**Water World as Another Home for the English Nation Reflected in the English Folklore**

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PLAN

Introduction.

The history of Britain’s relations with its “waterworld”.Why did it inspire the emergence of the rich English folklore ?

The water world in the English folklore : tales, stories fears, prejudices, poems connected with seas, rivers, lakes and their inhabitants.

The English nation’s attempt at trying to preserve its precious “waterworld” both as the natural resource and the cultural inheritance.

Conclusion.

The British are a most curious nation in many aspects. When a tourist from whatever continent comes to visit Britain the first conclusion he arrives at is how bizarre the people living there are. The main reason to their uniqueness will certainly lie on the surface: Great Britain is an island populated by the nation that had to grow up and go all the long way of its history alone being separated from the rest of the world by great amounts of water. This very characteristics turned them into not only a curious nation, but also an interesting and special one, whose history and culture are one of the richest in the world. And the water surrounding the island played not a minor part in its forming. So the British people respect and cherish their “watery” neighbour who from the earliest stages of their history up to now gave them food, drink, work, power, respect of other nations, wealth and after all entertainment. It inspired a huge number of stories, tales, poems, superstitions and prejudicies and it has always been worshipped by the people.

The studies of the British culture and therefore understanding of the national character of the English cannot stand apart from the research of its important product – folklore. By culture we mean the result of the social activity of people. Every new generation historically brings its piece into the whole process of the development of culture of this or that nation; so culture collects the values expressed through different means: literature, architecture, music, sculpture, traditions, cuisine, etc. Cultural development of the nation is essential for the development of every person belonging to it, because his understanding and percepting of the world is formed according to the society he grows up in and is influenced by the norms and values of this society.

Arts in general are always meant to bring beauty into the life of people and educate them through it, make them better, kinder and wiser. National folklore is no exception in this sense. Even if it very often does not have a human being as the central figure it still bring forward ethical questions, studies human soul, its moral qualities. Accepting this aspect presupposes that we realize the educational side of the folkloric characters and understand what their creators wanted to tell us, or warn about, or what kind of an ideal they meant to form up. However, each folkloric hero or character is a mixture of a number of different qualities and its nature is not always clear and easy to interpreter. Therefore the aim and the meaning of a character should be searched for in just one side of its complicated semantics.

So the aim of this work is to make a research in the part of a rich field of the British folklore concerning British water world through the means of songs, poems, stories, legends, fears, superstitions, tales. With the help of this material we shall study the changes and development of the English character, language, history and culture.

**Chapter 1**

The field of the country’s economy connected with water was always a great concern for those who ruled it for they naturally attached much importance to it. From the times when the English society was being born and only beginning to take shape kings already would interest themselves in the conditions of trading across the sea. In the eleventh century Cnut on a pilgrimage to Rome took the opportunity of obtaining from the Emperor and other rulers he met there greater security and reduction of talls for his subjects, traders and others, travelling in their lands. Already in the eighth century an English merchant called Botta was settled at Marceilles, perhaps as an agent for collecting goods to be sold in England. The Viking rades of the late eighth and ninth centuries disrupted trade on the Continent, but Englishmen may well have taken part in the Baltic trade opened up by this time. At least, there is no reason to deny English nationality to a certain Wulfstan who described to King Alfred a journey taken to the Frisches Haff; he has an English name.

On the other hand, we hear of foreign traders in England from early times. Bede speaks of London as the “mart of many nations, resorting to it by sea and land”, and mentions the purchase of a captive by a Frisian merchant in London. But the strongest evidence for the amount of sea traffic in Frisian hands is the assumption of an Anglo-Saxon poet that a seaman is likely to have a Frisian wife:

Dear is the welcome guest to the Frisian woman when the ship comes to land. His ship is come and her husband, her own bread – winner, is at home, and she invites him in, washes his stained raiment and gives him new clothes, grants him on land what his love demands.

Men from other lands came also. At the end of the tenth century a document dealing with trade in London speaks of men from Rouen, Flanders, Ponthieu, Normandy, France; from about the same date comes a description of York as the resort of merchants from all quarters, especially Danes.

The merchants and seamen plied an honoured trade. The poets speak with appreciation of the seaman “who can boldly drive the ship across the salt sea” or “can steer the stem on the dark wave, knows the currents, (being) the pilot of the company over the wide ocean”, and it was at least a current opinion in the early eleventh century that the merchant who had crossed the sea three times at his own cost should be entitled to a thane’s rank. The merchant in Aelfric’s “Colloquy” stresses the dangers of his lot:

I go on board my ship with my freight and row over the regions of the sea, and sell my goods and buy precious things which are not produced in this land, and I bring it hither to you with great danger over the sea, and sometimes I suffer shipwreck with the loss of all my goods, barely escaping with my life.

As we see people working in the sea or over the seas gained much respect in the society and were loved by others. But so much for the economical aspect. The water, as we already mentioned earlier, was one of the greatest attractions as a source of entertainment.

Fishing, like hunting, was highly popular in England, but these were pleasures reserved for the nobility. In the twelfth century, when the kings had normally been so strong, they had claimed such oppressive fishing – rights that all the classes had united in protest. One of the demands of the rebels in 1381 was that hunting and fishing should be common to all; not only was this refused, but in 1390 Parliament enacted a penalty for one year’s imprisonment for everyone who should presume to keep hunting – dogs or use ferrets or snares to catch deer, rabbits, or any other game. Fishing and hunting, said the statute, was the sport for gentlefolk.

So this is a scetch or an outline of reasons explaining why our ancestors valued so much the rivers, lakes, seas of their land – and it is worth mentioning that their land abounds in all that – and why they respected the work of sailors, merchants or travellers. All this is important for the understanding of how it was becoming an inseparable part of their culture and how it is reflected in their culture.

**Chapter 2**

What is folklore? Funk and Wagnall’s “Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend” (1972) offers a staggering 22 definitions, running to half a dozen pages. In recent years definitions have tended to be all – embracing in their simplicity: folklore is made up of “the traditional stories, customs and habits of a particular community or nation” says the “Collins Cobuild Dictionary” of 1987.

More specific definitions also abound; perhaps, folklore should be identified as the community’s commitment to maintaining stories, customs and habits purely for their own sake. ( A perfect example of this would be the famous horse race at Siena in Italy: the p a l i o attracts many thousands of tourists, yet if not a single outsider attend, the people of the community would still support the event year after year).

But what about those events or beliefs which have been recently initiated or which are sustained for reasons of commercial gain or tourism? Many customs are not as ancient as their participants may claim but it would be foolish to dismiss them as irrelevant. Some apparently ancient customs are, in fact, relatively modern, but does this mean they cannot be termed as folklore? The spectacular fire festival at Allendale, for instance, feels utterly authentic despite the fact that there is no record of the event prior to 1853. There are many other cases of new events or stories which have rapidly assumed organic growth and therefore deserve the status of being recognised as folklore.

Any work covering the question of folklore must be selective, but here we shall attempt to explore and celebrate the variety and vigour of Britain’s folklore concerning “waterworld” traditions, beliefs and superstitions. A wide geographical area is covered: England, Scotland and Wales with some reference to Ireland and other territories.

Entire books – indeed, whole libraries of books – have been written on every aspect of folklore: on epitaphs and weather lore, folk medicine and calendar customs, traditional drama and sports and pastimes, superstitions, ghosts and witchcraft, fairs, sea monsters and many others. While trying to cram much into little work I have avoided generalisation. Precise details such as names, dates and localities are given wherever possible and there are some references to features that still can be seen - a mountain, a bridge, a standing stone or a carving in a church.

Classic folklore belongs within the country to the basic unit of the parish. Most parishes could produce at least a booklet and in some cases a substantial volume on their own folklore, past and present . It would be a mistake, however, to think that rural customs, dance and tale were the whole picture, because there is a rich picture of urban and industrial folklore as well – from the office girl’s prewedding ceremonies to urban tales of phantom hitchhickers and stolen corpses.

In this age of fragmentation, speed and stress, people often seem to thirst for something in which they can take an active part. There is a need to rediscover something which is more permanent and part of a continuing tradition. By tapping into our heritage of song and story, ritual and celebration, our lives are given shape and meaning.

In some cases all we have to do is join in with an activity which is already happening; in others it will perhaps mean reviving a dance or a traditional play. But however we choose to participate, as long as we continue to use, adapt and develop the elements of our folklore heritage it will survive.

So this work may be regarded as an attempt to encourage us all to seek out the stories and customs of country, county, town, village, to understand and enjoy them and to pass them on.

**The watery world**

Not a single town or village in England is situated more than a hundred miles from the sea, except for a few places in the Midlands, and most of those in Wales and Scotland are nearer still. The coastline lies for thousands of miles, with a host of off-shore islands ranging from Scilly to Shetland and Wight to Lewis. It is hardly surprising then that our long and eventful maritime history is complemented by a rich heritage of nautical stories and superstitions, beliefs and customs, many of which continue to affect our daily lives – even oil rigs, very much a twentieth – century phenomenon, have tales of their own. Inland water, too, are the subjects of stories which echoes the folklore of the coasts and seas.

**Beneath the waves**

Many tales are told of submerged lands, and of church bells ringing ominously from beneath the waves. Between Land’s End and the Scilly Islands lies a group of rocks called The Seven Stones, known to fishermen as “The City” and near to which the land of Lyoness is believed to lie, lost under the sea. There is a rhyme which proclaims:

Between Land’s End and Scilly Rocks

Sunk lies a town that ocean mocks.

Lyoness was said to have had 140 churches. These and most of its people were reputed to have been engulfed during the great storrn of 11 November 1099. One man called Trevilian foresaw the deluge, and moved his family and stock inland – he was making a last journey when the waters rose, but managed to outrun the advancing waves thanks to the fleetness of his horse. Since then the arms of the grateful Trevilian have carried the likeness of a horse issuing from the sea. A second man who avoided the catastrophe erected a chapel in thanksgiving which stood for centuries near Sennen Cove.

Another area lost under water is Cantre’r Gwaelod, which lies in Cardigan Bay somewhere between the river Teifi and Bardsey Island. Sixteen towns and most of their inhabitants were apparently overwhelmed by the sea when the sluice gates in the protective dyke were left open. There are two versions of the story as to who was responsible: in one it is a drunken watchman called Seithenin; in another, Seithenin was a king who preferred to spend his revenue in dissipation rather than in paying for the upkeep of the coastal defences.

A moral of one kind or another will often be the basis of tales about inland settlements lost beneath water. For example Bomere Lake in Shropshire – now visited as a beauty spot was created one Easter Eve when the town which stood there was submerged as a punishment for reverting to paganism. One Roman soldier was spared because he had attempted to bring the people backto Christianity, but he then lost his life while trying to save the woman he loved. It is said that his ghost can sometimes be seen rowing across the lake at Easter, and that the town,s bells can be heard ringing. There is another version of the same story in the same place, but set in Saxon times: the people turn to Thor and Woden at a time when the priest is warning that the barrier which holds back the meter needs strengthening. He is ignored, but as the townsfolk are carousing at Yuletide the water bursts in and destroys them.

There is a cautionary tale told of Semerwater, another lake with a lost village in its depth. Semerwater lies in north Yorkshire not far from Askrigg, which is perhaps better known as the centre of “Herriot country”, from the veterinary stories of James Herriot. The story goes that a traveller – variously given as an angel, St Paul, Joseph of Arimathea, a witch, and Christ in the guise of a poor old man – visited house after house seeking food and drink , but at each one was turned away, until he reached a Quaker’s home, just beyond the village: htis was the only building spared in the avenging flood that followed.

One lost land off the Kent coast can be partially seen at high tide: originally, the Goodwin Sands were in fact an island, the island of Lomea which according to one version disappeared under the waves in the eleventh century when funds for its sea defences were diverted to pay for the building of a church tower at Tenterden. The blame for that is laid at the door of a n abbot of St Augustine’s at Canterbury who was both owner of Lomea and rector of Tenterden. However, sceptics say that Tenterden had no tower before the sixteenth century, nor can archeologists find any trace of habitation or cultivation of the sands. Even so, the tales continue to be told; one of these blame Earl Godwin, father of King Harold, for the loss of the island. He earl promised to build a steeple at Tenterden in return for safe delivery from a battle, but having survived the battle, he forgot the vow and in retribution Lomea, which he owned, was flooded during a great storm. The Sands still bear his name.

Yet worse was to follow, for scores of ships and the lives of some 50 000 sea farers have been lost on the Goodwins, and ill-fortune seems to dog the area. For example, in 1748 the “Lady Lovibond” was deliberatly steered to her destruction on the Sands by the mate of the vessel, John Rivers. Rivers was insanely jealeous because his intended bride, Anetta, had foresaken him to marry his captain, Simon Reed. The entire wedding party perished with the ship in the midst of the celebrations, but the remarkable thing is that the scene made a phantom reappearance once every fifty years – until 1948, when the “Lady Lovibond” at last failed to re-enact the drama.

Another fifty - year reappearance concerns the Nothumberland; she was lost on the Goodwind sands in 1703 in a storm, along with twelve other men – of - war, but in 1753 seen again by the crew of an East Indiaman – sailors were leaping in to the water from the stricken vessel though their shouts and screams could not be heard.

The Nothumberland was under the command of Sir Cloudesley Shovel, to whom is attached a further tale. Three years afterwards, the admiral’s flagship, the Association, was wrecked on the Gilstone Rock near the Scilly Isles. The fleet was homeward bound after a triumphant campaign against the French and some maintain that the crews were drunk. But the story which Scillonians believe to this day is that a sailor aboard the flagship warned that the fleet was dangerously near the islands, and that for this he was hanged at the yardarm for unsubordination, on the admiral’s orders. The man was granted a last request to read from the Bible, and turned to the 109 psalm: “ Let his days be few and another take his place. Let his children be fatherless and his wife a widow”. As he read the ship began to strike the rocks.

The admiral was a very stout man and his buoyancy was sufficient to carry him ashore alive, though very weak. However, official searches found him dead, stripped off his clothing and valuables, including a fine emerald ring. The body was taken to Westminster Abbey for interment, and his widow appealed in vain for the return of the ring. Many years later a St Mary’s islander confessed on the deathbed that she had found Sir Cloudesley and had “squeezed the life out of him” before taking his belongongs. The hue and cry had forced her to abandon the idea of selling the emerald, but she had felt unable to die in peace before revealing her crime.

A commemorative stone marks the place where the admiral’s body was temporarily buried in the shingle of Porth Hellick, on St Mary’s Island. No grass grows over the grave.

**The wreck of the ramilies**

Many hundreds of shipwrecks have their own songs and stories. Although the Ramilies, for example, was wrecked well over 200 years ago, tradition perpetuates the event as clearly as if it had happened only yesterday. In February 1760 the majestic, ninety – gun, triple decked ship was outward bound from Plymouth to Quiberon Bay when hurricane – force winds blew up in the Channel and forced the captain to turn back and run for shelter. Sailing East , the master thought he had passed Looe Island, and had only to round Rame Head to reach the safety of Plymouth Sound. In fact the ship was a bay further on and the land sighted was Burgh Island, in Bigbury Bay. The Promontory was Bolt Tail with its four hundred foot cliffs, and beyond lay no safe harbour at all, but several miles of precipitous rocks. As soon as the sailing master realised his mistake the ship was hove to, but the wind was so violent that the masts immediately snapped and went overboard. The two anchores that were dropped held fast, but their cables fouled each other, and after hours of fierce friction, they parted and the ship was driven to destruction on the rocks.

Of more than seven hundred men on board only about two dozen reached safety. Led by Midshipman John Harrold, they scrambled up the cliffs, by pure luck choosing the one place where this was possible. Next day a certain William Locker travelled to the scene to try to find the body of his friend, one of the officers. Locker himself would have been aboard the “Ramillies” but his lieutenant’s commission had come from the admiralty too late, arriving just a few hours after she had sailed. He found the shores of Bigbury Bay strewn with hundreds of corpses, their clothing torn away by the sea’s pounding, their features unrecognisable. The village nearest to the scene of the wreck was Inner Hope, and some there still maintain that a Bigbury man aboard the “Ramillies” pleaded with the captain to alter course; but he was clapped in irons, and went down with the ship. They say that only one officer survived because others were prevented from leaving the stricken vessel.

Most of the bodies were washed ashore at Thurlestone, a few miles to the west. There used to be a depression in the village green which marked the place where many of the seamen had been buried in a mass grave; this has now been asphalted to make a carpark. Then in the mid – 1960s a child digging in a sand dune found a bone. He showed it to a man on the beach who happened to be a doctor and identified it as human. Further digging revealed the skeletons of ten men, small in stature and buried in five – foot intervals -- perhaps these had been washed up after the mass burial. No scrap of clothing or equipment was found, and finally the bones were thrown into a lorry and consigned to a rubbish tip. Even though two centuries have elapsed since their deaths, one feels that the men of the “Ramillies” deserved better. The ship still lies six fathoms down in the cove which which has borne her name since 1760, and Wise’s Spring on the cliffs is called after one of the seamen who scrambled ashore with the tiny band of survivors.

**Portents of disaster**

Great pains are taken when first launching a vessel so as to ensure good fortune, and one of the most important portents is the ritual bottle of champagne which must break first time ( the liquid may be a substitute for the blood of a sacrifice ). It is interesting that the various ships to bear the name “Ark Royal” have always been lucky; for example when the World War 11 vessel sunk there was minimal loss of life. The original ship dated from Elizabethan times and had a crucifix placed beneath the mainmast by the captain’s mistress; this apparently secured the good fortune for all her successors. On the other hand there are vessels which seem perpetually unlucky, some even jinxed and quite incapable of escaping misfortune.

Brunel’s fine ship the “Great Eastern” was launched in 1858 after several ominously unsuccessful attempts. She ruined the man in whose yard she was built, and caused a breakdown in Brunel’s health – he died even before her maiden voyage. And despite her immense technical advantages, she was never successful as the passenger - carrying vessel.

In 1895 she was in port in Holyhead. When the “Royal Charter” sailed by, homeward bound from Australia, the passengers expressed a desire to see her and their captain was only too pleased to oblige. However, the ship strayed off course and a wild storm blew up. The ship was wrecked, with great loss of life. Some of the trouble was attributed to the story of a riveter and his boy who were said to have been accidentally sealed to the famous double hull. Unexplained knockings were heard at various times but although searches were made, nothing was found. When the vessel was broken up at New Ferry, Cheshire, in 1888 it was rumoured that two sceletons were discovered, their bony fingers still clenched round the worn – down hammers which had beaten in vain for rescue.

The “Victoria” was commissioned on Good Friday, the thirteenth of the month – and if this were not ill-luck enough, the fact that her name ended in ‘a’ was considered another bad sign. In 1893 she sank with heavy losses after a collision during the manoeuvres in the Mediterranean off Beirut, and interestingly, various things happened which indicated calamity: two hours earlier a fakir had actually predicted disaster, and at the time of the collision crowds had gathered at the dockyards gates in Malta, drawn by an instinctive apprehension of impending doom. At the same time during lunch at a Weymouth torpedo works the stem of a wine glass had suddenly cracked with a loud retort; and in London’s Eaton Square the ship’s Admiral Tryon was seen coming down the stairs at his home. He was in fact aboard the “Victoria”, where he survived the impact but made no effort to save himself. As he sank beneath the waves he is said to have lamented: “It was all my fault” – and so it was, for he had given the incorrect order which led to the collision.

Generations after her loss the “Titanic” is still a byword for hubris. In 1912 the “unsinkable ship” struck an iceberg on her maiden voyage and went down with 1 500 passengers and crew. Again, a variety if omens anticipated the disaster: a steward’s badge came to pieces as his wife stitched it to his cap, and a picture fell from the wall in a stoker’s home; then aboard the ship a signal halliard parted as it was used to acknowledge the ‘bon voyage’ signal from the Head of Old Kinsale lighthouse – and the day before the collision rats were seen scurrying aft, away from the point of impact. After the calamity Captain Smith, who went down with the ship, is rumoured to have been seen ashore.

One cause of the “Titanic” disaster is said to have been an unlucky Egyptian mummy case. This is the lid of an inner coffin with the representation of the head and upper body of an unknown lady of about 1000 bc. Ill-fortune certainly seemed to travel with the lid – first of all the man who bought it from the finder had an arm shattered by an accidental gun shot. He sold, but the purchaser was soon afterwards the recipient of the bad news, learning that he was bankrupt and that he had a fatal disease. The new owner, an English lady, placed the coffin lid in her drawing – room: next morning she found everything there smashed. She moved it upstairs and the same thing happened, so she also sold it. When this purchaser had the lid photographed, a leering, diabolical face was seen in the print. And when it was eventually presented to the British Museum, members of staff began to contract mysterious ailments – one even died. It was sold yet again to an American, who arranged to take it home with him on the “Titanic”. After the catastrophe he managed to bribe the sailors to allow him to take it into a lifeboat, and it did reach America. Later he sold it to a Canadian, who in 1941 decided to ship it back to England; the vessel taking it, “Empress of Ireland” , sank in the river St Lawrence. So runs the story, but in reality the coffin lid did not leave the British Museum after being presented in 1889.

The former prime minister, Edward Heath, in his book “Sailing” (1975) revealed that he too had experienced the warnings of ill omen. At the launch of the “Morning Cloud 1” the bottle twice refused to break, and at the same ceremony for the “Morning Cloud 111” the wife of a crew member fell and suffered severe concussion. This yacht was later wrecked off the South coast with the loss of two lives, and in the very same gale the “Morning Cloud 1” was blown from the moorings on the island of Jersey, and also wrecked. Meanwhile, the Morning Cloud 11” had been launched without incident and was leading a trouble free life with the Australian to whom she had been sold.

As recently as December 1987 a strange case came to light as a result of a Department of Health and Social Security enquiry into why members of a Bridlington trawler crew were spending so much time unemployed. In explanation, Derek Gates, skipper of the “Pickering”, said that putting to sea had become impossible: on board lights would flicker on and off; cabins stayed freezing cold even when the heating was on maximum; a coastguard confirmed that the ship’s steering repeatedly turned her in erratic circles and in addition, the radar kept failing and the engine broke down regularly. One of the crewmen reported seeing a spectral, cloth-capped figure roaming the deck, and a former skipper, Michael Laws, told how he repeatedly sensed someone in the bunk above his, though it was always empty. He added: “ My three months on the Pickering” were the worst in seventeen years at sea. I didn’t earn a penny because things were always going wrong”.

The DHSS decided that the men’s fears were a genuine reason for claiming unemployment benefit, and the vicar of Bridlington, the Rev. Tom Wilis, was called in to conduct a ceremony of exorcism. He checked the ship’s history, and concluded that the disturbances might be connected with the ghost of a deckhand who had been washed overboard when the trawler, then registered as the “Family Crest”, was fishing off Ireland. He sprinkled water from stem to stern, led prayers, and called on the spirit of the dead to depart. His intervention proved effective because the problems ceased, and furthermore the crew began to earn bonuses for good catches.

**Sailors’ luck**

Sailors used to be very superstitious – maybe they still are – and greatly concerned to avoid ill-luck, both ashore and afloat. Wives must remember that “Wash upon sailing day, and you will wash your man away”, and must also be careful to smash any eggshells before they dispose of them, to prevent their being used by evil spirits as craft in which to put to sea and cause storms.

Luck was brought by:

tattoos

a gold ear-ring worn in the left ear

a piece of coal carried

a coin thrown over the ship’s bow when leaving port

a feather from a wren killed on St. Stephen’s Day

a caul

a hot cross bun or a piece of bread baked on a Good Friday

The last three all preserved from drowning. David Copperfield’s caul was advertised for sale in the newspapers “for the low price of fifteen guineas”, and the woman from the port of Lymington in Hampshire offered one in “The Daily Express” as recently as 23 August 1904. One Grimsby man born with the caul has kept it to this day. When he joined the Royal Navy during World War 11 his mother insisted that he take the caul with him. Various other sailors offered him up to L20 – a large sum for those days – if he would part with it, but he declined.

For over two hundred years now a bun has been added every Good Friday to a collection preserved at the Widow’s Son Tavern, Bromley – by –Bow, London. The name and the custom derive from an eighteenth – century widow who hoped that her missing sailor son would eventually come home safely if she continued to save a bun every Easter. Some seamen had their own version of this, and would touch their sweetheart’s bun (pudenda) for luck before sailing.

Other things had to be avoided because they brought ill-luck.

For example:

- meeting a pig, a priest or a woman on the way to one’s ship

having a priest or a woman aboard

saying the words: pig, priest, rabbit, fox, weasel, hare

dropping a bucket overboard

leaving a hatch cover upside down

leaving a broom, a mop or a squeegee with the head upwards

spitting in the sea

whistling

handing anything down a companionway

sailing on a Friday

finding a drowned body in the trawl (in the case of Yorkshire fisherman)

Although many of these beliefs are obscure in origin, others can be explained.

For example, the pig had the devil’s mark on his feet – cloven hoofs – and was a bringer of storms; furthermore the drowning of the Gadarene swine was a dangerous precedent. Then the priest was associated with funerals, and so taking him aboard was perhaps too blatant a challenge to the malign powers – if he were to be designated in conversation he was always “The gentleman in black”. The pig was curly tail, or in Scotland “cauld iron beastie” since if it were inadvertently mentioned the speaker and hearers had to touch cold iron to avoid evil consequences; if no cold iron were available, the studs to one’s boots would do. The other four animals were taboo because they were thought to be the shapes assumed by witches who were notorious for summoning storms.

Perhaps women were also shunned because they were considered potential witches, although a good way to make a storm abate was for a woman to expose her naked body to the elements. Bare - breasted figure – heads were designed to achieve the same result. Nevertheless, during HMS “Durban” ’s South American tour in the 1930s the captain allowed his wife to take passage on the ship. Before the tour was halfway through there were two accidental deaths on board, besides a series of mishaps, and feeling amongst the crew began to run high. At one port of call a group of men returning to the ship on a liberty boat were freely discussing the run of bad luck, attributing it to “having that bloody woman on board”. They did not realize that the captain was separated from them by only a thin bulkhead and had overheard the whole conversation. But instead of taking disciplinary action, he put his wife ashore the next day; she travelled by land to other ports, and the ship’s luck immediately changed for the better.

Fridays were anathema – “Friday sail, Friday fail” was the saying – since the temtation of Adam, the banishment from the Garden of Eden, and the crucifixion of Christ had all taken place on a Friday. One old story, probably apocryphal, tells of a royal navy ship called HMS “Friday” which was launched, first sailed and then lost on a Friday; moreover her captain was also called Friday. Oddly enough, a ship of this name does appear in the admiralty records in 1919, but the story was in circulation some fifty years earlier. This fear of Friday dies hard. A certain Paul Sibellas, seaman, was aboard the “Port Invercargill” in the 1960s when on one occasion she was ready to sail for home from New Zealand at 10pm on Friday the thirteenth. The skipper, however, delayed his departure until midnight had passed and Saturday the fourteenth had arrived.

Whistling is preferably avoided because it can conjure up a wind, which might be acceptable aboard a becalmed sailing ship, but not otherwise. Another way of getting a wind was to stick a knife in the mast with its handle pointing in the direction from which a blow was required – this was done on the “Dreadnaught” in 1869, in jury rig after being dismasted off Cape Horn.

In 1588 Francis Drake is said to have met the devil and various wizards to whistle up tempests to disrupt the Spanish Armada. The spot near Plymouth were they gathered is now called Devil’s Point. He is also said to have whittled a stick, of which the pieces became fireships as they fell into the sea; and his house at Buckland Abbey was apparently built with unaccountable speed, thanks to the devil’s help. Drake’s drum is preserved in the house and is believed to beat of its own accord when the country faces danger.

**Denizens of the deep**

With the mirror and comb, her ling hair, bare breasts and fish tail, the mermaid is instantly recognisable, but nowadays only as an amusing convention. However, she once inspired real fear as well as fascination and sailors firmly believed she gave warning of tempest of calamity.

As recently as seventy years ago, Sandy Gunn, a Cape Wrath shepherd, claimed he saw a mermaid on a spur of rock at Sandwood Bay. Other coastal dwellers also recall such encounters, even naming various landmarks. In Corwall there are several tales involving mermaids: at Patstow the harbour entrance is all but blocked by the Doom Bar, a sandbank put there by mermaid, we are told, in relation for being fired at by a man of the town. And the southern Cornish coast between the villages of Down Derry and Looe, the former town of Seaton was overwhelmed by sand because it was cursed by a mermaid injured by a sailor from the port.

Mermaid’s Rock near Lamorna Cove was the haunt of a mermaid who would sing before a storm and then swim out to sea – her beauty was such that young men would follow, never to reappear. At Zennor a mermaid was so entranced by the singing of Matthew Trewella, the squire’s son, that she persuaded him to follow her; he, too failed to to return, but his voice could be heard from time to time, coming from beneath the waves. The little church in which he sang on land has a fifteenth – century bench – end carved with a mermaid and her looking – glass and comb.

On the other hand, mermaids could sometimes be helpful. Mermaid’s Rock at Saundersfoot in Wales is so called because a mermaid was once stranded there by the ebbing of the tide. She was returned to the sea by a passing mussel – gatherer, and later came back to present him with a bag of gold and silver as a reward. In the Mull of Kintyre a Mackenzie lad helped another stranded mermaid who in return granted him his wish, that he cpuld build unsinkable boats from which no man would ever be lost.

Sexual unions between humans and both sea people and seals are the subject of many stories, and various families claim strange sea – borne ancestry: for example the Mc Veagh clan of Sutherland traces its descent from the alliance between a fisherman and a mermaid; on the Western island of North Uist the McCodums have an ancestor who married a seal maiden; and the familiar Welsh name of Morgan is sometimes held to mean “born of the sea”, again pointing to the family tree which includes a mermaid or a merman. Human wives dwelling at sea with mermen were allowed occasional visits to the land, but they had to take care not to overstay – and if they chanced to hear the benediction said in church they were never able to rejoin their husbands.

Matthew Arnold’s poem “The Forsaken Merman” relates how one human wife decides to desert her sea husband and children. There is also a Shetland tale, this time concerning a sea wife married to a land husband:

On the island of Unst a man walking by the shore sees mermaids and mermen dancing naked in the moonlight, the seal skins which they have discarded lying on the sand. When they see the man, the dancers snatch up the skins, become sea creatures again, and all plunge into the waves – except one, for the man has taken hold of the skin. Its owner is a mermaid of outstanding beauty. And she has to stay on the shore. The man asks her to become his wife, and she accepts. He keeps the skin and carefully hides it.

The marriage is successful, and the couple has several children. Yet the woman is often drawn in the night to the seashore, where she is heard conversing with a large seal in an unknown tongue. Years pass. During the course of a game one of the children finds a seal skin hidden in the cornstack. He mentions it to his mother, and she takes it and returns to the sea. Her husband hears the news and runs after her, arriving by the shore to be told by his wife: “ Farewell, and may all good attend you. I loved you very well when I lived on earth, but I always loved my first husband more.”

As we know from David Thomson’s fine book “The People of the Sea” (1984), such stories are still widely told in parts of Ireland and in Scotland and may explain why sailors were reluctant to kill seals. There was also a belief that seals embodied the souls of drowned mariners.

The friendly dolphin invariably brings good luck to seafarers, and has even been known to guide them to the right direction. As recently as January 1989 the newspapers reported that an Australian swimmer who had been attacked and wounded by a shark was saved from death only by the intervention of a group of dolphins which drove off the predator.

Also worthy of mention here is another benevolent helper of seamen lost in open boats: a kindly ghost known as the pilot of the “Pinta”. When all seems lost he will appear in the bows of the boat and insistently point the way to safety.

Other denizens of the deep inspired fear and terror. The water horse of Wales and the Isle of Man – the kelpie of Scotland – grazes by the side of the sea or loch. If anyone is rash enough to get on him, he rushes into the water and drowns the rider; furthermore his back can conveniently lengthen to accommodate any number of people. There are several tales believed of the water horse, for example, if he is harnessed to a plough he drags it into the sea. If he falls in love with a woman he may take the form of a man to court her – only if she recognises his true nature from the tell-tale sand in his hair will she have a chance of escaping, and then she must steal away while he sleeps. Legnd says that the water horse also takes the shape of an old woman; in this guise he is put to bed with a bevy of beautiful maidens, but kills them all by sucking their blood, save for one who manages to run away. He pursues her but she jumps a running brook which, water horse though he is, he dare not cross.

Still more terrible are the many sea monsters of which stories are told. One played havoc with the fish of the Solway Firth until the people planted a row of sharpened stakes on which it impaled itself. Another serpent – like creature, the Stoor Worm, was so huge that its body curled about the earth. It took up residence off northern Scotland and made it known that a weekly delivery of seven virgins was required, otherwise the towns and villages would be devastated. Soon it was the turn of the king’s daughter to be sacrificed, but her father announced that he would give her in anyone who would rid him of the worm. Assipattle, the dreamy seventh son of a farmer, took up the challenge and put to sea in a small boat with an iron pot containing a glowing peat; he sailed into the monster’s mouth, then down into its inside – after searching for some time he found the liver, cut a hole in it, and inserted the peat . The liver soon began to burn fiercely, and the worm retched out Assipattle and his boat. Its death throes shook the world: one of its teeth became the Orkney Islands, the other Shetland; the falling tongue scooped out the Baltic Sea, and the burning liver turned into the volcanosof Iceland. The king kept his promise, and the triumphant Assipattle married his daughter.

Perhaps, the most famous of all water monsters is that of Loch Ness, first mentioned in a life of St Columba written in 700 AD.

Some 150 years earlier one of the saint’s followers was apparently swimming in the loch when the monster “suddenly swam up to the surface, and with gaping mouth and with great roaring rushed towards the man”. Fortunately, Columba was watching and ordered the monster to turnback: it obeyed. The creature (or its successor) then lay dormant for some 1 300 years, for the next recorded sighting was in 1871.

However, during the last fifty years there have been frequent reports and controversies. In1987 a painstaking and and expencive sonar scan of the loch revealed a moving object of some 400 lb in weight which scientists were unable to identify. Sir Peter Scott dubbed the monster “Nessiterras Rhombopteryx”, after the diamond – shaped fin shown on a photograph taken by some American visitors; the Monster Exhibition Centre at Drumnadrochit on Loch Ness describes it as “The World’s Greatest Mystery”. Tourists from all over the world flock to visit Loch Ness, monster and centre.

**Nautical customs**

The seas will always be potentially dangerous for those who choose to sail them and most seafarers tried hard to avoid incurring the wrath of Davy Jones – they once were sometimes reluctant even to save drowning comrades lest they deprive the deep of a victim which would serve as a propitiatory sacrifice though the dilemma could be resolved by throwing the drowning man a rope or spar. This was a much less personal intervention than actually landing a hand or diving in to help and therefore less risky.

Various shipboard ceremonies were observed and maintained religiously: at Christmas a tree would be lashed to the top of the mast (the custom is still followed, and on ships lacking a mast the tree is tied to the railings on the highest deck). At midnight as New Year’s Eve becomes New Year’s Day the ship’s bell is rung eight times for the old year and eight times for the new – midnight on a ship is normally eight bells – the oldest member of the crew giving the first eight rings, the youngest the second.

“Burying the Dead Horse” was a ceremony which was continued in merchant ships until late in the nineteenth century, and kept up most recently in vessels on the Australian run. The horse was a symbol for the month’s pay advanced on shore (and usually spent before sailing); after twenty-eight days at sea the advance was worked out. The horse’s body was made from a barrel, its legs from hay, straw or shavings covered with canvas, and the main and tail of hemp. The animal was hoisted to the main yardarm and set on fire. It was allowed to blase for a short time and was then cut loose and dropped into the sea. Musical accompaniment was provided by the shanty “Poor Old Horse”:

Now he is dead and will die no more,

And we say so, for we know so.

It makes his ribs feel very sore,

Oh, poor old man.

He is gone and will go no more,

And we say so, for we know so.

So goodbye, old horse,

We say goodbye.

On sailing ships collective work at the capstan, windlass, pumps and halliards was often accompanied by particular songs known as shanties.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries big, full-rigged vessels were bringing cargoes of nitrate, guano and saltpetre to Britain to South America ports. When a ship was loaded and ready to sail round Cape Horn and home, the carpenter would make a large wooden cross to which red and white lights were fixed in the shape of the constellation known as the Southern Cross. As this was hoisted to the head of the mainmast, the crew would sing the shanty “Hurrah, my boys, we’re homeward bound”, and then the crew of every ship in harbour took turns to cheer the departing vessel.

Seafarers crossing the equator for the first time – and sometimes the tropics of the polar circles – are often put through a sort of baptism or initiation ceremony. The earliest recorded reference to such a ritual dates back to 1529 on a French ship, but by the end of the following century English vessels were involved in the same custom, which continues to this day in both Royal Navy and merchant service.

One of the crew appears as Neptune, complete with crown, trident and luxuriant beard; others represent Queen Amphitrite, a barber, a surgeon and various nymphs and bears. Neptune holds court by the side of a large canvas bath full of sea - water, and any on board who have not previously crossed “the Line” are ceremonially shaved with huge wooden razors, then thoroughly ducked. Finally, the victim is given a certificate which protects him from the same ordeal on ane future occasion. Even passengers are put through a modified form of the proceedings, though women are given a still softer version of the treatment.

When a naval captain leaves his ship he can expect a ritual farewell. Even Prince Charles was unable to escape when in 1976 he relinquished command of the minesweeper, HMS “Bronington”; he was seized by white – coated doctors (his officers), placed in a wheelchair and “invalided out” to the cheers of his crew members who held up a banner inscribed: “Command has aged me”.

Other marines departed in a less jovial manner. When a man died at sea his body would be sewn into canvas, weighted, and committed to the deep. The sailmaker was responsible for making the shroud, and would always put the last stitch through the corpse’s nose, ensuring that there was no sign of life and that the body remained attached to the weighted canvas. This practise was followed at least until the 1960s, the sailmaker receiving a bottle of rum for his work. Nowadays the bodies are seldom buried at sea but are refrigerated and brought back to land. However, those consigning a body in this way still receive the traditional bottle of rum for their trouble.

**CHAPTER 3**

We have had a look at some samples of well and carefully preserved British folklore that relates about the British “waterworld”. But the question of our time no less important is whether the people with such an affection for their land try to preserve it from the harm that may cause our age of highly developed machines, ships, tunkers, etc.

Britain’s marine, coastal and inland waters are generally clean: some 95% of rivers, streams and canals are of good or fair quality, a much higher figure than in most other European countries. However their cleanliness cannot be taken for granted, and so continuing steps are being taken to deal with remaining threats. Discharges to water from the most potentially harmful processes are progressively becoming subject to authorisation under IPC.

Government regulations for a new system of classifying water in England and Wales came into force in May 1994. This system will provide the basis for setting statutory water quality objectives (SWQO), initially on a trial basis in a small number of catchment areas where their effectiveness can be assessed. The objectives, which will be phased in gradually, will specify for each individual stretch of water the standards that should be reached and the target date for achieving them. The system of SWQOs will provide the framework to set discharge consents. Once objectives are set, the enterprises will be under a duty to ensure that they are met.

There have been important developments in controlling the sea disposal of wastes in recent years. The incineration of wastes at sea was halted in 1990 and the dumping of industrial waste ended in 1992. In February 1994 the Government announced British acceptance of an internationally agreed ban on the dumping of low- and intermediate – level wastes was already banned. Britain had not in fact dumped any radioactive waste at sea for some years preveously. Britain is committed to phasing out the dumping of sewage sludge at sea by the end of 1998. Thereafter only dredged material from ports, harbours and the like will routinely be approved for sea disposal.

Proposals for decommissioning Britain’s 200 offshore installations are decided on a case – by – case basis, looking for the best practicable environmental option and observing very rigorous international agreements and guidelines.

Although not a major source of water pollution incidents, farms can represent a problem. Many pollution incidents result from silage effluent or slurry leaking and entering watercourses; undiluted farm slurry can be up to 100 times, more polluting than raw domestic sewage. Regulations set minimum construction standards for new or substantially altered farm waste handling facilities. Farmers are required to improve existing installations where there is a significant risk of pollution. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food publishes a “Code of Good Agricultural Practice for the Protection of Water”. This gives farmers guidance on, among other things, the planning and management of the disposal of their farm wastes. The Ministry also has L2 million research and development programme to examine problems of farm waste and to minimise pollution.

Britain is a signatory to the 1992 North East Atlantic Convention, which tackles pollution from land – based sources, offshore installations and dumping. It also provides for monitoring and assessment of the quality of water in the convention’s area. In order to minimise the environmental effects of offshore oil and gas operations, special conditions designed to protect the environment -–set in consultation with environmental interests – are included in licences for oil and gas exploration.

Pollution from ships is controlled under international agreements, which cover matters such as oil discharges and disposal of garbage. British laws implementing such agreements are binding not only on all ships in British waters, but also on British ships all over the world. The Marine Pollution Control Unit (MPCU), part of the Coastguard Agency, is responsible for dealing with spillage of oil or other substances from ships in sea.

So great care is being taken to manage to preserve all that precious that Britain has. Keeping the waters in a good conditions would help to keep the traditions connected with it as well, and to pass them on to other generations.

There is no other way to understanding people, their character, past and present but through its linguistic and cultural inheritance. If a person is determined to get a closer acquaintance with the inner world of the French, Italian or English, he should study their language and culture, because only through this he can really get in touch with a strange nation. Finding out some facts, materials on this or that country he would no more than get informed, develop his intellectual abilities and that of the rational memory. But linguistic and cultural education inspires imaginative thinking, influences his emotions and forms his taste. Linguistic materials, and the national folklore is certainly an important part of it, are inseparable from the language: the language itself plays the part of the informational source of the national history and culture.

So in this work we showed the essential role of the English folklore relating about the water world of the country in the development of the English language, forming of the national identity and character and its close connection with the British history.

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