5, to the Greek derivation, also apply to this opinion, besides many others.

IV. Some have asserted that *Hogmanay*, *Trollalay*, was French, and should be written

“ L'homme est né !

Trois Rois là !

Objections.

No *MAN par excellence* was born on New Year's Eve; and no *Three Kings* made their appearance on that night. Objection 5 to the Greek derivation above also applies here, besides many others.

V. Mr Callender's learned paper, in vol. ii. page 1 of these Transactions, ought to be taken into consideration. Although some of the objections here mentioned apply also to his theory, and although I humbly conceive his interpretation to be deficient in point of consistency, I perfectly agree with him in his interpretation of the word *Trolle*; and from the spirit of inquisitiveness and fairness manifest in his paper, I almost flatter myself, that if he had had the same data before him as I, he would either have arrived at the same results, or approved of those which I have had the honour of laying before the Society.

⁵ The word *ἄγια* is translated *φύλαττε* in the glossary, and *νάνα, σώσον δὴ σώσον*. The words *ἄγια* and *νάνα* are not placed together consecutively in the song.